

Ian Ayres

*An interview with Ian Ayres, writer of *Private Parts*. Ayres's crusty accounts of a boy's life on the wild side explores the extreme boundaries of human behavior and amorality, offering a journey through his life from his early years in houses of ill repute to his life in Paris today.*

Interview By Tina Hall

Writer/Director/Producer Ian Ayres produces documentaries with an edgy honesty that is hard to beat. From *The Jill & Tony Curtis Story*, and several others, he has covered a wide array of subjects with clarity and taste. Most recently Ian directed *Tony Curtis: Driven to Stardom*. Featuring interviews with people who knew Curtis well (Mamie Van Doren, John Gilmore, Hugh Hefner, Harry Belafonte and a great many more) along with film extracts, archive footage and rare photos that highlight his life and career, it gives fans a respectful glimpse into what made Tony Curtis a legend of the silver screen.

Can you tell us a little about yourself? What were you like as a child?

Born in Los Angeles, my life began in a traveling carnival where my father owned a shooting gallery. A few months after I turned four, my parents divorced.

Always the new kid in school, I never learned how to make friends or socialize. My imagination became my refuge. One of the parlor girls introduced me to expressing myself through words in a notebook. Mom made lots of cash that she'd have me smash into my pockets. So, while she turned tricks, I grew obsessed with words. The word thing started when I was seven. Soon after my fifteenth birthday my mother introduced me to the world of drugs through what she called her "diet pills." Wired on amphetamines I'd serve coffee to men waiting their turn to be with her up the winding staircase of our latest apartment.

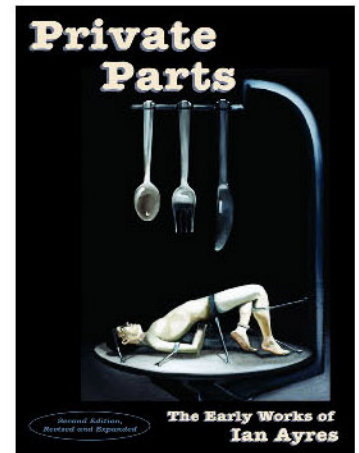
A few months after our first parlor opened, I read a book about Marilyn Monroe and ran away to Hollywood to become a movie star. Discovered by a director who offered me the lead role in a movie called *The Greek Connection*, I got the hell out of Hollywood as soon as I learned it was some kind of sex film. Now Mom took a new interest in me. We'd go shoplifting together. Some of the most fun we had together was during our shoplifting adventures. And everything I ever stole was for her. I guess the same went for the poems I'd write. She wouldn't listen to me except to give feedback on something I wrote.

I've always lived in my own realm of imagination. Never thought of it as being creative until I was 18 and going through all that I told to Paul Brickman, who combined my young pimping days with his conformist upbringing to create the movie *Risky Business*.

After my "masseuses" had stolen everything from a secret parlor I ran in Miami, I learned about James Dean. While smoking pot with a prostitute named Pat, I shared my fear of being forgotten, as if I'd never existed, after I died. I said I wanted to do something I'd be remembered for in this world. She coughed up some smoke with: "You want to be a legend like James Dean?" When I asked her who he was, she told me to go to the mall and buy a biography on him. All they had was David Dalton's *The Mutant King*. But I soon discovered what was to become my favorite Dean biography — then called *The Real James Dean*, by John Gilmore. Reading it put me in the skin of James Dean. Gilmore made Dean so human and real that I believed I, too, could conquer Manhattan. He made Jimmy come to life. Anyhow, one thing leads to another. Smoking that joint with my lesbian prostitute junkie friend when I was 18 led me to James Dean and James Dean, thanks to John Gilmore, got me hooked on a life of creativity.

How did you first become involved in film?

After I gave up on becoming the next James Dean, I wanted to devote my life to reading and writing poems. Then, in 1999, a filmmaker named Eric Ellena talked me into being a founder of French



Private Parts
Poetry. Literary Nonfiction.
Bringing together the best poems from Ayres's early verse to his erotic and darkly imaginative later pieces, this stunning collection also features his previously unpublished experiences with luminary legends such as Tennessee Williams, Allen Ginsberg, Yoko Ono, Edmund White and Quentin Crisp.

Connection Films with him. I didn't mind the production side of things as long as it didn't interfere with my poetry. Then I talked Eric into starting a press for a poetry anthology series I titled Van Gogh's Ear. Next I got the idea for a celebrity edition of Van Gogh's Ear and asked every celebrity I could to contribute. An assistant to the legendary Tony Curtis responded with a request that I telephone. After he said Tony would gladly contribute to this special edition of the anthology series, he suggested I do a documentary on Tony and his wife, Jill, because they saved horses from slaughter. But Tony opened up about his childhood and fascinating life. I figured that would make an interesting bonus for The Jill & Tony Curtis Story DVD. Deep down, however, I knew it might end up being another documentary. It did. Now I don't know if I'll ever escape filmmaking. My poetry's been on hold ever since that second documentary.

What was it like to see Tony Curtis: Driven to Stardom premiere at the Los Angeles Jewish Film Festival?

He'd died and I didn't have time to grieve. During his last time in Paris I kept asking him to walk for the cameras because, when we met, he confided his desire for recognition from the Academy Awards, though feared he'd be in wheelchair to accept his Oscar. The very last thing he said to me in Paris was due, I think, to my asking him to keep getting out of that dreaded wheelchair for his public appearances. I'm not sure if he was angry or joking but, after an exhausting appearance among his paintings at an art gallery for news cameras, he got back in his wheelchair, looked up at me and asked, "What are you going to have me do next — porn?" Feelings hurt, I said, "Yes. And you will be the star. You're my favorite star." Instead of a porno, I began interviewing people who knew Tony throughout his life. I'd begun making the film before he died. I wanted him to be at the premiere.

Did you enjoy having the chance to talk to all the people you did while filming this one?

When we arrived for each interview, I swear my heart tried to break out of its ribcage. Fears

of rejection are often unbearable for me. But everyone we interviewed turned out to be very sensitive and caring. They made us feel right at home. I feel a great affection for everyone I've interviewed.

John Gilmore is in this one and I understand he recently did two very long interviews with you (one dealing, of course, with Marilyn Monroe)?

John was most kind and patient with us during the interviews, especially the recent one about Marilyn Monroe. I felt as if Marilyn were right there with us. Too many coincidences to be coincidence. She was there.

Why do you think his work is so appealing? Are you looking forward to the release of his latest work On the Run with Bonnie and Clyde as much as I am?

John Gilmore shares that certain something that James Dean had, something otherworldly and magical. He does more than write books, he creates experiences that bring you to the core of the human condition and grip every

fiber of your being. I've already paid for an advance copy of *On the Run with Bonnie and Clyde*. I know it'll be more than a book — it'll blow you away like machine gun bullets.

What projects are you currently working on?

During interviews for the Tony Curtis film, people kept sharing unknown things about Marilyn. So I decided to make a bonus called All About Marilyn but found the most insightful stuff could only be cut down to 33 minutes. Then I realized Marilyn mattered too much to me to be a mere bonus. So now I'm in the process of making the documentary on her that I'd always hoped someone would make. It's a respectful, loving one that's feature length! There is so much more to Marilyn Monroe than any documentary has ever brought to life. Marilyn Monroe was a great artist. Many consider her a genius who, through this film, will finally be shown the respect she definitely deserves. She has my respect. That's for sure!

What matters most to me, however, is love. It takes a lot of guts to love, but totally makes life worth living. The rest is silence.



Outside our limo at the Century Theater premiere of "Pacific Coast Highway" starring my first lover, known as Jeremy Scott, in Hollywood at the end of April, 1981. The director, William Higgins, tried to get me to star in an incest porno as Kip Knoll's brother. Wanting more out of life, I turned it down. I liked Kip, though. He was a good person.

Photo by William Higgins