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**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
WITH EXTRA ANCHOR
LEEZA GIBBONS**


SPOTLIGHT ON
LEEZA GIBBONS

EXTRA, EXTRA!

by linda sivertsen



When Leeza and I met for the first time, it was to commiserate. Our husbands had been out of the country for over a month, acting together in a series for NBC. Even before we met, we felt the bond of women with small children who yearned for their fathers. Missing my husband, I turned on her talk show one day, hoping she had something to say about their shoot. Only the week before, Leeza's husband, Steve, had sent home a joke video of scantily clad women surrounding him on a tropical beach catering to his every whim, which Leeza aired. This particular day, however, the show had a different tone.



Leeza was sharing with America her longing to see her husband. She spoke emotionally about something close to my heart, my three year-old son was angry and distressed at the loss of his daily playmate, and no amount of explaining helped. Leeza spoke of her daughter Lexi's nightmares, a result of Steve's absence. Location jobs are the most challenging for children left at home. I called Leeza at the studio and we arranged a meeting.

Eight years have now passed since our hilarious dinner, where my toddler decided to throw his first public tantrum in a crowded Beverly Hills eatery. Leeza's small children were spellbound by his antics, and in spite of their amusement, we

not sure how she does it, but I've seldom found a more fascinating or worthy subject. America fell in love with Leeza sixteen years ago when she joined the anchor team of *Entertainment Tonight*. The unabashed enthusiasm she displayed for her work was refreshing in the 1980s, a decade characterized by attitude. It wasn't long before Leeza was ranked one of Hollywood's most popular journalists.

Our interview takes place at Leeza's Mediterranean home in the Hollywood Hills. As usual, the woman I see before me in jeans looks as refreshed after a long day as she does on television, but it would never occur to her to think of herself as others see her. There in lies her charm. It's why we trust her; we know she's real, just a woman struggling to get her kids to school on time with their hair brushed like the rest of us. So what if her "extras" are prettier than ours? The juggling she does to keep it all in balance is universal.

I loved turning the tables on the woman normally asking the questions. Leeza, I know that quitting your talk show and hosting *Extra* has brought ease into your life. What do you love most about your new job? She replies, "Oh, that's easy! With the *Leeza Show*, I wasn't able to be available for as many plays, performances and games with my kids. That was the hardest part. I love my job because it gives me great flexibility to be a mom and a businesswoman. I can take my kids to school and be present for all those priceless moments. I'm so grateful my employers respect my need to be a hands-on mom. Like with most women, I'll give so much more if I can make sure my children get what they need from me first."

I then asked her about always being upbeat and does she have a personal philosophy or

have to pick your battles and the foe I'm up against is a powerful, cruel and random adversary that has claimed my beautiful mom. It's clear to me that all of the abundance I have is on loan for this lifetime. So, it is up to me to share it with others, passing it on before I go. Service has always brought great purpose to my life, but means even more now that it's my mother's eyes staring back at me."

As we continued our discussion, I wanted to know how the terrorist attacks changed her approach to work and family? "Our collective consciousness has gone through a seismic shift. From a quiet, warm bed at night to an active pursuit of happiness during the day, Americans had begun to feel entitled to this glorious life we have come to know. I have slowed down. I hold my kids tighter. I worry less about a new wrinkle and I pray more. I am reaching out even more to others because I know that if we close ourselves off from humanity, we block God's path to us and through us. Recognizing the fragile nature of life makes me embrace the truth, that we can recreate our lives at any point. What we think and feel at any moment is up to us. Perhaps the best way to show patriotism is by loving our families, praying for peace and being willing to pay the price to have our freedom, while believing that we can and will make this world a more fair and beautiful place. My two older kids planted a tree outside their bedroom windows so they will remember that good things grow from tragedy; things like hope, faith and compassion. They placed a rock at the base of the tree, which reads: Never forget 9-11-01. Trying to explain something incomprehensible to them has forced me to test my own views."

I asked how with all of her obligations, does she stay balanced and sane? "Life is so painfully, unbearably and ridiculously short, so I try and keep focused on what matters most. I'm not saying that I don't get stressed and worried and rushed, but I wake up with a smile on my face because I love my life. I'm grateful. I just believe that life is a gift. One thing that definitely keeps me balanced is learning from the mistakes of others. Since I will never live long enough to make them all on my own, I might as well keep my eyes open! I admire the successes and victories of others and, as you know, I am never shy about asking people how they achieved their dreams."

She continues, "one more thing, on being balanced, come on, let's be real, some days

She's got beauty and brains, but motherhood keeps Leeza balanced

took our meals to her home rather than give them any further ideas. Thankfully, my son's rebellion subsided, but the friendship, forged on that night, remains constant. Throughout the years, Leeza has been a mentor, creative collaborator and girlfriend. The more time I spend with her, the more impressed I become. She is fun, happy, loyal, honest, energetic, gorgeous, brilliant, spiritual and balanced. I'm still

a way of looking at life? She responded with, "My philosophy is found in Eleanor Roosevelt's words: 'When you cease to make a contribution, you begin to die.' A sense of service is very important to me. I've always had it. Even as a little girl, I wanted to help many people through television." She has her challenges too. "The desire to serve is a more deeply personal one now that I am fighting an enemy called Alzheimer's. You

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I'm running on empty from lack of sleep. Some days, I give in to whining from the back seat. Some days it's all I can do to make it to school in time for a parent-teacher conference, much less make a difference in the world. But as I clumsily navigate my way through this thing called life, I realize whether it's my role, as wife, mother, sister, daughter, friend or employee, there will be many days when I just don't get it right. That's cool as long as I get another chance to try again."

What do you find most fulfilling, I asked? "I love a chance to get intimately involved with real people facing challenges and striving to make a difference. Every time I conduct an interview, I learn something more about the power of words, the resilience of the human spirit and the complexities of our lives that we think are so unique and yet for the most part, are so similar. We all want and need to be connected to others. The people we choose to join us on our path and those we meet along the way all affect the way we leave our mark here on Earth."

Leeza is always looking for that something extra. She gives that something extra to the people that touch her life. In a nutshell that may be the "secret" to Leeza's balanced life. She gives and receives with an open heart and an inquisitive mind enriching countless lives along the way.

Leeza Gibbons will host the "Kaleidoscope of Color" Charity Gala at DCOTA on February 2, 2002 at 7:00 p.m. Marvin I. Danto, founder, CEO and COB of Danto Investment Company, Michigan Design Center and DCOTA, has generously contributed \$100,000 to this black-tie gala that will honor and benefit eight South Florida children's charities. One hundred percent of the proceeds from ticket sales and silent auction items go back to the charities directly. For more information call Jenny Pudwell at (954) 356-4361.

Linda Sivertsen is a freelance writer and the award-winning author of "Lives Charmed: Intimate Conversations with Extraordinary People". Linda has been featured on CNN, Leeza, Extra, E, the Star and New York Post. She is a speaker, editor and book proposal coach. She can be reached online at: www.livescharmed.com