

KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

GLORIA STEINEM INTERVIEW
GLORIA: IN HER OWN WORDS
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

GLORIA STEINEM

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Interviewed by Peter Kunhardt and Sheila Nevins

GLORIA: The Person - *Glamour Girl*

Body Image

01:19:38;02

GLORIA STEINEM:

Well, I-- I don't obsess on thinness, and I love to eat. But I am concerned or aware, because both my father and my sister-- shortened their lives by how much they weighed. They really were seriously, seriously overweight. My mother not so much. So, I'm conscious of it. I'm conscious of it.

01:20:13;02

Well, some-- some of my interest in being thin is-- is cosmetic, but it's not unhealthy. I mean, it-- it has more to do with being healthy. And I-- I'm aware of the weight at which I am the right balance between bone and fat, or whatever it is that you are. So, I-- I-- I'm in no danger of-- of having a dis-- eating disorder. I mean, I would rather have a cold for two weeks than throw up once. (LAUGHS) And I love to eat. But I am conscious of-- of not getting fat, I'm sure because of the example of my father and my sister.

Gloria's Look

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02:32:09;27

GLORIA STEINEM:

Well, the streaked hair I can-- directly attribute to (STOMACH GROWLING) Breakfast at Tiffany's. (CHUCKLE) I somehow totally related to the character in Breakfast at Tiffany's. She says at one point-- she's living in a tiny little house. She's married to-- in the country, she's married this guy just in order to be able to take care of her brother. He's a much older man. And she walks down the dirt road every-- she reads magazines and work-- walks down the dirt road every day a little further and a little further until finally she doesn't come home.

02:32:48;06

So somehow, I really identified with Holly Golightly. (CHUCKLE) The aviator glasses were more about hiding, you know, because-- well, first of all, I'm very nearsighted and-- you know, very subject to bright sunlight. So th-- I needed sunglasses. But the bigger they were, the more I felt like I'd hide behind them.

14:15:54;04

Well, let's see. How do I make myself look-- I-- I-- when I'm buying something, (LAUGHS) I always end-- I frequently end up saying that's too lady-ish for me. I really don't want to look like a lady. I don't see why I should make myself look unattractive and give into the idea that to be smart or serious, you know, you-- you have to-- give up all decoration. You know, we should be able to wear whatever we want. I met the actress who-- who did Legally Blonde.

14:16:43;10

Reese Witherspoon. I was sitting next to her one day. And she said-- that she'd done the role, Legally Blonde, because of me. I said, "Really. You know, amazing." I-- and she said, "Yes, because I heard you once say we should be able to wear anything we fucking well please and be taken seriously."

(LAUGHS) So, I do believe that.

03:04:54;09

I-- I got my hands from my father, not my mother, who had-- very creative competent hands. My father had these long artistic hands, which he was kind of ashamed of 'cause he didn't think they were properly masculine. So he wouldn't wear a ring, for instance. But both my sister and I inherited his hands.

01:42:01;10

I have no idea if I was a "hottie" or not. I didn't see myself as a "hottie," except sometimes when it was a detriment. You know, I remember walking into the-- most memorable was walking into a Life magazine editor where my agent had sent me, and he looked up from his desk, and said, "We don't want a pretty girl. We want a writer. Go home." That was it. But fortunately, New York magazine came along, and fortunately, Clay Felker, as an editor, was as open to ideas from-- from women as from men.

A Price for Being Pretty

14:13:17;29

GLORIA STEINEM:

I-- I think of myself as-- I don't know -- in the past, as a pretty girl, and now as-- you know, but the-- the-- the problem is getting identified by your outside instead of by your inside. So, I-- I think we all have to use whatever it

is we have. You know, and for-- for good purposes. So, if I-- am counter to the prejudiced view of what a feminist looks like, I'm happy about that, because a feminist looks like any woman or a man, for that matter.

14:14:03;04

There's a price-- there's a price for being considered pretty or beautiful or good looking. And it's very hard to talk about it because it's like complaining about being rich, for which there's also a price. (LAUGHS)

14:14:19;02

But-- because people think being pretty or beautiful solves everything-- which of course it doesn't. And also, the hard part for me-- I must say the painful part, is that what I-- that I work really hard and then the result is-- is attributed to looks. That's-- it's really painful. And you would think at 76 that would go away. But it's still there sometimes.

14:14:58;14

One of the prices of being pretty is that you can't-- you're not supposed to also be smart. And, you know, that's a horrible price. Terrible. But the-- the thing that we all share, and I'm always looking for what unites us. You know, is that we're judged by our externals, by the way we look. So, if-- if we're pretty, then everything we did is attributed to that. If we're not pretty, then we're only doing whatever it is because we couldn't get a man, or because we're not-- you know. So, we all share this same problem of being identified by how we look, and we can work on that.

Undercover at Playboy

03:11:36;12

GLORIA STEINEM:

No-- I-- actually, when I first met-- Hugh Hefner after I had written the piece and I-- the piece about being an undercover Playboy Bunny and I was some-- few years later doing a-- a profile of him for McCall's, I ended up feeling sorry for him, you know, because he-- he just seemed so isolated and out of it. You know?

03:12:05;04

And I-- I remember I had a fantasy because I was going to interview him in the-- the mansion in Chicago. And the man who (CLEARS THROAT)-- who opened the door for me was a very elegant older man, a black man who was, I guess, the butler or something. And he was very distinguished. And-- and I thought, "You know, probably this guy is running the whole empire. And he just hired this schlepmy white guy (CHUCKLE) to front for--" You know-- I-- I-- I really felt sorry for him. But I can't really indulge the luxury of feeling sorry for him because he's a destructive force in the world.

Music and Dancing

01:43:33;12

GLORIA STEINEM:

I play music when I'm-- when I'm by myself. I also dance when I'm by myself. Well, I-- hopefully, I dance when I'm with other people too, but-- but I mean, there's something great about being able to put on a record, and dance wildly for ten minutes, and then go back to your computer.

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Some-- sometimes it's-- Latin dancing, sometimes it's-- more often, probably disco because that was my formative period. Although I-- I-- just when I was

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in Zambia, I discovered the source of the bump. I was-- (LAUGHS) dancing with a bunch of women underneath a tree by the Zambezi River.

01:44:20;15

And they were doing the bump. I said, "Oh, so this is where it came from."

03:29:22;20

Tap dancing was-- the extremely impractical way I was gonna get out of Toledo. I went to dance school. And I watched Hollywood movies with the only women I saw who were doing something different, you know, were in Hollywood movies. And I couldn't sing. And I couldn't act. But I could dance a little bit. So, it was gonna be my ticket out. 'Course, I was never good enough-- to really make that work. And fortunately, my mother had sacrificed greatly to get both her daughters to college. So that was a little more practical than-- tap dancing and ballet, which was-- confined mainly to Elks' Club conventions and operettas and (CHUCKLE) and so on in Toledo.

03:30:21;16

Barbara Walters-- you know, I knew sh-- she-- she was here, also in this apartment, sitting on the couch, interviewing me. And I had been told that she was gonna ask me to tap dance. So I disconnected the music-- the-- system. (CHUCKLE) So, and I said, "No, no, no, I-- you know, there's no music." And she said, "I'll sing." (CHUCKLE) So, I ended up-- I thought-- "Well, if she's willing to sing." So I did do it. And actually, the two of us did it at a benefit, then, later, in Carnegie Hall. We were both terrified. (CHUCKLE)