



# FIROOZ ZAHEDI

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## OUT TAKES

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ANGELINA JOLIE, DREW BARRYMORE, SIGOURNEY WEAVER,  
GLENN CLOSE, LEONARDO DICAPRIO, MERYL STREEP,  
GOLDFIE HORN, SANDRA BULLOCK, ELLE MACPHERSON,  
MARIANNE FAITHFULL, ANDY WARHOL, JEANNE TRIppLEHORN,  
DENNIS HOPPER, JOAN CHEN, SAMUEL L. JACKSON, DEBBIE HARRY,  
CATE BLANCHETT, ANIELICA HUSTON, UMA THURMAN



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A conversation with Beth Hedin DeWoody

**B**eth Hedin DeWoody: Hi Firooz.  
Firooz Zahedi: Hi Beth.  
BHD: You and I have known each other 20 years. You came to photograph me after I hit on you for a charity auction through *Us Weekly*. And then we had lunch for 20 years, and in that time your career seemed to really take off. Of course you have very famous fans, because I know your name. I was hitting on you, and I was very impressed with your photos and knew them from *Us Weekly*. So why don't you tell me a little about how you got to *Us Weekly*, how you got to America, and how you started your career?

FZ: Okay, well I came to America, wanting to do with photography. I came way back in 1987 to go to Georgetown University to study foreign service. But I always wanted to be involved with the arts, so after writing to a friend for a couple of years in the '70s, Georgetown, I went to an school, and I took photography as one of my courses. But I didn't know who exactly I wanted to be. Through a friend of mine, I got to know Judy Wexler, and he took a liking to me, and he let me take photographs for *Interview* magazine, and that was one of exciting to get your work published. You don't see as much money in it. And then later on I became friends with Elizabeth Taylor and worked with her, and then Judy saw the photos I'd done of Elizabeth in Iran and various other places, and because he was such a huge fan of her he did a whole cover story and used quite a bit of my photos, and that was very exciting because I finally had a magazine where I'd photographed, and the funny thing is that we were friends. We were at the Cannes conference, she was doing my portrait, and she'd come over to spend a couple of weeks with me, and he wanted her to go to Iran. She and I became friends, and she asked that I go along with her. So I took all these photographs of her in Iran, like snapshots of her all over the place, and snapshots of her wearing head scarves, etc. And that just took something to her. In Judy saw them and he was the general. I see the other hand was sort of ignorance of the whole thing because you know, to me they were just snapshots, nothing great. We didn't spend hours and hours getting prepared for them. But anyway, he saw them in the magazine, and I got more work from him. I graduated from an school, and Elizabeth was so encouraging. A couple years later when she came to Los Angeles, she took me. Anyway, as I went to Hollywood, California with Elizabeth Taylor back in the summer of 1978, she was working on a movie she was set to be photographed. I ended up staying there. I still to have with someone, we decided to go married, and I built up my career there. It was then in the beginning, I was still getting some assignments from *Interview* magazine. One of my photographs in *Interview* magazine was seen by the photo editor of *Us Weekly* who then contacted me and gave me an assignment, and that assignment led to more assignments, and within a couple years I was doing a contract with them. And then I got a contract with *Provision* magazine, a huge movie magazine, and then *Entertainment Weekly*, and I was working a lot with the movie stars, which I'd always wanted to do. What I go on?

BHD: Keep going.

FZ: So that's where you see me, when I had just signed a contract with *Us Weekly*, and they did this party in New York, and they offered me an interview who could do a portrait to put in on the cover, and that's where you and I met.

BHD: So I still have the photograph hanging in my home in Southampton, which I'm very proud of. But I want to talk about your working with celebrities because a lot of people don't realize, or put your name attached to some images, but the images themselves are really and collected in so many people's minds, like *Us Weekly*, *Play* magazine, and the *Entertainment Weekly* photograph with her hair, a gorgeous photograph, or you know, some of the movie posters that you've done. So, what I'd like to know is: what are the fun and some of working with celebrities? How much do you control the situation? How much do they and their people lead the shoot? So, tell us about that.

FZ: That's a good question, actually because once you're established, and people start to see because they like the quality of your work, and I'm known for making women look good, they come to you knowing that you're going to make the actress look good, and you have quite a bit of control. They trust you. They put themselves in your hands. The bigger the star, the more to deal with. The only time I've had a rough time is with some lower known celebrities type actresses who are very nervous, and they don't really want to put themselves in your hands. You know, they just think that they have to have a specific look, and that's it. And they don't go along with it, and in the end the photos are not that great. They don't look good. But when they know that you know what you're doing, and they trust you, they're in whatever you want. I mean I'll have some of those actresses take their top off when I haven't even asked them to. [Laughs] So, basically.

BHD: Well, I've seen the comparisons are great that saying you've worked with very difficult actresses, or you know, outside people think they're very difficult, and worked very well, like Barbra Streisand. Your image is going to be as her most obvious career. So, she's known for wanting to control the situation. So tell us about, you know, how you work with her and get her to do what you want to do. And then I'd also like to know more about Jane Fonda because you're going to be shooting her next exclusive photo.

FZ: Well I started with Elizabeth, who was the biggest celebrity-obsessed there ever was, and we started off because we were friends. She was so encouraging, she let me do what I wanted to do, and I always felt very secure because, you know, she gives me great. So I did an hour my career with the movie stars looking forward. I could work with just a single camera and tonight and make someone look good. So when it came time these super celebrities who I was hired to work with but who may not have worked with me before like Barbra, I was given some advice by someone at *Entertainment Weekly* the first time I was about to go shoot Barbra, the publicity agent for whom she did "The Princess Diaries," and they were in New York, and they said, you know what, she will probably want to control the shoot, you have to be careful not to give it to her. So even though I was used to work with her the day before the shoot, we had me and we discussed what we were going to do, and then I went back the next day and to things up really well. I know how to fight a bully.



**A**nd I'll bring up, and she looked at the film. I think, this is a photograph that you shot a Polaroid and showed it to the person, and she started making comments about the light, and I pulled her in when I was coming from, and why the lighting was good or bad, etc., and I remember that. And then when she saw the film later, she looked at that my work relationship with her started back in the mid '90s, and she used one of those images for an album cover, and she kept bringing me the same album covers, book covers, etc. She knows what she wants. I mean, she's a director, she knows her film, she's quite artistic in that way, but she knows me, and she knows me with film. You know, those actresses who are young women in age, they want me because I don't try to make them look bad. I take the best qualities they have and I embrace them, and I'm not to make them look good, or normally as possible without resorting to too much Photoshop. But I also make them feel good. I make them feel secure about themselves, that looks like I did this shoot with her for a British fashion magazine, and I had this really great makeup artist who I'd worked with for L'Oréal, and I called her into using him, and his work is amazing. It's a lot of makeup, which when you see in real life it's a lot of makeup, but in a photo it looks good. And she was a little concerned, she had a gun that came for a long time. She'd come across a camera and look and healthy, you know, she was so self, and when I showed her on the camera, she also looked, and she was like "Wow! This is amazing." And she looked amazing because I said to her "Don't, you started so many events in your life, you should feel secure about yourself. You had the best of the best, the best of the best, you had the best of the best that everyone expects, that while one of them was back that everyone expects, so you know, you are a multiple woman. You should feel secure about it."

**Bill:** No, I think it's wonderful you can collaborate especially with a man who does have the knowledge and expertise, and I was lucky enough once to watch Barbara Streisand get lighted by James Wong Howe, and she was definitely a part of the process, but obviously had enough respect for him to allow him to, you know, do what he does, and it was very interesting watching that. You mentioned shooting digital, so I want to ask you about digital versus film and how you feel about that and the future of photography.

**FE:** Well it is true, I mean the future now belongs to digital photography. Everyone's doing it, practically. Film, some of us still use it. I would love to continue using it as long as I can. The quality is different between the two prints. When I couldn't afford to attach to the beginning, I would overexpose the film, so I would go high-speed film which had a lot of grain, so that just covered the film. You didn't see a lot of wrinkles. With digital, it's so cheap you're overexposing. The way is that they're adding grain now to digital, because you know, they're trying something that film could do, and they're adding it to digital. But you look through fashion magazines, and you look at the digital images, the film ones is dead. The future, it's graphic or pitiful. It's not a healthy film style. And you know, when you're shooting digital with a monitor, it takes time for the monitor to refresh. So with film you could shoot faster, so if someone was moving around or moving or giving a great expression, you could capture it. With film, you have to print. You have to make a few minutes before you do each shot. You want get that kind of spontaneous type of image that you get with film.

**Bill:** Let's talk about your Outsides. Actually, the Outsides idea was mine. You told me about those wonderful there that were always kind of rejected by the magazines, but they were actually to you the more interesting about. So I let that it would be a really great book to have all those pictures that everyone else rejected but you loved. So, tell us about the Outsides.

**FE:** Yeah, I was putting together a lot of photos that were rejected from my shoots to do a book with.

The thing to those are so many great images you get in a shoot because when you shoot a roll of film, or even if you shoot digital, you don't just take one photograph. In the old days, the old photographers used the 35s and film would shoot with those huge 8 by 10 cameras. They think, was time consuming, so they would do a handful of frames, and they were usually very still and very address energy in their work, and they created that style, that beautiful style which was not at all equal with those beautiful close-ups with the highlight and the shadow, and all that, because they really didn't have the opportunity to have today of making people move around during a shoot, so you could get a whole range of one or two rolls of film. I know that Lady Gaga used to shoot two or three rolls of film. I like to get my shots or really to take a roll of film because that's what the camera is there. Some people like to build up the energy, but in the beginning it's all so getting, but they've been in hair and makeup for two to three hours, and you give them the right direction, put them at ease, give them the right direction, any remaining energy, or whatever. Whenever you're about to take a image, you get it out of them or even as you can because always to feel they can get comfortable in with the camera thing. It's they get to get to many shots that to not have the energy that I would have had to have come to the magazine, or in the end, and for their progress, the editors or the advertising people see a difference that that they want you in. For instance, the Pop Culture that they they used for the magazine, she's not looking the way. It's lying in front of her and she's looking at a cigarette. The shot I've chosen for this feature, she's got the gun in her hand. So it's a little bit more provocative, a little bit more dangerous, and there isn't a photograph of her. One with her hands over her eyes wearing the see-through top, that I shot for "Flirty Girl," and I'm sure they would see that because, you know, Lady Gaga, they do not hold back from using anything, but they used a more simple shot of her pulled back, and you know, you wouldn't see her because I thought she was only a powerful shot that that's the one I would have used in her own. There's a shot of "Signature Woman" that I did for a December issue that she shot that they did "Woman in Hollywood," and she's looking the best, and it looks like she's getting, like a man. That I would have had to have seen in the cover for "Woman in Hollywood," just because, you know, why not?

**Bill:** Tell us about the Outside Magazine, which is one of my favorite photographs. How is this one different from the one that we used for the magazine?

**FE:** This one is a little more extreme than the one they used in the magazine. The magazine was the L'Oréal Fashion Show Magazine, way back in the 1990s or something like that. It was around the time Dennis had done this first one of those and had the great computer in studio. He'd always been known as the hell boy, the wild guy and the crazy guy, so they wanted me to do a shoot with him that portrayed the wild, crazy Dennis. And I knew Dennis really, I'd got him several times at a friend's house for drinks. I'd grown to know him, and he had a few drinks with him for a couple of years after we started. The fact, as when he came to the city I had the coffee being in my conversation with him, but I got him to bring high heeled shoes, which, and I said "Dennis, they think you're insane in England, get the suit on to my, I'm not, but because you will see a little trouble put on the back, let's just see with them." So we did. They used the shot, when he was walking because they wanted it to be a little more light. The one is looking a bit more serious, and that's the reason I chose that.

**Bill:** Wonderful. I want to talk to you about the future because now that I'm in your life, the future is bright. (Laughs!) I know there are a lot of exciting plans with the Outside book, hopefully, and other books that you plan to do, shows and exhibitions that have happened like LACMA, and at Lolla Palooza gallery, so tell us what your vision for the future is.

**FE:** My vision for the future is just, wherever. You know what? I've been there, I've done that. I've taken photos that I'm very proud of, and I will continue to be creative, I will continue to take photos. I don't have a longer to film, being famous. What makes me the happiest is to be with you, and to be creative, and the little things, really. And if great things happen, they will happen.



















