



Bad Girl Makes Good

The town of Wallingford has a starring role in a major new movie out this month, but newer residents might not recognize their town in the film version of *Riding In Cars With Boys*, the 1990 memoir by native daughter Beverly Donofrio.

Donofrio describes how, prior to filming, she toured the town with producer James Brooks and director Penny Marshall, to show them the sights of her youthful indiscretions: "Jim kept saying, 'Wow, what a great place you grew up in.' And I kept saying, 'No, it wasn't *like* this back then.'"

The town looks too nice now, she says, and even the American Cyanamid factory doesn't smell as bad anymore. So, to take some of the shine off, they filmed part of the story in East Orange, N.J., and built a Main Street set based on old photos.

Those scenes should look familiar to old-timers, says Donofrio: "They'll recognize going to Big Top, cruising around with your arm hanging out the window and a cigarette hanging out of your mouth."

Cruising Main Street was the beginning of all Donofrio's troubles. She grew up in the '60s, smart and restless in a small town, her father a cop, her mother a clerk at Bradlees. Rebellion came in its course, and she turned into what used to be called a "bad girl," pregnant with her son at 17, divorced at 19 and still partying recklessly long after that, clinging to dreams of a glamorous life in Manhattan.

During her son's nap times, she began an unruly self-education, eventually attending Middlesex Community College and

winning a scholarship to Wesleyan University. That didn't necessarily straighten her life out, and she still struggled—and continued riding in cars with boys—until her son himself went to Wesleyan. That's when she did the baddest thing yet: She wrote a book about it all, mortifying her father, she says, but making her mother the proudest mom ever.

"I think my father was hurt and felt like I was trying to get back at him," says Donofrio, who now lives in central Mexico. "My mother's more proud than embarrassed—she introduces me to everyone as 'My daughter, the author.'"

On Oct. 19, Donofrio's bad old days will be all over the big screen, with Drew Barrymore in the lead, Adam Garcia as her son, and James Woods and Lorraine Bracco as her parents.

Not surprisingly, Hollywood took a few liberties. It did get the mood of stifling small-town Italian Catholicism right, says Donofrio, and "the totally involved, omnipresent parents." But the wedding scene (in which Donofrio and her son play small parts) is heavy on stereotypes. It wasn't true, for example, that family friends brought food to her wedding at the Wallingford Italian Club. Says Donofrio, "My sister got mad at that—she said, 'That's so tacky. That's not the way it happened.'" Then again, "in the movie we had a great band that played old Louis Prima songs. But at my wedding we just had a jukebox and did the bunny hop."

—Robert McGuire