

● screen



# Austin Powered

Texas's Sandra Bullock bounces back from a personal rough patch with a batch of new films

"I didn't realize this year was going to be as full as it was," Bullock (on Oscar night in March) said recently. "I'm tired."

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"Sandra has a twinkly, goosey quality," says her *Numbers* costar Ben Chaplin.



*Notice* "is a love story to New York," says Bullock (on location with Hugh Grant).

For once Sandra Bullock enjoyed going to the Oscars. Deeply attached to the halter tops and jeans she wears at home in Austin, Texas, Bullock began the morning of March 24 grimly telling her assorted primpers, "I just want to go do this thing and go home." Then she was poured into a Valentino gown that "made me feel like a princess." Lined up as the night's prince: Hugh Grant, her costar in the upcoming romantic comedy *Two Weeks' Notice*. "He oozes charm," the girl-next-door says of the rake-next-door. "But I'm sure he's a different charming with me than with the ladies." She pauses, then erupts in laughter: "Not that I'm not a lady!"

No doubt. But it's no surprise that Bullock, 37, doesn't think of herself as a Hollywood glamor gal. With homes in Austin, Jackson Hole, Wyo., and Tybee Island, Ga., the actress manages to avoid the place for most of the year. But with three movies hitting theaters in '02—the current thriller *Murder by Numbers*, next month's *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* and *Notice*, slated for December—she can't dodge the spotlight for long. In fact,

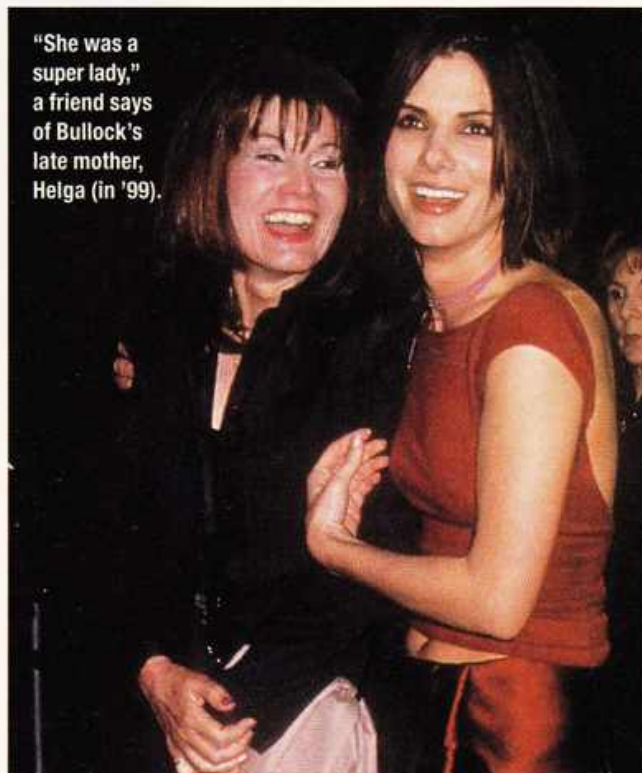
Thomas, who directed Bullock in *28 Days*, "She's a big, fat woman star, and all big, fat women stars have a tough time with men."

For Bullock the past couple of years have been tough, period. In April 2000 her mother, Helga, a German-born opera singer, died at 63 after battling cancer. Seven months later the chartered plane Bullock was traveling in crashed on landing in Jackson Hole, losing its wings and nose. Bullock walked away without a scratch, for which she credits her late mother: "I feel like I always have someone watching my back."

Friends say Bullock still faces such challenges with the same pluck and kindness that earned her the title of senior Most Likely to Brighten Your Day two decades ago at Washington-Lee High in Arlington, Va., where she and her sister Gesine, now the 32-year-old head of Bullock's production company, were reared by Helga and her husband, John, a former voice coach. These days Bullock—who stays fit with the Zone diet and *Bun Busters!* videos—brings a Chinese herbalist and acupuncturist to her movie sets to help cast and crew cope with stress. "If you had anything wrong with you," says Ryan Gosling, who plays a teen killer pursued by Bullock's tough detective in *Numbers*, "you could go see them. She paid for that." Another on-set staple: her handheld BlackBerry computer, on which she dashes off e-mails. Her attachment to the device came in handy on Sept. 11, when Bullock was evacuated from her hotel room in lower Manhattan just after the World Trade Center collapsed. Running uptown with the crowd, "cell phones didn't work, so I e-mailed people that their relatives were okay," she says. "I kept running around asking, 'Who do you need me to e-mail?'"

Now she can afford to give the little organizer a long recharge. After *Notice* wraps sometime in May, Bullock plans to take a year off to hang out at her stone farmhouse in Austin. That means she won't—as widely rumored—play Wonder Woman in the upcoming remake of the kitsch '70s TV show. "Ixnay on the Onder-Woman-Way," she says in pig Latin. Followed, again, by robust laughter: "But I *am* a wondrous woman."

● Mark Dagostino and Amy Longsdorf in New York City, Anne Lang and Hilary Hylton in Austin, Rachel Biermann and Michael Fleeman in Los Angeles and Angie Isidro Bresnahan in Arlington



"She was a super lady," a friend says of Bullock's late mother, Helga (in '99).

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