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Nancy Jarecki's approach to benevolence, business, and one's "betty" is wildly and wonderfully original.

Sally Singer tells tales about a woman who is one part Nancy Drew, one part Benjamin Franklin.

LAST SPRING, A VERY RICH AND beautiful woman named Nancy Jarecki visited the *Vogue* offices. She wore a lacy Marc Jacobs jacket and True Religion Brand Jeans and carried a Bottega Veneta tote. After a breakfast of scrambled eggs in a private dining room, she announced that she had a surprise for me and my colleague. "Shut your eyes," she commanded. And we did. For about a minute we listened to various rustling noises. I sneaked a glance through a barely opened eye. "Don't peek, Sally," she said instantly, with a mom's all-knowing, unfoolable firmness. Another minute passed. "Now you can look," she said. We did. Before us was a row of glossy lunch-bag-size product cartons. Each bore the words COLOR FOR THE HAIR DOWN THERE. We blinked hard. It's not often that the subject of pubic hair arises before noon. Then again, in her friend Blaine Trump's words, Jarecki "is so out

of the box"—as it were—"you expect the unexpected from her." "You peeked," she accused me afterward, with a smile. "You have to tell that story!" And so I have. But here are some other stories about Nancy, a woman who knows the full value of a tale well told.

Roman Holiday

In August 2001, Nancy and Andrew Jarecki move from New York to Rome with their two young sons. They plan to stay for a couple of years, and they have the means to do so: They have just completed the sale of their interest in an enterprise called Moviefone, which Andrew cofounded ten years earlier, and are worth more than \$600 million.

Andrew passes the time learning Italian (he is fluent within four months) and editing a documentary he has directed, produced, and titled *Capturing the Friedmans*. It will in due course be nominated

Photographed by Jonathan Becker

STEALING BEAUTY

Best Skin Ever, a moisturizing foundation with total sun protection, is just one of Jarecki's creative endeavors. Here, the entrepreneur in her living room, with daughter Jeremy. Celine gray cashmere sweater and Ralph Lauren Black Label white blouse. In this story: hair, Teddy Charles for Orlo Salon; makeup, Rebecca Restrepo at the Wall Group. Details, see In This Issue.

Sittings Editor:
Alexandra Kotur.



for an Oscar, create a huge stir, and make a lot of money. Nancy, meanwhile, acquaints herself with the Eternal City's every nook, cranny, and curiosity shop. One day, while having her hair done in an old-style local salon, she notices that certain ladies leave holding a small bag. "What's in the bag?" she asks the proprietor. The proprietor murmurs something in Italian involving the words *hair* and *down below*. Ah, Nancy says. She has never encountered this custom before. Images from the pages of old *Playboys* spring unbidden into her mind.

(Today she recalls her own experience as "a really late developer" who used a mascara wand to darken that area: "I didn't get my period until I was eighteen. All my friends had pubic hair. People were calling me Kojak. What I had was light-colored. I couldn't have been the only one.")

She makes inquiries. (Andrew: "I started to see her up at night, doing the 100 E-mails about something. She had that look that she was on a mission.") Nancy asks a New York gynecologist about how many women match. More than half don't. She asks top New York salons if they've ever provided a little extra for that little extra. None have. She hires researchers to do U.S.-wide market research. She concludes—from Rome—that she has discovered a great untapped market. She dreams up a line of do-it-yourself, one-application, cream-based dye for a woman's "betty." She begins Bettybeauty, which is in stores now and comes in five colors, including hot pink ("Fun Betty"). She appears on Leno wearing a T-shirt that says, I'M A TRUE BLONDE. Her nine-year-old son Jasper moans, "This is so bad, so bad. It's so embarrassing. Why couldn't you have invented some new kind of hockey puck?"

Fire Away

In late 2003, the Jareckis must return to New York to manage the success of Andrew's movie. One February night in 2004, in the kitchen of their apartment in the Upper East Side's fabled Studio Building, Nancy, pregnant with her third child (a girl), cooks with her sons, Maxson and Jasper. (NB: The family has a full-time cook, a nanny, two housekeepers, and a handyman.) The stove is an

old one that hasn't been used for the two years the family was away. When she turns on the gas burner, there is a sudden burst of flame, and Nancy, according to Andrew, is left with "no hair on her face and the hair on her head burned back five inches." At the hospital, her skin falls off in sheets and has to be removed with tweezers. Her melted contacts have to be unstuck from her eyeballs. She goes "from having this perfect skin to a face like a Rorschach test" (says Andrew).

This is Nancy's situation: She can no longer go out without total sunblock. She must keep her skin constantly moist. She must cover the disfiguring marks on her face. She will have to get hair extensions for permanently bald patches and false eyelashes for life (she chooses Ardell, light brown, from her local pharmacy). For two weeks, she doesn't set foot outside the door. Then Andrew, in Los Angeles on movie business, asks their old friend the director Joel Schumacher to

"Nancy has a kind of self-respect that means that she's going to be interesting permanently," says Andrew

take her under his wing. "I was having dinner with Uma"—Schumacher means Thurman—"and André Balazs. They're very good friends of Nancy's as well. I said to her, 'They won't judge you, and you can't sit at home like the Phantom of the Opera.' She came to Wallsé wearing a Woody Allen-ish hat pulled down. Her face was ravaged. It was almost like a red-orange-blister pizza. It was definitely a terrible burn, and worse than I thought it would be. We were all shocked but pretended we weren't."

Two weeks later, she is on the red carpet at the Oscars. She wears a dress by her friend Pamela Barish that intentionally makes her look "really pregnant." A hairpiece conceals her barren crown.

Meanwhile, once back in New York, Nancy spends a lot of time sitting at her kitchen table mixing her base, her concealer, her moisturizer, her sunblock. Gradually she comes up with a combination that miraculously obscures her injuries and indeed gives her a dewy, natural glow. "I couldn't believe Nancy's skin the next time I saw her," says Schumacher.

"I probably have never seen her without makeup, but now it looks like she has no makeup on."

Nancy has another of her ideas. She goes from one mom-and-pop cosmetics laboratory to another until one agrees to turn her homemade potion into a commercial product. She calls it Best Skin Ever, and it's aimed at anyone with a need for total sun protection and moisturizing foundation. It will be widely available by early 2007.

Trust the Man

It is 1986. Nancy (then Nancy Frey) is a 21-year-old art school dropout living in L.A. She works at a small 24-hour cable entertainment channel called Movietime. "It used to operate out of a former porn studio, to give you an idea how classy it was," says Greg Kinnear, her colleague at the time. Movietime in due course metamorphoses into an entity known as E! Entertainment. Nancy is also an artist of some stature. In May 1989, she shows at the Q Gallery on Venice Beach. The opening is attended by a young Wall Streeter named Andrew Jarecki, who's in town from New York. A mutual friend rings Nancy and begs her

to go out with Andrew. She is unsure because she has a boyfriend of two weeks' standing. The next day, Andrew leaves thirteen messages. Dinner with the friend follows, and eleven messages follow that, including the statement "You've got to be my girlfriend." Nancy doesn't call back. "I think the guy sounds sincere," Kinnear advises her, although "he was leaving multiple messages to the point where he could have been a stalker." A few months later, she finally cracks, and she and Jarecki start having phone conversations, which lead to visits, which lead, within a year of their first meeting, to engagement, which leads to marriage on the Jarecki family's private island in the British Virgin Islands. The bride wears a very short dress of beige brocade. The happy couple settles in New York.

("She has a particular kind of self-respect that means that she's going to be interesting permanently," Andrew says when asked about his love for his wife.)

She enrolls in Barnard College to complete her undergraduate degree in visual arts and art history in three years

with honors. ("There's nothing worse than being with a group of people and someone says, 'Where did you go to school?' I don't have many hang-ups in my life, but that was one.") He decides to commit himself to a venture that will offer the first online movie bookings. It will also be the first Web site to accept credit-card payments.

Meet the Parents

In 1965, a young married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Frey, visit the Kansas Children's Service League in Topeka. They adopt a baby girl, whom they name Nancy. They provide Nancy with a loving home in Abilene, Kansas, and a brother, Jay. At the age of 21, she receives a copy of her birth certificate. It identifies her biological mother. She calls information in Kansas and tracks her mother down in the space of three telephone calls. Then she tracks down her biological father. A strange thing happens. As a consequence of her inquiries, her birth parents become reacquainted and discover that their separation all those years ago was the result of family shenanigans. Denied by circumstance the first time around, they fall in love all over again for many years.

Says Andrew, "To go back and meet her birth parents and not make it about her? That's fairly typical for Nancy." Her friend Diane Sawyer says, "Her life story is so interesting. She just has a beam of light running through her that can't be explained by conventional things." Andrew: "She's got a kind of a hunger. Most people who look the way she does get treated a little better. Because she started out on uncertain footing, she feels like she has to work very hard."

What Can You Say?

A few years ago, terrible things start happening to Nancy Jarecki's close friends. "Stillborns, A.L.S., Hodgkin's, brain tumor," she says. She notices how much difficulty people have talking to those who are suffering, and how tactless people can be. "People are not mean," she says. "They're not informed." Jarecki notices the same thing in the course of her other charitable work, which is extensive (she sits on the boards of Robin Hood Foundation and Project A.L.S.). "I was working with cancer families at Sloan-Kettering. The last thing these families needed was another person tiptoeing around them. People want to be treated as they were before. People do not want to be defined by their adversity."

So she decides to produce a book/television show/column that will explain how to say and do the right thing in order to alleviate the suffering or embarrassment of another. She and her assistant, Jon Rosen, do the research. Nancy goes to Rome and writes her book on adversity, which will be published next year. She dictates while her husband mans the keyboard. (Andrew: "I just went from running a public company, and now I'm a typist for my wife?") Then she burns her face, suffers crippling prenatal depression, and gives birth to a premature baby girl who spends a month in the hospital. She bounces back and goes back to thinking about others' adversities. "Nancy has an almost supernatural enthusiasm for life in general," says Rosen. "It's not anything contrived or forced or manufactured. It's like she got struck by lightning, didn't die, but retained the charge of the lightning."

Short Cuts

Says Jon Rosen: "Nancy called me up one day and said, 'There's this guy who's living in Brooklyn; he's blind, he's not doing well. He wants a talking computer.' He lived way out in Brooklyn. He was this sweet, sweet but infinitely sad man in his 40s who was 90 percent blind and had had all this surgery and was in great pain. He wanted a talking computer to get online and get some companionship. She hired me to basically set him up with a computer. At first she might have paid me to go, but then I'd just go once a week."

Says Ashley McDermott: "I met Nancy fourteen years ago, when I was moving to New York from Los Angeles. A mutual friend, Peter Farrelly, said, 'You can't live in New York and have any fun without knowing Nancy Jarecki.' I left her a message but didn't hear from her immediately. On the day she had her first baby, Nancy called. 'The baby is out, so I'm now returning phone calls from my bed,' she said. 'Welcome to New York. I didn't want you to think I wasn't calling you back.'"

The Wild Party

For as long as anybody in New York can remember, the life and soul of the party has always been a couple named Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Jarecki. She wears jeans and layered Victoriana tops, jackets from Marc Jacobs and Chanel, and shoes and bags that match from Hogan, Bottega, Michael Kors, and Dior. ("Life is so much easier when you're matchy-

matchy," she says to her friends. And to her children: "When I die, you will be very glad that William Doyle will have the matchy-matchy.") Andrew wears downbeat Prada.

They have the most wonderful friends. "A Jarecki party," says Diane Sawyer, "might have the fantastic social sensation and an artist you haven't heard of, and then someone you haven't thought of in ten years but is writing the most interesting book of philosophy." And they are the most wonderful guests.

"Everyone loves to spend time with them," Jessica Seinfeld says. "They are a couple where the wife is fun and the husband is fun. They both have a lot to talk about—in politics, entertainment, humanitarian issues." When they're in Nashville, Tipper and Al have them over for barbecues.

Urban Cowgirl

A country-music fanatic named Nancy Jarecki visits Nashville with her husband in 2005. They are researching original music for the movie she is developing. She falls in love with the city. "You know when you're at an age when you think you can't be surprised?" asks Nancy. "I went down there and was a kid in a candy store." Love for Nancy is the catalyst for business, so she becomes involved as a producer of a Hollywood picture about Nashville and its music. If she has her way, the movie will contain not a trace of red gingham or sawdust; and she will have her way because, as Sanford Panitch, president of New Regency Enterprises, explains, "Nancy gets passionate and then is like a whirling dervish." Says Laura Stroud, the head of the publishing company Big Alpha Writers Group, "Nancy Jarecki blew into this town like a fresh breeze. She made the CMAs—that's the Country Music Association Awards—"fun for all of us again."

Happily Ever After

Once upon a time there was a tall blonde girl from a small town in Kansas. While people around her succumbed to lassitude, fatalism, and complacency, she strove and she strove and she dazzled and she dazzled, and she neglected nothing and nobody. She lives in New York with her husband and three children and friends who love her and are amazed by her. "She's like helium," says Sawyer. "The world is a little bit lighter—it rises—when she is around." □