

ALL TALK

Growing up with the unwanted opinions of outsiders can sometimes get inside someone's head



To Be Or Not To Be

Inside the not-so-glamorous world of being a celebrity offspring

By MARELLA RICKETTS

“**M**ag-aartista ka ba?” someone I barely know might and will eventually ask. My first instinct is to grab the glass of water beside me and melodramatically splash it all over that person’s face; or—to be more realistic—I’d give them a simple explanation of how celebrity offsprings don’t always have to follow in their parents’ footsteps. As much as I want to do these things to the person who had just asked me a question I’d heard ever since I was a child, I know I can’t; it’s all reduced to a smile that slightly hurts my cheeks (maybe even a sheepish laugh, if I’m feeling generous) and a succinct reply: “No, I don’t plan on it.”

INT. RANDOM PERSON’S HOUSE—NIGHT
Inside a vacant guest room, **MARELLA**, 14, wipes her tear-streamed face with a tissue while her **MOTHER**, 40, patiently tries to comfort her.

MARELLA: (In a whiny tone) Mom, I’m tired. They promised it would only take three hours!

MOTHER: Stop crying. *Direk* said just a few more shots, and then we’ll continue the rest of the scenes another day.

RAYMUND, makeup artist, mid 30s, slowly peeks through the door with a wide grin.

RAYMUND: Ready *na ba*, Ma’am Mariz and Marella?

Forgive teenage me for the first paragraph. I had—and sometimes still have—a complicated relationship with the industry my parents work in. A distinct memory of mine during my early high school years was of my mother: I’d be eating breakfast downstairs, getting ready to head to school when my mother would bid me farewell before leaving for work (where she would be playing another girl’s mother for a primetime television show). The next time I’d see her face would only be the very next morning, when a languid, sleep-deprived version of herself would kiss me good morning as I’d be eating a different breakfast in a different outfit.

Film PERSONA (1966), INGMAR BERGMAN

Growing up as an introverted child, I had a rather hostile attitude towards anything that resembled the media. I couldn’t comprehend why taping hours had to take so long, the assistant director finally yelling “Pack up!” in the early hours of the morning, or why someone would want to disturb our quiet family dinner for the sake of one photograph. Perhaps I was simply being protective of my parents. They were mine; they didn’t belong to these people who identified themselves as “fans.” To get back at them for wasting a few minutes of precious family time, a secret hobby of mine as a seven-year-old was making futile attempts at ruining those pictures, my exasperated face making an unwanted guest appearance in the background.

Tagging along with my parents, I was exposed to the not-so-glamorous world of film and television. As a teenager, I slowly started to understand how the industry worked, showcasing a slight interest in them even. During shoots, I’d flip through the storyboard, taking note of what worked and what didn’t, and give small suggestions to the director whenever I felt brave enough. However, there were some frustrations. I’d remember my mother telling me not to do this or that, because it would make myself (and additionally, my family) look bad. Don’t frown at the interviewer. Don’t wear that outfit later. Don’t come home from a party too late, that behavior looks bad. I understood that both my parents had responsibilities for choosing careers in the industry that they work in. But all my naïve teenage self heard was *don’t, don’t, don’t*, making me feel like I had no choice but to do those things in order to make my statement clear: I *don’t* care.

INT. RANDOM PERSON’S HOUSE—DAY

It is day two of shooting the commercial for Product X, a tablet for menstrual pains. In the final scene, **MARELLA** miraculously recovers from her cramps, rushes down the stairs to meet her **MOTHER**, and delivers her final line.

MARELLA: I’m okay now—my mom, my idol!

In the background, **RAYMUND** gleefully claps to commemorate the last take of the last day of shooting. No more touch ups for him.

CUT TO:
INT. FAMILY CAR—DAY.

MARELLA in the car ride home, thinking about whether she really meant that last line.

Years later, my mother shared that it wasn’t easy to convince me to take part in the commercial. Initially, the early teenage version of myself was embarrassed of what my peers—specifically, those of the opposite sex—would say once they saw it. Would they be laugh at me? Contort their faces in disgust as I pretended to have menstrual cramps on-screen? Similar thoughts floated around my mind for the longest time. When I finally agreed to do it, my mother believed that things would continue to go on as smoothly. However, I still wasn’t used to the reality of how things worked in production—people coming late to set, the long shooting hours—so I took these things the wrong way. In addition to this, my worries regarding the subject matter of the commercial came back. There I was, fourteen or fifteen-year-old me slightly embarrassed about acting out something that was so natural to me. The

“MAG-AARTISTA KA BA?”

director and the cameramen barely knew what it was like to experience menstruation yet there they were, telling me how to act. As my mother recalls, I still held my composure in front of everyone, but once I was alone with her in a room, I would go back to my dramatics.

After my frustrating early teenage years, I grew up a little (much to my parents’ thrill, I imagine) and started to feel like less of an alien to the industry I was somewhat raised in. It wasn’t all that bad. I looked forward to the makeup artists painting on my face as we babbled on about the latest happenings in the world (or at least, in the world of a certain television network). I also liked observing—sometimes, meddling in—my father’s filmmaking process in the past. I’d happily join him during meetings and invite friends to join me on set whenever he lacked extras. To my delight, film turned into another language in which I could talk to my father to.

INT. RICKETTS’ MASTER BEDROOM—DAY.
Months after the shoot, **MARELLA** finds herself in her parents’ bedroom, about to view the commercial for the very first time. Her **FATHER**, 46, pushes a CD inside the CD player. Her **MOTHER** squeals.

FATHER: Excited, *anak*?
MARELLA: I don’t know.

The video starts to play; **MARELLA**’s eyes are glued to the screen. Once her parents insist on a second viewing, her eyes shift to the expressions on her parents’ faces: both amused and undoubtedly proud of their daughter.

Except for the occasional shoot or TV guesting, my parents never forced me into *showbiz*, leading to a natural curiosity with what went both behind and in front of the camera. After rolling my eyes at the media for so long, I realized that I was interested in it in by the time college came around. Initially, I was embarrassed to show this growing interest of mine to my parents, fearing something along the lines of ‘Ha! I told you so!’ would be shouted at my face. Thankfully, this was all in my mind; they were more than supportive of my decision to study Communications. This was a slap in the face, showing me that what hindered me from having this special relationship with them was one of my noteworthy talents as a teenager—pushing people away. By creating an imaginary wall for so long, I wasn’t just guarding myself from what I didn’t want to become (just another celebrity offspring attempting to become another celebrity), but also distancing myself from my parents and the world that they have made a living out of.

There are times when I would cross paths with someone who might recognize me or my last name. Our interaction might play out to be something like this:

(After few seconds of small talk.)

“Ah, *anak ka ba ni...*?”

I reply, “Yes, I am.”

They tell me that I should become an *artista* instead—a few even bold enough to suggest that is the best career choice for someone like me. There were times in the past when I asked myself if I can ever fully escape it, and I highly doubt I can. Truth be told, this is one aspect of my life I can’t simply ignore. And then I realize: is this really a matter of stepping out of my parents’ shadow? Of creating a life entirely separate from theirs? I might have just been competing with myself the entire time. ■