

ROSEANNE ARNOLD

Calling her life a “war zone”, actress/writer/comedienne Roseanne Arnold chronicles the story of her troubled and turbulent personal and professional life in her controversial new autobiography. *My Lives* (Ballantine Books, 29.95) she deals with her painful struggle with poverty, sexual and emotional abuse, bouts of drugs and depression, prostitution, unwed motherhood and personal battles with everyone from ex-husband, to her parents, to the producers of her show – always fighting tooth and nail for control of her show.

Rosanne is a woman who rarely held her anger in, who dished it out, who told the truth – unvarnished, uncensored, raw and raunchy. She powered her way to the top, leaving lots of unflattering headlines in her wake, but pulling in a devoted legion of fans, who kept her show *Rosanne* (CTV, Tuesday, 9 p.m.) in the top 10 for the last six years. Her first book *Rosanne, My Life As A woman* sold more than 425,000 copies. Since 1990, she’s been married to actor/producer Tom Arnold. She has four children: Jessica, 22, Jennifer 21, Jake 19 from her first marriage and a daughter Brandy 23, who she has been reunited with after her adoption at birth. She lives with her husband Tom in Brentwood, California.

M.M. Why do you call your show *Rosanne* a political statement for and about women?

R.A. I came to Hollywood to take over, to claim TV as the preserve for women. I came as *Atill-ness the Hun*; I wanted to make family sitcoms as we know them obsolete. Writers could not grasp the whole thought patterns behind women’s words. I wanted to see a three-dimensional women on television, because this is the women’s media. It’s all about demographics and demographics are all about women. And I did not understand why,

If that were true, why on this women’s media, women were raped, murdered, insulted and battered and everything else. So, I wanted a woman that was opposite all the others, that wasn’t like what they tell us that we are, In my show, the women is no longer a victim, ;but in control of her own mind.

M.M. You’ve called your life a “war-zone”, “a heavy metal dinosaur”, where you’ve personally been a victim many times. What was the impact of having a baby alone, with no support, at the age of 18 at a home for unwed mothers?

R.A. People have no idea what it’s like to be a birth mother and have to give up your child. They don’t have any regard for it. At the same time, they are always pro-the-adoptive parents and anti-the-women alone. When people get their children kidnapped and their faces end up on milk cartons, that what it feels like every day to be a birth mother and have to give up your child, but with absolutely no regard from society or any support. You don’t even know if the child was with a family that was good – did they beat her to death or what. It’s horrifying.

I would suggest that nobody do it. I met that daughter when she was 18 and she's now 23, and we have a great relationship and just this week we went back to her hometown and mine and took pictures of significant places to both of us, so we are trying to create our past history together. She lives in Los Angeles, and works on my show. I see myself in her face and I picture her when I gave birth to her and held her for about five days before she was taken. I said to her then "I'll see you when you're 18" I always knew that I would and I did.

M.M. You describe your episode with prostitution as "a sexual acting-out binge". How do you look at it now?

R.A. Sex became the most horrifying and disgusting thing in the world for me, and I could not bear for my husband to touch me. Yet, I would find myself in cars with strange men often, in partial or full nudity, something foreign to my conscious mind. It had taken seven years for me to be naked in front of my husband, Bill. The thought of it horrified me. I would bring my money home and buy groceries and toys with it. I realize now, of course, I did it because I had severe emotional and mental problems. It is very common that women who do it are survivors of incest. You're taught that is where your value is, so that is what you do.

M.M. How did you deal with the issue of sexual abuse in your life and finally put it to rest?

R.A.. You get beyond it, you never get over it. Working through therapy, when you come to the part when you realize that it is not your fault and you are able to forgive yourself, then you'll be okay. What happens is that abuse victims turn all of our hate towards ourselves, that is what is so horribly tragic. The abusers have no shame, but we have all their shame. When you've sorted it out and are able to give them their shame back and realize that you had nothing to do with it, and you were just very small, then you can get past it.

M.M. What was the connection between the sexual abuse and a weight problem for you?

R.A. Ninety per cent of overweight women have been sexually abused. That's a known fact, I heard John Bradshaw on TV talk about incest/sexual abuse victims gaining lots of weight in order to unconsciously hide their genitalia. I used to look at my naked body; I was so distended and misshapen from gaining then losing 50 to 100 pounds. It made me feel unlovable, unacceptable. This body, which had always been the receptacle for violence and abuse. I abused further by inflicting tears, holes and gouges on my belly, breast, buttocks, and thighs, everywhere unseen. You eat because you want to hide in your body, the same way as women who starve themselves to death have been sexually abused too. Food disorders are a way to hide in your body. I'm still involved in therapy; I will always be in recovery.

M.M. What would you say to the other women who are dealing with the same problem?

R.A. All victims have got to get therapy, you cannot do it alone. If you don't have any money, go to a 12 -step group. Don't put it off because after you

work through it, you'll realize how so much of your life has been influenced and controlled by it. And as far as I'm concerned abusers should be killed. I can sit and bullsh—like everyone else, and say that they should be rehabilitated, but the fact is that they are not able to be rehabilitated. This is a war against children and in any war, people have to die. So, you have to choose a side because it's a war that destroys children more than any disease, fighting, Bosnia or AIDS. It is a war that makes people who survive it suicidal for the rest of their lives, and destroys all of their self-esteem, their trust, every human emotion, taints them, destroys them, ruins everything. So I think that it is worse than murder to do that to a child. Some psychiatrists call it "soul murder." I think that for murdering children, people should die.

M.M. If you have so much pain, sadness, depression, battle wounds, how are you able to create comedy every day?

R.A. I love to perform. All of us comics have a great deal of sadness, I guess that's why we try to be funny, to get over it.

M.M. You've just gone through plastic surgery, a breast reduction, tummy tuck, face lift and nose job, restructuring your face and body. Does this go against your strong feminist principles; have you sold out to the male myth of female beauty?

R.A. I did it because it made me feel better. You can go to 10 years of therapy or you can just cut the sh—off, one's faster that's all. I had lived a life where I gained and lost 80 pounds a year, so you can imagine what my body looked like. I wanted that to end and didn't want to see the proof of that every time I looked in the mirror.

That's why I had it done. I was signaling my whole karma that the abusive behaviors were going to end. And I did not want my father's nose and my nose was beginning to look just like my dad's and I couldn't stand to look in the mirror.

I had to do it, it's over. I don't wear wooden teeth either. This is the end of the 20th century, plastic surgery is no big deal. It's no different than getting dentures. Women are holding these things over other women, it's really divisive and stupid. If you put half the energy that women put into talking about their weight and their looks into a political plan, we would already have a lot more money.

M.M. You call Tom your "soul mate", there is a symbiotic relationship between the two of you. How have you saved each other's lives?

R.A. We were very good friends and we tried to make a conscious choice to try to live and to support each other and that is what we have done. We are both survivors; we understand each other because of that.

M.M. You've been called "a demon", "the queen bitch", "a one women maelstrom." You've been read the riot act in most places you've ever worked. Why haven't censors, reprimands, threats, unflattering headlines ever stopped you?

R.A. I don't believe that anyone will change anything unless people fear you, and if people don't have any conscious fear of women then nothing will ever change. So, I always urge women to be as rude, and crass and big, and mean and loud as they possibly can be. And all those unflattering headlines, they never get what I mean, but I think that it is funny. The people who don't write those headlines get me.

M.M. In your struggle for power, what lessons have you learned?

R.A. I looked like I had power, but I didn't. All the while when I didn't have power, everyone was talking about all the power that I had, so I figured out that there is no such thing as power. The only thing that resembles it is the illusion of power. And everybody gets scared of that.

I continually read the Chinese book the Art of War, which contains a lot of different things about the art of warring. The thing that I liked most was that it said "The one that cares the most wins." I knew that I cared the most so that gave me a lot of confidence. You just can't sit there on your ass and care, you have to do the legwork. For this legwork I was labeled as "bitch", "queen bitch", which I take as the greatest compliment ever said. Bitch is such an awesome, powerful word and has no matching word in male words. It is powerful, scary, like a witch – actually, I prefer to be called "Queen bitch witch". I like that better.