

Cybil Shepherd

Cybil Disobedience

At 50, Cybill Shepherd has reinvented herself. From wholesome beauty queen to saucy cover girl, from heart breaking movie star (The Last Picture Show) to one of television's top comediennees (Moonlighting and Cybill), Shepherd now performs as a cabaret singer and will host her own TV talk show this fall, called "Men Are From Mars and Women Are From Venus". Her new autobiography, "Cybill Disobedience, How I survived beauty pageants, Elvis, sex, Bruce Willis, lies, marriage, motherhood, Hollywood and the irrepressible urge to say what I think", (HarperCollins Publishers \$39.50) reveals the most intimate details of her personal and professional life. When it comes to female health concerns, whether it is about sex, menopause or abortion, Shepherd's voices her opinions loud and clear. In so doing, she has championed numerous women's issues and has emerged as a female icon to the boomer generation. In her personal life, Shepherd has struggled with many relationships, from her long romance with Peter Bogdanovich, the married director of "The Picture Show" to her two marriages (David Ford and Bruce Oppenheim), as well as her encounters with Elvis, Bruce Willis and Don Johnson. Now at fifty, this strong-willed mother of three (Clementine, 20, recently married to Canadian actor, "Party of Five's", Todd Hunter, and twelve year old twins, Zachariah and Ariel) talks about her past and her new journey in life.

MM: Why has Cybill always been so disobedient?

CS: I love to break down walls and destroy taboos. On my TV show "Cybill", we broke all the rules, whether we talked about menopause or impotence. I was the first baby boomer to have a prime time hot flash. We skewered the injustice of a culture that pretends that women over 40 are invisible. We dealt with women's health issues every week. Are you familiar with the off Broadway theatrical piece called "The Vagina Monologues"? We did the Vagina monologues on prime time television about a year before the play was covered in the New York Times. If we are going to be as healthy as we can, in both body and mind, we need to be able to say the words that describe our body parts. What I found out as the producer and star of a television show, is that we could say "penis", but no one was allowed to say "vagina". So I figured we women needed equal time, for very important health reasons. Why is something so terrible in

women that we can't name it, but in men we can? We're sending a message to women and children that something is unmentionable. Our silence about any health issue is dangerous. In order for women and children to protect themselves and have the optimum pleasure that we deserve as human beings, we have to know all the names for and be comfortable with all our body parts. Women's pleasure is still a radical political concept. It's the unmentionable

MM: What did you learn, through your own personal experiences, from the sexual revolution?

CS: I feel that I benefited from women's liberation, which said that women have the right to pleasure. That it's a key element of our health and sanity and that there should be no double standard. At that time, women were exploding stereotypes, saying it's possible for women to have sex without being emotionally involved. Today we know that a lot of men can't have sex without being emotionally involved. I had the freedom, because of the sexual revolution, to say make love, not war. I believed that sex was good. However, what I found out about love and sex is that it's hard to predict. For example, I'd say, "In this sexual relationship I'm having, I'm not going to get emotionally involved," and there I was, getting my heart broken. In other relationships I would be fine and the man would end up getting emotionally attached. I've come to believe that those times gave our generation the freedom to find out that there are no set rules or ways of predicting how the physical and emotional collide. The revolution gave us the freedom to discover who we were and that's very exciting. Also, remember at that time, the only diseases you could get could be cured with a prescription.

MM: You write openly about your affair with a married man, your experimentation with a menage a trois, your numerous romances with people like Elvis Presley. Why reveal so many detailed intimacies about your sex life?

CS: The longest, deepest streak of disobedience in my life has been about sex. I never observed sexual canons. I did exactly what I pleased, early, with a man I thought would be the love of my life, than later with a dispensable succession of partners. My book is a political and sexual journey; it's really a "how not to" book. I wouldn't do those things today. It's very clear, today that I wouldn't have an affair with a married man. I wouldn't be interested in being a sexual partner of a man who is involved with someone else. I'd rather be abstinent. I'd rather be alone, unless someone is really available both emotionally and physically. And that person can't be, if he is having other relationships. I also had the freedom, at the time, to act out my

fantasies. I wouldn't recommend it. I considered putting a warning label on the book, saying "Do not try this at home".

MM: How did you come full circle to way you feel today?

CS: I paid a price for many of the things that I had done, as I was living it. First of all, feeling the sense of failure at my relationships, particularly when it came to my kids. I suffered; I have two failed marriages and I have three children with fathers that I cannot actively father with. When I was younger I also lied a lot because I wasn't given the right information. I think that's why I feel compelled to be so honest now.

MM: What has changed for you now that you are 50?

CS: I have a more intense sense of time running out because I almost died two years ago from a double intestinal twist, ten days after I finished shooting the "Cybill" show. I was taken to the emergency room. I had the beginning of gangrene, my white cells had shot up. I was violently ill and I had emergency surgery. They did what they call, presentation of the bowel after cutting me open. In the process of checking for any obstructions, these twists untwisted. When I asked my surgeon afterwards what caused it, he said it looked like I had had an internal injury. Actually, I had suffered no physical blow, but all through my diaries of that past year, I had been experiencing cut-throat politics and in fighting on the "Cybill" show. I wrote down about how I felt like I had been kicked in the gut. Talk about health! Here's this mental and physical connection that almost killed me. It brought home what we all know to be true, which is, there are no guarantees on anything. Within a period of six months, I lost my job and not just any job, but the kind of the job that is your whole life, because it has your name on it. Ten days later, I'm in the hospital almost dying. Within five months, my life partner dumped me very suddenly. I can look back and see it coming, but I just didn't want to see it at the time.

MM: How did you cope?

CS: I coped by turning to my really good friends and I found some, where I didn't expect them to be. People who seemed to be pretty good friends became intensely supportive and central to my health, mental and physical. I could lean on them; they were there for me. They were people that had been in my life, but I never realized that I could turn to them. Others, who were good, old friends, weren't there for me, for whatever reason. We know that friendship is so related to health and having someone in your life is so important, but I had no one. I had

my children. They stepped in, which is interesting. My older daughter, Clementine, had grown up with a supermom. In the public light, it seemed like I have it all and I can do it all. This concept that we women have all those balls in the air is a myth. Those balls that I seem to be juggling so effortlessly are, in fact, dropping all around me. What the public sees are moments of perfection, all the balls in the air, frozen for that instant, like in a still photograph.

MM: What other issues did you have to confront in midlife?

CS: I'm still having hot flashes. I find it a little scary sometimes, that my body is so taken over by this extraordinary feeling of heat. The only thing that has ever come close for me to understand that would be the heat of sexual pleasure. But it's not quite the same. I thought I really enjoyed sex, but I didn't feel that the doors really opened until I was forty. I also have to say at fifty, it's wonderful. Maybe I do it less because I know what I don't want; but when I do, I find it to be truly amazing. There's also another taboo, which is flying solo. I didn't have anyone to teach me about masturbation as an alternative to motel rooms. I think we need to grow up and do our kids a service and be honest about these things. How in the world are kids going to separate sex and love. If we say you only have sex with someone you love; well, in an ideal world, yeah! Otherwise the minute they feel sexual, what I was told was there was something wrong with me. If I feel sexual, I must be in love; well, that can lead you down a few paths you don't want to go.

MM: What about facing loneliness, living alone?

CS: Not until now have I realized how supremely important it was for me to confront and embrace my lifelong sense of profound loneliness, to stop making choices based on avoiding that demon. We have the internet, cell phones, e mail and if anything, we're further apart, not closer. I get so irritated by some very good friends who say "What's your e mail address?" "Pick up the phone" I tell them "I need your voice. I'd like to see your face and hug you." We have all these technological devices and yet, we have less connection and we are more isolated than ever before. As a single woman, I'm really glad I have my dog and cats. I got my German Shepherd four years ago and I'm glad he was in place when my life was in such upheaval.

MM: You've become the front woman for menopause. What insights do you want to share?

CS: We are the largest group of women in the world to be going through this change and we had no information. All we had was "take the magic pill". In fact, there isn't one. Each woman is different, as are her physical and emotional needs. We're also terrified of getting old because, as women, we're being thrown away, like old packages. Older women who represent the cultural gamut of sizes and ages aren't too welcome in any media. After nearly a decade of murmuring "I'm worth it" for L'Oreal, I was fired because my hair got too old, approximately as old as I was. It's okay for Robert Mitchum to get up early in the morning and look like Robert Mitchum, but it was not okay for me to wake up in the morning and look like Robert Mitchum. Fans are always asking why Bruce Willis and I don't reprise our Moonlighting roles for the big screen. The answer is studio executives would consider me too old for him now. With few exceptions, North American television has become the Bermuda Triangle for females over forty. There's nothing wrong with older men and younger women, just like there's nothing wrong with older women and younger men. Variety of love knows no bounds of age. We have something to learn from all of these stories, but we need to see ourselves, at all ages, reflected in these images.

MM: How has beauty shaped your life?

CS: I've had good fortune. Beauty is just a genetic roll of the dice. I had nothing to do with it. I certainly had no way to earn it. Beauty opened doors for me and it was the thing that I had to least work for, and that I got the most credit for. It also became "that's all you are." Beauty became a mask, as if it was only skin deep and you have nothing beneath the skin. I was very blessed as a child to be encouraged to develop other things. I had an early predisposition to be an athletic. I was a wild raving tom-boy.

MM: Is cosmetic surgery an option for you?

CS: Oh, yeah. But I don't know when or maybe not. I'm afraid to start on the front, then what do I do with my ass? If I start in the back, what do I do with my breasts?

MM: If you could use a few adjectives to describe yourself, what would they be?

CS: I would use the words honest and very young. I don't mean in the physical sense at all. I mean young because of the capacity to stay in touch with the little girl that plays. And oh yes, I'm definitely disobedient.