

Carlsbad By The Sea Resident Author Debuts New Memoir During Quarantine

When the quarantine hit, almost 90-year-old Jackie Epstein, a former writer for the *L. A. Herald-Examiner*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Tennis Illustrated*, and *National Enquirer*, did what she's often done to navigate life's uncertainties: she sat across from a blank white page and let the words flow.



Jackie Epstein, photo credit: Brenda Tootsies

My Love Affair with Hollywood is a book Jackie started writing over 30 years ago, initially entitled *Hollywood, Behind the Scenes*, when she and her husband, Robert Epstein, a *Los Angeles Times* executive, retired in Carlsbad in 1989. Jackie began writing children's books and giving talks about Hollywood, and Robert wrote plays. They also wrote a television series together when they weren't playing tennis and making love. It was a continual honeymoon that ended six years later when Robert was diagnosed with cancer and passed away six months later. They were married for almost 42 years.

"Books, series, and speeches were forgotten," she writes.

In 2013, Jackie moved to the Carlsbad By The Sea Retirement Community and immersed herself in the coastal community's many offerings, including, naturally, a writing class. The other students, enthralled by her "Hollywood-insider" vignettes, encouraged her to tell her life story as well as anecdotes about celebrities. Thus, the book became *My Love Affair with Hollywood*, a memoir. However, once again, life got in the way.



Betty White and Jackie Epstein

“I was always a party animal, much too social, with so many activities going on,” Jackie explained. “I had little time to write.”

And then the pandemic happened. “All of a sudden, I had all these hours and no more activities. So, I was writing day and night until I finished the book.”

My Love Affair with Hollywood follows Jackie’s life from its humble beginnings — born in Hollywood to a family of modest means — through her marriage and her numerous careers as a writer, film and television publicist, tennis columnist, realtor, educator, and public speaker.

Jackie has met and interviewed hundreds of celebrities throughout her life, and her book is chock-full of vivid encounters with some of Hollywood’s brightest stars.



Jackie Epstein and Gloria Steinem

Writing under the name “Jackie Manne,” she shared beauty tips and fitness routines from leading

ladies of the day, including Rita Hayworth, Doris Day, and Joan Crawford. She dug deep into her interviewees' superstitions, learning the secret behind Bob Hope's lucky cufflinks and why Zsa Zsa Gabor would never leave a hat on her bed while she was working. From comedian Jack Benny she gained insight into why comedians' marriages tended to last. "Less temptation, my dear," she quoted him as saying. "Women don't become aroused when they're laughing at you." And from Alex Haley, author of *Roots*, she received writing advice that would prove advantageous. "When you stop asking people about their lives and want to write about your own, write what you know."

Earning the nickname "Ms. Clean of Hollywood," Jackie deliberately avoided the more sensational story angles, instead choosing to focus on the stars' unique insights, their hopes, their fears, and above all, their humanity. "I never wrote a negative story about anyone," she said. Jackie quickly gained a reputation as a writer that celebrities could trust, even when her interviews turned into "off-the-record" confessions.

"I can sit down on a bench, and a stranger sits down next to me, and in 15 minutes, I know their life. They pour it out."

Although journalism seemed like a natural fit for her, Jackie came relatively late to the world of professional writing. Until her mid-30s, Jackie had a full life in her role as a "stay-at-home" mom raising four children and enjoying the "perks" her husband's career brought to their life.

"Our generation of women were nurses, secretaries, teachers. And then we got married and had children."

But one evening at a dinner party, all that changed for Jackie.

"You could see the women's eyes turn away and feel their disinterest after the host introduced me to them as a 'homemaker,'" Jackie writes.

At first, this infuriated her. In addition to raising four children, she was going to college at night and volunteering in her community. "Who are they to judge me like this?" She speculated that the career-women in the room with kids probably had live-in help, which she did not. But then she paused; perhaps it was she who *was* unsatisfied with the wife and homemaker's identity. Maybe she did want something more. She had re-read *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, which explored how, in post-World War II, women were released from jobs to be given to men returning from service and told to go home again to find fulfillment in their role as mother and wife. Yet, many had become deeply dissatisfied. And she was one of them. After taking a class to help her hone in on what might be best suited for her, she announced to her husband, "Robert, I want to be a writer!"

My Love Affair with Hollywood is a stroll down the Hollywood Boulevard of yesteryear, a refreshing examination of the "real people" who exist behind the veil of "celebrity" and a story of deep love and loss. Above all, though, it is a testament to a woman who has spent her life not only listening intently to others but listening to and heeding the persistent beat of her own heart.

Jackie Epstein still lives at Carlsbad By the Sea and is already working on her next book: *Walking a Duck in L.A.* Her memoir *My Love Affair with Hollywood* is available at Amazon.com.