

The Wild, Wild Ways of Nicolas Cage

“There’s a very fine line between Method actor and schizophrenic,” Cage has said. Which might explain this unpredictable star, who ricochets between inspired, offbeat performances and empty blockbusters; indulges in confounding extravagance; and names a son after Superman. How did Nicolas Coppola become Nicolas Cage? **LOGAN HILL**

PARENTAL GUIDANCE

JANUARY 7, 1964
Born in California to Joy Vogelsang, a dancer, and August Coppola, a literature professor and brother of **Francis Ford**.

1970
“When I was 6, I would sit there just wishing I could get inside that **little Zenith TV**. I wanted to be an actor.”



EARLY SEVENTIES
One Thanksgiving, August sets dinner table with no food, just **crayons and paper plates**.

1976
August divorces Joy, a schizophrenic. Cage: “She was plagued with mental illness for most of my childhood.”

1979
At age 15, Cage confronts famous uncle: “Give me a screen test—I’ll **show you acting**.” There was just silence in the car.”

1981
Hair feathered, chest buff, he gets his first role—as a **bodybuilding surfer** in the TV flop *Best of Times*.



1987
Stars in Coen brothers’ *Raising Arizona*, which is a box-office failure, then a **cult hit**, thanks in part to an endearingly oddball Cage.



1986
For *Peggy Sue Got Married*, he aims for “**Jerry Lewis on acid**” while “talking like Pokey from *The Gumby Show*... Francis hasn’t worked with me since.”



1984
Method acting in *Birdy*: Wears war-scarred character’s facial bandages for five weeks straight. Also persuades pal Johnny Depp to act.



1983
After choosing Matt Dillon over his nephew for *The Outsiders*, Francis Ford Coppola casts Cage in *Rumble Fish*. **Cage changes name**, inspired by either African-American Marvel Comics character Luke Cage or composer John Cage.



1983
For his first lead—a goofy punk in *Valley Girl*—Cage is praised by one critic for “**dopey sexuality**.”

THE DEFINING ROLES

1982
On the set of first film, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, “I was the **brunt of jokes** because my name was still Coppola.”



1987
First big hit: *Moonstruck*, with Cher. *The New Yorker*: “He may be the only young actor **who can look stupefied while he smolders**.”

1987
Proposes to Patricia Arquette at first sight. She refuses; he suggests a “quest” to prove his love. She asks for J. D. Salinger’s autograph, a black orchid, a **Bob’s Big Boy statue**, and a Tibetan wedding dress. Cage obliges; Arquette again refuses, then relents in 1995; marriage lasts six years.



1988
Cage **eats a cockroach** in the deeply strange *Vampire’s Kiss*. “If Pete Townshend could smash his guitar, I could damn well eat the bug.”



1990
Cage’s **first stab at action star** (*Fire Birds*) misfires: “They were trying for *Top Gun*. I couldn’t fit that bill.”

CHANNELING ELVIS



1990
Bases performance in David Lynch’s *Wild at Heart* on hero **Elvis Presley**.

1990
Pretends he’s a pilot, telling 300 fellow passengers their plane is losing altitude. “It was a joke, but **everyone started screaming**.” On December 26, has first child, son Weston, with girlfriend Christina Fulton.

NIC CAGE BY THE NUMBERS

- Total lifetime box office: **\$3.9 BILLION**
- Box office for two *National Treasure* films: **\$804,876,918**
- Box office for Oscar-winning *Leaving Las Vegas*: **\$32 MILLION**
- Box office for his directorial debut *Sonny*: **\$30,000**
- Number of tattoos on his back featuring a lizard wearing a top hat and carrying a cane: **1**
- Number of soundtracks featuring his singing: **5**
- Number of castles he’s owned: **3**
- Number of Bahamian islands he’s owned: **2**
- The most he’s spent on one car (for a Lamborghini formerly owned by the shah of Iran): **\$493,000**
- Number of pet sharks: **1**
- Amount currently owed in back taxes: **\$6 MILLION**

1996
Boorish big-budget phase begins with Michael Bay’s *The Rock* (\$335 million worldwide).



BLOCKBUSTER SUPERHERO



1997
More profitable **tough guys**: *Con Air* (“I’m going to be a cross between Elvis and Gregg Allman”) and *Face/Off*.



2002
Marries Elvis’s daughter, **Lisa Marie**, on August 10; files for divorce November 25.

2002
Nominated for an Oscar for two roles in *Adaptation*; Roger Ebert calls Cage “one of our **greatest male stars**” for his **daring choices** and profound commitment to his characters.



2004
National Treasure trashed by critics. Earns **\$347 million** worldwide.



OCTOBER 3, 2005
Third wife, Alice Kim, gives birth to son **Kal-El**, named after **Superman**. Career in mostly blockbuster overdrive.



2007
Outbids Leo DiCaprio in frenzied auction for **dinosaur skull**. Pays \$276,000.

2000-2002
Makes **directorial debut**, *Sonny*, starring James Franco. Also spends a few years chasing Oscar with serious leading-man roles, including silly *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*, for which he learns to play mandolin.



2000
For *Gone in 60 Seconds* with Angelina Jolie (whom he calls “**the female me**”), Cage negotiates for \$20 million against 15 percent of gross.



OCTOBER 2009
Sues former money manager for \$20 million for sending him “down **a path of financial ruin**.” Most of his dozen or so homes, 50 cars, two islands, two yachts, and jet have been sold, foreclosed upon, or are on the market.



NOVEMBER 2009
Fearlessly plays maniacal, off-the-rails cop in Werner Herzog’s *Bad Lieutenant*: **Port of Call New Orleans—his best role in years**.

STRANGER THAN FICTION

Cage doesn’t talk to the press much anymore, but when he did the quotes were classic.

ON BEING A COPPOLA:

“I felt like, ‘Why is it that [Francis Ford Coppola’s children] have all this stuff and my brothers and I don’t? I was frustrated beyond belief, man. I turned into **Heathcliff**. I felt a *Wuthering Heights* sort of drive... I said: You know what? I am going to get even somehow. I was going to buy a big house in San Francisco where they had one, and I did... It was unfortunate that revenge fueled so much of my ambition.”

ON MENTAL HEALTH:

“The offspring [of schizophrenics] tend to become overachievers... I’ve actually got a label. **I am a superfrenetic**. Charlie Chaplin was a superfrenetic.”

ON SELF-DEFENSE:

“I know if I do fight, I fight to kill. **My motto has always been Maximum Violence Immediately.**”

ON ELVIS:

“I was watching the documentary *This Is Elvis*, and by the time we got to him doing karate in a jumpsuit I was howling on the floor at the tragedy and the absurdity. That’s when I knew I loved Elvis. **He was the hot rebel in the fifties, an icon, and he was King Lear and the buffoon by the end**. His career was the ultimate myth.”

ON OVERSPENDING:

“I find ways of spending money that **mystify everybody around me.**”

ON STARDOM:

“We’ve become so glorified in the movie-star system that it’s become this artificial royalty, which, if you look at the roots of it, is completely preposterous. **The truth is that we’re circus clowns.**”

ON DRINKING:

“I have learned that when I do drink, just saying to myself, **‘I am sleek and self-contained’** spares me many problems.”

ON ACTING:

“I thought I could **change acting**, which isn’t a goal anymore.”

INFLUENCES ➤ **PINOCCHIO** Cage has said the Italian puppet’s story “parallels my life... The whole bit about ‘an actor’s life for me.’ Being a puppet who loses his strings.” ➤ **EDWARD MUNCH** While filming *Peggy Sue*, he relished stories of the painter’s clashes with critics: “I was delighted when I got terrible reviews.” ➤ **BARBARA EDEN** “When you fall into the Jeannie trap, you’re in trouble. They catch you, and you’re the one stuck in the bottle.” ➤ **EVEL KNIEVEL** “I saw George Hamilton play him in the movie, and I remember thinking

how cool Evel was.” ➤ **BRUCE LEE** “I wanted to be him so very badly I studied kung fu.” ➤ **JERRY LEWIS** “An idol for many years.” ➤ **LEADING MEN** For overall acting influences, he’s said, “I was doing what my heroes would do: Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift, Robert De Niro, Cary Grant.” ➤ **GENE KELLY AND MAX SCHRECK** The inspiration behind his bizarre turn in *Vampire’s Kiss*.

PHOTOGRAPHS: VENTURELLI/REIMAGE (MAIN IMAGE OF CAGE); UNIVERSAL/EVERETT COLLECTION (FAST TIMES AT RIDGEMONT HIGH POSTER, RUMBLE FISH); ATLANTIC RELEASES/EVERETT COLLECTION (VALLEY GIRL); TRISTAR PICTURES/EVERETT COLLECTION (SONNY); WILD AT HEART); GOLDWINE/EVERETT COLLECTION (ADAPTATION); HONEYMOON IN VEGAS); UNITED ARTISTS/EVERETT COLLECTION (LEAVING LAS VEGAS); BUENA VISTA COLLECTION (MOONSTRUCK); HENDALE FILM CORP./EVERETT COLLECTION (VAMPIRE’S KISS); WALT DISNEY CO./EVERETT COLLECTION (BRINGING OUT THE DEAD); TOUCHSTONE PICTURES/EVERETT COLLECTION (NATIONAL TREASURE); PATRICK MCKILLIAN (CAGE AND KING); COURTESY OF FIRST LOOK PICTURES (GAD LIEUTENANT); PORT OF CALL (NEW ORLEANS) PICTURES/EVERETT COLLECTION (GO AIR); THE ROCK); PARAMOUNT/EVERETT COLLECTION (BRINGING OUT THE DEAD);