

Having learned from childhood challenges, newly married Eva Longoria says,

# I Can Finally Move Forward

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When Eva Longoria strikes a pose in front of a camera, no one needs to shout, "Smile!" "It's just in my nature to be cheerful," she says. "I don't try to be that way, but I've learned there's no better medicine than laughing."

Best known for the last three years as Gaby, the sexy neighbor on ABC's *Desperate Housewives*, Eva, 32, is realistic about the ups and downs of life away from the fantasy of Wisteria Lane. A tabloid favorite for her recent wedding to basketball star Tony Parker, Eva always seems like the spirited girl on top of the world. But she also has known pain.

Growing up near Corpus Christi, Tex., the youngest of four girls, Eva was taught to handle a gun by her dad, Enrique, a rancher. She complemented that tomboy education by entering beauty contests and becoming Miss Corpus Christi. But it was her oldest sister who taught Eva how to get through the tough times.

"Liza is mentally challenged," Eva reveals. "She was my hero growing up. It was a blessing to watch her overcome every obstacle—tying her shoes, putting on a shirt, getting out the front door. And yet she still had a job and would come home on the bus by herself and help with dinner. You could only imagine the hurdles she encountered every minute of the day."

Eva's mother Ella, became a special-education teacher to help Liza and others coping with disabilities. "Liza was a role model to get me ready for life in Hollywood," Eva says. "You don't take health for granted. You don't take life for granted. It seems so insignificant to go, 'Damn it, I didn't get that movie role,' or, 'Damn it, so-and-so is wearing the same dress as me to the Emmys.' I didn't know there was another way. I thought everyone should be sensitive

and somewhat unselfish.

"My family is extremely optimistic," she continues. "I'm really blessed. My father is very quiet but loving. My mother is the most nonjudgmental person in the world. She's never actually given me advice. She would just say, 'Well, if that makes you happy.' She even said it when I was young and got my first tattoo. She was always supportive. When I said, 'I'm going to move to L.A. and be an actress,' she told me, 'All right. I hope that makes you happy.' She's an amazing woman."

Eva picked up her mother's strength. She moved to Hollywood and in 2000 got a small role on the TV show *Beverly Hills, 90210*. Her big break came with a role as the psychotic Isabella Braña Williams on the daytime soap *The Young and the Restless*. It was about this time that her two-year marriage to *General Hospital* star Tyler Christopher ended. But Eva quickly bounced back. "You get through it," she says reflectively. "My philosophy was that every time a door closed, I knew one would open."

In 2003, when her contract on *The Young and the Restless* wasn't renewed, she immediately went to an audition. "I remember saying, 'OK, done. Move on,'" she says. "I'm not saying people don't need to take moments to mourn a bad situation. You acknowledge the pain, but then you get over it. I'm a big believer in that. It's about moving on, moving on." So she did. Eva got a starring role on TV's *L.A. Dragnet*, but the show didn't last. Then she auditioned for a scandal-laced TV satire called *Desperate Housewives*. When it debuted on ABC in October 2004, Eva became an overnight sensation. Now strongly identified with the part, Eva feels good about her role. "There are going to be a lot of new adventures for Gabrielle," she says with a grin. "What I love about her is that she can go in any direction because she's kind of the freespirted one. She doesn't have children and doesn't have the conventional marriage."

Since the success of *Housewives*, Eva has branched out—she has her own production company and is a spokesperson for L'Oréal. In February, she will star with Paul Rudd and Jason Biggs in the film *Over Her Dead Body*. Her childhood experiences have driven her to charitable involvements, including Padres Contra El Cáncer (Parents Against Cancer) and the Entertainment Industry Foundation/Callaway Golf Foundation, where she tries to raise awareness of ovarian cancer.

"I'm a woman, I'm a daughter, and I have a sister with a mental disability," she says. "So a lot of causes are very relevant to me." Her sister Liza is the inspiration for the actress's own San Antonio-based Eva's Heroes. "We help intellectually disabled children grow and play," she explains. "We set up after-school programs, and we've put on golf tournaments to raise money where I prove that I'm a terrible golfer. But I can drive a mean golf cart and wear the cute outfits."

While using her star power to support good works, Eva is passionate about the need for ordinary people to care as deeply as she does. "You can never think, 'I'm not rich. I'm not famous. What could I possibly do?'" she says. "What makes the world go 'round is everyday people."

"My whole work ethic is based on my mother," Eva adds. "She raised us on a teacher's salary with my dad working all the time. I don't know how she did it. That's why I never feel like I'm doing enough. I have to constantly do more and more, because it's nothing compared to what my mother did."

The actress has her own rules for life. "Fun is mandatory," she says. "Exercise is mandatory. Love is absolutely mandatory. Not just from a lover, not just from, obviously, my husband. I love my husband with all of my heart, but I love my family. And I love my girlfriends. And I love my job. And I love my dogs. I love life, in general."

The biggest thing in Eva's life now is her new husband, San Antonio Spurs' Tony Parker. After a fairy-tale marriage in a castle outside Paris, Eva has spent part of the year living back in Texas.

"I feel like the rest of my life is just beginning," she tells me. "Even before we became man and wife, Tony and I always had that trust between us that a married couple would have. Every time I think of my wedding, I just smile. I just think what a beautiful man he is. It's funny, because it's so cliché for women to say, 'My wedding was the happiest day of my life.' But I find myself saying that and thinking, 'Yes, my wedding was the happiest day of my life so far.'"

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