

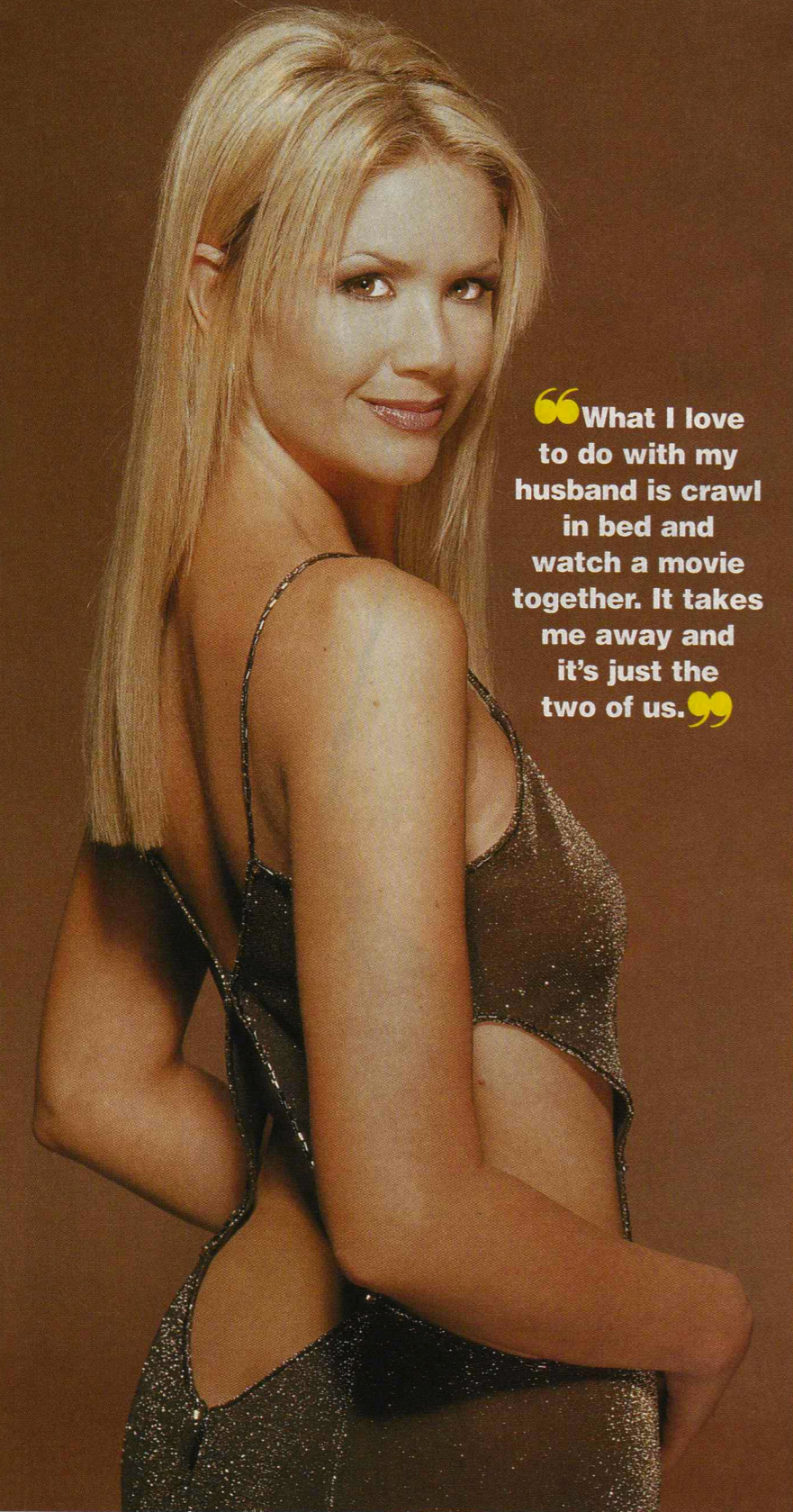
ACCESS
HOLLYWOOD'S
SEXY
CELEBRITY
REPORTER

Tom Cruise. Keanu Reeves.
Garth Brooks. Leonardo DiCaprio.
Robin Williams. The list of men in Nancy O'Dell's life reads like a who's who in Hollywood, not to mention who's hot. But before you start thinking that this beautiful woman is on a romantic crash course, her intimate chats and sweet kisses with the men of fame is all strictly business. Nancy is the female anchor for *Access Hollywood*, one of television's most popular entertainment reporting shows. *Complete Woman* turned the tables on Nancy, putting the professional interviewer in the hot seat to learn what goes on when the cameras stop filming...

by Lora Wintz

NANCY O'DELL

“The Tom Cruise interview I did after he won a Golden Globe was fabulous, and I love to interview Garth Brooks—he’s a sweetheart.”



“What I love to do with my husband is crawl in bed and watch a movie together. It takes me away and it's just the two of us.”

NANCY O'Dell has been kissed by Tom Cruise—the actual, *Top Gun*, *Risky Business*, *Mission Impossible* Tom Cruise. “Did you see that!?” exclaims Nancy. The blonde beauty gives a small sigh of amazement when she recalls the puck-

er-up move Tom bestowed on-camera at last year's Golden Globe Awards. “A lot of times after I've done an interview, the celebrity and I will do a quick thank-you kiss, but we're both standing up and saying good-bye and stuff so it's no big deal,” explains Nancy. “But Tom just

leaned over and grabbed my face and gave me a kiss. And I looked at my producer and I said, ‘Did you see? He came over to me! Make sure that gets on the show five times!’” Even though Nancy has interviewed hundreds of celebrities equally hunky to Mr. Cruise, she's not so

jaded with her position as female anchor of *Access Hollywood* as to brush off a moment-to-remember. “I thought it was just really sweet and special. And, of course, it was Tom Cruise,” she says matter-of-factly. There are a lot of perks to Nancy's job. She has attended and reported on dozens of major celebrity events like The Oscars, The Emmys and The Golden Globe Awards. Her list of in-depth interviews with top celebrities reads like the cast list of a really great film, with a really great soundtrack.

She has also appeared on television shows like *Just Shoot Me*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Melrose Place*, *Ally McBeal* and *The Simpsons* (“I've never been animated before—that was kinda cool!”), and in the films *Scream 2*, *Scream 3* and *The Bachelor*, as part of her role as the national honorary spokesperson for the March of Dimes Blue Jeans for Babies campaign (more on that later). Basically, if you wanted to call Nancy O'Dell a woman-on-the-go, you'd be right. And you'd also be pleasantly surprised to find that such a successful, determined woman is also a very sweet, very down-to-earth person, complete with a touch of Southern-gal accent, courtesy of her Myrtle Beach, South Carolina roots...

How does a Southern girl wind up in entertainment?

I actually started way back in Myrtle Beach, my hometown. I was doing sales for a television station. The station was small, and they needed someone to do a bit of reporting on the weekends. Someone from a bigger station saw me and asked me to be a full-time reporter. Then I moved to Miami, then to Los Angeles to do the news for NBC. I was an investigative reporter, and I would go home depressed from work, because it was usually all really sad news—interviewing the families of murder victims

and such. You can't help but let it affect you. When NBC mentioned they were going to be starting an entertainment program, I went for it.

Do you recall your first big event?

It was The Emmys. I remember being terrified; it was all so foreign to me.

Who was your first interview?

My first celebrity interview was Keanu Reeves. The producers told me, “He's not the easiest interview, Nancy. Don't worry if it doesn't turn out great, if he's not talkative.”

Did that make it worse or better?

It actually made me feel better; I thought it was really considerate of someone to tell me it might be hard. And, actually, I went in and the interview turned out wonderful. Keanu was fabulous and he couldn't have been cuter.

How do you handle the stress of doing a big-time celebrity interview and being on camera?

My first news director told me two things. One, he said to pretend that the camera is just another person. And two, he told me that you can fool everybody. You can be under complete panic, as long as you maintain that composure of being perfectly calm. It's true. Nobody ever has any idea of what's going on inside your ears, with your earpiece hooked up to a producer. They don't hear when people are telling you you're out of time; they have no idea that a star's publicist may be going crazy over a question you just asked. As long as you maintain the calmness on the outside, you're okay.

Who was your favorite interview?

The Tom Cruise interview I did when he won a Golden Globe was fabulous. He was down-to-earth, and he seemed to be speaking personally, not just about his movie. I love Garth Brooks; he's a sweetheart and I always look forward to talking to him. He's one of my favorites.

Have you ever walked away saying, “That was the worst?”

I have, with a very big celebrity. It was a he—one of the biggest ones out



Nancy gets glam for the cameras with the help of...

BEAUTY FILE

- **Aveda Cherry Almond Bark Conditioner** For a little tress TLC.
- **Black eyeliner** Nancy loves the cat-eye look.
- **Mark Zunino gowns** The designer custom-makes a dress for Nancy for every event. (She returns the gown for his showroom, and he gives her a sketch for her scrapbook.)

Unless otherwise noted: hair & makeup: Ing; fashion styling: Nicole Allowitz; photos: Harry Langdon.

there. He's kind of known for being quiet and you might just figure out who it is, but I won't name names. I walked into the room and he was sitting there with his eyes shut and his head down. I was trying to sympathize and said, “Oh, you must be tired.” He didn't answer. He didn't even open his eyes. I'm Southern, and I think that if you hear a woman's voice, you'd open your eyes. He had been doing interviews all day and I'm sure he was tired, but I thought it was rude. And the interview was just *eeeww*. He was very quiet and I remember feeling like I was pulling teeth trying to get something. It was a difficult interview. **Do you ever ask a question and get an answer you didn't expect?** All the time. A lot of times, there are set answers—you know, stars have to promote their movie. But that's one thing I love, when I get a celebrity who just seems to be very hon-

est and candid and tells you something that you totally don't expect. And it's always fun to see what kind of mood they are in; you never can tell. Sometimes they're in a giggly mood and you can get them to say anything. Robin Williams is always unexpected. Robin is a fun interview because he's just gonna go. **It's just “Hi, Robin”...** ...and he just goes! And it's always fabulous, it's always terrific. He's a fun one because you don't have to do all your homework for him. He'll just take it away from 'ya anyway! **What kind of schedule do you have for *Access Hollywood*?** It's crazy. A lot of people think, “Oh, what a nice, little, cushy gig, just taping a show.” Yes, we tape the show and we're done by 1:30 p.m., but then, people don't realize all the other work. For every interview, there's the homework—you have stacks of research and you have to

read all these articles and sort through the information to come up with the right questions. Then there are screenings, personal appearances, premieres and awards show—and those are usually on the weekends. But if you've gotta work, it's a fun job! **You're also involved with the March of Dimes...**

I'm the spokesperson for the Blue Jeans For Babies campaign. It's a program to help educate women on how to take care of themselves before they even get pregnant. A lot of people don't realize that if you're thinking about getting pregnant, you really need to make your doctor's visits months before you even start trying. One of the ways we came up with to promote the campaign is for me to do different cameos, wearing blue. I've done about 23 cameos, including *Ally McBeal*, *Just Shoot Me* and *V.I.P.* Every time I make an appearance, a corporation makes a donation to the March of Dimes. It's been great, because not only are we raising awareness, we're raising money for a worthy cause. **Good for you! Now tell us what goes on behind the cameras. We know you're married...**

I've been married to Dr. Richard O'Dell since September 1995. We met when we were both working in Miami. A mutual friend tried to set us up on a blind date and I was real tentative and didn't want to go; I kept postponing it. Finally, I was doing a live show when all of a sudden, I saw this beautiful man walking toward me. I said to myself, “Wow! He's really cute. I'd love to meet him.” He said, “Hi, I'm Rick. The one that so-and-so has been trying to set you up with.” I was like, “Gosh! What an idiot I was! I could have gone out with him before!” I always tease him and say, “You know you were cute. That's why you came to meet me!”

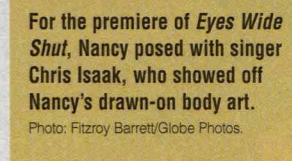
How do you find time together? It's really tough, actually, because his hours are so

ON THE TOWN



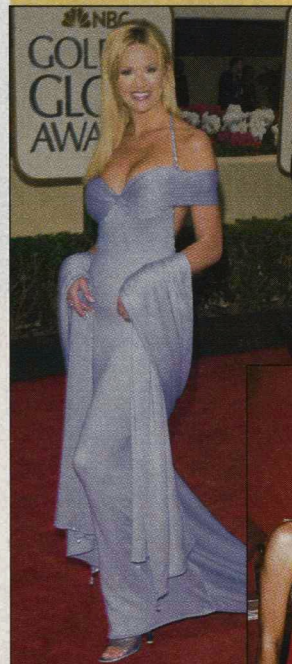
Nancy is the female anchor of *Access Hollywood*, along with male counterpart, Pat O'Brien.

Photo: Celebrity Photo.



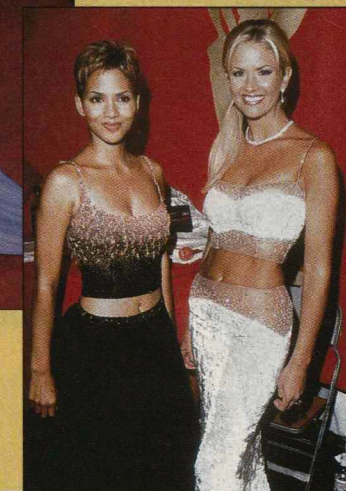
For the premiere of *Eyes Wide Shut*, Nancy posed with singer Chris Isaak, who showed off Nancy's drawn-on body art.

Photo: Fitzroy Barrett/Globe Photos.



Nancy strikes a glamour-girl pose with actress Halle Berry.

Photo courtesy Leslie Garson Public Relations.



much different than mine. He's an anesthesiologist and surgeries are usually scheduled really early in the morning, so he's usually done by noon. I'm usually just starting to tape the show at noon, then I have all these other things going on. Sometimes I don't get home until 8:00 at night. One way we try to find time together is to exercise. We'll run the neighborhood or walk or play tennis. It works really well because he's very health conscious and he loves to exercise and it's fun for us to do it together. **What's a great romantic evening with your husband?** What I love to do is crawl in bed and watch a movie together. I think that's so fine. It's relaxing and you just get taken away. You have fun talking and watching the movie and cuddling up. I think that's my favorite. It takes me away from everything that I have on my mind and it's just the two of us. **CW**