

Life Begins At Eighty

Photos courtesy of Kirk Douglas



"Kirk Douglas' talent begins in the soles of his feet and ends in the spirit that can vault beyond the stars." These words of tribute from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts sum up the essence of the man. A lifetime of achievement - which includes 85 films, nine plays, eight books and a host of other contributions to his art, his country and his fellowman - speaks for itself.

Born December 9, 1916, the son of illiterate Jewish-Russian immigrants, Issur Danielovitch was driven to leave behind the poverty of his childhood which he did with great success. He made his Broadway debut as a singing Western Union boy in *Spring Again*. In 1942, Mr. Douglas decided to enlist in the U.S. Navy, where he served as a communications officer in anti-submarine warfare.

After the war he returned to Broadway and, in 1949, his agent arranged for him to co-star with Ava Gardner and Gregory Peck in *The Great Sinner*. Kirk declined and instead chose to play the anti-hero, Mr. Kelly, in *Champion*, at a much lower salary. The role of the cynical boxer in Stanley Kramer's film, won him both stardom and an Academy Award nomination. He received his second nomination in 1952 for playing an opportunistic movie mogul in *The Bad and the Beautiful*, and his third in 1956 for his portrayal of Vincent Van Gogh in *Lust for Life*, for which he won the New York Film Critics' Best Actor Award.

In 1955, Mr. Douglas formed one of Hollywood's first independent film companies which he named Bryna, after his mother. It was managed by his wife Anne, and produced many memorable films including *Paths of Glory*, *The Vikings*, *Spartacus*, *Lonely are the Brave* and *Seven Days in May*.

On a personal level, one of Mr. Douglas' great victories has been his dramatic recovery from a debilitating stroke which occurred several years ago. At one point, he actually contemplated suicide. How he surmounted his depression is recounted in his book, *My Stroke of Luck*, which is inspirational and entertaining reading. In Mr. Douglas own words: "My stroke taught me so much, and for all that it stole, it gave me even more....Now I want to share what I have learned." His book has helped countless people. It is definitely a must read.

Mr. and Mrs. Kirk Douglas have contributed and continue to donate millions of dollars for the building and restorations of playgrounds. They have already established 200; their target is at least 500.

