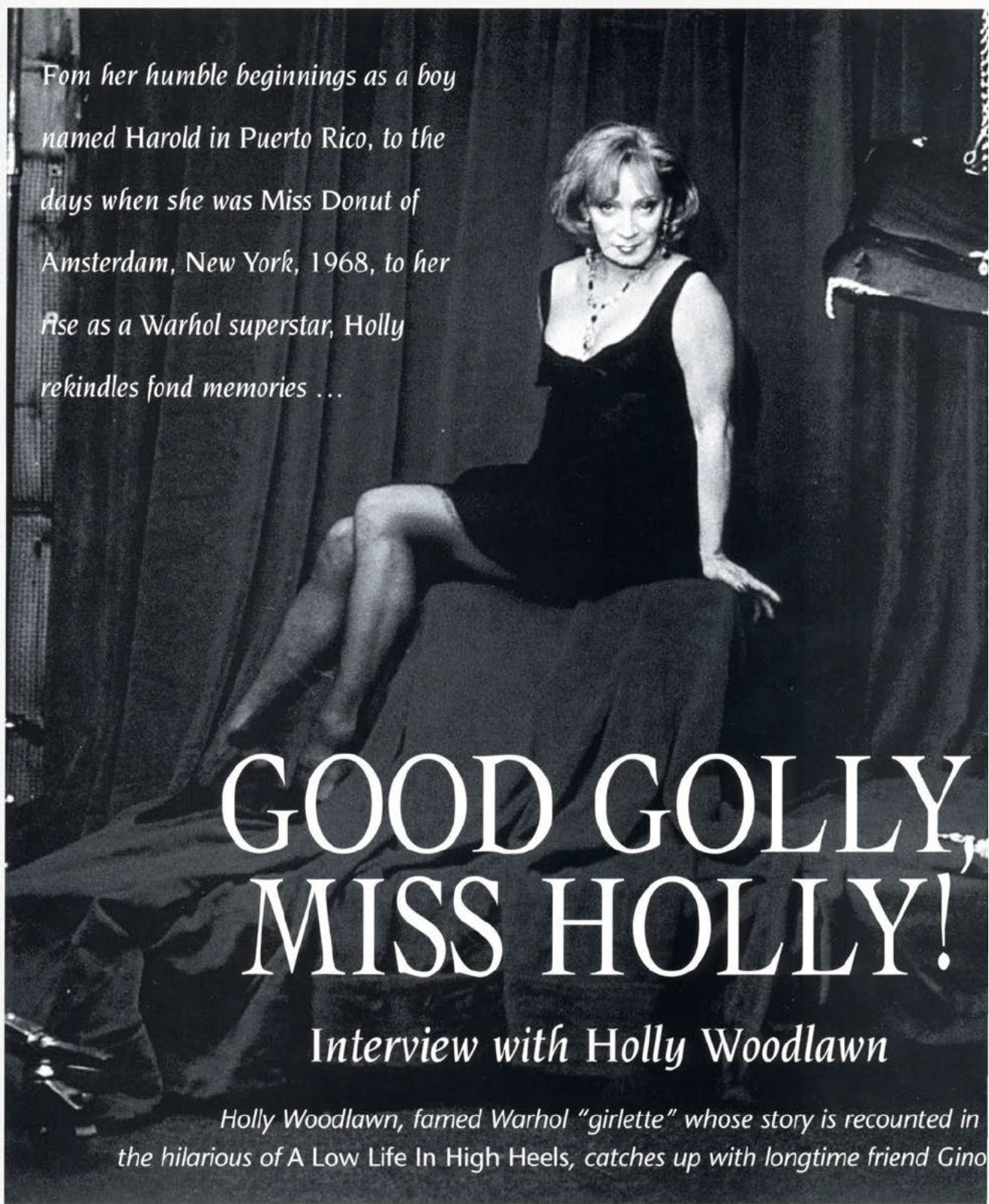


From her humble beginnings as a boy named Harold in Puerto Rico, to the days when she was Miss Donut of Amsterdam, New York, 1968, to her rise as a Warhol superstar, Holly rekindles fond memories ...



GOOD GOLLY, MISS HOLLY!

Interview with Holly Woodlawn

Holly Woodlawn, famed Warhol "girlette" whose story is recounted in the hilarious of A Low Life In High Heels, catches up with longtime friend Gino

Photo by Giovanni [REDACTED] courtesy "In The Bag," a documentary about women and their bags to be aired on



Albert

the Lifetime Channel

For some readers who don't know your story, tell us briefly about your rise to fame.

I thought Andy Warhol was some crazy person. I had my two girlfriends, Candy Darling and Jackie Curtis, and they had just done Andy Warhol's *Flesh* and told me that I should be in one of those movies. I was being quite fabulous and doing speed, dancing on tables at Max's Kansas City club in New York, when Paul Morrissey who directed *Flesh* heard about me and called me up and offered me a part. I was only supposed to do work on it one day. I knew who Joe Dellasandro was, but I was a little uncomfortable. Warhol never appeared on the set. I never met Andy until after I finished the film. When the director George Cukor saw it, he thought that my performance should be nominated. He started a petition for me because at that time no independent productions outside of the big studios were eligible. We didn't qualify, but there were enough people that signed that petition that after that year, it turned things around for qualifying independent films.

Why do you think Andy used Drag Queens in his movies?

He was attracted to Drag Queens because they were beyond women. He wanted to recreate the '30s and '40s glamorous movie star, and at that time, women were not glamorous, but Drag Queens were always glamorous. When I finally met Andy, the first thing he said was "Holly, you're so glamorous!" I didn't play a Drag Queen, I played a woman. There was no explaining it in Andy's movies, and that's why Andy was fabulous. When he made his films, he didn't say, "This is a man playing a woman." He just said this is it. He just got Drag Queens, who were the most glamorous things that were going on. Before us, Ultra Violet and Edie Sedgwick were there in his circle, but then he found us. The Warhol days were fun. We were going to all those parties and getting bombed, and meeting Janice Joplin and Jim Morrissey from the Doors who stuck his tongue down my throat. That's all in the book.

What brought you to L.A.?

Right after Andy died, I had to get out of New York. The funeral was at 10 a.m. at St. Patrick's, and the whole crowd was there. Everyone was coming in limos and all the press and the cameras were there. Yoko was delivering the eulogy, and I thought, mmm, Andy never liked Yoko. And then I heard this scraping sound next to me. It was this woman shoving coke up her nose. I got up and left and went across the street at Saks, bought some make up with \$40 I had in my purse, went home and got a one-way ticket to L.A. I skipped the party afterwards. I just had to save myself from all that stuff. I had been in Los Angeles before when I did a movie called *Scarecrow in A Garden of Cucumbers* - it's in the bible (*A Low Life In High Heels*). I just wanted to go West - it wasn't like I was suicidal, but I had to save myself. I suppose I would have hollowed out a canoe and gone to Hawaii if I didn't settle here. When I came here, I was doing cashier work at a place called Wacko on Melrose. It's like a card store. I did that for 6 months.

How did your autobiography, *A Low Life In High Heels* get written?

I met Jeff Copeland, my writing partner on the book, the first time when he called me up and introduced himself as a producer. I thought he was a big time producer, and he took me to dinner at an inexpensive restaurant named El Coyote! He wanted to write a book, and of course he was flawless and humpy. I thought of writing a book, but I get bored talking about myself. I think I'm boring and dull! The book took 8 months of pure hell. We met every day. I'm a lunatic and Jeff has my sense of humor, but it's not that it's dark or black or maudlin or moody. What I loved about him most of all was that he just kept picking at my head, to the point of where I had to remember, and we tortured each other and made each other work. He wanted to kill me, and he wouldn't talk to me. I'd be on the phone at 3 in the morning telling him I remembered something, and he'd have to be at work early the next day. You know when you find somebody who is your soul mate? He was. We would be at the French Market at 9 o'clock in the morning drinking coffee, and he would have his little pad and pencil, and I would say, "Jeffrey please, not now! Not now!" And he would say, "Holly, can't you remember?" I don't know how it came off! I tried the tape recorder thing, but I couldn't remember anything. There were periods in my life that were completely blank. I said, "Listen honey, you're going to have to move in next door."

Did you have any trouble finding a publisher?

We wrote a proposal, and we had an agent that sent it out to everybody, and nobody wanted it any part of it because they said Oh, no, Andy Warhol! Nobody cares anymore. We sent the first draft to St. Martin's press, and while we were waiting for them, we wrote two other books together. The waiting was awful. St. Martin's wasn't the only publisher that was interested. There were two offers; one said O.K., Jeffrey can be your ghost writer, and the other from St. Martin's Press didn't want Jeffrey but had a better offer. So I told my agent I'm sorry, but I'm sticking with Jeffrey. That day, the *Publisher's Journal* magazine had a review on our proposal, and the reviewer said if the book will be anything like this proposal, she'd recommended anyone out there to spend any amount of money to get it, so St. Martin's upped their offer. I told Jeffrey that I had a better offer from another publisher, but I want to keep him. St. Martin's finally published the book with Jeff after all. As soon as we got an advance, I forced Jeff to buy a computer, and once we got the computer, the book went fast. Jeff types a zillion words a second.

Any movie deals in the works?

I was talking with Miramax, and Gus van Sant was going to be the director. Debbie Mazar was supposed to play me. She's a good friend of mine, and if you don't know her, she played on L.A. *Law* as a New York transplant.

Didn't we hear that Madonna was interested in the project?

Harvey Firestein was going to work on the screenplay, but that didn't work out. I first found

out that Madonna was interested in playing the role of Candy Darling from Harvey, who had dinner with her the night before and pushed the idea it to her. I thought, Madonna? O.K., but then 6 months later it was the Candy Darling movie, not the Holly Woodlawn movie. They just wanted the title, and they wanted the rights to the story in perpetuity. The word *perpetuity* stabbed me in the heart. The contract was 20 pages long. I couldn't do sequels. They could sell t-shirts and stuff with my name on them, and I couldn't have made a penny.

Did we see you in a Madonna video?

About a year after that deal fell through, Madonna was trying to do a take-off on a Warhol movie with her *Deeper and Deeper* video, and it was shot in Los Angeles, so my friend Oolo asked if I wanted to be in the video. That's when I met Debbie Mazar. I met Madonna and it was very cordial, very strange, but you hear so much about her and I was really impressed about how nice a person she was. She was in control of everything. She directed that video. It was done very well, very Warholesque.

Who would you like cast as Holly Woodlawn?

I think only a woman can play me. It's not that I don't think a guy could play it, or a Drag Queen, it's that I want it to go to another place. If I can be a woman, why can't a woman be me? I also want Candy Darling to be played by a woman. The only reason I want that is because our heads were there so much that we were women. I'm glad that the deal with Madonna playing her fell through. I can't see her playing Candy. I could see Sharon Stone doing it. Candy was Superwoman. Nobody was more feminine than Candy Darling! Jackie should be played by a man. Jackie never wanted

to be like a woman. The reason he dressed up like a woman was because he would be famous for it in a Warhol film. Candy and I wanted to be women and wives. Candy died of cancer in 1974. She was buried wearing a chiffon gown. Candy lived as a white goddess. Of course, everybody used her. I don't think Andy went to her funeral, but I think he helped pay for it.

What was the funniest thing that happened to you while performing?

It was at the Continental Baths. Everybody worked at the Continental Baths. Most of you know that Bette Midler performed there and used to be accompanied by Barry Manilow on the piano. I was getting my hair done, and I had this humongous wig, and I had this dress that was silver mesh made out of spandex. I was getting my make-up done and my gown was very Carmen Miranda, and somebody gave me a quaalude. I went on stage right between the sweat and the steam. The hair came down, the dress rode up and shrank so much that you saw everything! I was beyond the beyond and felt drunk! I couldn't deliver. I said to the audience, "Do you believe you people paid \$7 to see this shit?" That was the last time I got strung out on stage. After the show, I took the dress off and dove into the pool naked. More recently, I've performed at The Gardenia and The Rose Tattoo here in town. Michael Greer directed me at The Rose Tattoo, and during that show, I would have to open this door and go into this little room and have a costume change, but he forgot to direct the door! I went into the room, and did my change, but couldn't get out! I was screaming and yelling. I'm sure the audience thought it was a part of the act, but it wasn't. That was the last time I used that room or did a cos-

tume change during that run. I'm lucky. I feel very lucky, because for some reason when those horrible things happen to me, when I'm on the high wire without a net, I somehow make it through. One day I was doing a show in 1976, the Bicentennial year, and Jackie Curtis came, and my manager told me I had to sing *God Bless America*. So here I am, singing "from the mountains," and I hear "to the Andes." Jackie is yelling from the audience "Great Gown! Great Gown! Yeah, mamma!"

After my last interview with Dorian Corey that appeared in *Dragazine*, I should ask you - are there any skeletons in your closet?

A lot was edited out of the book, but I don't mind talking about it. When we finally gave St. Martin's press the book, 3 months later we'd send them another book, so it finally got to the point where the publisher, Michael Bennett, said Stop It! We had to edit out things we could not publish about certain persons. That was the main reason I left New York. I had an ad in *Screw* magazine! I was a working girl. That's when I decided to leave New York. I was also doing cocaine and I was a mess. I mean a real mess. I thought those stories were the best part of the book, but the publisher said those parts were just too shocking. I would never name names, otherwise they'll break our knee caps! Football players, baseball players, real famous stars. That's as far as I can go.

What are some of your fondest memories from performing?

I had so much fun doing *The Ritz*, with Casey Donovan as Brick the detective, and me as Google Gomez. I wish they picked that up. I performed at Gypsy's club at 58th and 2nd, because I lived



PHOTO: JULIASLOWAN

Excerpt from Holly's fabulous autobiography, "A Low Life In High Heels"

George and Peter felt I was in need of some theatrical culture, and took me to see a play by a Mr. Charles Ludlam. They said it was an experimental piece called Terdsinelle. I was very excited about it and envisioned it to be some fabulous Elizabethan drama about somebody - a woman, I presumed - named Terdsinelle. Surely it would be something I could savor. Well, there we were in a warehouse-turned-theater watching this play, and I wasn't understanding a goddamned thing that was going on! What was this insanity on the stage? And why was this woman called Black-Eyed Susan ranting and raving while sitting on the toilet bowl? And where was this Terdsinelle woman anyway? When I expressed my confusion to Peter, he gave me the queerest look and then laughed. He leaned into my ear and softly whispered a shocking revelation. This play was not about a woman named Terdsinelle - it was about Terds In Hell!

across the street. I would go there and Gypsy would say that I was in the audience and ask me to sing. Gypsy was wonderful!

What don't you like about performing?

I've been doing cabaret for 10 years, and it doesn't matter how wonderful the place is, or how big it is, you always have to go through a god-damned kitchen! No matter what, you always feel like blechhh right before you go on. The strangest things have always struck me!

How often do you dress up?

I don't dress up often anymore. Who wants to get up at 7 a.m. and spend hours just to go to the grocery store? I dress when I feel like it, or when they're going to pay. There are times when I love being Holly Woodlawn and being fawned over, though.

Do you use the men's or lady's rest room?

There are times when I get up at 7 in the morning, with no make-up, no nothing, and looking like shit with my hair pulled back, and people say yes ma'am. I don't get it. When I dress as Holly, painted to death and lots of hair, no one has ever called me sir. If I'm at a restaurant and I have to go to the bathroom dressed as Holly, I can see in people's faces they're not sure which way to point me. I go to whichever one is convenient. If you've got to pee, you've got to pee.

Any beauty tips to share with us?

There's only one beauty tip - grease is the answer! Oil and grease. I use olive oil to take off my make up. Extra virgin because it's less smelly. A lot of moisturizers and grease.

Are you involved with local Drag life at all?

I used to go to Drag Balls in New York and watch - I couldn't believe it. These girls were like stars. They would work for a whole year on a costume for just one night, like Miss Universe. It wasn't in me to do that. I've been here in L.A. 5 years and only now just went to Peanuts the other night. I'm basically very quiet and shy, although no one believes it. The girls are gorgeous! They're all siliconed and tight, but I'm not there anymore. I have to give the kids their time. I wasn't really involved in Drag life in New York either. I was into my own business.

What are you working on now, and what's next for you?

I was on *Birds of Paradise* starring Timothy Bussfield, but it got cancelled. I'm just working on the movie for *A Low Life In High Heels*, trying to produce it, and that's it.

Any last words to *Dragazine's* readers?

I enjoy reading *Dragazine*! It's not a plug - I really do. For *Dragazine's* readers? My only words to anybody out there is - fuck me and let me get on with my career!

Holly Woodlawn Update

Holly has just come back from Big Sur having worked on a new screenplay with producer Jerry Connelly, and the Studios are lining up. Holly can be seen around town teamed up with pianist Wayne Moore in her new cabaret act.



PHOTO: JENNIFER