

A full-page photograph of Salah Bachir standing in a lush garden. He is wearing a dark blue, long-sleeved, button-down tunic and black trousers. He has a white beard and is looking directly at the camera. The garden is filled with various plants, including tall green grasses, yellow flowers, and trees with autumn-colored leaves. A black metal chair is visible in the background.

SALAH BACHIR

I N T E R V I E W

Dive into the glamorous world of Salah Bachir! ? From flings with celebrities like Edward Albee, Keith Haring, and Brian Bedford to unforgettable moments with Katharine Hepburn and Paul Newman.

**From
Hollywood
Legends to
Heartfelt
Advice:
Salah
Bachir
Unveils His
Remarkable
Journey**

1. Your memoir promises to share stories of your interactions with iconic figures. Can you give us a glimpse into one particularly memorable encounter with a celebrity mentioned in the book?

Considering the book mentions my flings with Edward Albee, Keith Haring, and Brian Bedford, I take it you're looking for something else! There are 54 chapters that include cooking for Ella Fitzgerald, shooting up (insulin) with fellow diabetic Mary Tyler Moore, doing a road trip to Niagara Falls with Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, singing to Ginger Rogers, and hanging out with Douglas Fairbanks Jr.

Fairbanks took me to Katharine Hepburn's place in New York. I asked her if she would come to Toronto so we could honor her with a Lifetime Achievement Award. I thought she had said yes. I reached out and formally invited her a few months later to the gala in Toronto. Not sure what I was thinking! Here's a woman who won four Oscars and never showed up to receive any of them, so maybe I should have known better. At least she took the time to write me a lovely rejection letter. Who does that? I can imagine her tapping it out herself on her Underwood typewriter. We reprinted the letter in the book.

"Dear Salah Bachir: I'm grateful to you for telling me that I have won an Award. At the same time, I have to say to you that I don't go to these celebrations. I think you should give it to someone who would love to attend because I am unwilling to pay that price of fame. Thank you anyway." Katharine Hepburn

2. The memoir is co-written with Jami Bernard and is the first to feature pronouns on the cover. How did this collaboration come about, and why was it important for you to include pronouns in the book?

I've been friends with Jami for over 30 years, ever since she was the film critic for the New York Post and New York Daily News. I have long admired her work, and she was present at many of the events we cover in the book. It was natural that I should reach out to her. We had a great time collaborating and became much closer.

As for pronouns, I couldn't believe they had never been used on a book cover before! While writing the book, I received a letter from an organization we had given money to, and it was addressed to Ms. Salah Bachir.

It's both a small and big gesture to use your pronouns. Every organization, every bank, every corporation that flies the Pride flag for one day a year should encourage all their staff to use gender pronouns. It's just a courtesy. It's also empowering if we normalize it and take the onus off only certain people having to tell you how they identify. It may be one of the easiest things we can do as allies — and it can't be banned in Florida or Texas.

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3. In your interactions with Hollywood legends such as Marlon Brando and Elizabeth Taylor, what valuable lessons or perspectives have you gained that have accompanied you throughout your career and life?

It's what they did with their celebrity status that really impressed me. Brando was always an outspoken supporter of civil rights and native people. Elizabeth Taylor raised awareness and funds through her AIDS foundation. She made a huge difference by being a constant champion. Taylor, despite her soft voice, was unstoppable, went through so many life-threatening surgeries, and lived through so much pain. When I met them, they both had been dismissed because of their weight and negative body image. But they were still as sexy as ever, warm, lovable, and approachable. They had a special aura about them with a little bit of that "fuck-you" attitude that got them through life.

4. Your memoir was published on October 17th. What prompted you to share your life stories at this specific moment, and what message do you hope readers will take away from your experiences?

I had a few life-threatening moments involving sepsis and had emergency surgery after my kidney transplant four years ago. During the months of recovery, I started to post tidbits on social media from my encounters and friendships with ordinary people who happen to be famous. The posts were aimed at people who were shut in during the pandemic, and I tried to make them empowering, uplifting, and amusing. The book is a little bit about a lot of people, and a lot about me. I wanted to make sure some of the stories and contributions that "stars" made beyond their film career were remembered and celebrated.

I want readers to walk away with a feeling of compassion, belonging, and the need for community. No matter how famous a person is, they may be going through the same struggles as anyone else. Even though I've been in the entertainment industry for over 40 years, it was during my seven years of dialysis while I was recovering from the transplant that I realized the real heroes who deserve recognition are the nurses, doctors, and frontline workers who got us through a pandemic. The people who have dedicated their lives to helping others without the fame and glory that comes with being a "celebrity."

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5. As the founder of Videomania and Premiere, you played a significant role in the publishing and video distribution sectors. How have these early ventures shaped your approach to entrepreneurship and business?

These ventures gave me a platform and an audience. We were able to highlight films that included diversity and inclusion. I've been able to use my entrepreneurship, my company, the companies I've been involved with, and my connections to raise hundreds of millions of dollars for capital campaigns and galas, supporting not only LGBTQ+ institutions but also healthcare, poverty relief, and food security. Perhaps I'm more accustomed to the kindness of friends than strangers.

6. You have received five honorary doctorate degrees and numerous awards for your philanthropic work. How do you reconcile your successful business career with your commitment to social justice and the arts?

I think they go hand in hand. Your clients become your friends. They want to be involved and want to do business with people who are socially responsible and caring for others. I think most of my business success has resulted from nurturing relationships and growing them. Also, by being socially responsible to the community. Often that is where I have met many new clients and friends.

7. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, you have been the Grand Marshal of the Toronto Pride Parade twice. How has your identity influenced your philanthropic efforts, and what role do you see for yourself in promoting LGBTQ+ rights?

I have been active in protests and support of gay rights and queer artists for over 40 years. I am what young people call these days 'an elder', but hey, I'll take it! Still here. Still queer. Still as active as ever, but the last few years have given me the opportunity to fund and nurture many young organizations and activists.

As for Pride — I was one of the only Grand Marshals to have a float. For me, it's always been about visibility and breaking down barriers and stereotypes. In February 2005, I ran a series of ads on the big screen advocating for same-sex marriage and encouraging people to lobby their local members of parliament to uphold the charter of rights and approve same-sex marriage. At the time, I co-owned with Viacom the largest on-screen media company in Canada. The ads ran on-screen before the movie started, when you are a captive audience looking at a 70-by-40-foot screen. One ad said: "I do" means the same whether you're straight or gay. Another ad said: Marriage is a fundamental human right whether you're straight or gay.

8. With more than 3,000 pieces in your art collection, could you highlight a few works or artists that hold special meaning for you, and how does your passion for art intersect with your other activities?

We have many powerful pieces, from iconic Warhol images, Keith Haring, Cree artists such as Kent Monkman, Atilla Richard Lukacs, Stephen Andrews, and Lebanese Canadian artist Jameilie Hassan. Also, a large photography collection including Herb Ritts, Greg Gorman, Annie Leibowitz, Robert Mapplethorpe, Mary Ellen Mark, and Ruth Orkin.

One of our most powerful pieces is Betty Goodwin's *Distorted Events*, which talks about the Holocaust. It has numbered tattoos from a concentration camp, a blue flame on a steel panel, and a big shovel hanging over the panel. The piece focuses on how death has become a number. She had an assistant dying of AIDS at the time, and the numbers of the tattoos reflect how we dehumanize people and death: "5900 people died of AIDS this week," but there are no faces.

We love sharing our art and have had numerous shows specifically from our collection at major galleries. We have also donated more than 1000 pieces to different museums, galleries, hospitals, universities, and community centres so the art could be shared and seen.



9. As a native of Lebanon currently residing in Toronto, how do you stay connected to your cultural roots, and do you see any specific ways in which your background has influenced your approach to business and philanthropy in Canada?

I'm still very much in touch. I visit regularly and support a few organizations there.

I come from a small town where there was a great sense of community. We all knew each other and had lived together for a long time. Maybe some knew more than they should, as small towns tend to be, but people took care of each other, and that influenced me greatly. Growing up, when someone was in need in our village, everybody tried to help. From a young age, I've always tried to do what I can.

10. We conclude this interview with our recurring question: If you could give advice to the child you once were, what would it be?

Don't pretend you're somebody else. Tell your story. Know your friends. Tell your story as boldly as you can and don't worry about criticism. As my 10-year-old nephew Christopher will tell you — Never give up!

And who knows, maybe you too one day will be interviewed by Eclair Magazine.