

Calendar

Ridicule Survivor

Tammy Faye Booksigning

She has Betty Boop, not Bette Davis, eyes. She sounds like a preacher on helium or someone running for president of the Munchkins. She's Tammy Faye Bakker, now Tammy Faye Messner, who, unlike former husband Jim Bakker, the disgraced televangelist, has never been charged with any crime, unless it's a crime to return again and again in various reincarnations to the celebrity platform. It's been said that after the nuclear holocaust, there will be only cockroaches, Cher, and...Tammy Faye.

Her latest endeavor is a new book,

I Will Survive... And You Will Too! A book-signing is scheduled to take place here

LOCAL EVENTS

on Saturday, the same day that a billboard of her face will be unveiled in New York's Times Square, part of an ad campaign for the new music TV network, Fuse (seen in San Diego on Channel 341). (It's an interesting choice, her manager, Joe Spotts, was told. "Well, she has survived," he said, explaining that Fuse is trying to keep music-video programming alive, since MTV isn't. *Fuse: Honk If MTV Sucks* is one of Fuse's slogans.)

A celebrity's life is a busy one, and Messner spoke on the phone during the second day of taping the reality TV show *The Surreal Life*. She and five other celebrity types, including porn-film star Ron Jeremy and white rapper Vanilla Ice, were living together in the Hollywood Hills, their every hug or squabble filmed for possible airing when the show's second season begins early next year. Even this interview was recorded.

Messner was asked if she didn't agree that, while she has had it tough — what with family deaths, divorces, drug dependencies, and so forth — it's a different kind of tough from the kind experienced by a noncelebrity. She did agree. "That's because you survive in front of everybody. It's really hard to live in a glass house. You're afraid that if you let your emotions show, you'll be put down and hurt some more. Everybody hurts the same and survives in the same way, but it's harder when you're doing it in front of the entire nation."

On the other hand, many more people are invested in a celebrity's survival — for example, the man who, according to her book, gave her \$10,000 during her financial difficulties. "You won't believe this, but that was the only money I ever received



Tammy Faye Messner

during that time," she said. "And for the rest of it I started a church and became a pastor."

The man who gave her the money was gay. Messner for over 20 years has been gay-friendly, an affront to others in the Christianity business. For her trouble, she has become a gay icon, joining the formidable ranks of Joan Crawford, Elizabeth Taylor, Judy Garland, and Garland's daughter Liza Minnelli.

Why is there an affinity between her and gay men, in her opinion? "I accept them for who they are. I'm nonjudgmental." Judging our life choices, she said, is "between us and God; that's not between us and anybody else." She also thinks that gay men identify with her. "I've been through so many hard things, being judged and being made fun of, and they've all been through things that are very similar."

Being ridiculed hurts; it has to. "It hurts until you learn to laugh. I laugh along with everyone else now when *Comedy Central* pulls one of their pranks."

Does laughter help her with the resentment some people feel toward celebrities? "You can't help the fact that you're well-known. Really, you can't." She thinks the resentment is sad but understands it: "They might feel left out."

Maybe resentful people feel they deserve fame, too? "And they probably do! A lot of people are famous because they got the right breaks at the right time. It's almost an accident. I think a lot of people who aren't famous could do a whole lot better than some of us who are. They just haven't been discovered yet!"

Roe Messner, her husband of ten years, was the contractor who helped build the Christian theme park Heritage USA, near Charlotte, North Carolina, that was Jim Bakker's downfall, since fraud connected with it sent him to prison. During Bakker's prison time, the couple divorced and the Messners got married. (Bakker, now paroled, has also remarried.) In the mid-1990s, Roe Messner spent time in prison himself, having been convicted of

bankruptcy fraud.

Messner was asked if normal life could ever be lived by a celebrity, especially one with a face as recognizable as hers. Her answer implied it was possible only at home. She described a "cozy little house in North Carolina" on a cul-de-sac, where she and Roe live. "And there I am just Tammy." Nobody comes to her door, uninvited? "No, they don't, which is really interesting, but all of our neighbors keep an eye out for me. If they see anybody that shouldn't be in the neighborhood, they'll call me. It's wonderful how they have banded together to protect our privacy."

— Jeanne Schinto

Booksigning:
Tammy Faye Messner
Saturday, November 1,
3:00 p.m.
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North Park
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