

## 'Reason for Living' not just Jill Ireland's story

### Jill Clayburgh lands role in family drama

Christy Bergslien

"Reason for Living: The Jill Ireland Story" is not about the actress, says Jill Clayburgh. The TV movie, airing Monday, May 20, on NBC and starring Clayburgh in the title role, is about families.

Actress Jill Ireland made 35 films in her long career. Almost one year ago to date, she died of breast cancer. But before her death, the actress penned two novels: "Life Wish," chronicling her battle with cancer, and "Life Lines," depicting her adopted son's heroin addiction, overdose and death.

"Reason for Living" is based on "Life Lines" and Ireland's determination to help her son beat the monkey off of his back.

"I think she felt strongly about what she learned from having dealt with her cancer," said Clayburgh of Ireland. "She felt she could help her son deal with his flirtation with death. She felt she knew something about death, and, therefore, she had a way to communicate with him."

The film is really about what you do and where you turn when you have tried everything you can think of to help a loved one. "It's not about her as a celebrity or as an actress," said Clayburgh. "It's a very passionate story about a woman and her feelings for her family, her children, her parents, her own life and her own mortality. People might turn it on because it's Jill Ireland, but I think the book's success is because of its originality. It's not a self-serving book about 'how great I am' and 'how wonderful I am.' It's a pretty soul-searching look."

Originally, Ireland had planned to play herself in the telefilm. She is, in fact, executive producer of the production. When she realized it would be impossible to do so, she made a list of the actresses she would want to see in her role. Clayburgh, nominated twice for an

Oscar ("An Unmarried Woman, Starting Over") and once for an Emmy ("Hustling"), made the list and won the part.

Ireland's husband, Charles Bronson, reportedly hasn't read either of his wife's books and was opposed to the making of "Reason for Living." His role will be played by Lance Henriksen ("Aliens"). "It's something that she jokes about in her book and, in fact, the movie," said Clayburgh, noting it was her understanding that things had been worked out with Bronson.

Clayburgh has never met Bronson or Ireland. The materials she used to prepare for her role were Ireland's books, tapes she had made with the show's producers and TV interviews. It is the second real-

person role she has played. In 1976 she played Carole Lombard in the biographical film "Gable and Lombard." Such a role demands certain responsibilities, but she looks at it as a challenge.

"I think that the film is about her very human struggle to find an answer, and then to have to try something else," concluded Clayburgh, herself the mother of three. "Parents feel so helpless when these things happen and so inadequate and sort of that feeling that 'Anybody could do it (parenting) better than I could.' I hope that you walk away seeing that nobody does it all that well, but everybody does it as well as they can, and that's sort of all you can ask of yourself."

Academy Award-nominee Jill Clayburgh plays the title role in "Reason for Living: The Jill Ireland Story," Monday on NBC. The biodrama, based on Ireland's bestseller "Life Lines," chronicles the actress' fight to end her son's heroin addiction amid her own battle with cancer.



Phyllis Rashad (left) and Dyan Cannon form an unlikely friendship while handcuffed together and on the lam in CBS' *Jailbirds*, premiering Thursday.