Leigh Taylor-Young

Actress
Soylent Green (1973)

Entrancing Leigh Taylor-Young was born on January 25, 1945, in Washington, D,C,. to a diplomat father and raised in Bloomfield Hills, MICHIGAN, the older sister of future actress Dey Young and writer/director Lance Young. She studied classical ballet and, following high school, attended Northwestern University where she initially majored in economics. She switched gears after developing an interest in theater, however, and studied under drama teacher Alvina Krause, and would apprentice as the youngest member of the Eaglesmere Summer Repertory Theatre.

Leigh eventually moved to New York with designs on a professional career and studied under acting guru Sanford Meisner at the Neighborhood Playhouse. Her major break came when she was cast in the already firmly established primetime TV soap Peyton Place (1964). She played the mysterious Rachael Welles, whose character was brought in to provide clues to the disappearance of Allison MacKenzie (played by Mia Farrow who shocked ardent viewers by abruptly leaving the series). A mysterious girl herself, Leigh proved to be a fetching figure with her slightly off-kiltered beauty and unsympathetic countenance.

Like Farrow, Leigh developed a bit of bad publicity when she too walked off the weekly series after only one season. She also fell into the arms of the very popular -- and very married -- series star Ryan O'Neal. The couple would marry in February 1967 following his divorce from actress Joanna Moore. By then, Leigh was already pregnant with their child Patrick O'Neal, who would later become an actor before turning to sportscasting.

Leigh started off in films auspiciously as a "flower child" of the psychedelic late 1960s. She earned a Golden Globe nomination for "Best Newcomer," when she played opposite Peter Sellers, in the eccentric comedy, I Love You, Alice B. Toklas! (1968), but then appeared opposite her husband in The Big Bounce (1969), a kinky misfire. She went on to appear in a cameo in her husband's British-made movie, The Games (1970), but her career sputtered again with a series of misguided features, including the star-heavy epic, The Adventurers (1970); another kinky British film, The Buttercup Chain (1970), which dealt with kissing cousins who don't quite stop at kissing; the beautifully photographed but rather hollow action-adventure The Horsemen (1971) co-starring Omar Sharif; and the mild romp, The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight (1971) which is best remembered for starting Robert De Niro off and running in films. Arguably, Leigh's best remembered role during that period came alongside Charlton Heston in the controversial film Soylent Green (1973), although she was a bit overshadowed by the grisly topic material and showier performances of co-stars Heston and Edward G. Robinson.

Following her separation from O'Neal in 1971 (they didn't divorce until 1974), the actress made herself somewhat scarce while raising her young son. In 1978, she married agent/director Guy McElwaine, but that marriage would also end in divorce. In the 1980s, she made a comeback of sorts as a mature -- but still spicy -- presence. Taking a backseat to Albert Finney in the film thriller Looker (1981) and to Glenn Close and Jeff Bridges in the whodunnit Jagged Edge (1985), she found her best results back on TV.

Leigh would nab a supporting Emmy award in 1994 for her portrayal of vixen Rachel Harris on the acclaimed drama series Picket Fences (1992). In addition, she performed in several plays, in the US, England and Scotland, including "The Beckett Plays", "Knives" and "Sleeping Dogs". More recently, she appeared in her writer/director brother Lance Young's film Bliss (1997). Leigh also would play a regular role on the daytime soap, Passions (1999) as wealthy Katherine Crane.

A few movie roles have come her way into the millennium, including the film comedy Slackers (2002); a cameo role (as Mrs. Leigh Taylor Young) in then-husband Craig Sheffer's film Ritual (2002); the comedy crimer Klepto (2003); the comedy A-List (2006); as a psychiatrist in the sci-fi adventure Spiritual Warriors (2007) and, more recently, the drama The Wayshower (2011).

Finding a fulfilling life off-camera, Leigh became an ordained minister in the Movement of Spiritual Inner Awareness, and her voice can be heard in the Search of Serenity series of audio meditations from The Course in

Miracles trainings. She is also a grandmother of two granddaughters from son Patrick's affair with the older Rebecca De Mornay.