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THE DESPERATE HOUSEWIFE WHO GOT POLITICAL

Eva Longoria She's the
actress turned activist

HOW I BECAME A DEEPAKE

By Hugo Rifkind

SAD IN BED

The truth
about sex and
antidepressants



THE ACTRESS WHO TURNED ACTIVIST



Clockwise from top left:
Hillary Clinton, Eva Longoria
and Gloria Steinem, 2020;
with Joe Biden at a rally in
2014; with Barack Obama
in 2005; on the set of
Desperate Housewives

She found fame as a Desperate Housewife, but Eva Longoria has moved beyond acting. Whether she's campaigning for the Democrats, speaking out on behalf of Latina women in Hollywood or directing her first film, there's no stopping the 48-year-old powerhouse. Interview: Helena de Bertodano



Eva Longoria photographed at the Maybourne Beverly Hills by Leigh Kelly



With her husband, José Antonio Bastón, in 2019



With friends Victoria Beckham and Kate Beckinsale in 2012

Eva Longoria says she is often stopped in the street by people who think she looks like someone famous. “They go, ‘Oh my God, do people say you look like Eva Longoria? You look exactly like her. It’s crazy!’ I go, ‘They say it all the time!’ But I never say, ‘Yes, I am her.’”

At times, she doesn’t feel like she is Eva Longoria, at least not the Eva Longoria that people have in their imaginations – largely based on her 8-year, 180-episode role as the fabulously fickle former model Gabrielle Solis in *Desperate Housewives*, the television series which became a worldwide hit. “I don’t live life as a celebrity. Being in the public eye is what I do; it’s not who I am.”

Anyway Longoria, 48, has come a long way from Wisteria Lane. A director, producer, entrepreneur and political activist, she seems to be everywhere these days – hosting the excellent CNN travel and food show *Searching for Mexico*; directing her first feature film, *Flamin’ Hot*; running two charities; advertising L’Oréal. She has her own production company, UnbeliEVAble Entertainment, which recently secured straight-to-series orders for Apple TV+ and Prime Video.

She keeps her 9.3 million Instagram followers up to date with lifestyle advice and cooking videos – for which she uses her cookware line, Risa. And, of course, like all self-respecting celebrities now, she has her own tequila brand, Casa Del Sol (“It wins all the blind tastings”). She has a four-year-old son, Santiago, with her third husband, the Mexican businessman José Antonio Bastón.

Oh, and she also finds time for her friends, especially her best friend, Victoria Beckham.

‘I ALWAYS KNEW I’D HAVE TO WORK SUPERHARD AND OUT-HUSTLE EVERYONE’

“We are peas in a pod,” says Longoria, who is a godmother to 11-year-old Harper.

We meet at the Maybourne Beverly Hills, an elegant hotel just off Rodeo Drive that attracts a celebrity clientele (*American Idol* host Ryan Seacrest is in the lift today, Al Pacino in the lobby). You hear Longoria before you see her. Despite her small physique (she is 5ft 2in), she has a bellowing voice and a wicked cackle, which precede her into the suite where we meet.

She is briskly friendly and straight to the

point. “What are we talking about today?” she asks, flopping into a sofa.

We are talking about the aforementioned *Flamin’ Hot*, which is coming out on June 9. She switches instantly into gear. “I am Richard Montañez...” she says, referring to the janitor turned executive who is the subject of the movie. It is a well-wrought rags-to-riches story: Montañez, a young janitor at the snack giant Frito Lay, pitched a spicier new product to his bosses, who (eventually) listened to him and launched Flamin’ Hot Cheetos in 1992. According to *Newsweek*, the flavour “rejuvenated the brand” and made billions.

“When somebody says, ‘That job’s not for you – you’re probably not smart enough, ideas don’t come from people who look like you,’ Richard dared to ask, ‘Why not me?’ Naivety was his superpower. I have that same mentality. I’m super-optimistic and very curious. I ask and ask and ask to the point of annoyance.”

Longoria fought off stiff competition, mostly male, to direct *Flamin’ Hot*. “I knew I was gonna have to work twice as hard and out-hustle everybody. And I’m OK with out-hustling anybody in the room. I did such a good pitch. Then [I got it] and I was like, ‘Oh God, am I gonna have to do everything I just said I was gonna do?’ To my own credit, the heads of Searchlight said, ‘The movie you made is exactly the movie you pitched in the room. Many times that doesn’t happen.’”

One would be foolish to underestimate Longoria. She certainly doesn’t underestimate



With her second husband, Tony Parker, in 2010



herself and is not backwards about blowing her own trumpet, but balances it with such engaging charm that she does not come across as arrogant, just very, very determined and focused.

It is a quality she has always had. The youngest of four daughters, she was born in Texas to Mexican parents. Growing up, Longoria says everyone used to comment on how beautiful her sisters were. “I was *la prieta fea*, which means the ugly dark one. People would come up to my mom and say, ‘Your daughters are so beautiful. And who’s this?’ My sisters would tell me I was adopted. I remember thinking, ‘OK, I’m not the pretty one. I’m going to be the smart one.’”

She did well enough on tests at her local school that she was accepted on a Gifted and Talented programme. “I had to be bussed across town to the rich neighbourhood. I remember getting on that bus the first day with my bean taco for breakfast – I don’t think there’s a day I haven’t eaten that for breakfast – and everybody had a Pop-Tart. And I remember a little girl going, ‘She’s Mexican.’ I was like, ‘Who?’ I was too young to navigate that identity in the moment – and later realised that it was probably a negative thing she was saying.”

Of course, it just gave her more of a determination to succeed. “I was like, ‘If I’m going to be a dentist, I’m going to be such a successful dentist. If I’m going to be a lawyer, boy, I’m going to be a good lawyer.’ I just wanted to be successful and independent.”

In 1998, she won a beauty pageant (“I’d blossomed by then. My mum said, ‘Oh honey, please don’t enter. You probably won’t win’”), then after college moved to Los Angeles, where she was signed by an agent. “I touched every rung of the ladder: I was an extra, then I got one line, then five lines, then a guest star, then a co-star, then a series regular. I really worked my way up. It wasn’t like I was discovered at Starbucks... I get my work ethic from my mom – I feel like there’s 48 hours in a day. I’m very efficient.”

She is so dynamic that I feel absolutely drained after an afternoon in her company. Her Instagram is even more exhausting – she posts updates several times a day, and a few days before we meet, she uploads a video of herself going to the gym at 5am while on a movie shoot in Albuquerque. “4.30am,” she corrects me when I mention it. “My day always kicks off with exercise. I do it for sanity not vanity. I’m energised for the whole day.”

After the gym she spends time with Santiago. “We have a fun morning together, rolling out tortillas, getting ready for school. My morning and night-time routines with him are sacred: bath time, story time, bedtime. That’s the most consistent part of my day.”

She talks to him on video call while she is

SHE CALLED OUT TRUMP’S RACISM. ‘MY FATHER ISN’T A CRIMINAL. HE IS A VETERAN’



With her son, Santiago, in 2022

preparing for this photoshoot. “*Te mando un beso. Te quiero* [I’m sending a kiss. I love you],” she coos, waving at him. They live between Mexico City and Los Angeles. “Mostly Mexico City now – but he travels with me everywhere. He was a Covid baby, so his whole toddler years we were home. He’s been very spoiled because he’s always been with Mom. Now [when I leave] he’s like, ‘What are you doing all day, Mom?’”

Although she speaks to him exclusively in Spanish, she did not grow up speaking it herself. “I only learnt it a few years ago. Spanish is my third language. My second language is actually French because of my ex-husband [Tony Parker, her French-American second husband – they lived in France].”

It was through Parker that she first met the Beckhams. “Tony and David knew each other. That’s how we met and then they moved to LA and I was one of the few people [Victoria] knew here when she arrived.”

That was back in 2007, when Beckham signed with LA Galaxy. The two couples started spending time together. “David is an amazing cook, very talented,” says Longoria. She clicked immediately with the former Spice Girl. “I wish people knew how funny and charming and smart Victoria is. She’s the funniest person. I think she’s an introvert but

she’s an extrovert with me. We are inseparable.”

They meet up as often as possible – usually in Paris, Longoria’s favourite city (“the George V is my home away from home”), or London. “We have sleepovers all the time, mostly at their farmhouse or in London. We usually just blab all night. She’s extremely loyal. There’s never a moment I can’t call her, that she’s not available, that she’s not flying to see me or I’m flying to see her. Or I’m raiding her closet. She gives me motherly advice and business advice.”

Beckham was there for Longoria when her marriage to Parker fell apart in 2010 over reports of Parker’s infidelity. A few years later, Longoria met her current husband in Mexico City. “A friend of mine set us up. Unbeknown to both of us, he tricked us into going to the same restaurant and introduced us. The rest is history. He’s one of the kindest, classiest human beings you’ll ever meet.”

In 2016, when Longoria was planning her wedding in Mexico to Bastón, she turned to her friend. “I was like, ‘You have to do this dress!’ She was, ‘I don’t do wedding dresses.’ I was like, ‘That’s perfect, because I don’t want a wedding dress. I just want a dress.’ It was not my first time getting married and I wanted it to be a non-wedding dress. So she was like, ‘OK, that I can do.’”

In the end, Longoria ended up wearing three different Victoria Beckham outfits for her wedding. “She did my civil outfit, my wedding dress and the after-party dress. She brought everything – I mean, she literally carried it with her. Put it on me, buckled my shoes because I couldn’t bend down, zipped up my dress when I got drunk. She was like, ‘I know my role.’ She is that best friend.”

Beckham could not ask for a better advocate for her clothing brand. “I feel the most feminine and powerful at the same time when I’m in a Victoria Beckham dress,” enthuses Longoria. “She designs with that empowered woman in mind: the cut, the fabrics, the functionality of it. She knows this is probably a woman who’s on the go and has shit to do, but wants to look beautiful.”

As a couple, Longoria says the Beckhams are made for each other. “When you see them together you go, ‘Wow, this is a couple that just makes sense.’ They’re similar in their family values – the best parents you will ever witness. They do it effortlessly and it’s beautiful to watch them. The family is always together. That’s the thing I marvel at: how well they can parent their children with who they are and everything that they have going on in the world. They have the best

OPENING SPREAD: DRESS: ALEX PERRY; FARRINGS: LEVAIN RING; JOSEPH SAIDIAN & SONS; STYLING: MAKE-UP: REILLY AT THE ONLY AGENCY; MAKE-UP: MELISSA HERNANDEZ AT THE WALL GROUP; AND HAIR: LISA SATORN, BOTH USING LOREAL

children: great hearts, kind, polite, mannered, talented children. Harper rules the roost. She's a sweet, beautiful, kind young lady."

Longoria has several other British friends, including the actors Jack Whitehall and Kate Beckinsale and often spends time in the UK. Does she like British food? "God, no!" she replies, looking aghast. "Definitely not the food. I do like the parks. I will go to them in the pouring grey rain." She shot the comedy-drama series *Decline and Fall* with Jack Whitehall in Wales. "Everyone kept telling me, 'I'm so sorry you're shooting in Wales,' and I was like, 'What are you talking about?' I loved Cardiff. I loved Pizza Express. I thought it was like this tiny mom and pop store that made the most amazing pizza. Jack was like, 'Honey, it's a chain.'"

Longoria uses food as a way to bring her friends together. "I will land from Europe and cook a meal for 16 people, because it's so relaxing to me. It's the greatest form of love, to nourish somebody... And I'm lucky that my husband's identical – he loves having our house full of people and full of love."

She says she's always been a foodie. "I'm a good eater... I've been cooking since I was five or six, out of necessity. My mom was working a full-time job and I was like, 'I'm hungry.' She's like, 'Well, figure it out. I am not a short-order cook.'" So her aunt, who had a catering

service, taught Longoria how to cook. "She did weddings and *quinceañeras* [a girl's 15th birthday celebration] and so we all ended up working in the kitchen for her."

So when she was asked to present *Searching for Mexico*, a food travelogue co-produced with Stanley Tucci, she jumped at the opportunity. "I was very excited about the emotional journey I took. Because when you're talking about the food of a country, you're talking about the people of a country – they're intimately intertwined. There wasn't a day I didn't cry over somebody's story, whether it was a Michelin star chef or a Mayan woman making tamales in her flat."

She is hoping to do a second season. "There are so many states we didn't cover. The breadth of beauty that Mexico holds should be celebrated, especially in the United States, where the past administration really made a villain of Mexico, as a country and a people. I would like to reverse that image."

A lot of her philanthropic efforts are based at the Mexican border, trying to reunite families. "It's heartbreaking: families who still can't find their children; children in cages. I can't imagine my child being exposed to that kind of trauma."

As a "ninth-generation Texan", she points out that she is far more American than Donald Trump – whose name she cannot

bear to utter. "My family have never crossed a border. The border crossed us." She co-chaired Barack Obama's re-election campaign in 2012. "And I was on Hillary's and Biden's campaigns." She took to the stage during the 2016 Democratic national convention, calling out Trump on racism: "My father is not a criminal or a rapist. He's a veteran."

She says that women – especially Latina women – still have a long way to go in Hollywood. "We are getting less jobs as directors than two years ago. People look at Hollywood as a progressive entity and it's not... I think we're more aware, thanks to the #MeToo and Time's Up movements, about what's appropriate in work environments. That's been a game-changer for our industry as far as how we're treated on sets or in writers' rooms and meetings. Has it led to hiring more women? I don't think so."

Occasionally there is talk about a *Desperate Housewives* comeback – but Longoria thinks it is unlikely to happen. "I'd be the first one to sign up. I miss Gaby. I miss the girls. I miss Wisteria Lane. But I've talked to Marc Cherry [who created the show] quite a bit about it. His big thing is, 'What would we say? We fully explored these characters.'"

The show was innovative, she points out, because back then it was unusual to have a series in which women drove the narrative.

'I REMEMBER SHE STOPPED A REHEARSAL TO TAKE A CALL FROM OBAMA'

"We weren't an addendum to somebody's story. We were the story. I was the young one [29] when we started *Housewives*. But I remember it being a big deal that the other leads were 40-year-olds. It wasn't only women, it was 'old' women."

Although she enjoyed playing Gaby, she says she has little in common with her. "She was the complete opposite: self-absorbed, selfish, doesn't want kids. Hopefully people think I'm compassionate and kind. And I love children. That's what made it so fun to play her because she would say and do things I wish I could say and do, but wouldn't. It's so funny, because when the show ended, we could keep our wardrobe. And I was like, 'I don't want any of this.' Gaby was so loud with her wardrobe: leopard dresses and snakeskin boots. I ended up taking most of [Teri Hatcher's character] Susan Mayer's clothes home, because she had cashmere sweaters and neutral colours. I was like, 'That's my speed.'"

She used the set as a training ground for all aspects of the industry, even coming in on days when she wasn't filming. "It was my film school. I was on the set of the biggest TV

show in the world at the time, with these amazing directors and endless budgets. I paid attention and asked a lot of questions... People think I'm an actor turned director. But I am a director-producer turned actor. I've always been way more interested in behind the scenes, in how the sausage is made."

Later, I ask Cherry what his first impression of Longoria was. "She was too short to play a former runway model," he quips. In every other way, he knew she was a perfect fit for Gaby, but even he is amazed at how far she has gone. "She started as a hilarious and talented actress, and somewhere along the way transformed into a force of nature, using her platform to effect change in social policy, politics and the entertainment industry... The first moment I realised she was becoming more than an actor? I think she once interrupted a rehearsal to take a call from Obama. So I waited."

Although she does not turn 50 for a couple of years, she often refers to herself as 50 already. "I have no bones about ageing," she says matter-of-factly. "It's gonna happen. I loved it when somebody said, 'Eva Longoria

looks older than when she was on *Desperate Housewives*.' I'm like, 'You are older than when I was on *Desperate Housewives*.' We've all aged since then. I do think social media and society put a lot of pressure on women about how they should look. And I luckily don't care."

This is not just empty talk. She often posts cooking videos to Instagram wearing no make-up. "I will see in the comments, 'You're so brave to not wear make-up,' and I'm like, 'Brave? If I have to put on make-up to face the world, then it's not happening.' That should be the norm." During Covid she posted a home video colouring her long grey roots, which went viral. "People couldn't believe I showed myself colouring my hair. I've had grey hair since I was 15. That's not something I'm ashamed of."

Indeed, she says she feels much more confident about her looks now than she did 30 years ago. "Fifty is the new 20. It's not an age to be scared about... Did you see JLo when she turned 50? That beautiful photoshoot? Gwyneth Paltrow too?"

An idea occurs to her and she starts chuckling. "When I turn 50, I want to be in a thong, on top of a lowrider [car]." She is joking of course. At least, I think she is... ■

Flamin' Hot will be available to watch on Disney+ from June 9

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