

aryl Hannah is puzzled. Thirty minutes into lunch at a hip eatery in Venice, Calif., the owner drops by her table to say how thrilled he is to see her back at his restaurant. After he walks away, she stares into her bowl of vegetable soup, stunned that he even remembers her. "I don't think I've been here in 15 years," she whispers, shaking her head.

Not so long ago Daryl Hannah was a movie star. Problem was, she hated it. But there she was up in lights anyway, a loopy Amazonian blonde who beguiled America beginning with a turn as a lovelorn mermaid in 1984's Splash. She shared the screen with Tom Hanks, Steve Martin and Harrison Ford. Her romances buoyed the tabloids. But she just wanted to disappear. "I've never been comfortable being the center of attention," she says now. "It's always freaked me out." So Hannah dropped herself off the A-list, focused on environmental activism and retreated to a rural spread near Los Angeles. Now the 52-year-old drives a truck that runs on French fry grease, dotes on her rescue pig Molly and, when it suits her, actsmost recently in a little ensemble comedy called The Hot Flashes. But Hannah, who was diagnosed with autism as a child and suffered from "debilitating shyness" as a result of the disorder, says the best thing in her life now is growing comfortable in her own skin.

"I'm a grown-up now," she says. "I've learned a couple of things that would've really made my life easier if I'd only known them 20 years ago."

It was a hard road getting there. As a little girl growing up in an affluent Chicago family, Hannah seemed walled off from other people. She rocked incessantly—"I still do," she says-and "checked out" at school. Doctors diagnosed her with autism at a time when the disorder was not wellunderstood and recommended she be medicated and institutionalized. But her mother, Susan, a schoolteacher, refused. (Hannah's stepfather was Chicago developer Jerrold Wexler.) Isolated by her disorder, Hannah found solace watching reruns of old movies. "I



went on to appear in 1987's Wall Street and

2003's Kill Bill.



thought, 'If that's a job, I want to do it,'" she recalls. "Acting for me was about going to the Land of Oz and meeting the Tin Man. It still is."

With her family's backing, Hannah moved to Los Angeles at 17. An agent noticed her stunning looks and signed her. But overnight success was complicated by her autism, which she hid from movie executives. She refused to do talk shows or attend her own premieres "not because I was above it," she says, "but because I was terrified."

These days "I still work," says the vet-

eran of more than 40 films, "but I'm definitely not being offered the greatest roles in the world." Getting older is part of it, but despite nasty blog posts,

Hannah says she hasn't had plastic surgery. Rather, her focus is on her causes, which include promoting alternative fuels, marine protection and fighting human trafficking. Hannah has been jailed five times in the past seven years at various protests. "I've seen her so nervous she's literally shaking on a red carpet," says her best friend, Hilary Shepard. "But she's learned that when she feels passionate about some cause, she loses all her fears."

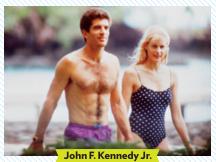
She has also left behind the luxuries of stardom. For two decades Hannah has lived off the grid, pumping well water and relying on solar power for her oneroom home in L.A. and for the ranch in the Rockies she shares with a menagerie of animals, including two alpacas. "She's constantly flying off to help someone or some cause," says Shepard. "Then she returns with a one-eyed dog." She's been "happily involved" with a man for 3½ years; she declines to name him, but she's been seen with Wallflowers keyboardist Rami Jaffee, 44. She says she learned from past relationships that "I no longer have time for unnecessary drama."

It's a good and simple life, and if people still do double takes, remembering that girl who was up there in lights, that's okay too. Back then, "I wasted so much time scared, self-conscious and insecure," says Hannah. But this afternoon, as she returns to her chickens, pig and garden, she's content. "Life," she shrugs, "is too short to stress the small things anymore." •

THE MEN SHE LOVED HER PAST ROMANCES TAUGHT HER 'NO DRAMA IS GOOD.... I MAKE WISER DECISIONS NOW!



Hannah met the musician, 12 years her senior, as a teen when he visited Chicago for a concert. The romance ended after a domestic dispute in 1992.



"America's most glamorous couple," as the British press crowned them, spent time in her hometown (Chicago) and his (N.Y.C.) before parting in 1994 after 51/2 years.



The Wallflowers keyboardist, 44, and Hannah have been photographed together at events since 2011, but she won't discuss the relationship.