

Beyond *the* Cleavage

even as she approaches 70-years-old (that's right, 70!) Raquel Welch still has the cleavage to get everyone's attention.

Her new book "Raquel: Beyond the Cleavage" hit bookshelves on March 29 and quickly put the sex symbol back at the forefront of everyone's mind. The book is 336 pages and takes readers through Welch's life, from her humble beginnings as the daughter of a Bolivian immigrant and an American mother in Chicago to her days as Hollywood's sexiest leading lady to her current role as "Mama Duck" to a new generation of Tinsletown starlets.

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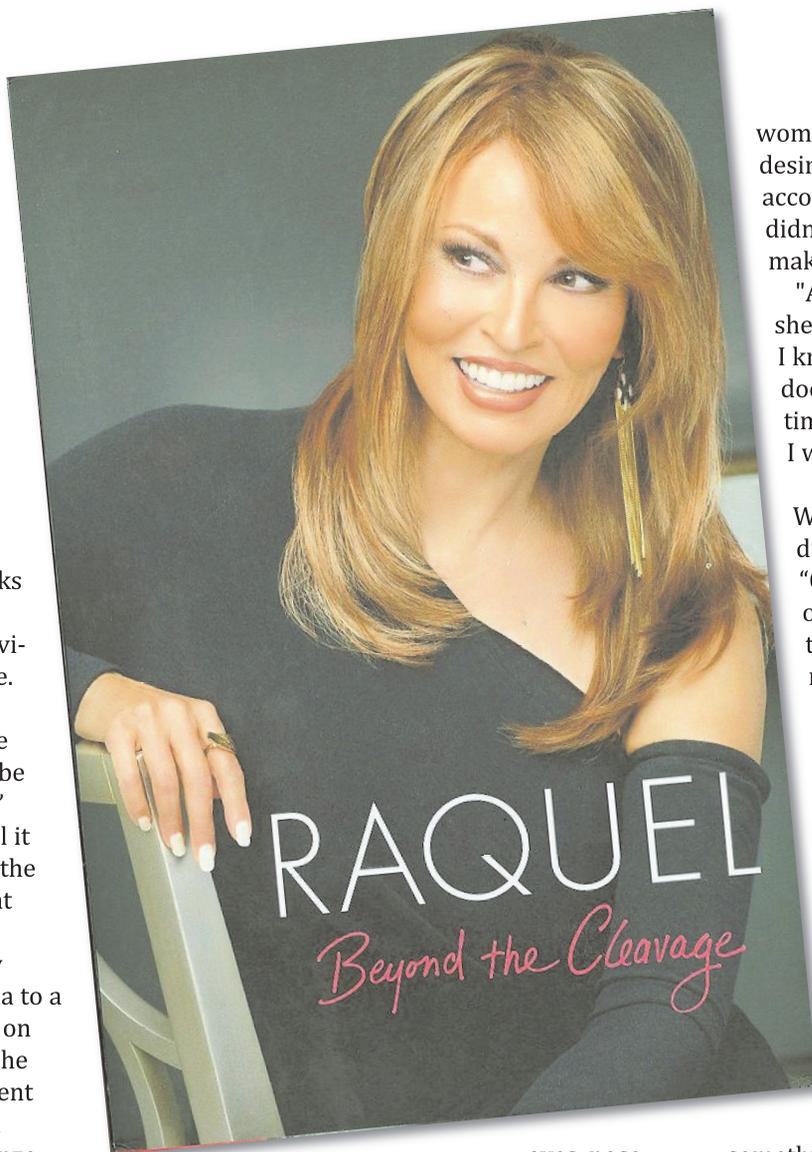
In her book she talks extensively about every part of her previously very private life. On being her post-menopausal days, she says "It's not easy to be an aging sex symbol." But if anyone can pull it off, it's obvious from the cover of her book that she can.

Welch was actually born Jo-Raquel Tejada to a working-class family on September 5, 1940. She describes how she went from being Jo-Raquel

Tejada, a bronze-skinned girl whose name no one could pronounce, to simply Raquel.

"Jo-Raquel Tejada. Quite a mouthful," she wrote. "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."

Welch goes on to describe her early days in school, growing up as 'Rocky,' her marriage at age 19 to publicist and when she first began to realize she was sexy. At first, the shy girl felt uneasy about the way she looked. She said like her hair,



eyes, nose, mouth, hips or (shockingly!) her breasts. They were "set too widely apart on [her] torso."

Once she began taking dance classes, after moving to California, she found plenty of men – young and old alike – who were happy to help her shore up her self-esteem.

"I wasn't able to spot anyone similar to my type whom I could gauge myself by. I judged myself 'passable,'" she said. "Fortunately, any lack of confidence I had about my physical appeal wasn't shared by the opposite sex. They were not nearly as critical as I was. This became obvious from the way they stared at me when I got off the bus and walked down the street to my dance class. It was rather uncomfortable . . . but intoxicating."

From there, her future was shaped. She soon became America's favorite pinup – in that legendary doeskin bikini she wore for the film "One Million Years B.C." – all while raising two children.

In a recent interview with Good Morning America, Welch said she had no idea "One Million Years B.C." would make her one of the most desired

women on the planet (the "most desirable woman of the 1970s" according to Playboy). She said she didn't even expect the movie to make much of a splash.

"A caveman epic? Who cares?" she said. "It was so schizophrenic. I knew I wasn't her, the lady in the doeskin bikini, but at the same time, everybody else thought that I was."

She had married agent James Welch in 1959, but the two divorced in 1964. By the time "One Million Years B.C." came out in 1967, she was caring for the children by herself. While making the film, Welch was a single mother of two, but she said that and just about every other part of her real life were swept away once the film became a hit. She insists she had no idea the movie studio was even circulating the picture of her for the movie.

"I just got off the plane and suddenly everybody knew who I was," she said.

Since her career took off with "One Million Years B.C.", Welch has become

something of an icon. In addition to showcasing her body on the cover of Playboy in 1979 and becoming a worldwide phenomenon, she's shown her formidable acting chops too.

She has appeared in 35 movies, starred on Broadway in the critically acclaimed "Woman of the Year" and "Victor/Victoria," and won a Golden Globe for her performance in the film "The Three Musketeers."

While she has not spoken much publicly about her love life, Welch did speak to the issue of her failed attempts at lifelong matrimony. Since her marriage to James Welch dissolved, the actress has been married three more times, most recently to restaurateur Richard Palmer, from whom she is currently separated. She speculates that her problem with marriage may be the very thing that made her so successful.

"After four husbands, I don't think I'm a good candidate for wifedom," she said. "I like my independence too much." ●

— Editorial Contributor
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