

My Name Is
Barbra



Barbra Streisand

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BARBRA STREISAND

Viking



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This book is dedicated to the father I never knew . . .
and the mother I did.

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Prologue

An “amiable anteater”?
That’s how I was described at nineteen in one of my first reviews as a professional actress. I was in *I Can Get It for You Wholesale*, playing a lovelorn secretary, and I could see the comparison . . . sort of.

Over the next year, I was also called “a sour persimmon,” “a furious hamster,” “a myopic gazelle,” and “a seasick ferret.”

Yikes. Was I really that odd-looking?

Only a year later, when I was in my second Broadway show, *Funny Girl*, my face was exactly the same, but now I was being compared to “an ancient oracle,” “Nefertiti,” and “a Babylonian queen.” I must say I loved *those* descriptions. Apparently I also had a “Pharaonic profile and scarab eyes.” I think that was supposed to be a compliment, though I have to admit one of those eyes does look cross-eyed at times . . . and it seems like the Pharaoh also had a big schnoz. People kept telling me, “Get it fixed.” (I bet no one said that to *him*.)

Sometimes it felt like my nose got more press than I did. In the cover story in *Time* magazine, the writer said, “This nose is a shrine.” (Sounds good!) Then he went on, “The face it divides is long and sad, and the look in repose is the essence of hound.” (Not so good.)

So which is it? Am I a Babylonian queen or a basset hound?

Probably both (depending on the angle).

I wish I could say none of this affected me, but it did. Even after all these years, I’m still hurt by the insults and can’t quite believe the praise. I guess when you become famous, you become public property. You’re an object to be examined, photographed, analyzed, dissected . . . and half the time I

don't recognize the person they portray. I've never gotten used to it, and I try to avoid reading anything about myself.

But sometimes I'll just pick up a magazine in the dentist's office, for example. (I happen to like going to the dentist, because I love how my teeth feel after they're cleaned. It's also an hour of peace with no phone calls.) Once when I was waiting, I saw a story about Neil Diamond, who was a grade ahead of me at Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn. Actually it was about his brother, who'd invented some crazy bathtub that had a stereo system and all sorts of electronic gadgets (perfect . . . for getting electrocuted). And it's not cheap . . . fourteen thousand dollars! I'm thinking, *Who would ever buy such a thing?* And then I read that I'm one of his customers! I didn't even know my friend Neil had a brother, and now I'm being used to sell his bathtub?!

That's irritating, but other stories cut deep. One night, my dear friend Andrzej Bartkowiak, a brilliant cinematographer who did two films and a documentary with me, came over for dinner. (Actually, he was cooking, because I'm a hazard in the kitchen. I can burn water.)

Andrzej had been to see his friend earlier (a medical doctor, by the way) and happened to mention that he was having dinner with me. The doctor said, "I hear she's a bitch."

"What?" said Andrzej. "What are you talking about?"

"She's impossible to work with."

"That's ridiculous. Have you ever worked with her?"

"No."

"Well, I have . . . three times . . . and she's wonderful to work with. In fact, she's a very nice person."

"No, she isn't. She's a bitch. *I read it in a magazine!*"

That's the power of the printed word.

And there was no hope of changing this man's mind. He chose to believe some writer who had never met me, rather than the person who really knows me. That upsets me deeply. Why couldn't he accept the truth?

For forty years, publishers have been asking me to write my autobiography. But I kept turning them down, because I prefer to live in the

present rather than dwell on the past. And the fact is, I'm scared that after six decades of people making up stories about me, I'm going to tell the truth, and nobody is going to believe it.

Recently, my husband, Jim, and I were driving home from a movie and stopped at the supermarket because I suddenly had a craving for coffee ice cream. We walked into the market holding hands, and a man came up behind us and said, in a loud voice, "I'm so happy to see you back together!"

Back together? When were we apart? Did my husband move out and I somehow failed to notice?

You see, I like facts. I have great respect for facts, and the idea of just making something up really bothers me.

So I finally said yes to writing this book, after dancing around the idea for ages. I actually wrote the first chapter back in the 1990s, in longhand with an erasable pen . . . and then lost it. Now I wish I knew how to type, because once I started again it took another ten years, since I still have other commitments, like making records, and besides, I get really bored with myself. I'm trying to recall things that happened a long time ago. (Thank God for the journals I've kept, which have been invaluable.) And then sometimes I realize that I haven't been remembering the full story and have to dig deeper, no matter where it leads . . .

I wanted to be an actress ever since I was a child . . . maybe from the moment I was taken to my first movie, and stood up on the seat so I could see the screen. Still, it's amazing that my dream came true, and I'm very grateful to all the people who helped me along the way.

They say that success changes a person, but I think it actually makes you more of who you really are.

Frankly, I think I'm rather ordinary. I just happened to be born with a good voice, and then I guess there was something about my looks, my personality, whatever talent I had that intrigued people (or annoyed them). I know I ask a lot of questions. I have a lot of opinions, and I say what I think . . . and sometimes that gets me into a lot of trouble.

I'm not a very social person. I don't like to get dressed up and go out. I'd rather stay home with my husband and my dogs. Sometimes we'll invite family and friends over for dinner and a movie, or to play games like Rummikub, backgammon, or hearts. (I also play every night on my phone in the dark before I go to sleep, to clear my head of all the stress of the day.) I love painting with my son, Jason (he's much better than I am) . . . I can spend hours taking photographs in my garden . . . and because I don't go out much, I forget who I am to the outside world.

Which reminds me of something. Recently I was going to the dentist (to get my teeth cleaned again), and while I was waiting for the elevator, I noticed this woman staring at me. So I moved away, but she didn't stop. I thought, *Why is she still staring? Did I spill something on myself?*

And then I realized, Oh yeah . . . I'm what's her name.

I think it's time to dispel the myths about that creature.

And that's why I'm writing this book . . . because I feel an obligation to the people who are truly interested in my work, and the process behind the work, and perhaps the person behind the process.

So, here goes . . .