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HE SAID SLYLY

Glenn Plaskin Interviews
Sylvester Stallone



TORTURED

Sylvester Stallone At 13 O'Clock

THE GLENN PLASKIN INTERVIEW

AGONY.

Right from the start.

A botched birth, July 6, 1946. Crammed into a stiflingly hot charity ward on the Lower East Side, the infant's mother wailed as a frenzied physician delivered the baby, Michael Sylvester Stallone, with forceps — and severed the infant's facial nerve on the left side, leaving his lip, chin and half his tongue partially paralyzed. Later in life, the skinny kid with rickets would remember that he was like "Mr. Potato Head with all the parts in the wrong place. . . I wanted to be anybody but me."

Growing up in Hell's Kitchen, the oddball with a speech impediment, lopsided mouth and droopy eyes was tormented by neighborhood punks who called him "Sylvia." His father beat him periodically. He remembers being kissed by his mother just twice.

He burned with rage. "I'd sit and wait for cars with a lead pipe, I'd paint the house black, hack up Santa Claus, fire arrows from a classroom window, jump off a roof with an umbrella and break my arm. . . ." By age 12, he'd broken 11 bones. And he'd been kicked out of 13 schools.

At 15, having been told his brain "was dormant," he turned to bodybuilding, using an automobile axle as his first set of weights.

And after that, there were years of desperation as an actor and playwright in New York. "Nobody, nobody," he remembers bitterly, "would give me a break." At age 29, he hatched one himself. He called it "Rocky." It was 1975.

That year, with \$106 to his name and a pregnant wife, Sylvester Stallone was offered \$360,000 for the script — provided he agreed not to star in it. He said no. Instead, he took a paltry salary of \$75,000 — plus a 10%

cut of the net profits.

The rest — the \$30 million salary per picture, the \$1 billion-plus in box-office gross for the slew of "Rocky" films and "Rambo" films and others — is history.

The rags-to-riches climb has not been without sorrows. Although Sly's 14-year-old son, Sage Moonblood, is starring with him in the new "Rocky V," opening this week, his younger son, Seargeoh, 11, is autistic — "locked in darkness," Stallone grimaces. His penchant for extramarital dalliances ended his 11-year marriage to Sasha Czack. And his brief marriage to Danish actress Brigitte Nielsen left him suicidally depressed. After rebounding with a string of blondes, he's more recently settled down with 21-year-old aspiring actress-model Jennifer Flaten, though he's still suffering from a bad case of the DTAs: "Don't Trust Anybody," Sylvester Stallone laughs heartily.

A warrior to the bone, passions swelling, the planet's most highly paid film star, 44, reveals here his "essence," muses on a nightmare childhood, considers the rise and fall of Rocky Balboa, contemplates his libido, his past lives and his obsession with clocks — as the hourglass empties.

As "Rocky" junkies clap their hands and critics groan over a fifth installment, what's it doing to you? "It's Cinderella, it's coming home. The dream is over. Rocky's peaked, he lost his money, his marquee value, and his brain is damaged. It's midnight. Come back to reality, you have no worth."

What's going on in his brain? "His brain is slowed, slurred, but he's sweet. He's also trapped by the greatest fear of all — he can't make a living. He says: 'Screw it, I've gone through this cycle for 15 years and — [shouting] — I'm BACK on the same corner. I smell this neighborhood, people are laughing at me. Did I go all this way to become ANOTHER BUM FROM THE NEIGHBORHOOD? Did I do this?'"

It could happen to you. "I've got an emergent fund; Rocky's got nothing. He blames himself. He's filled with this horrible self-loathing until comes across a big, blond-haired, blue-eyed Ol' Rocky's going to make him another Rocky — but can't. THE SOUL, the character, isn't there. It turns on him, signs with a Don King character with the devil. There it is, there it is."

Where does that leave Rocky? "Brokenhearted. His marriage is in shambles, he begs forgiveness and gets atonement. But then the Don King tells his new champion, says: 'Here's the ticket — sit against teacher.' The kid attacks Rocky in a street brawl. Rocky is like Damocles on his turf, he's unbeatable. He wins, but nobody wins. It's dead."

If this is the last sequel, why doesn't Rocky die? "Can't die. I wanted him to die, but Hollywood producers don't think the same way."

Cynics say you're holding out for a "Rocky VI." "There's no 'Rocky VI.' He's done."

This was the character that made you. Isn't it for you to kiss him good-bye? "Are you kidding like seeing someone in a hospital and you know the last time. He's full circle. It's over."

Katharine Hepburn once said: "In life, once you open a door, you can never close it. You can even come back, but it's open forever." Are there days you wish you could close the Rocky door and escape the stereotype forever? "Yes, yes. But the irony is that if I hadn't walked through that door, I wouldn't have a chance to open any others."

In your own life, what were the chances that Hell's Kitchen kid could crawl from 10th Ave and 49th Street to Hollywood and wind up top?

