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Octavia Spencer, Just Where She Wants to Be! The Award-Winning Actress Shares Her Most Treasured Moments Rising to Fame in the December/January Issue of AARP The Magazine

In an exclusive interview with AARP The Magazine, Octavia Spencer talks about her latest film and recounts the importance of living in the moment while on the way up with family and friends

LOS ANGELES, CA—After years of struggles playing unnamed roles – clerk, waitress, bus driver, and woman in elevator – the now Oscar®, Golden Globe® and BAFTA® Film Award-winning actress Octavia Spencer is making the most of her opportunities, but what she treasures the most are the experiences and bonds forged along her journey.

Starring in the new romantic fairy-tale, *The Shape of Water*, on the heels of her breakout roles in *The Help* and *Hidden Figures*, Spencer talks of the importance of experiences and relationships in a candid interview with *AARP The Magazine* (ATM). “If you’re constantly chasing success, then you’re not really living in the moment. Save money and go places. Do things...Trust me, I love working and getting to do what I do, but I had a lot more fun on the way up,” says Spencer as she looks back fondly on the days when her friends were all short on money yet long on time. Close pals like Melissa McCarthy, Allison Janney and director Tate Taylor would join Spencer and other friends on a number of adventures. Now, no longer short on money, but short on time, she doesn’t see them as often but they remain close and Spencer cherishes the times they can gather for dinners. “We just revel at the idea of getting to hang out for a night,” says Spencer. Growing up as the sixth of seven children all raised by a single mother in Montgomery, Alabama, Spencer highlights that it’s the company of her family that grounds her. “Until I get married, I’ll always spend Christmas with my family in Alabama,” says the actress.

Professionally, *The Shape of Water*, in which Spencer portrays the best friend of a woman who falls in love with a sea monster, is a marked departure for an actress who has repeatedly played people of that era struggling to assert their civil rights. Though the film is set in 1960s America in a mainly white workplace, Spencer’s race is not mentioned. “As crazy as this will sound, that was quite refreshing for me, to not have to talk about my race,” says Spencer.

The following are excerpts from *AARP The Magazine*’s December/January 2018 cover story featuring Octavia Spencer, available in homes starting December and available online now at www.aarp.org/magazine/.

Selections from Octavia Spencer’s Cover Story in AARP The Magazine’s December/January Issue

On her new film, *The Shape of Water*:

“I knew I wanted to do it the minute my agent told me I would be meeting with Guillermo (Director Guillermo del Toro),” says Spencer. “I’ve been a fan of his for years. He is like the godfather of the horror genre, and I’m a huge horror fan.”

On overcoming adversity:

Diagnosed with the learning disability dyslexia as a child, Spencer learned to cope by reading mystery novels. Spencer says, “My teacher told me, ‘You have to pay attention to everything, because you don’t know what is a clue,’ ” Spencer recalls. That gave her the motivation to decode every word. “That’s how my brain processes information now,” she says. “I can always tell people, ‘This is what’s about to happen. Connect the dots.’ It’s not like I’m psychic or anything—it’s just all there in the details.”

On being typecast:

“When I was 26, they were trying to give me 50-year-old parts,” Spencer laughs. “As a woman of certain physical attributes, people would like to only see you in a couple of archetypes, like the nurturer nanny or the



sassy woman.”

On treasured moments while young, broke and struggling:

Spencer looks back fondly to the time when her friends were short on money but long on time: “On my first trip to New Orleans...one of our friends was a successful writer—it was Steven Rogers...and he kind of sponsored a writers’ retreat for us all, because we were all writing things.” Another time, about 20 friends shared a house in Laguna Beach, California, where they wrote during the day and cooked dinner together at night. “It was wonderful,” Spencer says.

On being more mature and achieving success:

Spencer says, “When you are 20, you still care about what people think and how you’re perceived. When you turn 30, you start to get an ownership of self. By the time you turn 40, you start to care less about how you’re perceived, and you own your mistakes.”

On how she spends her free time:

“When I see people who are happy and joyful and of a certain age, I know it’s because they know the meaning of life,” says Spencer. “It’s about how you spend your time. It’s not about chasing things on life’s treadmill...it’s about the people that are sitting around my table—my family, my nieces and nephews, my friends.”

On friends and enduring relationships:

Says Spencer, “There are those people who love you stripes and all, and there are people who only love the *idea* of you. The ones who love the idea of you are there for you when you’re successful. The people who love you stripes and all know that there are peaks and valleys to life. And they’re going to be with you in the peaks and in the valleys.

On simple pleasures:

“My biggest indulgence is quiet time in front of the TV with a fire,” says Spencer. “And I recently discovered Sangría. It’s cheap wine with a lot of sweeteners.

On her admittedly dark sense of humor:

“I laugh at people falling down, as long as I know they are OK,” says Spencer. “I’m that person.”

On dating:

“I don’t really like to talk about dating,” says Spencer. “It’s not easy dating anywhere, but definitely not easy dating in Hollywood. I don’t know whether I’d call it ‘fun.’ It’s very interesting—let’s just say that.”

On aging:

While traveling in Ireland, Spencer recalls “seeing all these women with platinum silver hair and there was something about them—they were all so beautiful. My friend said it’s because they haven’t done anything to their faces. They look like a real 50-year-old or 60-year-old...if you’ve got a laugh line, you’ve earned it. It means you’re really happy. I’m fine with creases.”

On holiday plans:

The company of Spencer’s family grounds her: “I’ve always spent Christmas with my family,” she says. “Until I get married, I’ll always spend Christmas with my family in Alabama.”

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About AARP The Magazine

With more than 37 million readers, AARP The Magazine is the world's largest circulation magazine and the definitive lifestyle publication for Americans 50+. AARP The Magazine delivers comprehensive content through health and fitness features, financial guidance, consumer interest information and tips, celebrity interviews, and book and movie reviews. AARP The Magazine was founded in 1958 and is published bimonthly in print and continually online. Learn more at www.aarp.org/magazine/. Twitter: twitter.com/AARP

About AARP

AARP is the nation’s largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With nearly 38 million members and offices in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, AARP works to strengthen communities and advocate for what matters most to families with a focus on health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. AARP also works for individuals in the marketplace by sparking new solutions and allowing carefully chosen, high-quality products and services to carry the AARP name. As a trusted source for news and information, AARP produces the world’s largest circulation publications, AARP The Magazine and AARP Bulletin. To learn more, visit www.aarp.org or follow @AARP and @AARPadvocates on social media.

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