

A Portrait of the Actress: Pam Grier

Written by Kymberly Keeton
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Actress Pam Grier is best known for her roles in blaxploitation films in the 70s is back with a memo regarding advocacy, feminism, life, love, sexuality, and independence. These messages are written down in an easy vernacular for fans. Her memoir, *My Life in Three Acts: Foxy*, takes an intriguing look at Grier's life and legacy. During the summer of 2010 she did her U.S. book tour. For Grier, it was her "Big Hug Healing Tour."

The African-American actress was born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Pam Grier's mother was a nurse, and her father was a Technical Sergeant in the United States Air Force. She has one sister and one brother. As a result of living in a military family, the Griers moved around a lot. The book opens up with Pam Grier talking about having a keen instinct regarding African-Americans and white people not communicating with each other in the sixties.

The actress speaks candidly about racism in America while growing up in Denver, Colorado.

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"You realize it was a navigation of oppression {during those times}... I had instincts such as seeing parents hide anger so they could save their families. You could also see other people of other races look at you differently. Back then, parents would tell you why other people had prejudgments about you."

Through Grier's life she tells *The Dallas Weekly/Soflymythirties* that she became an advocate for African-American females at an early age. Reminiscing via telephone Grier states, "I was an activist at the age of twelve, standing up for other girls whose skin was darker, or who wasn't middle class. I wore Goodwill clothing up until the age of eighteen. I fought for independence as a woman."

The leading lady exerts, "I mean up until years ago a woman could not buy a home, and then a few more years back women could not vote or drive."

Living in Denver, Colorado with her family, Pam Grier participated in stage productions and entered beauty contests to pay for college. She knew what it took to make it in America at an early age; she just needed a foot in the door. In 1967, Pam Grier's life changed forever.

According to her bio Grier moved to Los Angeles, California in 1967, where she was hired as a receptionist at the American International Pictures (AIP) company. There she was discovered by Jack Hill. He immediately offered her roles in prison films such as *The Big Doll House* (1971), and *The Big Bird Cage* (1972). After having moderate success with those films she then was cast in blaxploitation movies, playing big, bold, strong, women, beginning with Jack Hill's *Coffy* (1973).

In *Coffy* (1973), Grier played a nurse who sought revenge on drug dealers; her character was portrayed as the baddest woman to hit the street with strength, beauty, and power. Pam Grier played a similar role in *Foxy Brown*.

Grier proclaims that the title given to African-American films (blaxploitation) had no negative connotation to her. She says, "The term blaxploitation did not bother me... I always felt the

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movies were for a black audience.”

After the film *Coffy* debuted it was an instantaneous hit at the box office and Pam Grier was noted as the **first** African-American female to star in an action film. Grier contends that as soon as she started playing the heroine in blaxploitation films the notion of women exposing themselves as independent, strong, and powerful was on radar by all the critics.

Grier adds, “As soon as I did the films, I portrayed characters that were profane, and people still want to label that era as women exploiting themselves.”

Regardless of what her critics stated, PamGrier is still smart, sexy, and fine. She says that relationships never kept her from doing what she loved—nor would she allow it.

Grier acknowledges her roots pertaining to relationships, “I was raised during the times where tradition was important. Today, I want to be with someone who understands independence.”

Many people define their lives by age and success. Pam Grier has a totally different perspective towards the myth, “I define myself by energy. I date men in their forties. You are interesting when you have an education or when you are self-educated. I don’t think of age... I ski and snow-board.”

Grier addresses her life and where she was in her thirties. When it came to love or dating she says, “I have more opportunity to self-explore now and meet men outside of my comfort zone. When I was thirty—men were skeptical of a woman’s every move.”

Grier confirms who she is today, “I am Agape,open to a relationship, and don’t want to be smothered. I want to be with someone where I can be me and maturity says it all.”

Pam Grier’s career has continued to be on the move for more than thirty years. In 1997, she

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starred in Quentin Tarantino's film, *Jackie Brown*, and recently was cast in the hit Showtime television series "The L Word," which deals with the lives of female lesbians. Grier was diagnosed with cervical cancer in her thirties; she has fought back and now the cancer is in remission.

Her memoir, *My Life in Three Acts*, was written with Andrea Cagan. The book outlines her life as an actress, advocate, sex-symbol, rape survivor + love, loss, and redemption.

Pam Grier believes that a lot of people need hugs right now, because they do not love themselves internally.

The actress states, "You have to give yourself second/third chances in life... not all people survive or heal their wounds. When you have something to say you empower others."

Pam Grier has definitely something to say in three acts; get ready to read her book!

