

ALAN ARKIN'S CAPE BRETON ISLAND

BY TIFFANY THORNTON

The Margaree River, Cape Breton Island
Photograph: Adam Hill



Alan Arkin at his home on Cape Breton Island

Oscar-winning actor and author Alan Arkin has been entertaining audiences for decades with his wry humour and quick wit.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1934, Arkin knew from a very young age that he wanted to entertain and started taking acting lessons at the age of 10 years. He delved into music, as the lead singer and guitarist of The Tarriers, a folk group, in the mid-1950s. The band's success led to a hit song, "The Banana Boat Song," yet Arkin left it all behind to pursue acting, landing a gig with Second City. This opportunity opened him up to the world of improvisational comedy, which would play a pivotal role in his life.

Arkin's ever-evolving career has seen him take the stage on Broadway. On screen he brilliantly encapsulates each character he portrays. From one of his earliest roles as



Alan Arkin at Grand Étang Harbour, NS

a violent thug who terrorizes Audrey Hepburn in *Wait until Dark* to his most recent television roles in Netflix's *The Kominsky Method* alongside Michael Douglas and *Spenser: Confidential* with Mark Wahlberg, there is no question that Arkin always steals the show. He is one of only six actors to receive an Oscar nomination for his very first acting role (in Norman Jewison's *The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Coming*). He eventually won in 2006 for *Little Miss Sunshine*, in which he played a grouchy, heroin-snorting grandfather. This year he will appear as Wild Knuckles in *Minions: The Rise of Gru*, due to be released across Canada on July 2.

Yet there is also a side to Arkin that few know, one deeply rooted in his philosophical outlook on life. He has been meditating for over 50 years, and his "interior adventures," as he refers to them in his latest book, *Out of My Mind (Not Quite A Memoir)*, give the reader a glimpse into a more introspective and spiritual side of his journey. Around this time in his life, he visited Cape Breton Island for the first time and fell in love with the region instantly. He has had a home there for almost three decades. [EDIT]'s Tiffany Thornton caught up with Arkin to chat about his love of Cape Breton and his new book.



I FELT AN ENERGY IN CAPE BRETON THAT I NEVER FELT ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD.

[EDIT]: You have had a home on Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia for years. What drew you there? Was it an instant affinity?

ALAN ARKIN: I had, for most of my adult life, the sense that I had some inexplicable connection with Nova Scotia. But never visited till I was in my late forties. I was saddened when I first drove up because I didn't feel the connection that I thought I might, but then as I continued north and crossed the causeway to Cape Breton I immediately felt as if I'd come home. Don't ask me why, but that feeling has never changed.

Every time we go there it feels like a magical place. I had a German shepherd once. He was very well behaved; a magnificent, wonderful dog. The minute we drove up to cross the causeway he would start crying and didn't stop crying until he got to our place.



Alan Arkin after inner tubing down the Margaree River

Alan Arkin in *Inspector Clouseau*, 1968 *The Incredible Burt Wonderstone*, 2013Alan with the Best Supporting Actor Oscar for *Little Miss Sunshine* in 2007With Christopher Walken and Al Pacino in *Stand Up Guys*, 2012

[EDIT]: What inspired you to gravitate to the Margaree Valley?

ALAN: It had an energy that I hardly experienced anywhere. If you travel as much as I do, different places have a different type of energy. I felt an energy in Cape Breton that I never felt anywhere in the world.

[EDIT]: What would be the perfect kind of day for you on the Island? What favourite places do you enjoy popping into?

ALAN: I'm eighty-six years old, so I don't run around the way I used to! There are a few restaurants I love, the Dancing Goat and the Herring Choker. I particularly love the Frog Pond in Cheticamp — best coffee I've ever had anywhere and a lovely atmosphere. I love the art at the Frog Pond, Bella Mona Lisa gallery and Two Macs gallery.

Also the antique shop, Myles From Nowhere. The owner is one of my favourite people, and it's one of my favourite places. He is a brilliant self-taught sculptor. He was embarrassed to show people initially. He would go to the woods and carve things on big rocks, and he got really good at it. We have a lot of pieces of his; I've sent them all over the world.

I enjoy hanging out at these places, visiting friends and just taking walks along the water.

[EDIT]: You recently wrote and published a new book, *Out of My Mind (Not Quite a Memoir)*. Had you known you wanted to write it for a while?

ALAN: I was taking a series of workshops in Santa Fe on consciousness, and this guy who ran the workshops came in at one session with a bunch of empty notebooks and pencils. He said, "For the next half an hour, I want everyone to write down all the experiences they've had in their lives where they know there is more to reality than what we see when we are walking around." Everybody got very excited; we sat and wrote for half an hour. And when we were through, he said, "Rip the pages out of the notebooks, and put them in your wallets and handbags. Next time you have a bad day, go back and read it."



Top to bottom: Alan Arkin with Sylvester Stallone in *Grudge Match*, 2013; with Morgan Freeman and Michael Caine in *Going In Style*, 2017; with Mark Wahlberg in *Spenser Confidential*, 2020; and receiving his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame with Steve Carell and son Matthew Arkin, June 7, 2019

It was really an exciting affirmation of the fact that we all had experiences that define the conventional idea of what reality is. I put it away, then at one point I looked at the notes I had written, and I started writing! It came out as whatever it is. I sent it to my agent, and I said, “I don’t know what this is. I can’t write anymore — this is all that’s coming out.” I told her, “I don’t think it’s enough for a book.” She said, “I think it is.” It’s a short book, but it’s all I got.

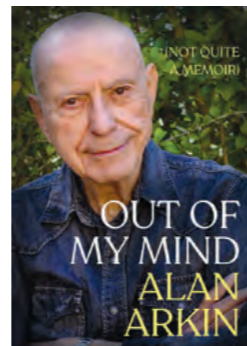
[EDIT]: You state at one point in the book that you say to yourself not “What do I want here? What can I get out of this?” but instead “What is needed here?”

Is that a way of thinking you have applied for some time?

ALAN: It was an evolution, not a flash of lightning. I have been meditating for fifty years. You start to become the unified field, and as that happens your sense of need starts diminishing. You need less and less from the outside world to confirm your reality, to confirm your existence, to confirm your worth. As those needs start diminishing, you start realizing that it happens automatically, and you start becoming less selfish. You feel okay with what you’ve got. You don’t have that incessant thing that most of us in the West have: my life would be okay if only I had blah blah.

Meditation takes care of all that. After a while you’re sitting in silence. You’re not asking anything of anybody. No one is asking anything of you. No distractions of any kind and everything is fine. You start carrying that into your outside world, out into your social existence. Things become easier; people like you more; you like people more. You realize you are not looking to gain something from them; you are just enjoying their company. Everything is fine the way it is!

Out of My Mind (Not Quite A Memoir)
by Alan Arkin is published
by Simon & Schuster
and is available now
simonandschuster.ca



HANDCRAFTED WITH LOVE

BY CAIT MILBERRY | PHOTOGRAPHS BY NAOMI PETERS

with her mom and brother. When she was 15, she picked up her first camera. From there, Peters moved to Toronto to attend Ryerson University and pursue her photography career. Being in the busy city, she felt she needed some down time and started to create with macramé and crochet, and from that moment, she says, she was “hooked.”

In the summer of 2018, Naomi and her partner, Doug, took a trip to the Maritimes to visit his mom. It was then, as she drove across the Harbour Bridge in Saint John, New Brunswick, Peters says, that she decided she wanted to spend the next portion of her life there.

“I can remember looking at Doug and saying, ‘I mean, this place is pretty great! Beautiful architecture, amazing food and an art gallery on every corner!’ Right then and there, we decided to move. The first year transitioning to Saint John was a dream. The community was so friendly and inviting. My first week in town, I got an invite from photographer Kelly Lawson to post up at a pop-up show at The Studio on Prince William. I was shocked! I already had people inviting me to showcase my work! New Brunswick makes me feel like I can follow my dreams and be successful. The sky is the limit.”

Peters sells and ships worldwide through her website, and she is always attending local markets to meet more folks in the community.

Through social media, the online shop and using time-lapse photography, she shows us how she creates these stunning pieces and Saint John is the backdrop. Her ability to showcase her work is admirable and we encourage you to get one of her pieces as she is an artist to have in your home.

Peters is beyond thoughtful with every piece she creates. She is carefully finding new ways to bring sustainable options into her work. For example, she uses beets and avocados to dye certain items and give them a new look.

The pandemic forced many artists, including Peters, to find new methods and products for their customers, but she is excited about what 2021 is bringing: “Watching how Saint John banded together to support their local businesses during this pandemic was inspiring. I truly think this place is magical. Full of opportunity and supportive people who care.”

naomi.studio