

Friday, June 05, 2009

SUBSCRIBE

New Jersey
MONTHLY[HOME](#) [RESTAURANTS](#) [LIFESTYLE](#) [JERSEY SHORE](#) [ATLANTIC CITY](#) [TOWNS & SCHOOLS](#) [TOP DOCTORS](#)
[EVENTS](#) [FIND A BUSINESS](#)[Home & Garden](#) [People](#) [New Faces New Jersey](#) [How Things Work](#) [Best of Jersey](#) [EcoLogic](#)

Lifestyle

[A](#) | [A](#) | [A](#) [ShareThis](#)

Guiding Light

Trenton-born Judith Light is helping AIDS victims—and helping herself to a hit TV show.

by [Eric Butferman](#)

Posted October 20, 2008

[Click image to enlarge](#)

Photo by Peter Kramer.

Emmy-Award winner Judith Light would be the first to tell you that if she did not grow up in New Jersey she may never have succeeded as an actress. "To be that close to New York City and also have a structured acting environment where I lived was critical to me realizing my dream," says the Trenton native.

But chasing her dream so early, Light admits, contributed to her feeling like an outcast as a child. "I was so obsessed with acting and would do anything to get better," she says. "I didn't do all the normal things kids do and I think it isolated me from others. Looking back, I'm glad I went for it, but it's also nice to feel like you belong."

Today, Light, 49, belongs on anyone's list of Jersey natives who have made good in Hollywood. She is seen on TV as Claire Meade in the ABC hit *Ugly Betty* and as Judge Elizabeth Donnelly in NBC's *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*. Her feature films include *Save Me*, an independent release that tackles issues relating to AIDS, sexuality, and religion.

Light paid her dues in repertory companies around the country before landing her breakthrough role in 1977 as Karen Wolek in the daytime soap *One Life to Live*. Greater stardom came her way in 1984, when she was cast as advertising executive Angela Bower in *Who's the Boss*, which would run for eight seasons on ABC.

It was during a break from *Who's the Boss*, that Light took on the role that would have the greatest impact on her life. She appeared in a television movie as a mother whose child has been infected by AIDS. Unfortunately, it was a true story.

"Working on the Ryan White Story literally changed my life," she says. "I had always felt for people who had AIDS but it wasn't until I heard Ryan White himself give an interview and talk about how badly people would treat him that I knew I had to get involved. This boy was so brave and it was a wake-up call to me. If he could help so many at a young age, it was time for me to get involved."

Seeking a way to help, Light teamed up with Project Angel Food, an organization that feeds AIDS victims. Over the years, she has become a highly visible advocate for a host of other AIDS-related and human rights organizations and charities, including Broadway Cares. "I'll give money to help. I'll give time, anything!" she declares.

Light's commitment to this cause has extended to the big screen. When Chad Allen, a popular television actor on shows such as *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* and *My Two Dads*, announced he was gay, it was rumored that all of his roles would dry up. Allen decided to take his career into his own hands and asked Light to act in a film he wished to star in, *Save Me*, about a young homosexual whose parents send him to an ex-gay ministry to "cure him" of his same-sex feelings.

"This has been one of the most important projects I've ever been a part of," Light says. "It talks openly about homosexuality, but looks at all points of view." The film premiered last year at the Sundance Film Festival and had a recent limited run in New York. It is based on a screenplay written in part by Light's husband, the actor Robert Desiderio, whom she met while appearing on *One Life to Live*.

Busy as ever, Light looks back on her acting roles and feels her best opportunities have all had one thing in common: diversity. Whether playing a prostitute on *One Life to Live*, for which she won two Emmys, or conservative, kind-hearted Angela Bower, or the struggling Claire Meade, Light wants to be challenged—just like when she was a little girl growing up in New Jersey.

"I think about the time I spent at St. Mary's school [in Burlington] and remember teachers like Ruth Strahan who believed in me and took the time," she says. "I hope I'll do as much for others as people have done for me."

[ShareThis](#) | [Print This](#)

[HOME](#) [RESTAURANTS](#) [LIFESTYLE](#) [JERSEY SHORE](#) [ATLANTIC CITY](#) [TOWNS & SCHOOLS](#) [TOP DOCTORS](#) [EVENTS](#)
[ADVERTISE](#) [CONTACT US](#) [CHANGE OF ADDRESS](#) [SUBSCRIBE](#) [GIFT SUBSCRIPTIONS](#) [BACK ISSUES](#) [SITE INDEX](#)

New Jersey
magazine

Copyright © 2009 New Jersey Monthly Magazine | [Legal Disclaimer/Privacy Statement](#)
Please visit our other sites: [ParkPlaceMagazine.com](#) & [NewJerseyBride.com](#)