

Raquel

Beyond the Cleavage

By
Raquel Welch



EasyRead Large Bold



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Image A



Image B

***For Damon and Tahnee
with all my love***

Preface

Though you may know who I am and what I look like after all these years, it's safe to say that you don't really know much about me. How could you? I'm usually a very private person and allow people to make whatever assumptions they will from my public image in various films and television appearances.

So before I start spouting off, it's only fair to bring you a little closer into my confidence and let you know something about myself. In a sense I'm using the occasion of this book to say a lot of things I've never said before. It's a change for me to air my opinions publicly and to share what kind of person I've become ... now that I've grown older. Indeed, through most of my professional life I've been seen and not heard. So now that the passing years have given me plenty to say and the courage to say it, I hope you can find something in my words that serves you.

This is a book not only about aging, but also about coming of age. For me, getting older has been about coming into my own and finally getting to the point where I'm not afraid to speak my mind. We are, without question, living in a very turbulent and pivotal time in history. I don't recognize my country anymore, or the role of women in this world of vanishing moral values. Our culture seems to be in the throes of change, but who knows what will emerge in its place. I am cheered

by the knowledge that we women have broken through the proverbial glass ceiling, rising to the forefront of the political scene, both as vice-presidential and presidential candidates. More and more we are part of contemporary social commentary and can, I hope, provide a steady compass for the future. I am further emboldened throughout the pages of this book to speak candidly about the lost art of being a woman; about aging, lifestyles, love, sex, forgiveness, and ... Well, read on and you'll get to know me better.

RAQUEL

Part I

BEING A WOMAN

ONE

Behind the myth

Contrary to popular Myth, I didn't just hatch out of an eagle's nest, circa *One Million Years B.C.*, clad in a doeskin bikini. In fact, I was more surprised than anyone to find myself on location in such an exotic setting, high atop a volcanic mountain in the Canary Islands! With the release of that famous movie poster, in one fell swoop, everything in my life changed and everything about the real me was swept away. All else would be eclipsed by this bigger-than-life sex symbol.

She came into public consciousness as a physical presence, without a voice. How could I hope to survive such an unpredictable beginning, and learn to carry the baggage that came with it? *One Million Years B.C.* was only my second film for 20th Century Fox. I had no other credentials as an actress outside of that one laughable line of dialogue: "Me Loana ... You Tumak." It felt like I'd stumbled into a booby trap—pun intended. I am living proof that a picture speaks a thousand words. It seems like everything that's happened to me since has flowed from that moment, frozen in time.

The irony of it all is that even though people thought of me as a sex symbol, in reality I was a single mother of two small children! It's true! However, nobody would

have believed it back then, not when they saw me in that skimpy fur bikini. Can you picture the girl in the poster with a baby in one arm and pushing a stroller with the other? Kind of destroys the fantasy, doesn't it? Ironically, I am duty bound and destined to do just that.

My task of destroying the myth is long overdue. It's an absolute necessity to pull back the veil, so to speak, in order to make way for the authentic *me*. So let's flash back in time to almost seventy years ago and retrace the steps of my real life.

World War II

I was born in 1940 in the Windy City, Chicago. Not ideal for a newborn baby girl with thin Mediterranean blood, courtesy of my Spanish father. For my first outing, I was bundled into a snowsuit to protect me from the very, very cold weather. Luckily for me, my folks moved to California when I was barely two; a good thing, because my baby brain was frozen solid until that point. That's probably why I've had an aversion to anything cold ever since, from icy drinks to frigid people.

Happy in the warm glow of the California sunshine, my baby brain thawed and I became a much more smiley toddler in the Golden State of Boredom. My father worked as an aeronautical engineer in San Diego, de-

signing aircraft at General Dynamics. It was wartime, so we lived in government housing, called “the projects” in the Mission Bay area. The units were almost like military barracks. Up until I was five, I would save the tinfoil from my gum wrappers for the war effort. Everybody pitched in back then.

My mother was Anglo. Her ancestry dated back to John Quincy Adams and the *Mayflower*. My father was born into a good family in La Paz, Bolivia. I was the first of their three children. My father had been hoping for a firstborn son and got me instead. He didn’t have much regard for the female of the species, unless they were parading around in swimsuits. Do you get the picture? My brother, James Stanford—called Jim—was hatched on exactly the same day as me, two years later, on September 5. My younger sister, Gayle Carole, came along one year later.

Even though Mom, Dad, and two-year-old me ended up in Southern California where the sun outside was always shining, it was strangely chilly inside our family home. Physical affection was in short supply. There was no cuddling or lovey-dovey stuff happening, even between Mom and Dad. I don’t recall ever seeing him kiss her or hold her hand. I was left hungry for a taste of tenderness and romance from an early age. All of us were terrified of my father. He was quick to anger and was a stickler for manners and rules in our modest home. I complied.

As a kid, I had a highly emotional nature and loved being swept away on flights of imagination. Inside my head, anything could happen, and I could avoid the fact that I felt trapped under the thumb of my domineering father. In my mind, I was already grown-up and independent. I was simply waiting for the biological process to catch up with my vision ... so I could escape. I had to wait to reclaim my childhood until after I left home.

I grew up with one ear glued to the radio. Our family gathered 'round it to hear Roosevelt's speeches, and I also knew all the words to the popular tunes on the airwaves. I would sing them around the house, in the car, and on the backyard swing. My favorites were *Don't Fence Me In* and *I'm Looking over a Four Leaf Clover*. My father used to call me out to the living room to sing for company. It was kind of embarrassing, but I did it anyway. I got the early impression that above all else, I was on this planet to make my moody dad proud of me.

Later on, we got a brand-new television set, complete with rabbit ears and fuzzy black-and-white reception. There were lots of comedy shows, with Jackie Gleason, Red Skelton, Milton Berle, and Sid Caesar; but my fave was Jerry Lewis. I used to squeal with laughter over his childish antics. He seemed like a big overgrown kid. By the time I grew up, I had switched my attention to Dean Martin, the suave, handsome crooner. Years later, I

would actually get the chance to star in a movie with Dean and Jimmy Stewart!

What's in a Name?

Just as the war ended, in 1945, so did my kindergarten class. A dark cloud had been lifted, and we moved out of “the projects” and across the bay into a real house, with roses growing over a trellis; a yard filled with peach, plum, and avocado trees; and a dog named Shep. Dad drove a Hudson. It was the American dream! It was also a new neighborhood, and I changed schools just in time to enter first grade at Bay Park Grammar School.

I was registered with my full name: Jo-Raquel Tejada. Quite a mouthful. No one could pronounce it. My schoolmates started calling me “Jo.” No matter how many times I tried to tell them, “I’m not Jo. I’m Raquel,” I couldn’t make them stop. One day, my mother showed up at the administration office and scratched the “Jo” off the school record. Gone were those two letters that bound me to her, since I’d been named after her—Jo was short for Josephine. The only problem in deleting it was that “Jo” was the only part of my name that anyone could *pronounce*. Why couldn’t I be a Mary Smith? I didn’t like being so different. But I was, and in time, I would learn to embrace my “Raquelness.”

I had no idea how I got the name Raquel Tejada. I had just accepted it. But now the question had been raised

and was begging for an answer. It turns out that I'd been named after my paternal grandmother, Raquel, whom I had never even seen. She lived in La Paz, and I didn't meet her until I was thirty-two. The name "Tejada," Mom explained, came from the name for the type of spear carried by the king's royal guards in sixteenth-century Spain. I couldn't relate.

Dad seemed indifferent to his heritage and never spoke of his childhood, his siblings or parents, or anything personal. For most of my life, he was an enigma to me. He spoke only occasionally of his Bolivian roots, and he never spoke Spanish in our home. This made me feel like there was something wrong with being from Bolivia, "a third-world country." It was troubling, but I didn't ask about it. I was only six years old and didn't want to know the answer. For now, if the kids at school could just get my name right, I'd settle for that. By the time I hit high school, everyone called me Rocky.

Over time, I came to think that my father's willful disconnect must have made him feel very lonely and isolated at times, which would account for his moods. This presented me with some serious issues to work through. Was my dad ashamed of his Latin heritage? I chose not to think so, to sidestep feeling ashamed myself. On a childish, subliminal level, I actually did understand why he was not forthcoming about his background. It was because he had divorced his family and his country to come to the fabled U.S.A., the land