



THANKSGIVING AT ELIZABETH'S

BY ALEX HITZ



MOST OF THE TIME, if you move to a new city far away from the one you grew up in, you end up making another kind of family: the family of beloved friends. I've now done this twice—once in New York, and again in Los Angeles. This family is the one you choose—and they choose you—not the one you were born into. And that chosen family often has an extended family as well.

Victoria Brynner, a celebrity broker and producer—and daughter of Yul “The King” and Dior home guru Doris—is one of my chosen family. Early on in my Los

Angeles holiday career, Victoria suggested I join her, her husband, Gino, and their children for Thanksgiving—at the home of her godmother, who just so happened to be one of the most famous actresses in the world. Yep. Sounds great. I'd love to.

Elizabeth Taylor's house, where I first went in 2003, and then many more times for both Thanksgiving and Easter dinners before she died, was an unremarkable brown-glass 1960s suburban-type house, with a super-remarkable art collection. Her father had been an art dealer, and when Elizabeth first started

making money as an actress, he advised that she buy paintings. Her collection included masterpieces by Modigliani, Rembrandt, Renoir, Pissarro, Picasso, Hockney, Frans Hals...you name it. The living room, which transformed into a dining room at holiday time for the table for 40 people, was dripping with famous art—the really good stuff—just as her fingers and ears and neck and wrists were dripping with enviable jewelry. I was wowed by the contrast of that time-warped Brady Bunch house, complete with its shag carpet, and these

word-class pictures.

But the house just wasn't the point. Another contrast to be struck by: in Hollywood, it's not every day stars are surrounded by generations of family who love them and whom they love back—in fact, it's an anomaly. In addition to mother/daughter Debbie and Carrie, Jose Eber, George Hamilton, and a smattering of other celebrity orphans and strays, there were three generations of gorgeous Wildings and Todds and Burtons with the same electric violet eyes that their matriarch was so famous for. Trust me:

they *adored* their mother, their grandmother. I could tell all this before I ever even met her.

The game that everyone played, and had done for many years, was guessing—even betting—when Elizabeth would come down from her room. We were invited for 4 in the afternoon, and she usually arrived around 6:30 or once even 7. They said sometimes she didn't come down at all, but I never saw that—even when she was really sick. Whenever I was there, Elizabeth came down. Make no mistake that, even from her wheelchair,

where she was towards the end, she was still a STAR.

“Elizabeth, I'd like you to meet my friend Alex,” cooed Victoria to her godmother. And Elizabeth looked up, and I looked at her, and that moment is one I will never forget in my life. Her violet eyes shined on me and her face was nothing but warmth, intensity, and welcome. Elizabeth's hand outstretched, and the world was, all of a sudden, never the same: those eyes looked into mine and she said, liltily, “Oh I am SO happy you are here. I've heard so much about you.” ♦



Opposite page: Thanksgiving always reminds Alex of Elizabeth Taylor, who hosted him for the holiday beginning in 2003. This page, clockwise from top left: Elizabeth Taylor, known for her enviable jewelry collection, at the 1957 Cannes Film Festival; George Hamilton was another regular guest at Taylor's Thanksgiving dinners; Taylor was long adored and surrounded by her children and their families; the remarkable art collection at Taylor's home.

