

# INTERVIEW WITH ANNA THOMSON, STAR OF THE MOVIE, "SUE," DIRECTED BY AMOS KOLLEK

BY HARIETTE SUROVELL  
PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBIN HOLLAND

## oh...Sue how much I missed u

**S**ue, directed by Amos Kollek and starring Anna Thomson, Tracee Ross and Dechen Thurman is a powerful and disturbing portrait of a New York City single woman's descent into friendlessness, joblessness, homelessness and, eventually, emotional illness. Sue, whose mother has Alzheimer's, whose beloved and protective boss has died, and whose tolerant landlord is losing his patience, is vulnerable, tormented, confused... and yet she retains a certain dignity as she attempts to make contact with others and invariably fails.

A fading beauty, Sue still has the power to attract men, and at one point she admits that she can "only communicate with people through sex." So she fills the void in her life with sexual encounters with strangers, all the while ignoring the reality of her financial demise and her impending eviction. Anna Thomson, a frail-looking blonde beauty who projects a complex vulnerability, immerses herself in the role so completely that one tends to confuse the actress with the part. Thomson, has, however, had a long film career, including parts in *Heaven's Gate*, *The Crow*, *I Shot Andy Warhol*, *True Romance*, *Something Wild*, and, perhaps, most memorably, as the prostitute whose face-slashing sets off a vendetta in *Unforgiven*.

I interviewed her in Cafe Orlin and she seemed much like Sue: fragile, gracious and vulnerable.

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**Given your long history in film, why do you think "Sue" is your first starring role?**

I don't know. People ask me that all the time. In France, the reviews have said, "Why have you kept this woman a secret?" I don't know. I putter along. I stopped working for a few years after my husband died. We had been married for seven years. He got colon cancer (Thomson has 61/2 year old twin sons from the marriage.) I just stopped working for a while and it was right after *Unforgiven* and I guess that was the time to strike because the iron was hot, but I wanted to be with my family. Then I met Amos Kollek almost by accident, and he wanted me to star in this role.

**I'm so sorry. Have you had a lot of tragedy in your life?**

I always had a perfect life until a certain point, when a lot of people died around me all at once. I was tougher before — bad tough and more resilient. Today, on the phone, this guy was just telling me what a bitch I used to be.

**How about a brief bio?**

I was raised in N.Y.C. and in France, where I went to school. My parents were in the fashion business, and my father really liked the elegance of French living. I didn't do well at school so I became a ballet dancer in Paris. I was a good soloist, but I wasn't good in the Corps. I came back to N.Y.C. and danced with a small company here, and then I

worked at the Public Theatre. Someone gave me a part in a play there almost by accident when I was quite young and I met Christopher Walken. He was really great to me. He protected me and told me all these looney maxims that were really right about how to exist in the world — like, "Say yes and then just do whatever you want." I've worked a lot with him since then and it seemed right that I should become an actress. I never went back to complete high school.

**You have played a lot of prostitutes (Thomson will also play a prostitute in Kollek's upcoming film *Fiona*, which features a number of actual "working girls"). Why?**

I've thought a lot about that. I don't know exactly why. For one thing, I do a lot of nudity, and a lot of actresses don't do nudity. For another, I do a lot of extreme characters, and prostitutes are extreme characters.

**Why so many extreme characters?**

Because my life has been extreme. It's been either totally perfect or everything's terrible. To play someone normal would be outside my ken because nothing normal ever happened to me.

**I think you have a vulnerable quality. Could that be a reason?**

Vulnerable with big tits.

**Amos Kollek is the son of Teddy Kollek, the Mayor of Jerusalem. What's he like?**

He's very quiet, but very intelligent, with a strange sense of humor, and he's very, very kind. He has a college degree in psychology.

**Let's talk about Sue, which is one of the more interesting movies I've seen in some time. I have never seen a movie about a woman character who can only communicate through sex.**

I think it's hard to make a connection in real life. I think that what Amos has done that is quite brilliant is not to make films where things come out easy and even... someone is nice and someone else is nice and so they make a connection. In real life, someone reaches out and someone else reaches out, but they miss. Sue wants help, but she doesn't really know the girl who offers to lend her money, and she's embarrassed, and then when she decides she wants the money, the girl is gone. I think that really happens in life... it's not as easy to make lasting connections as the movies depict.

**Well, most people have at least one friend. I don't think that the majority of people lead totally isolated lives.**

I don't think it's everybody, but I don't think it's as unusual as one thinks. I think there are people who look nice and they're going around getting their groceries so it's hard to judge how forlorn they are. Often, the people you think are

functioning are not really functioning.

**True. But have you ever encountered women who can only communicate through sex?**

AT: If you're having trouble finding a job, or if you're not in school, and you're semi-attractive, you can always walk into a bar and get some guy to come home with you. Ironically, it's one of the last socially-acceptable ways to make contact. But if I came up to you in a cafe and asked if I could have coffee with you and wanted to be your friend, you'd find it strange. A bar pick-up is risky, but it's not seen as aberrant.

**Don't you think that when Sue gets eaten out in the middle of a movie theatre that that's pretty extreme?**

I think that she's quite far along towards the end, and that everything that happens in the last few weeks is pretty extreme.

**How would you describe Sue?**

Amos has said that he has known women in N.Y.C. before — on the outside, they were smart, funny, charming, but actually, their lives were a lot worse than he had noticed. They were failing or falling through the cracks.

**Does Sue's predicament somehow mirror your own life, in that you have had so many tragedies?**

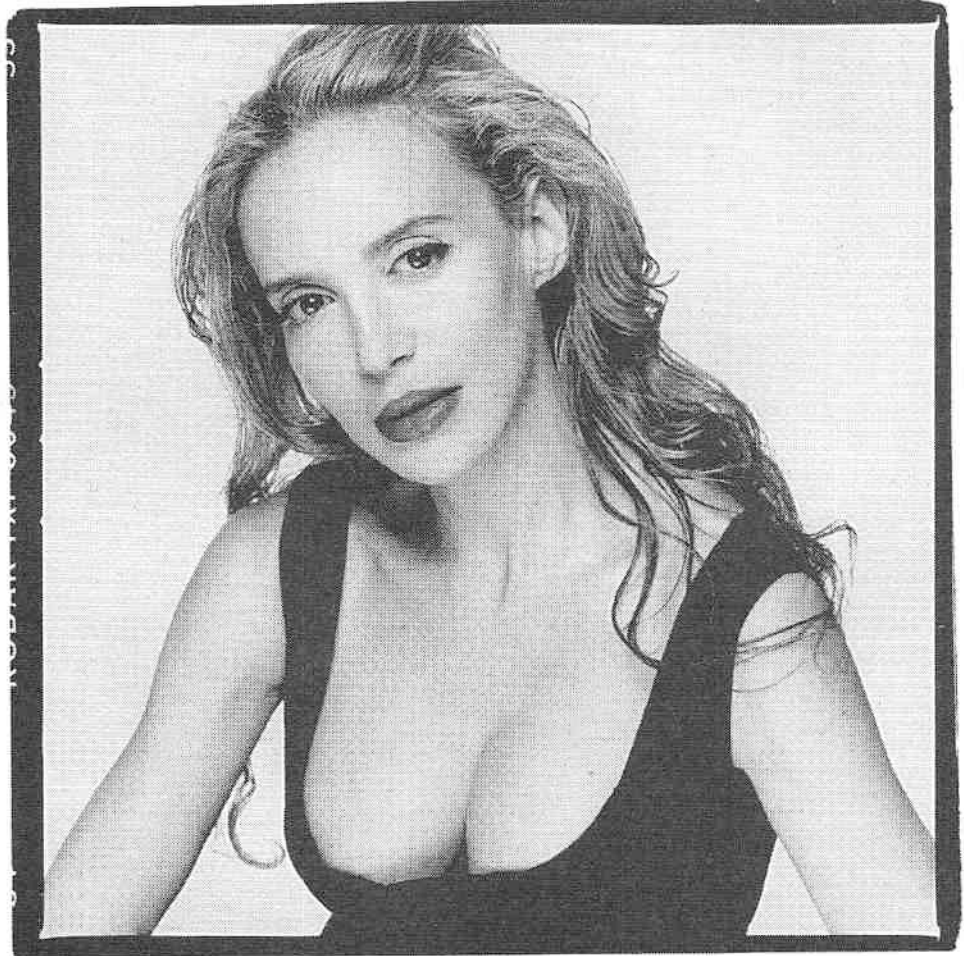
I don't think I could have played this character before my husband died. But Amos has such a light touch. He was able, with very minimal takes to achieve a great balance. He kept Sue probable and identifiable. He kept the film from falling into various potential abysses. He has a good touch for many things going on at the same moment.

**What didn't seem credible to me was how, with her resume and experience, Sue couldn't get a job.**

But people can smell desperation. If they see that something is off, anything that happens in the job interview is a clue to them. Sue didn't get jobs because of how she looked or what she said, but because she gave off that smell.

**You say that Sue's decline began way before we're introduced to her in the movie.**

You'd have to make a 40 year movie to explain someone's life. I don't know that Sue declines emotionally. Certainly, she does physically. She's trying not to turn into some horrible woman who blames everyone else for her life. And one problem is that she never had an effective support system. If, when her boss died, she had been able to talk to her mother, that might have helped save her. But she couldn't, because her mother had Alzheimer's. I think Sue feels that if she's gonna go down — and it looks like she is — she's going to retain all her dignity and control. She can't control her bank account, her life or her relationships, but she can at least control her behavior and be nice to people.



**Why doesn't she try to get her rent paid?**

I think at the very beginning she doesn't really believe that the landlord will throw her out. She keeps thinking he'll float her another month as he has before, and suddenly, she's out on the street.

**I would have made a more concerted effort to pay the rent, but Sue just gets drunker and drunker.**

I think she tries. I think she keeps thinking that when she gets a job, she'll pay back the rent.

**When she sleeps with Austin Pendleton and he thinks she's a prostitute and offers her money, she's incredibly appalled and shocked... and this from someone who has public sex in a movie theater. Why didn't she just take the money and start charging for sex and get her rent paid?**

I think everyone has different standards. At certain points, she's very conservative, and, at others, she's not conservative at all. For some reason, that's just not what she wanted to do. She didn't want the stigma or whatever.

**What is this movie about to you?**

I think that, like anything, it's about a lot of things... compassion, kindness, dignity, bad timing... going down but being admirable.

**Who did Willie, the black man she met periodically in the park, symbolize?**

He was a symbol of the people you can meet in N.Y.C. who are genuinely kind, and that two people who are both going down can be kind. New York isn't just a tough city. Sometimes, for absolutely no reason, people are kind. Does it change anything? No. Are you glad the moment existed? Yes.