

BARBARA EDEN

Hollywood's Most Famous Genie Comes Out of Her Bottle with a Best Seller on Life, Love and Magical Powers

By Michael P. Naughton



There is talk of remaking the 60s TV hit, *I Dream of Jeannie*. But who would play the most famous genie of all time? Alicia Silverstone, Cameron Diaz, Jessica Alba? Could Hollywood capture lightning twice? I spoke with Barbara Eden about her new book, *Jeannie Out of the Bottle*. Candid and funny, Eden's take on Hollywood, stardom, and the many triumphs and challenges of her life is more than a terrific read...it's a time travel back when watching her show made us dream about a life with our very own beautiful, fun and magical genie.

MN: Your book is getting wonderful reviews. You mentioned in a Huntington Post interview that it was "extremely difficult" to write it.

EDEN: Often in life we have ups and downs—and tend to put the "downs" behind us. When you write a memoir you have to be truthful and it isn't easy to go back and revisit those times.

MN: A great story in the book is about Warner Brothers talent scout (Solly Bianco); he rejected you, then sees you on the studio lot, doesn't realize he rejected you and wants to hire you.

EDEN: Right. He doesn't recognize me (laughs). He wanted to make a test at Warner Brothers; he was a VP and head of talent and didn't know who I was. When I turned around and looked at him, I was so frightened. I thought for sure I was going to get kicked off the lot (laughs).

MN: It's 1964 and you're finishing *Rawhide* with Clint Eastwood. Take us back to your meeting with the brilliant Sidney Sheldon and your meeting at the Polo Lounge in Beverly Hills.

EDEN: Working with Clint was fabulous. He was very young, I was very young, and even then he was talented. It was fun. I had an interesting part; I was a dance hall girl he didn't approve of (in the episode), but then found I had a heart of gold and was a nice girl. At that time I had left Fox Studios and was guesting on many television shows and (*Jeannie*) was just another show. I'd seen it in the trades and saw gorgeous brunettes being tested, all very tall women; Ms. Syria, Ms. Israel, Ms. Italy, Ms. Greece, and then I was sent the script. I read it and my agent said: "Did you like it?" I said, "I love it...are you sure they know what I look like?" (laughs) He said, "Well I think they do, because they're very interested, made an offer and would like you to meet Sidney Sheldon." He called and invited me to tea. Having said that, I realized later that many of Sidney's friends were comedy writers I had worked with, and I think Sidney knew what I had done. He did due diligence and that's how I got the part.

MN: You worked with Lucille Ball. I understand she was a fan of yours?

EDEN: Well, I was a huge fan of hers. I was on one of her last shows, and couldn't believe it when

I walked on the set ...I was actually in Lucy's house...of course it was RKO Studios. She was wonderful to me. Just delightful. She couldn't have been nicer.

MN: I enjoyed very much the 1856 letter you included in your book from your great, great, great grandfather John A. Bills (it's like out of a Steinbeck novel) when people used to take the time to write, instead of Twitter.

EDEN: I love that letter. I'm so happy my grandmother let me have it.

MN: You talk about the painful loss of your son Matthew.

You said, "There is no choice, you just go through it." Any message for parents who might be having problems with their children?

EDEN: I don't know. You have to nip it in the bud before it starts. You have to be horribly vigilant—and I thought I was. It never occurred to me that where we lived, on our block, people I knew (I didn't know them well, but they were neighbors)...I had no idea that they were growing marijuana in their backyards. Matthew told me about that years later. But that is really what started him off. He was just a little boy. I had no idea. You have to be really, really careful. Also I don't think (kids) deserve—well they deserve it, but cannot have it—privacy! They cannot have it anymore. You have to go in their drawers, in their closets. You have to know what they are doing every minute; and especially on the internet. As far as parents having problems with their children...who right now know that their children are at risk? The only thing they can do is reach out to others in the same situation. Find qualified personnel to help, and there aren't many. Get your child into rehab before they are 18, or you won't have any control over it. I was told if you put a child at risk in rehab for two years, that they might have a chance of survival, and that is all you can hope for...or a miracle.



MN: I recently had the pleasure of meeting Jon—your husband, at The Beverly Hills Country Club book signing you had. I understand he handles your social media and website. How do you feel about the social media networking and PR we have today?

EDEN: I think it is very important. I am not adept at it, my husband is. I tell him what I'm saying and he'll post it.

MN: Let's talk for a minute about your Australian Labradoodle named Djin Djin, after your magical and invisible dog on, *I Dream of*

Jeannie. I'm a HUGE dog lover—and MY dog is the greatest dog that ever lived.

EDEN: He is [Djin Djin] the greatest dog that has ever lived! (laughs). Oh gosh, our dog is a human in a fur coat. He just looks right into our eyes. Djin Djin watches television.

MN: Does he have a favorite program?

EDEN: Oh yeah, Animal Planet, but we won't put it on, he just barks and barks, talks and talks (laughs).

He recognizes music and also commercials that have dogs. Djin Djin will come running from another room if he hears certain music with a dog in it; he'll come around and sit in front of the screen and wait until the dog comes out (laughs).

The real magic of Barbara Eden is honesty, integrity and innocence. Thank you Barbara for the

happiness that you have brought to so many people. As far as I'm concerned, there will only ever be one Jeannie. ●

