

Nan Colton was nanny to 'Cocoon's' senior stars

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Published: October 15, 2010

Updated: March 21, 2013 at 10:12 PM

Playwright, director and stage actress Nan Colton says she applied to be an assistant producer on "Cocoon" just for the opportunity to meet Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy - "two pillars of the American theater." From the moment she showed up at the downtown hotel where the crew was headquartered, she was put to work. "I ended up taking care of the needs of older stars of the film, making sure they had everything they needed and getting them to set on time." She is full of memories about the cast members. She says Cronyn loved talking about his work. "We spent hours talking about the theater," she recalls. "He was up early before anyone else and would hit the water for a swim. He was so full of life. And his wife was so gracious."

Most of the cast stayed at a former Hilton Inn on St. Pete Beach. During downtime, some of them hung out at the Hurricane, the Hilton's rooftop bar and a nearby Bennigan's. Colton recalls that Hollywood offspring Tyrone Power Jr. and Tahnee Welch (Raquel Welch's daughter) were stand-offish, with Welch seeming to dislike the moving making process. Maureen Stapleton was larger than life, full of energy, eccentric and a little neurotic. Wilford Brimley kept to himself and landed a 128-pound tarpon while fishing offshore, she said. Colton remembers Steve Guttenberg as being more concerned about which pair of dark glasses to wear in a scene than character development. "Brian Dennehy also was a great conversationalist because he could talk about any topic," she says. Dennehy also liked libations and was arrested in St. Petersburg for driving under the influence. "Don Ameche was also a gentleman and held himself erect, straight as a stick," she says, recalling one time when he introduced himself to some elderly female residents. When he said he was Don Ameche, one of the ladies fired by "You can't be Don Ameche. He's a handsome man!" Jack Gilford was her favorite. "We talked about how he had struggled through hard times because he was blacklisted during the Communist scare and couldn't get work," she says. "He used called up painful emotions in the scene where he carries his dead wife (Herta Ware) to the pool to try to revive her - but he is too late. Every time I see that scene I cry because I know what he went through in his life."