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# UNBROKEN DREAMS

*She has one of the most celebrated faces in Hollywood but we may not be seeing it for very long if Angelina Jolie's latest directorial project, Unbroken, is anything to go by. M2woman sat down with the 39-year-old actress, supermum and human rights ambassador to find out more about her new focus behind the lens. BY LEENA TAILOR  
IMAGES COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES*



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“I HAVE TO GO ON  
THIS JOURNEY. I  
have to walk in this  
man’s footsteps.”

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COVER STORY





There's a quiet yet conspicuous buzz in the air on the 14th floor of the Four Seasons Hotel in Beverly Hills ahead of Angelina Jolie's arrival. In the hospitality suite, publicists are debating which colour background the actress needs for interviews.

"She told us black," says one.

"No, she prefers dark grey because she almost always wears dark grey," answers the other.

"Or black!" responds the first.

Down the hallway, an Australian security guard stands perched between the elevators, earpiece in place and glancing over every few seconds to ensure all is in check outside Jolie's awaiting suite. Feeling like a kid out-of-bounds, I clutch my notebook and dictaphone slightly higher, in an attempt to display my legit presence waiting in Jolie's space. Even higher as the biggest, burliest security guard I've ever seen emerges from a fire exit, which seems to have appeared out of nowhere. She's on her way.

While the heavy security presence is somewhat quiet and subtle – the guards conversing through their headpieces in hushed, mumbled phrases – the scene inside the press room is more a riot, a handful of international reporters arguing about how each will get a question in.

"Maybe we should take turns?" suggests one.

"No! It's Ange. We won't get through everyone," retorts another.

"So we just fight for questions as usual then?"

The issue remains unresolved until upon her subdued entrance, a reporter announces we will take turns – a diplomatic move, which clearly impresses the UN ambassador. Initially straight-faced and serious, she takes a seat. Her skin is pale and her hair sits lifelessly, missing the glamorous, celebrity shine one expects to ooze from the do of Hollywood royalty. Where her black, elbow-length jacket ends, I eye up her arms, searching for the giant veins that the tabloids make cover stories out of – finding only one.

It's been more than a decade since the 39-year-old Los Angeles-born daughter of actors Jon Voight and the late Marcheline Bertrand found a stardom so blazing that anything from veins to wrinkles could make headlines around the world. In that time, she has won Academy Awards and Golden Globes, been named an ambassador then Special Envoy for the UN, married Brad Pitt, adopted and birthed six children, and received an honorary Damehood from the Queen.

She smiles, almost shyly, upon hearing her long list of accomplishments then pauses when asked what is left for her to do in life. "My focus now is [family]. My son just turned 13 and I want to make sure he becomes a great man. I have six children and like every mother, I want to make sure they're all growing properly and in years to come, I want them happy, healthy and to have everything they need in life.

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## "I realised early on that AWARDS, MONEY and all of that DON'T MAKE YOU HAPPY."

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"I realised early on that awards, money and all of that don't make you happy. It certainly helps to know that you're going to get another job, but you're happy when you're of use.

"So I'll keep trying to figure out where I can do good things. I know who I am at home and I'm trying to figure out in the world – with my humanitarian and political work – where I can be useful and what I'm capable of because I don't know. But I'm going to keep learning and trying..."

Through her humanitarian work, Jolie has become a hero to many. But it was while in Cambodia with her family that she found a life-changing hero of her own while reading the story of the late Louis Zamperini, *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience and Redemption*.

A former Olympic runner, Zamperini enlisted in the US Army Air Force, but his plane went down in the Pacific after suffering mechanical problems. Aged 26, he miraculously survived 47 days adrift shark-infested waters, only to be captured by the Japanese, who held him captive and tortured him for two years until WWII came to an end.

"When I was halfway through the book, I had this almost physical, emotional reaction of, 'I have to go on this journey. I have to walk in this man's footsteps. I have to become and learn from him and in doing this, I will learn more about life,

history, strength of the human spirit and resilience. I will be a better person on the other side if I'm allowed to take this journey."

The story's value to Jolie became unshakeable, Zamperini's incredible tale (which Universal Pictures bought the film rights to, back in the 1950s) so powerful that she was hell-bent on landing the director's gig. While the *Maleficent* star recently announced her retirement from acting for a permanent move behind the camera, at the time, her only directing credits were documentary, *A Place in Time* and 2011 film, *In the Land of Blood and Honey*.

With no misconceptions about how her name might help her win the job, Jolie instead relied on a rubbish bag of prep to validate herself.

"I made all these boards of the different chapters in the story..."

At this, she giggles and her eyes light up as she excitedly recalls the story of her pitch, like a school-girl recapping a successful show-and-tell. Suddenly, all preconceptions of "icy Ange" melt away as she eagerly chats about the passion project with undeniably genuine enthusiasm.

"I broke the story up into chapters in my mind and visually for styles, colours, messages," she continues. "I even had charts of how faith or abuse went through the whole film. I had all these charts and could only fit it all into a garbage bag, so I had this big, crazy garbage bag and my ten boards and carried it all up to make my presentation – which [Universal Pictures'] Donna Langley still laughs at!

"It was really meticulous.



“I came into this trying to get a job and knowing that I wasn’t walking in as an actor or with any collateral I’ve built over the years as actress. I had to walk in as a director and convince them to be comfortable with this particular aspect of me – who I am, what I represent and what I can contribute simply as a director.”

“I fought to get this job, fought to get it green-lit, fought to get the right cast and fought through it.”

A fighting spirit is what resonated with Jolie when reading about Zamperini’s story and his perseverance in the face of relentless hurdles. Her own life struggles have been well-publicised, from a young adulthood littered with drugs, depression and self-harming, to losing her Mother to ovarian cancer, undergoing a preventative double mastectomy, weathering a troubled relationship with her Father and becoming public enemy number one after her romance with Pitt, 51, was blamed for his divorce from Hollywood sweetheart Jennifer Aniston.

Asked when she has most had to discover her own Zamperini-like strength, she recalls that day in March 2002 when she became adoptive mum to son Maddox. In disbelief that she was now a parent, she sat in a house in Africa gazing at him while wondering how she would ever fulfil the role of motherhood.

“I remember the first time he got hurt and I was like, ‘It’s fine! You’re fine!’”

“Then you realise you’re that person. You’re the person that says it’s all fine, with total confidence that you will make it fine because that’s your job now – to make it fine.”

“You’re not the one crying anymore.”

Now a mother-of-six, Jolie enjoyed giving her kids a taste of life Down Under, where they learned to surf – despite Pitt being kept in the dark because he’s afraid of sharks – and spent many nights at the zoo.

“[*Unbroken* actor] Miyavi was there with his kids one night too. Our kids wanted us to match them, so by the end of the night, we were sleeping in Taronga Zoo and everybody had onesies on and we were all of a variety of animal.”

While Miyavi fears his depiction of Zamperini’s biggest torturer “The Bird” could harm his successful musical career in Japan, he believes the message of the film is worth the risk.

Jolie agrees. “We read the paper every morning, look around the world and want to believe that we’re going to be able to overcome this and that as human beings, we can step forward, have a better future and somehow not be overwhelmed by everything that feels so... dark.”

“Louis always said, ‘This isn’t about how exceptional I am. I want everyone to see through my story how exceptional they are. I am not exceptional.’”

“He was born an Italian immigrant to a poor family, was always in trouble, made bad choices and there was nothing about him that said, ‘He is going to be a great man.’ You would’ve said the opposite.”

“But through his life, when he met challenges – and boy he went dark – he knew that we can all take a step tomorrow to go forward, that’s different. And that is the choice we all need to make.”

“He continued to give and inspire others up until his passing. People felt he improved their lives because he cared and was invested in other human beings and that’s the greatest thing.”

“It’s that message that I want to teach my children and that I want people to get from the movie – the strength of the human spirit is a very powerful thing and it exists in all of us. We can make things better.”

Zamperini’s July passing was a deeply emotional blow, just as Jolie was putting finishing touches on the movie. Aged 97, the Christian convert (played by British actor and *Skins* star, Jack O’Connell in the film) battled pneumonia for 40 days, his fighting spirit never waning as he emerged from an induced coma, tenaciously attempting to regain lung function. Jolie visited him often.

“Before he was in the ICU, I brought the movie on my laptop, so we could watch it together and talk about his life, and it was an amazing experience because it was watching this 97-year-old man watching himself run, win races, fight against all odds and also seeing him watch his Mother and Father. I know he felt he was going to be seeing them very soon, so he was very at peace at the end of his life.”

“For a fighter like Louis, at a certain point, we all wanted him to know that we weren’t expecting him to continue fighting – he wasn’t giving up a fight; he had fought hard enough and taught us everything he could.”

At this, the publicist calls time. Jolie’s heading home to Pitt who is practising his French scenes for *By the Sea*, which she wrote, directs and co-stars in. But there’s still one journalist who hasn’t had their turn and she insists on taking the last question – quizzed about how her own swimming abilities compare to Zamperini’s 47-day survival at sea.

“I am an okay swimmer, but I am one of those mothers who taught my kids to swim really early because I have a fear of drowning for children. I’m paranoid with water, so I got mine in as quickly as possible”

“I haven’t swum in the ocean for a long time and I probably should go out and get in the sea.”

“Our lives get too full and fast and we forget to just go and enjoy a big swim in the ocean.”

“I’m going to do that... I’m going to do that and think about Louis.” **M2W**



Top, left & bottom right: Director Angelina Jolie on the set of NBC Universal’s movie *Unbroken*, an epic drama that follows the incredible life of Olympian and war hero Zamperini who survived in a raft for 47 days after a near-fatal plane crash in WWII – only to be caught by the Japanese Navy and sent to a prisoner-of-war camp. Bottom left: Angelina Jolie on set with Jack O’Connell as Louis “Louie” Zamperini.



Image: David James



Image: David James