

# Culver City Neighbors



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Cover Photo by Robert Staley

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# Erica Shaffer, Jimmy Paola, Amadora Paola WITH NO COMMERCIAL INTERRUPTIONS

By Tony Garofalo | Photography By Robert Staley

FADE IN:

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY SHOT - DAY

Actors are picking up photos and exchanging audition stories. JIMMY is paying the cashier for his 8X10 promotional headshots when he spots a real looker shuffling through proof sheets on the other side of the counter.

**JIMMY**

Are you a photographer?

**ERICA**

No, she's back in the studio on a shoot.

The expression on JIMMY's face says it all. The shapely five-foot-four vision with hazel eyes and caramel brown hair was born to be in front of a camera.

**JIMMY**

I'd like to make an appointment.

**ERICA**

(checking schedule)

Looks like she's booked up for a while. Does two weeks from today work for you?

**JIMMY**

I'll check my schedule and give you a call. I'm Jimmy, by the way.

**ERICA**

Erica.

JIMMY walks to the door, flashing the coy smile of a man with a plan. Erica doesn't look up from the proof sheets, but doesn't see them either. She's basking in the "moment." Game on.

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY SHOP - NEXT DAY

**ERICA**

(On telephone)

Yes. I remember you. What's up, Jimmy?

**JIMMY**

I'd like to have some headshots taken.

**ERICA**

Didn't you just pick up 300 yesterday?

**JIMMY**

Yeah. They aren't good. I need better ones.

There is a montage of scenes of JIMMY calling ERICA in the days leading up to his appointment, asking questions he knows the answers to - anything to bond with the girl with the hazel eyes: "What should I bring with me?" ERICA shakes her head and rolls her eyes at the question. JIMMY is a man on a mission.

*JIMMY is played by Jimmy Paola. ERICA is portrayed by Erica Shaffer. Any resemblance to actual events, locales or persons in the foregoing scene is entirely intentional.*

The scenario of *When Jimmy met Erica* is vintage rom-com. Their story seems quaint: boy meets girl without logging into *Match*, *eHarmony* or *Zoosk*. Their first date took place over potato latkes at Jerry's Famous Deli in Studio City in 1996. They have been together ever since.

One look at Erica Shaffer and you think you've seen her somewhere. It's more than likely you have. She has one of the most recognized faces on television. With appearances in more than 300 commercials over 20 years, she has been called "the most famous TV star you've never heard of."

"I get recognized a lot," she says. "Sometimes people think we might be neighbors or maybe went to school together. Two or three times a week I get, 'You're that Spectrum lady!' (Erica was the 2018 TV spokesperson for Spectrum Business.) Or, 'Aren't you that Hyundai lady?'... 'Wayfair lady?'... 'Lowes lady?'"

Erica and Jimmy concentrated on their careers and traveled the globe before finally tying the knot in 2003 at a chic hotel in West Hollywood. It turned out to be the proverbial affair to remember.

"We were married on Halloween," Erica says. "We all stayed at the hotel and told our friends they had to come to the ceremony in costume. I wore a gorgeous gown and Jimmy looked amazing in his tux. But when we were making our stately walk down the aisle and saw Captain America and the Cowardly Lion, we totally lost it."

"We were laughing so loud," Jimmy adds. "Even during the vows. How do you not break up when the Mutts Cutts car from *Dumb & Dumber* is at your wedding ceremony!"

Everything about Erica suggests a strong and confident woman. She had a recurring role as a news anchor on the TV series, *Scandal*, for seven years. "I play a lot of spokespersons and doctors. I've played everything from an obstetric surgeon to a ghost nurse," she says with a chuckle.

Jimmy is reluctant to talk about himself, but when Erica leaves the room to take a call, I have a one-on-one with the Rochester, New York native.

"I'm basically retired from acting," he tells me. "I run a business acting as a liaison between the LA Film Permit Office, movie location shoots, and TV producers of such live events as the Oscars and the Golden Globes. But I keep my SAG dues current," Jimmy says with a grin, "just in case."

Erica comes back with news that she has "just booked a job" - actor-speak for got a part on a show. It's on an episode of the CBS crime drama, *S.W.A.T.* "I'm playing another doctor," she announces. "This week *S.W.A.T.* brought me in to read for the part of a bank manager. The next day they wanted to see me for the doctor role in the



same episode. Last week I had three auditions in scrubs.

Given that so many directors and casting agents know Erica, I ask if she ever gets roles without auditioning. "If only," she says. "I probably audition five times a week. Even if the show producers know me, they still want me to meet the director. Actors audition. That's what we do. That goes for a lot of A-list actors, too."

The San Diego native is all in when it comes to her career. She attributes her discipline to growing up as a dancer in three ballet companies, from six to eighteen years old. These days she brings that same dedication to the practice of yoga and is a certified instructor as well. "Connecting breath to movement is a great way to deal with the rigors of a crazy business and a super-charged city," she says, "and, need I say it? The freeways."

Erica never knows where her work will take her. "I've shot in China and in every state except the Dakotas," she says. Jimmy chimes



Photo by Marija Thomas

in, underlining the irony of an actor's life. "Erica once flew to Miami to shoot a Nutrisystem infomercial, then flew back to LA to film a *CSI Miami*." Erica adds, "I was pregnant on that Nutrisystem shoot and since we were selling *skinny*, the director had to shoot around the baby bump."

That baby is now the couple's eleven-year-old daughter with the intriguing name, Amadora. "I discovered the name online and fell in love with it," Erica says. "Amadora means 'gift of love' in Italian." After her Nutrisystem debut inside the womb, Amadora's next commercial was inside a Hyundai at age six, followed by a pitch for a Midwest grocery chain, co-starring her mom and a lovable lab.



When Amadora isn't in class at her area parochial school, the sixth grader uses her slight, willowy frame to good advantage as a member of the Aviator Volleyball Club. "I'm a libero," she explains. "I'm in the back row and have to pass the ball to the setter." Volleyball players know it takes a fast, scrappy player to dig up the tough spikes and pass the tough serves. Ten minutes with Amadora tells you she is up to the challenge.

When Erica is not auditioning, performing or teaching...when

she isn't leading yoga class, working out at Equinox or spinning at SoulCycle, she might just chill out – or it might be time to drive Amadora to an out-of-town volleyball competition. Chilling might have to wait until Amadora's summer vacation, when mother and daughter will be off to London and Paris. Jimmy has Labor Day covered. "I just booked our flight to Hawaii on Labor Day weekend," he says with anticipation.

Life is good for this work-hard-play-hard family.

Come fall, it's business as usual for Jimmy – facilitating the production of high-profile live events in Tinseltown; for 11-year-old, Amadora – back in school and on the volleyball court – passing, diving, digging up spikes. As for that trouper, Erica Shaffer, no doubt she will chase the dream of that one film, that one TV moment that can change the course of a career. Erica is one performer who doesn't sleepwalk through that dream. She has worked diligently to master the craft she loves and is poised to become a household name to go with that oh so recognizable face.

*TV writer-producer Tony Garofalo is an Emmy Award-winner and a veteran of such classics as The Merv Griffin Show, The People's Court and Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.*

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