Mention the classic horror films from the 1930s to the 1960s, and three names immediately come to mind: Boris Karloff, Lon Chaney Jr. and Bela Lugosi – and Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee if the Hammer films from England are included. But for many aficionados of the genre, a fourth star must be included – Vincent Price.

In 1999, “Vincent Price: A Daughter’s Biography” by Victoria Price was published. It is a book rich in detail, capturing not only Vincent Price the actor, but the man as a husband and father, and an avid art enthusiast, collector and promoter. In 2011, Victoria went on the lecture circuit to talk about her father in honor of the 100th anniversary of his birth. Since then she has made periodic appearances throughout the country to offer insight into Vincent Price for his still faithful fans. Most recently, Victoria offered a presentation on opening night of Son of Monsterpalooza on Oct. 11.

In the first minute of her presentation, Victoria confessed she is not a fan of horror movies. “But I am a fan of horror fans,” she said. “It’s because of you guys that my dad’s legacy is still alive.” Victoria said that her dad was the most interesting person she’s ever known. “The reason I like to talk about him is that he did something really well, and that is he lived his life really well.” She said that she believes the reason Vincent had a good life was that it boiled down to one word – love. “He loved life. He loved art. He loved people. He loved adventure. He loved laughing. He loved giving back.” Thus his life was filled with joy.

Vincent grew up in an affluent family in St. Louis, as his father owned a successful candy business. Vincent was the youngest of his siblings and was different in several ways. His family was blessed with musical talent that came up a bit short in Vincent, which was fine with him, as his passion was in the visual arts. At age 11, he bought his first painting, a Rembrandt, taking three years to pay off the $37 price. As a young man he traveled to Europe to see the great works of art.

Young Vincent also took in interest in acting, and when he developed an acquaintance with the writer James Thurber, he told Thurber about his acting ambitions. Thurber in essence told him to forget it. But years later, Thurber said he was no longer giving people advice about their career choices, given how far off he had been with Vincent.

His work caught the interest of movie makers in Hollywood, who in 1935 offered Vincent a $1 million contract. He went to Helen Hayes and asked for advice. She challenged him by saying, “Do you really know your craft?” Because if you don’t, Hayes said, you will be a flash in the pan. Upon reflection, Vincent concluded he did not know his craft, having really only done one play, and he turned down the contract.

After taking time to learn his craft, starring in plays on the East Coast, he finally went to Hollywood, and was hired by Universal Pictures. His movie debut was in a comedy “Service de Luxe.” Although he was cast as a
leading man, he did not feel comfortable in that role. He wanted to be a character actor, so he went to work for the Mercury Theatre with such upcoming greats as Orson Welles.

While at the Mercury, he met and soon married actress Edith Barrett. He returned to Hollywood and was now moving into his niche of character roles.

Among his films in that era was one of which he was particularly and facetiously proud. It was called “Green Hell” and is considered one of the worst films ever made.

Divorced from Edith Barrett in 1948, he met a costume designer named Mary Grant in 1949, who became his second wife and mother of Victoria. Vincent and Mary shared an interest in art and enjoyed traveling in the pursuit of great works throughout the world.

In the McCarthy era of the early 1950s, Vincent was gray-listed for being a “pre-war anti-Nazi sympathizer,” meaning that if before the war if you were against Hitler’s Nazi regime, you had to be a communist. When he finally was taken off the list, he was offered a role in “House of Wax.” He took it because it had a bit of an art theme.

Victoria said this movie changed his life. While the movie was playing to full houses in New York, he was starring in a play, and sometimes he would go into a showing of “House of Wax,” sit behind teenage girls who were squealing throughout, and at the end of the movie he would lean forward as say in a menacing voice, “Did you like it?”

Away from acting, he was an adventurous art collector, and he and Mary were cultural ambassadors.

Meanwhile his reputation as a star in horror movies was growing, and he enjoyed his association with director William Castle, with whom he made “House on Haunted Hill.” At age 50, Vincent became a father again, and Mary at age 45 was a mother for the first time as Victoria was born.

Victoria related why she is not a fan of horror. When she was about four years old, she was taken to see Vincent in a children’s play, “Peter Pan,” in which he played Captain Hook. When little Victoria saw her father wearing a hook and being mean, she became unglued. “A loud tantrum freak-out,” she recalled. So during intermission, Mary took Victoria backstage so Vincent could show her that the hook was removable and fake. While relating this story, Victoria presented a visual record of a series of photos of the backstage scene, and as each one progresses, little Victoria seems to be less upset, eventually, in the last photo, seen playing with the hook.

Victoria said she never saw any of her father’s horror movies until she was 16. She found them hard to watch because he was mean in them, and he would get killed, sometimes in hideous ways.

Vincent also is known for his roles in the Edgar Alan Poe adaptations like “The Raven” and “The Masque of the Red Death.” Starring with Karloff and Peter Lorre forced Vincent to be a mediator, as Karloff was a disciplined, follow-the-script actor while Lorre came from the improvisation-rich German theater.

Victoria said she lived a very normal childhood, and she showed photos of events that seem very
ordinary – Halloween parties, friends over for visits, even a picture of Vincent riding the Teacups at Disneyland with Victoria and her friends. “Dad was having way more fun than me and my friends,” Victoria noted.

Despite sharing so much together, including collaborating on a cook book, Vincent and Mary drifted apart. While making “Theater of Blood” in 1973, Vincent met British actress Coral Browne and eventually left Mary and married Coral.

“Coral was an amazingly powerful woman,” Victoria recalled. “She was not the nicest person on the planet. But she was brilliant and talented and they (Vincent and Coral) fell head over heels in love. And my parents’ marriage had not been working for a long time, so it was a new lease on life for my dad.” Vincent and Coral had an amazing marriage for 18 years, Victoria said. Coral was not easy but she was full of life.

Starting in the 1970s, Vincent lectured throughout the world on visual arts. But he still was acting, pushed out of his comfort zone by Coral, and in 1978 he took a stage role, a one-man show titled “Diversions and Delights” playing Oscar Wilde, the playwright and author. Vincent then took the show on the road.

He also served as host of “Mystery” on PBS, which Victoria said suited him so well. Vincent liked to meet and encourage young artists, and was doing a show on Disney called “Read, Write and Draw,” and was teaching kids how to create stories. An associate suggested Vincent meet a young artist who was quirky but talented and who had written a short movie titled “Vincent” about a little boy who wants to be Vincent Price. This young artist/filmmaker was Tim Burton. Vincent agreed to narrate the film, which came out in 1982.

Later, Victoria said, “Tim gave my dad a great gift; he gave him his swan song, which was ‘Edward Scissorhands.’ How many actors do you know who get to go out at the end of a 60-year career with a role (he played The Inventor) that is so touching and iconic?”

Coral kept Vincent away from this children during her marriage to Vincent, and it was not until after her death in May 1991 that Victoria was able to reestablish a relationship with her father. Her discussions with Vincent in these later years led to the writing of the biography.

Oct. 25, 2013, marks the 20th anniversary of Vincent Price’s death at age 82, and in reflecting upon the incredible life of her father, Victoria said, “I think the thing that was so extraordinary about my dad was that he found a way to find joy in whatever he did. To my dad it was passionately important to have people live a life of meaning.”