



*"... if we are led by God and not our own desires, we have an opportunity to be INFLUENCERS and affect lives."*

ACTING ON

# Smith

*Actress and author Nancy Stafford doesn't aim to leave her legacy on film or the printed page. Instead, she feels her greatest work is helping others draw closer to Christ, whether they live next door or across the globe.*

IN HER 25 YEARS AS AN ACTRESS, NANCY STAFFORD has had some notable roles, including that of Andy Griffith's resourceful law partner, Michelle, on the long-running television series *Matlock*, which can still be seen in syndication. However, her greatest roles have largely been played offscreen—as a Christian author and speaker, a board member of several organizations that minister to the Hollywood community, and a pastor's wife. Not content to rest on her laurels, though, Nancy continues to look for new ways to serve the Lord in the second half of life.

"New beginnings are not just for the young," says Nancy, 54, who believes that God is calling her and others of her generation, telling them: "It is not too late; I still have plenty for you to do."

In fact, she believes that maturity better equips us for service. An outing during a recent trip to Egypt reinforced that belief. While watching the production of papyrus, she saw the plant material being soaked, pounded, squeezed, and compressed until it finally became something to be written upon. "It is the same with us," she observes. "Life may have shaken, wounded, or compressed us, but now we are softened and finally able to be in a place where God can write something on our hearts."

While she continues her work with Christian organizations that serve those in the entertainment industry and a busy schedule of speaking at colleges, retreats, and conferences, Nancy also has found herself embracing a more global outlook, which she views as a natural progression of her ministry. "We may enter midlife



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thinking. *What do I have to do with the state of the world today? or How can God make an inroad? But we should instead think, Worldwide, wherever I choose, I can plant a seed."*

Toward that end, she has begun working with SAT-7, a Christian satellite television network that offers programming that is locally produced by and for Christians in the Middle East and North Africa. The 24-hour, multichannel operation broadcasts inspirational Bible-based programming, including children's programs and talk shows focusing on women's issues, to millions of viewers.

In an area of the world where illiteracy is prevalent, Nancy points out

that television can be a powerful source of support and education. "These individuals are highly persecuted; it can seem impossible to live as a convert in the Arab world," she says. "We are so blessed and have taken it for granted, when people all over the world are dying for their faith in Christ and are clamoring for information."

Nancy didn't always live out her faith with such passion. Raised as a believer during her late teens, the Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, native rebelled against what she viewed as hypocrisy in her church. "When I went to college, that provided me with a good excuse not to go to church, and pretty soon, I was cooked," she reflects. It would be 15 years before she found her way back to the Lord, a journey that began with a medical crisis.

When she was in her mid-20s, Nancy was living New York City, enjoying a successful career as a model and actress on the daytime soap opera *The Doctors*. Then she was diagnosed with skin cancer, and doctors told her the surgery needed to remove it might disfigure her face. "I began to realize how important this shell, this façade, had become to me," she says. "I grew up ridiculed—I was a geeky, gangly girl—so the fact that my looks had become my source of affirmation and income was ironic. I was so far from my roots."

For the next few years, she became a student of world religions and New Age philosophies, with a little Christianity mixed in, as she sought to satisfy the yearning in her soul. Then came an unexpected encounter with God on a beach in Hawaii. A production mix-up caused her to arrive several days early for the filming of an episode of *Magnum P.I.* Determined to stay out of the sun, she holed up in her hotel room,

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her only reading material a recently purchased book of Christian testimonies. "It broke me," she recalls. "It was as if God had made an appointment with me, and by the end of the three days, I was the prodigal child, rushing back into God's arms."

After that conversion experience, she prayed for work that wouldn't compromise her faith and was offered a role on the Disney series *Sidekicks*. She also prayed for a godly man with whom to share her life. She soon met one—at a Marina del Rey espresso bar. Larry Myers was a professional musician and pastor who had established several churches in the Los Angeles area and specialized in ministering to artists and musicians.

The couple dated for a year and a half, "to be sure he knew what it was like to be an actress' husband and I knew what it would be like to be a pastor's wife," says Nancy. Happily married for 19 years, the couple has enjoyed rehabbing a ranch just outside of Los Angeles, which they open to others for retreats, and they are currently contemplating new directions for their ministry.

"We have both been blessed with amazing, interesting, and varied careers," says Nancy. "This next season of our lives, we need to decide what to do next and how we can pour ourselves into the next generation of people who are taking the church forward."

For that reason, she continues to work with groups that serve the entertainment industry, including Hollywood Connect, which provides young believers with spiritual and practical guidance when they arrive in Tinseltown.

Nancy believes in leading by example, saying that it's impossible to impose faith on the secular media through boycotts or legislation about content. "You



*Before beginning her acting career, Nancy was a top model with the Ford Agency in New York. Here, she appears in a 1982 ad for salon products (top) and a 1984 high-fashion photo (middle). As an actress, Nancy has starred in and appeared on television series as well as movies. Here, she's shown with Robert Hays, her co-star in the 1995 television movie *Deadly Invasion*.*



"We honor Christ with all of our life. In every occupation and work environment, we are REFLECTIONS OF WHO HE IS."

Nancy and her husband of 19 years, Larry Myers.



have to change the hearts and minds of people. We all represent Christ in how we conduct ourselves in the workplace. That means being on time, valuing excellence, and taking on more than your share of the load. It's not about evangelizing all the time. We honor Christ with all of our life. In every occupation and work environment, we are reflections of who He is."

As she looks back, Nancy can see how God ordered her steps, as each of her careers and life experiences has dovetailed with the others—her acting experience led her to host a syndicated television show *Main Floor*, focusing on beauty and fashion, which segued into an Internet column that eventually grew into a book,

*Beauty by the Book: Seeing Yourself as God Sees You* (Multnomah Publishers, 2002).

That book led to speaking engagements across the country and eventually to another book, *The Wonder of His Love: A Journey Into the Heart of God* (Multnomah Publishers, 2004). While the second book is a devotional, Nancy says both books have a similar purpose: helping people "understand how incredibly and passionately God is in love with us—the real us."

Through her books and speaking, Nancy has found that sharing even the most painful experiences of her life, including childhood insecurities and the heartbreak of infertility, miscarriage, and failed adoption, has allowed her to connect with others in similar situations. "I was sometimes hesitant to share my own struggles, but I realized I was missing an opportunity to minister to others," she says. "I began to see that I could comfort others by sharing the comfort I received from Christ."

While embracing ways to minister to others, Nancy has continued acting, recently appearing in the film *The Wager*, starring Randy Travis, and making guest appearances on several prime-time television series, including *ER* and *Judging Amy*.

Between writing, speaking, acting, and ministry work, Nancy's days are full, and she wouldn't have it any other way. "I have never worked harder in my life as I have in these last six years of writing and speaking, and I have never earned less money or had more life challenges," she says. "But, I have never had a season in life during which I felt I made as much of an impact as I do now—on young women and the next generation of Hollywood, and through SAT-7."

She is looking forward to what's ahead and is willing to let God chart the course. "So much of my career has not always been what I planned, but you have to be willing to get off the main road. Sometimes the road you end up on leads straight to your destiny. The path may be overgrown with weeds, and it may not be easy to find, but if we are led by God and not our own desires, we have an opportunity to be influencers and affect lives."

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To find out more about SAT-7, visit [www.sat7.org](http://www.sat7.org).