

george hamilton

The Man Behind the Tan
by Jann Seal

He's good looking, debonair, wears his grey hair like a crown and sports a signature tan that just won't stop. Meet George Hamilton, all of the above and more! In a recent interview with *Fabulously 50+* Magazine, he revealed a treasure trove of lifetime hurts, happiness, what-was-then and what-is-now reflections and basic tenets that guided him to a successful life as an actor, personality, father and genuine, down-to-earth person.

Hamilton spent his high school years in Palm Beach, surrounded by wealth and glamour, and that influenced his evolution. Much has been written about his relationship with his mother, two brothers, and the fairy tale life he lived when Worth Avenue was his playground. Yet little is known about how it affected his direction as a maturing adult.

"My mother had a house on North Ocean Boulevard," he says, "but the house I lived in as a teenager was not the same when I looked at it as an adult. It's the adult perspective that creates the shadings in your life definitions."

Remembering his life as a student at Palm Beach High School, Hamilton admits that he often reflects

on who he's become as an adult. He remembers watching celebrities, politicians, socialites and captains of industry floating down Worth Avenue in a world known only unto those in their strata. "You'd see Jack Kennedy, world-class polo players, people who were only written about in magazines, and here I was, wondering who I was going to be."

The anchor piece in the puzzle of "Who is George Hamilton?" was put into place when he opted out of English class and into an acting class. It proved to be a good move, and he even won an award as "Best Actor in the State of Florida" at a statewide competition. Armed with a newfound confidence and the first inkling of what he wanted to be, Hamilton learned that acting the part would eventually get him the part.

A thrift shop purchase of a \$10 tuxedo started opening doors and in he went. His mother had advised him to sport a tuxedo when he didn't know what else to wear, even if it had holes. "The holes made it look very chic, like it belonged to your grandfather," he recalled her saying. "And don't worry about being overdressed," she said. "The tuxedo just makes you look like you're going on to a better party!"

He wore that tuxedo regardless of the evening's focus, and this proved to be his personal party trick. Hamilton continued his studies of the lifestyles of the



George Hamilton reveals a treasure trove to Fabulously 50+ Magazine

rich and famous while working as a cabana boy at a friend's club in Westhampton, Long Island, and began acting his part.

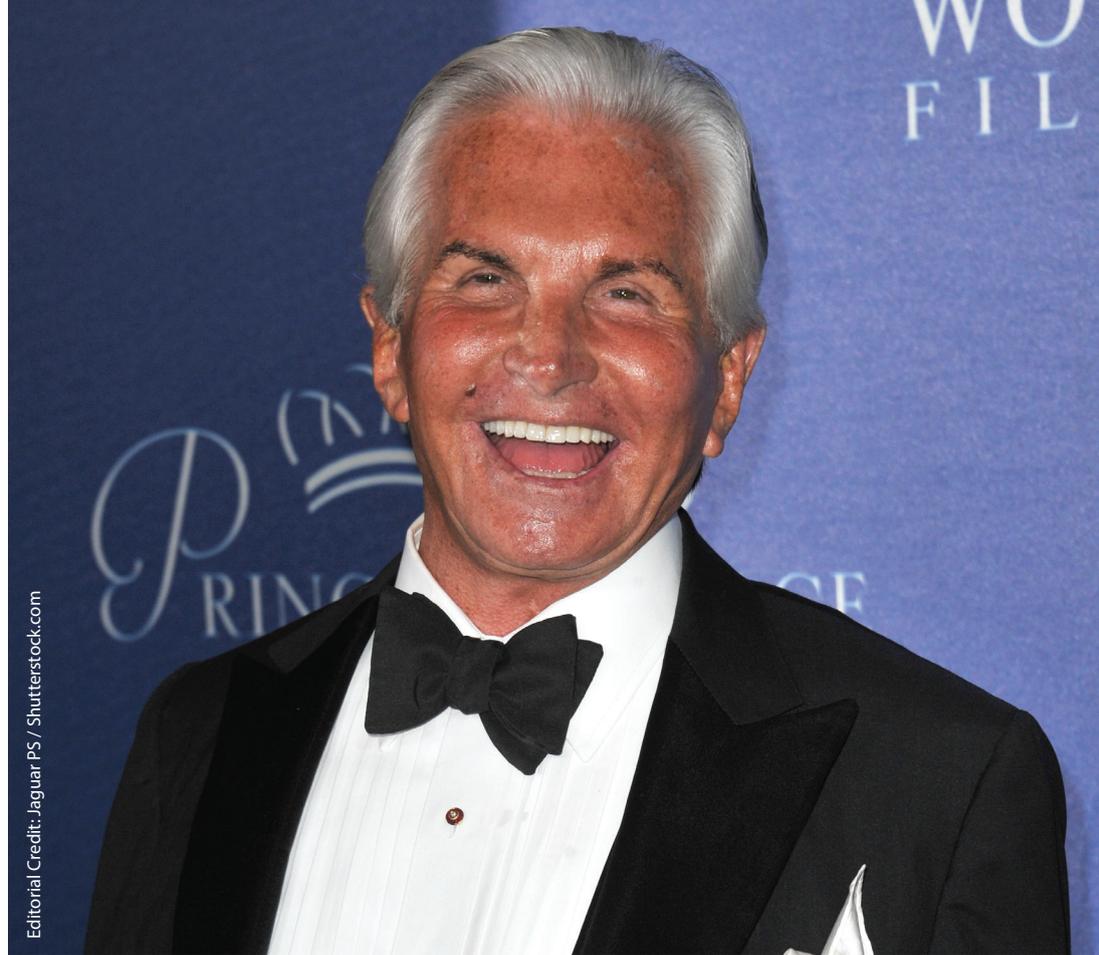
The tuxedo also enhanced the bravado Hamilton carried naturally. "I never was in awe of movie stars. My mom and my brother always treated me as an adult. I had no fear of celebrities. Stars were just people my mother and brother wanted to be like, and so did I."

Hamilton's filmography is legend, and includes Golden Globe and BAFTA awards for his body of work, most notably as Georges in the national tour of "La Cage Aux Folles." But you don't get awards for lifetime values, and that's where Hamilton shines brighter than his statues.

"Your principles are what define you as a man. The sons of men who have made it in industry have no value for the struggle. They inherit and splash their money around to cover their feelings of inadequacy." This philosophy was brought home to him as he sat at his brother Bill's bedside shortly before his death.

"I knew that Bill loved 'things' – cars, jewelry and the outward manifestations of wealth, but at the end of his life, when I asked him what he would have liked out of life, his words were to love more."

Hamilton believes that money should be used to help others, not for an inheritance. "Money has an energy. It should be constantly moved about or it'll strangle you."



His connection with drug rehabilitation is well-known in Palm Beach County, and he faults the medical profession for over-prescribing pain medication that often leads to addiction. "People are easily addicted to pain meds. Then they take to the streets to get more, and a vicious cycle is born. This generation needs people of character to help them, because their lives have been left in a mess."

Hamilton's values are rooted in his generation -- he turns 77 this year. "I was born in 1939, when people were proud

to be Americans. I saw soldiers returning home after World War II and watched as the country thanked them for what they had sacrificed."

"As an actor, I was stunned to realize the importance we were handed, sometimes above that of heads of state. Actors and the films we made allowed people to dream, which was important in the war years. Problems were forgotten as they sat in the darkened theater. But the studio forbade us to talk of politics, to have a public opinion on anything."

"My belief was that an actor's role was to be an example, not to be put on a pedestal and revered for all the money we made and spent. While we had to keep our opinions to ourselves and not preach, we demonstrated our beliefs living by example."

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Hamilton has followed this principle his entire life. Add his inimitable sense of humor, and you have the man pegged. His latest incarnation...as Colonel Sanders in Kentucky Fried Chicken's Extra Crispy (read extra-tan) Fried Chicken commercials. His white suit tugs at the buttons across his chest, and his goatee may be a bit off-center, but these are just the subtle touches of humor that define George Hamilton wherever he goes. He is so much more than "the man with the tan." 🍷