

THE MANY ROLES OF
amy
 BRENNEMAN

BY DEBORAH SHADOVITZ

Amy Brenneman, who currently co-stars on *Private Practice* and played alongside Al Pacino in last year's movie thriller *88 minutes*, is perhaps most widely recognized as the star of her critically acclaimed, Golden Globe, and Emmy Award-nominated series *Judging Amy*. This multi-talented actress is less known for her off-screen successes as co-creator/co-producer of *Judging Amy*; as a Harvard graduate majoring in comparative religion; as co-founder of a traveling theater group; and as a mother of two. Her latest endeavor puts her at the fore of the move toward eco-friendly living, which she graciously shared with us.

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my is a spokesperson for Healthy Child Healthy World, an organization that advocates non-toxic living for families. "I went on the road for their Blue Butterfly Campaign — 5 Easy Steps to a Healthier Home," says Amy. She recounts the steps: pesticide safety, plastic wisdom, non-toxic cleansers, cleaning indoor air, and organic/healthy foods (details at healthychild.org). "The steps are actually fairly easy to accomplish, and I'd love to see all parents try them."

In support of keeping children safe, Amy has joined friend and conscious mom Kathy Arnos, producer of the Whole Children, Whole Planet Expo (wcpexpo.com) by appearing on lecture panels in 2006 and 2008. The expo, for all ages, is the largest sustainable educational experience

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available for families today. For example, she spoke about “Environmental Dangers in the Home and School — Cautions and Solutions,” sharing her experiences of the healthier home steps and other lessons she’s learned.

I half-jokingly asked Amy whether her father, well known as an environmental attorney and activist, *might* have had an influence on her eco-wise. “In a big way,” she laughed. “My dad was part of the group that started the first Earth Day, part of the group that started the first EPA, and part of the group that started the first Department of Environmental Protection in Connecticut. But it was really all around us. Growing up in the early to mid ’70s, ecology was an exciting thing all the kids were involved in. There was almost a competitive thing among us — ‘my mother’s car gets 40 miles per gallon...’ In 7th grade shop class, we did silk screening, and I designed a shirt that said ‘Ecology for America.’ I was very proud that my dad did this kind of work, and I feel with the ’80s and Reagan we took a giant step backwards. What we’re experiencing now we should have been experiencing years ago, but it’s as if everyone said, ‘Oh, no, forget about that. Drive your gas guzzlers and don’t worry about it.’”

As a mother now, with 8-year-old daughter Charlotte and 4-year son Bodhi, how does Amy participate in our planet’s betterment? In addition to driving a hybrid, Amy incorporates eco-living into her family’s daily routine. “We turn off the water while brushing teeth. My kids are into taking showers now, so I remind

them that we don’t want to stay in too long because it’ll waste water.” She adds, “Bodhi is obsessed with litter. When we see trash on the ground, he’ll say, ‘You know what happened? Somebody threw that napkin down, and now it’s litter.’” Amy laughs as she recreates his youthful tone of realization. “When we go to the park and see that it’s littered, we pick up trash. You know, on the micro level, we just do what we can do.”

In an ongoing effort to live in balance with the environment, Amy continues to educate herself on changes to make in the outside world as well as within her home. “I’m not an expert; I’m just the average momma in that way. But, I have learned a lot. It’s wonderful to learn more and more about this stuff and then realize that most of it is not that hard to do.”

Amy’s eco-friendly garden was even featured recently in the *L.A. Times*. With help from Anne Phillips of Go Green Gardeners in Van Nuys, Amy has created a beautiful and safe space for her children. “I met Anne five years ago, and she has helped me to ‘green’ my yard. I had to accept that I live in a desert climate, which is different from the lush Connecticut landscapes I grew up with. Yes, we can have some of that... we can have some lawn... but I’m conscious of how much water we use, and I’m trying to not be so indulgent. Anne’s input has been invaluable, but she wants me fall in love with succulents, and I just haven’t,” laughs Amy. “But I love willowy grasses and many other plants which are more drought resistant. I’m learning

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what’s beautiful about living in a desert climate.”

On a different front, Amy also travels and speaks for The Feminist Majority, the nation’s largest feminist research and action organization dedicated to women’s equality, reproductive rights, health, and non-violence. “When I was growing up,” she recounts, “with ecology and ‘Free to Be You and Me’ and feminism, there was a sense that things were getting better. There was the Civil Rights Act, Stonewall, and the idea of equal rights for all... but watching some of those things fall back over the last eight years was so emotionally searing. That women’s rights and these things should become politicized is so *weird* to me because it’s just factual.” *The idea of things going backwards never figured in!* As always, Amy’s thoughts return to her children. “I don’t want to give my children a false sense of optimism,” she adds, “because we are living in a challenging time. We’re also living in a wonderful time, filled with opportunities to help. But we must find that balance.”

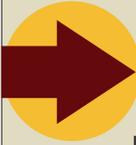
Of course, I *had* to ask what made Amy and her writer/director/producer husband, Brad Silberling, choose the Valley as home?

Marrying Brad, Amy moved into his bachelor pad in Benedict Canyon, which was “adorable and tiny,” she reminisced. “We wanted a rambling, mysterious space and room to grow.” The moment she saw the house, she felt it was magical, and what they dreamed of. “We’ve been here 11 years, and while the paparazzi culture has grown, we don’t get that here. I go to buy a lipstick on the westside, and paparazzi are in your face with huge zoom lenses. We are so left alone here, and that’s important for my family. It’s just a much more *grounded* place than some of the other parts of the city.”

Amy and Brad are also careful not to over-schedule the children, allowing them plenty of time to use their imagination. Their Valley home has room for the kids to play, run around safely, and learn some formative lessons of sustainable living.

Reflecting on her experiences, Amy exposed herself as a truly compassionate woman with insight and wisdom. Concern for her fellow man, the planet, and her family clearly shapes both her personal and work life. For example, filming *Judging Amy*, young Charlotte was always with her on the set. But as Charlotte started school and with the advent of a second child, Amy moved from starring roles to being part of an ensemble cast because it allows her much more time with them. I heard her pride as she spoke about Charlotte’s generous and accepting nature and Bodhi’s “why” questions about things falling through the sky in his dad’s new film *Land of the Lost*.

I’d kept her long enough so it was time to let her get back to those all-important children. ♦



DID YOU KNOW that *Judging Amy* was based on Amy’s mother’s work as one of the first Juvenile Court judges? One of the first three women judges in Connecticut in 1967, The Honorable Frederica Brenneman created and defined groundbreaking laws and policies in those first days of children’s courts. As part of a birthday tribute to her mother, Amy spent two days at the Hartford Court where “there were social workers and lawyers and probation officers and clerical and other judges — all telling me stories. I turned to my husband and said, ‘you know, this is a TV show.’” Never before had an actress in a TV drama been the creator, producer, and star or shipped scripts off to her mom to vet them. “At the beginning,” she recalls, “the team didn’t know what to make of me.”