

A Momentous Life, From 'The Birds' to BIG CATS

**Movie Star, Model and Activist
Tippi Hedren Receives the Press Club's
Visionary Award for Public Service**

BY CHRISTOPHER PALMERI

TIPPI HEDREN won international acclaim for her portrayal of a young socialite attacked by seagulls in the Alfred Hitchcock thriller *The Birds*. Tonight, she is being honored by the Los Angeles Press Club for her five-decade commitment to protecting big cats.

Since 1983, Hedren, the movie star, model, activist and mother, has been operating the Shambala Preserve, an 80-acre sanctuary near Palmdale, California, where she has helped rescue more than 235 lions, tigers, cougars and other exotic felines. The cats have come to her from sources such as the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Humane Society. At Shambala, in the Mojave Desert, they find a permanent, loving home.

"Our only purpose is to allow these magnificent animals to live out their lives with care, understanding and dignity," Hedren explains in the Shambala mission statement.

For that commitment, and all her groundbreaking work, Hedren is receiving the Press Club's Visionary Award for public service.

Nathalie Kay Hedren was born in New Elm, Minnesota, in 1930. She was given the nickname Tippi by her father, who ran a general store in a nearby town. As a teenager she participated in department store fashion shows. At age 20, she moved to New York where she began working for the famous Eileen Ford modeling agency.

Hedren's wholesome face graced the covers of some of the era's most-read magazines, including *Life*, the *Saturday Evening Post* and *McCall's*. In 1961 she learned from an agent that Hitchcock was interested in casting Hedren after



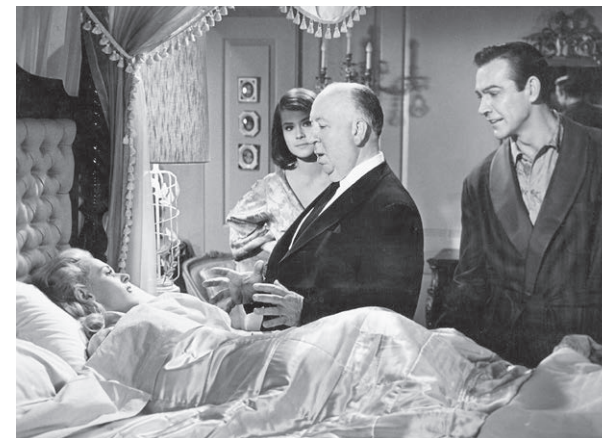
The size difference between an adult male lion like Leo and Hedren makes the point why big cats do not make appropriate pets.

seeing her on TV in a diet drink commercial. After a series of screen tests and acting lesson from the British director, she was cast as the lead in his 1963 picture *The Birds*, starring alongside the suave Australian actor Rod Taylor. It was her first film.

"Like a dormant volcano we know one day is going to erupt," is how Hitchcock described her.

It was a grueling shoot, not only due to the dozens of live crows, ravens and gulls thrown at her by men in leather falconry gloves but also by the relentless control exerted on her by the director. Hedren survived, and she shared a Golden Globe as New Star of the Year with Elke Sommer and Ursula Andress.

The picture has been called a masterpiece by the Ameri-



Hedren lives at Shambala Preserve, located in the high desert outside of Los Angeles.

Far left, Hitchcock and actor Sean Connery during the filming of *Marnie*. Left, Hedren with Buddy, an acquaintance from *The Birds*.

can Film Institute. It set the bar for other intelligent thrillers from *Jaws* to the current hit *It*.

"Special effects have taken quantum leaps since *The Birds* was made and I have a feeling that the way Mr. Hitchcock did it was much more effective than had it been done digitally," she told an audience at a screening in 2009.

Hedren would make one more picture with Hitchcock, another classic, 1964's *Marnie*. Hedren's turn as a secretary with a penchant for theft and a phobia of the color red would be her last with the director, who turned on her during the filming of the movie. Hitchcock wouldn't let her out of the seven-year contract he had made Hedren sign, paying her \$600 a week but refusing to let her work elsewhere.

In a series of books by author Donald Spoto, Hedren would later share her stories about the dark side of working with Hitchcock. These included the director's obsession with Hedren and—in what now seems like a familiar tale in Hollywood—his unwanted sexual advances. She was a pioneer in sharing such stories. Hedren's struggles with Hitchcock were later chronicled in the 2012 HBO/BBC biopic *The Girl*, in which Hedren was played by actress Sienna Miller.

"He ruined my career, but he didn't ruin my life," Hedren was quoted as saying when that film came out. "I still admire the man for who he was."

Hedren later continued to work in television and movies. In 1969, while filming in Africa, she watched a pride of



Hedren started her modeling career with Eileen Ford agency; she wrote and starred in the 1981 film, *Roar*.



With daughter Melanie Griffith and granddaughters Dakota Johnson and Stella Banderas, Hedren received her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2003; Hedren and a graduating class of nail technicians.

lions close up and was inspired to take on what would be her lifelong crusade to protect the animals. She wrote and starred in the 1981 film *Roar*, about a family's misadventures with the big cats.

The picture also featured Hedren's daughter with her first husband, the actress Melanie Griffith. Acting has become a family affair, as Hedren's granddaughter, Dakota Johnson, has also made a name for herself, starring in the *Fifty Shades of Grey* films. Still, Hedren has a realistic view of the challenges of the trade.

"My advice to anyone contemplating acting as a profession is to be independently wealthy or have another vocation as a backup," she once said. "Most actors make a pittance."

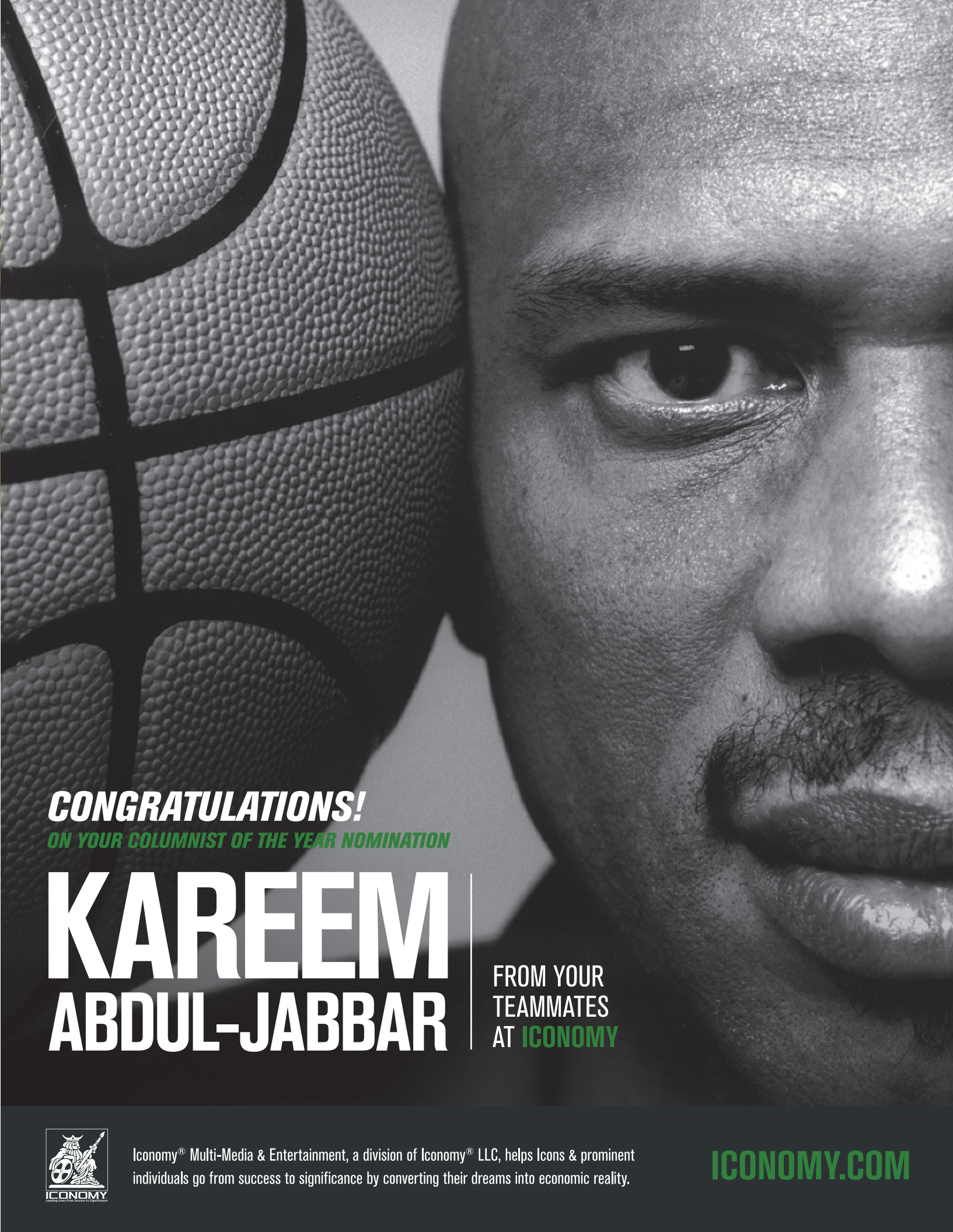
In another surprising twist to Hedren's story, the indefatigable humanitarian had a part in developing the Vietnamese nail salon industry in the U.S. While working with another charity, she discovered that Vietnamese refugees loved

manicured nails. Hedren had her own nail specialist teach the women how to do the work and coordinated additional training with a nearby beauty school. The award-winning 2014 documentary *Happy Hands* chronicles her efforts.

Today Hedren devotes much of her time to the Shambala Preserve, where she also lives. It's a lot of work, providing round the clock care to those beautiful, but dangerous creatures.

Shambala is open for tours, some given by Hedren herself. She sells merchandise and even allows annual sleepovers in African tents. Often, the exotic animals she's taken in are ones that belonged to people who kept them in private homes. Among the celebrity pets Hedren has hosted are Michael Jackson's two Bengal tigers, Sabu and Thriller.

Last year, she published her autobiography, *Tippi: A Memoir*, joking that after all these years, it was "about time I stop letting everyone else tell my story and finally tell it myself."



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