

# ***MERYL STREEP: ON THE COUCH***

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## *Publisher Info*

- Been a top-ten indie since its start in 1992
- Publishes 4-6 books a year
- Distributed nationally by Baker & Taylor Publisher Services
- Frontlist and backlist titles represented in Hollywood by APA (Agency for the Performing Arts)
- Publishes almost all types of books, from memoirs to mysteries, young adult novels to history and biography
- Bancroft books have received numerous starred reviews—four, in fact, for two 2018 summer books—and have won numerous awards
- *The Missing Kennedy*, a NYT ebook bestseller, was on the cover of *People Magazine* when published in 2015
- Recent mystery (*Her Kind of Case*) received star reviews from all but one of trade review publications
- Published the books of two Pulitzer Prize winners (Alice Steinbach, Stephen Hunter)

## OVERVIEW

Meryl Streep is a Hollywood icon, a political activist, a twenty-time Oscar-nominated actress, and a mystery. *The Devil Wears Prada*, *Kramer v. Kramer*, *Julie & Julia*, *Mama Mia!*, *Sophie's Choice*, Meryl does it all, but who is she when the camera stops rolling? What are the thoughts that she keeps hidden?

Enter Dr. Darcy Dale.

The most successful psychoanalyst in New York City, Dr. Dale has treated a number of the most famous and exceptional women in the world. Marilyn Monroe, Jackie O., and Barbra Streisand, have all managed to find their way to the doorstep of this doctor's office.

Fully aware of Dr. Dale's notability, Streep, decides to pay her a call, but not for psychiatric treatment. The actress hopes to observe Dr. Dale as a means of preparing for her next role as a psychoanalyst. The two strike a deal: Streep will undergo analysis herself just as psychoanalysts must do as part of their education.

In the newest installment of her *On the Couch* series, Dr. Alma H. Bond gives us a seat on the couch next to Meryl as the actress prepares for her next role, and Dr. Dale performs an analysis of one of Hollywood's most talented actresses. What follows is one of the most thorough and comprehensive biographies on Meryl Streep.

You now have before you a detailed guide to all that made Meryl. Anything you have ever wondered is chronicled in Dr. Dale's session notes. In-depth research spanning Streep's ancestry, childhood, college years, romantic entanglements, and more all finds its way onto these pages. Anyone who has ever wanted to learn more about Meryl Streep as a person, or has an interest in her acting methods would undoubtedly enjoy this book.

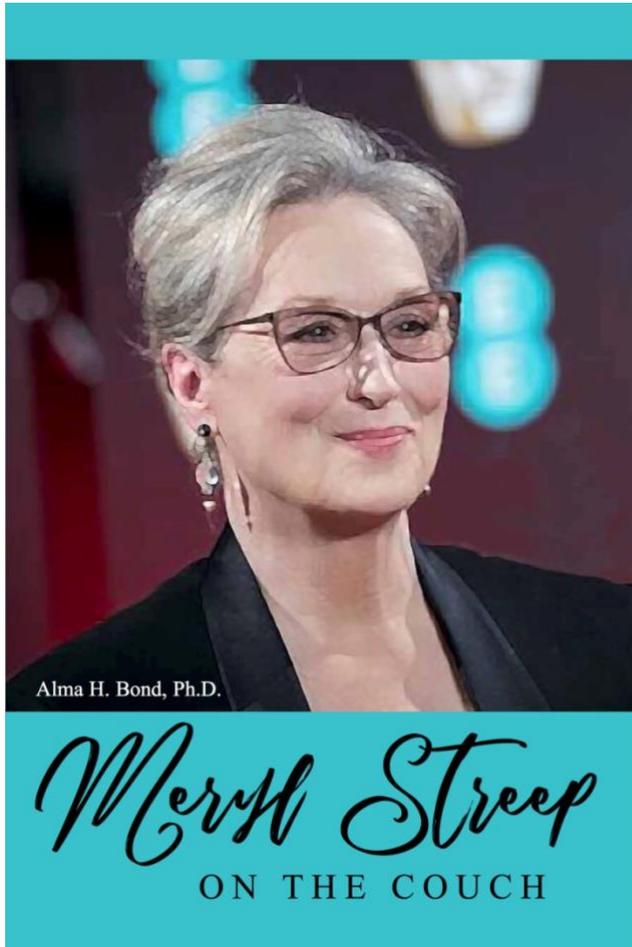
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### Shorter

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# TARGET AUDIENCES AND WHY

## Psychologist/therapists



- Students (and alumni) at the schools she went to: Vassar College, and Yale University School of Drama

### Women

- Book tells the story of a well-known female figure

### Meryl Streep fans

- As of 2017, 59% of Americans were fans of Meryl Streep

### Older Audiences

- A majority of Meryl Streep fans are over the age of 55
- Baby Boomers

### Historians

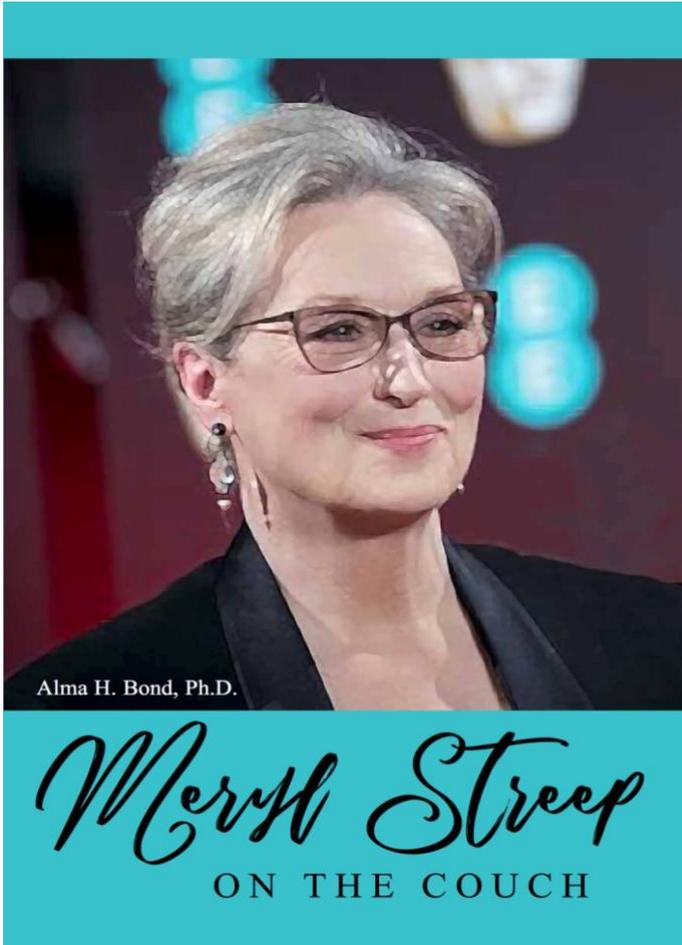
- Women's History

### Democrats/left-leaning

- While a majority of Meryl Streep fans are older and tend to lean conservative, they are 54% more likely to have an unfavorable view of Trump
- Fans of Meryl Streep tend to watch left-leaning news stations.

## Praise for *Meryl Streep on the Couch*

“In *Meryl Streep: On the Couch*, Alma Bond continues the intriguing approach to biography she has used successfully in previous *On the Couch* books. In this latest installment, Bond’s fictional psychoanalyst, Dr. Darcy Dale, leads Meryl Streep through a training analysis to prepare the actress for an upcoming film role. During this extended series of sessions, Streep discusses her



family history, her marriage and children, and the arc of her career. She also offers her thoughts on many of her previous movie and theater roles. Bond’s unique take on biography makes for an entertaining read, even when covering some of the less exciting aspects of Streep’s early years. Of course, in the psychoanalytic context, those early years take on outside importance. The author’s decades of expertise as a practicing psychoanalyst shine through in Dr. Dale’s observations about Streep – and gives the novel format credibility. This book is a must-read for Streep fans who want to not only learn more about the life of this accomplished actress but also to peek beneath the surface of her remarkable success.”

—SHERRY KNOWLTON, AUTHOR OF THE ALEXA WILLIAMS SUSPENSE SERIES

“In this fictional work, Dr. Bond is represented as Dr. Dale Darcy (the fictionalized psychoanalyst) who works with Meryl Streep, with Streep learning about the psychoanalysis process in tandem with Darcy’s wish to understand this great actress. Bond recognizes the idea that Streep, while always herself, is able to step into anyone’s shoes, and it is that empathy that makes her the great actress she is. While Bond never interviewed Streep, her exceptional grasp of Streep’s identity and creative process comes from the superb use of source material that Bond cites at the end of the volume. One need not be a scholar to know that once again Bond has captured, in this delightful fictional but essentially biographical read, the essence of an amazingly accomplished woman.”

—HELEN K. GEDIMAN, PH.D.

“*Meryl Streep on the Couch* is one of the most eye-opening books about a celebrity I have ever read. Although I didn’t know much about Meryl Streep’s life or activities outside of her film career, the conversations she had with Dr. Darcy Dale revealed a wealth of humor, insight, and integrity that most people never knew she had. Streep is a charmer for sure, on and off the screen, but it’s in this ‘mock

psychoanalysis' where she'll show readers for the first time in her life the deepest parts of her life – the good and the bad. Despite being a famous actress, Meryl Streep isn't a woman without hopes and dreams that extend beyond herself and her family, nor is she devoid of losses that have left profound changes in her thoughts and actions. I believe that *Meryl Streep on the Couch* is a must-read book for many people even if they aren't die-hard fans of the actress. She truly is an incredible human being.”

—**TYLER JONAS, LOYOLA UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**

“It must be a pleasure to lie on Alma Bond's couch. Alma Bond, Ph.D, a retired, successful New York psychoanalyst, shares her professional insights and observations in *Meryl Streep, On the Couch*. In the sixth of Bond's series of *On the Couch* biographies, Academy Award-winning actress Meryl Streep reviews her life, revealing heart-felt facts, sorrows, and successes. Dr. Bond, as Dr. Darcy Dale, weighs in with psychological perceptions, even parsing Streep's 'harmonious balance' of ego, super ego, and id. Bond's unique perspective as a therapist gives this unauthorized life story a fresh and intriguing point of view. It also will make you want to read Bond's other *On the Couch* titles that include the life stories of Marilyn Monroe, Jackie O, Hillary Clinton, and Barbra Streisand, and Michelle Obama.”

—**ELIZABETH MEADE HOWARD, AUTHOR OF *AGING FAMOUSLY: FOLLOW THOSE YOU ADMIRE TO LIVE LONG AND WELL***

“Another incredibly well researched and successful portrayal of a Hollywood icon. Your ability to humanize celebrities is uncanny. After reading your draft of *Meryl Streep: On the Couch*, I felt like I had gained a better understanding of, and deeper respect for, this great genius.”

—**LIZ RYAN, TOWSON UNIVERSITY**

## Q&A With *Meryl Streep* Author Alma H. Bond, Ph.D

Q: What was the most challenging part of writing this book?

A: Keeping it from being boring. Meryl is so superb a person in every way I know of that it was difficult to keep her an interesting character.

Q: What do you hope your readers will take away from the book?

A: I hope that those who did not begin the book loving her will do so by the end of the book. I also hope they will learn something about creativity.

Q: How did your experience of writing this book compare with your other *On the Couch* books?



A: Barbra Streisand was more fun to write, Jackie Onassis perhaps a more interesting woman, and Marilyn Monroe more haunting, but I love Meryl more than any of them. To write a biography requires living with a person for a year or more. Living with Meryl in my head made me happy.

Q: What is your first step in writing your *On the Couch* books?

A: I do a great deal of research, reading everything that I can find that was written about the person, watching all films, and reading anything he or she may have written. With an actress like Meryl Streep who has been in the public eye for over fifty years, that is a great deal to read! It probably took me a year to get through most of it, even though I am a very fast reader.

Q: What first inspired you to do a series like *On the Couch*?

A: I am a psychoanalyst who gave up a marvelous private practice in Manhattan to write full time. To keep from missing my patients too much, I put various celebrities “*On the Couch*.”

Q: What inspired you to choose Meryl Streep as your next “patient” for your *On the Couch* series?

A: I chose her because I’ve always had great admiration for her. I don’t care to write about anyone, celebrity or not, whom I do not look up to. I’ve always loved movie stars. When I was a little girl I wanted to be an actress, and used to wish that Barbra Stanwyck was my mother. I looked up to her as a great actress, and thought she was warm and loving, and that she would be the ideal person to be my mother. Years later, I read that her friends thought she was all that I thought she was as a person. The “*On the Couch*” series is a grown-up extension of my little girl



fantasies. I think Meryl Streep would make a great mother!

Q: How long does it typically take you to research the books and what is the best source of information for you?

A: Anywhere from six months to a year. Each “patient” has different sources of information. Streisand, for instance, has a great deal written about her in musical forums.

Q: Was there anything that you uncovered in your research about Meryl Streep’s life that surprised you?

A: Yes, that her behavior in the early part of her “analysis” is typical of her. She really does close herself off to friends. Whether she opens up to Don, I don’t really know, but suspect that she does. I hope that she does!

Q: Was there anything that you were curious about that you were not able to find through your research about Meryl?

A: My research answered my questions, or I would have continued it until it did.

Q: Do you think Meryl Streep and Don Gummer’s marriage is successful? If so, why? If not, why not?

A: Yes, very successful. I take this up in the book. I think it is successful mainly because they give each other space to be their own persons.

Q: In what ways do you think Meryl Streep’s relationship with her mother influenced her?

A: Meryl had a marvelous mother, who was a wonderful role model, both as a warm loving mother and working woman. She allowed Meryl to be and do whatever she wanted, and trusted her for it to be all right. Thus Meryl’s conscience allows her to do atrocious things, like reenact an abortion onstage.

Q: After researching Meryl’s childhood and young adulthood so extensively, who would you say, if anyone, had the biggest impact on her?

A: Unquestionably her mother.

Q: Why do you think Meryl seems relatively unhappy about her children becoming actors?

A: The life of an actress is incredibly hard, as they often have to be on the set as early as 4:30 in the morning to be made-up, and work until late at night until a scene is finished. Their hours are dreadfully long, and they often have to be away from home and family for extended periods of time, living in lonely hotel rooms.

As I said, when I was a little girl I badly wanted to be an actress. But when I learn about the terrible lives they lead and the price they have to pay for fame and glory, I am happy I never became one. I can understand why Meryl does not want her children to be actors.

Q: Do you have a favorite film of Meryl's? If so, which one and why?

A: That is a difficult question. I always like to see a picture Meryl is in, as she is always good. I liked the film about Margaret Thatcher very much, as she was so like Thatcher in every little detail such as her walk that her performance was awe-inspiring. Ditto about the Julia Child movie..

Q: Dr. Dale seems to dislike Meryl in the beginning of the book. Does that reflect any of your own opinions or have you always been a fan of hers?

A: I don't like that she is closed off to her friends, but I didn't know that until I did the research.

Q: Dr. Dale does a lot of work to try and break through Meryl's "coldness". Why do you think that Meryl is so reserved in real life?

A: She says it is because she is so exposed in her professional life that she needs to keep something of herself to herself. But I wonder if Meryl exposed her inner life even to her mother, when she was a child. Children often believe their feelings about sex or anger would be unacceptable to their parents, and keep the feelings to themselves. Thus they never find out if they were wrong.

Q: Dr. Dale often notes of how "normal" Meryl is - in the well balanced psychiatric sense. What, in your opinion, is the reason behind Meryl's ability to stay so well balanced?

A: As I indicated, she had a wonderful mother, who accepted whatever Meryl chose to present to her. Therefore, Meryl is able to accept herself so well.

Q: Dr. Dale touches on grief a lot with Meryl. Do you think the death of John Cazale still affects Meryl? If not, how did she get over it? If so, to what degree do you think it affects her?

A: Yes, I think his death still affects her. I don't believe we ever really get over losing a person we love. I think her quick marriage to Don, who was an entirely different kind of person than John, helped her cope. With Don, she learned there can be life after loss. Life goes on.

Q: Is there anything you would say to Meryl now if you got the chance to meet her?

A: I would say pretty much what Dr. Dale said to her, that I think she is an admirable woman,

and the world is lucky to have her, both as an actress and human being.

Q: Is there anything (acting role, political stance, personal life, etc.) that you would like to see Meryl take on next?

A: I would like to see her play the great Shakespearean women tragedians, particularly Lady Macbeth and Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, and perhaps even Juliet - yes, Juliet. She apparently was great as Isobel, in *Measure for Measure*.

*January 2, 2017*

My name is Darcy Dale. As those of you who have read my other books know, I am a psychoanalyst who has an extensive (and expensive) practice on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. One morning before we started work, my long time assistant Rivka Ruben rushed into my office and heaved herself on top of my desk.

“What’s the matter?” she asked, her astute eyes glancing up and down my slumping body. “That’s a terrible way to start the New Year. You look glum as a tiger locked in a cage.”

“Nothing’s the matter,” I said, lying between my teeth.

“Who’re you kiddin? I know you as well as you know any of your patients. Come on, ‘fess up to Mama. What’s the problem?”

I knew there was no getting her off my back until I told her. So I said, “Well, maybe I am a little blue.”

“What are you blue about? I haven’t seen you looking this gloomy since Marilyn Monroe left town.”

“I always get depressed when a patient I’ve grown to love leaves me.”

“Aw, poor baby! Well, you’re such a good analyst there’s always one or another leavin’, so that means you’re depressed about half the time. Who’re you mourning today, for God’s sake?”

“Can’t you guess?”

“Yeah. Barbra Streisand.

“Right.”

“Ha! I knew you wouldn’t get away with discharging her without grieving. You never do. And she was extra special, so it’s worse this time. Well, I have some news for you that just might make you feel better. A new patient called for an appointment this morning who might possibly replace Barbra, Marilyn, and all the other movie star patients you fall madly in love with.”

“Who is it?” I asked eagerly.

“Not so fast! An analyst is supposed to remain neutral. Some analyst

you are! One more reaction like that and I'll report you to the American Psychoanalytic Association.

Promise me you won't let this new patient take over your life the way you did with Barbra."

"Yeah, I promise," I said, crossing my fingers behind my back. "Who is it this time?"

"Meryl Streep."

"Meryl Streep? Meryl Streep? Are you kidding? I don't really like that woman. She's one cold drink of water. I don't even like her style of acting. I read in some paper or other that Streep said that many people consider her to be a technical actor, but she explained that she just comes to the set ready to work, and doesn't want to screw around and waste the first ten takes on adjusting the lighting. In any event, her acting doesn't move me in the films that I've seen. Katharine Hepburn apparently agreed with me about Streep. According to her official biographer A. Scott Berg, Meryl Streep was her least favorite modern actress on screen: 'Click, click, click,' she said, referring to the wheels turning inside Streep's head. I agree. No, Meryl Streep is not my jam, either as an actress or a person. She'll never replace Barbra in my affections."

Rivka grinned knowingly. "We'll see."

"When is she coming?"

"As a matter of fact, she is your first patient this morning. What a great way to start the New Year!"

"Well, thanks for giving me time to prepare!" I rushed to the mirror by my door, pulled down my blouse, took out my lipstick, and started combing my hair.

"I thought you weren't interested in Meryl Streep," Rivka said. "Why are you getting all dolled up?"

I gave her a dirty look and pushed her out the door.

January 2, 2017

A few minutes later, Meryl Streep sailed through the office door and extended her arm to me in a direct, firm manner. (What else would you expect?)

"Hello," she said. "I am Meryl Streep."

As if I didn't know!

"Good morning, Ms. Streep." I said, pointing out a chair to her." I studied her carefully as she arranged herself and her belongings on the chair. I thought she did not look like a patient at all. "You do not impress me as a particularly neurotic woman," I said, perhaps a bit precipitously. "What brings you here to see me today?"

"Thank you," she answered. "I am happy to hear you say that. Actually, you've hit the nail right on the head. I am not here for any personal problems."

"Oh? Then why *are* you here?"

She waited a moment and then continued, "I've been offered a unique role in a new movie called *The Psychotherapist* in which I am to play a psychoanalyst.... I always research my roles very carefully, and leave no stone unturned to learn all the information I can about them. I decided that the best way to find out how therapy works ... is to come and be analyzed myself."

"That seems admirable to me," I answered. "But do I sense some hesitation about your request?"

She smiled, and said, "You are right on the ball again, Doctor. I *am* hesitant."

"Why?" I asked.

"I was afraid you wouldn't take me on as a patient if I told you the truth. But I'm a person who lives by the truth both in my relationships and in my work. I realized that if I started off here with a lie, I wouldn't get anywhere." She brushed her hair back in a way that I soon realized was customary.

"You are quite right," I said, thinking I might get to like this woman

after all. "But I may be able to help you with your problem. There is something we in the field call a training analysis, which is used to teach students how to become psychoanalysts. It is a requirement for analytic pupils, because there is truly no better way to learn how to conduct an analysis than to experience it oneself. There is no reason I can think of why you couldn't undergo such an analysis."

Her face lit up, and she said, "How wonderful! That sounds just right for me."

"Thank you. But surely you must have some other reservations about it, too. If not, I have to warn you, it will be just as difficult for you as for any ordinary patient. You, like every other patient, will have to open up to a complete stranger and say things you have not even admitted to yourself. That is very difficult, especially when you are not in any pain about them. You will have to face any fears you have that have been repressed all your life and say and feel things you've never faced before. If the treatment is a success, it will change you in ways you or your loved ones may not like. For instance, a successfully analyzed patient told me yesterday that when she told her sister that she was finishing her analysis, the sister said, 'I liked you better the other way, when you did everything I wanted.'"

She smiled.

"It will be harder for you than for most other patients," I continued, "because most are motivated to heal the terrible emotional pain they live under. You do not impress me as a person who lives with daily psychological distress, nor does anything I've read about you in the newspapers imply that you are. Rather the reverse; they write nothing but complimentary things about you and your personality. But if you do decide to undergo treatment, you will certainly learn how an analysis works, or I will not allow it to continue... Would you like to try it for a month and see if it is helpful to you?"

She smiled again, a deep smile that reached from her head to her toes, and said, "When do we begin?"

*January 4, 2017*

I found it hard for me to take my eyes off her. Meryl is very beautiful in an unusual sort of way. Meryl Streep is a good height for a woman - not too tall, not too short, perhaps five feet six inches. She was born in Summit, New Jersey on June 22, 1949, which made her sixty-seven years old. She looked at least a decade younger.

She has exquisite bone structure, especially her sculpted cheeks. As I said, she is very beautiful; at least everybody thinks so but Meryl, to hear her tell it. I'm not so sure. To me, she looks different in every movie I've ever seen her in. Many times she looks stunning, but on others she resembles the girl next door who maybe babysat your children. She is America's quintessential shiksa. It is quite believable that in high school she was a cheerleader.

Her skin is like alabaster, and her cheekbones look like they are carved from marble. Her light blue eyes are somewhat hooded, and perhaps a bit too close together, but in the overall picture, one doesn't notice them as one would the eyes of an ordinary woman. But then nothing about Meryl Streep is ordinary.

Her curtain of cornfield-yellow hair tumbled over her shoulders and lit up the room like a cascade of sunshine. Her glowing, lily-fair skin creases only when she laughs, which she does often. I remembered something that Mike Nichols once said about Meryl, "She looks like she swallowed a lightbulb. There's something that's completely transparent about her, a look of reflected light that's quite striking and delicate. She's very fine-looking, with very delicate features." I understand what he meant.

Like her or not, one wants to go up to her and stroke her hair. Her pale blue eyes capture you and hold you in their grasp. They twinkle if she doesn't catch you looking at them. Her nose is long and forked, not that of the usual beauty queen at all. But again, who cares? And her very fit figure resembles a gently tapered candle.

If I had to describe her in one sentence, I would say, "She looks like the chief high school cheerleader all grown up, but more exotic."

I was surprised to see that she wasn't particularly well dressed. In fact, her clothing was rather gauche. She was wearing black jeans and green cowboy boots she said her husband had given her for Christmas. She hates the "slink" of high fashion, she told me later. Imagine wearing that outfit when visiting a psychoanalyst for the first time! She could have passed for a sixties hippie, which, in a way, she is. Perhaps her style was a leftover from those days.

"I love these boots," she said, stretching them out after catching me looking at them. "When Don first gave them to me, I slept with them under my pillow. My daughters keep trying to steal them away from me. I don't know whether they want to wear them themselves or just can't stand having a mother who wears cowboy boots. But I fooled them. I keep the boots in the freezer. They are safe there because God forbid my daughters should ever go into the kitchen."

She looked deep into my eyes, and said, "I'll bet you're thinking that I don't dress like a movie star." (I was.) "You are right. First of all, I have to feel comfortable in my clothes. And secondly, if people don't think I'm a movie star, they don't bother me. So the way I dress is a good thing all around.

"I know you're not supposed to speak ill of the dead, but Earl Blackwell finally died, so I can tell you this: I was on his blacklist every year for being the worst dressed person."

"Oh, was he some sort of society columnist or something?"

"Every year Blackwell named the worst dressed people in America. I was a regular on the list. The thing that was unbearable for me about it was the emphasis on how you look. I just... I couldn't put up with it. I mean, it just drove me crazy.

"I don't know," Streep replied when I asked who designed the somewhat shabby black cardigan, black jeans, and purple, buttoned-up shirt she was wearing. "I've had them for years. I've had this cardigan since my son was born." Her son, Henry, turned thirty in November.

I nodded, silently comparing how different she looked on being presented with her last Academy Award. She had worn a simple, classic golden gown, with a cinched waist. Her hair was done in an elegant updo.

*Meryl Streep* ON THE COUCH

She had taken home top honors for her leading role in *The Iron Lady*, but her golden gown generated almost as much talk as her acting. She looked like nothing so much as an Oscar herself. But I smiled as I thought she looked as beautiful in her jeans and green leather boots as in her golden gown. They say, "Clothes make the woman." In her case, I disagree. I suspect she would look as beautiful wearing a dishrag.

Later, I asked her, "Do people say to you, 'You look much prettier in person than you do in the movies?'"

She answered with her characteristic sense of humor, "Yes, but it's probably a lot better than, 'God, you look so much better in the movies that you do in real life!'"

January 6, 2017

She rang the bell precisely at 9 am as we had planned, and dashed into my office.

“Do I lie down on the couch?” she asked, without any greeting.

I smiled and said, “If you like,” hoping she wasn’t planning to act out an actress playing the part of a patient.

She threw herself on the couch, and was quiet for a moment. “For the first time in my life,” she said, “I can’t think of anything to say. This is harder than accepting an Oscar! .....What should I talk about?”

“How about what you are thinking this very moment?”

“Well, that’s kind of embarrassing.....OK, I know, I’m supposed to say everything that comes to mind----well, I’m thinking about you.”

“What about me?”

“I’m thinking you’re not like the analysts in the movies. You are.... more...human, like a real person. An analyst should be wearing tortoise shell glasses like a librarian and be dressed like an old frump. You aren’t. It’s hard to say this to another woman, but you are even pretty.... You seem very real, kind of like my Aunt Bessie.

“What do you think of Aunt Bessie?”

“She is a nice, kind lady. She has always been loving to me. I love her.”

*Hmmmm, I thought, not a bad start. She has formed a positive transference\* to me already.*

As if she had been reading my mind, she said frankly (she was nothing if not frank) , “Well, don’t get a swelled head about it. I love *her*, not you.”

“Of course,” I said, thinking, *This woman doesn’t have any trouble speaking up! Shades of Barbra Streisand.*

“Well. That wasn’t as hard as I thought it would be,” she went on. “What do I talk about next?”

“Tell me the story of your life in an emotionally meaningful way.”

“That’s a long story. Remember, I’m sixty-seven years old! That’s a

lot of remembering! Where do I start?"

"How about at the beginning?"

"Good idea, because I just found out some things about my ancestors that explain a lot about me. May I come back tomorrow and tell you about it?"

I knew she was scared of being analyzed and was putting off beginning it, but I figured she was entitled to be. She was starting a long, dark journey and had no idea where it would lead her.

"Good. See you then." She turned around as she reached the door and smiled. It was a real smile, not that of an actress in the movies. I found myself smiling back, just as naturally, and thinking again, I may get to like her after all.

\*transference: the redirection of feelings formerly felt about significant figures in childhood toward a new object such as a psychoanalyst.

January 9, 2017

Meryl came in rather languorously and lowered herself onto the couch

“Well, here I am,” she said slowly, “so I guess I haven’t changed my mind about being analyzed. Of course I may live to regret it...” She chose her next words with great thought and care. “I recently learned some very important information about my family history that may help you understand me. Does that interest you?”

“I’m all ears.”

“Good. I’ve been wondering about my genealogy lately, so I went to the library and looked us up. I thought knowing where I came from would help me understand who I am. Do you agree?”

“Absolutely.”

“Well, what I found out really surprised me. For instance, I’d always been told that I have some Jewish blood, which is fine with me, but the records show no evidence of it. Apparently, it was another family by the same name that was Jewish. I had also known very little about my family’s European heritage or their deep roots in this country.

“I once read a book called *The History of the Streep Family in England*, which traced my father’s history. Maybe that’s where the idea of our having Jewish blood originated. They were Jews who had come over from Holland to England, and took the name *Streep*, which means ‘stripe’ in Holland. Do you think the stripe wearers were criminals? If so, I’ll look them up again if I ever have to play a convict.

When I asked her what she had wanted to learn about her family’s past, she laughed. She has a remarkable laugh. Sometimes it is light and airy, sometimes it is a surge of boisterous elation that carries over into what she is saying next. But it is always clearly Meryl. This time she flung back her head as far as it could go, threw her body forward until it reached her lap let loose a full-throated harrumph, and slapped her thigh for good measure. She said, “I’ve always thought I came from well-earned obscurity, but it looks like I was wrong. I read some hilarious stories about

my mother's side of the family. It seems an ancestor of mine was hung for horse thievery in Philadelphia (she laughed loudly again), and that one of my grandmothers helped Carrie Nation bust up bars during the temperance movement. Sounds like me. Maybe that's where I get my rebelliousness!

"I'd always had a vague notion that there was some American version of royalty in me, like coming over on the Mayflower. It turns out I was right. Can you imagine me being a debutante?" she asked, holding up her green boots. "I would make a lousy debutante, though maybe a better one when I was a teenager and a cheerleader, and was still trying to fit in. But I've learned better since then, thank God."

"I agree!" I said enthusiastically.

She smiled and continued, "I was able to trace my family tree all the way back to the seventeenth century and to discover relatives from Germany, Switzerland, and England, who were among the earliest settlers in the United States. Indeed, on both sides of my family, I am descended from founding fathers in Pennsylvania and Rhode Island," she said with pride in her voice. "Can you say that?" she asked, turning her head to look at me.

"I'm afraid not," I answered.

"That's OK. I guess not many people can," she mused. "Do you want to tell me about your background?"

I wondered about whether I should break the rule of anonymity and talk to her about my heritage. Strangely enough for an actress of Meryl's caliber, she spoke most of the time in a flat voice, almost a monotone. Sometimes I even found it difficult to listen to her. I thought maybe if I spoke about myself in a personal way, it might liven her up.

"My heritage is as different from yours as can be," I began.

Her voice perked up. "Oh, that's interesting. What is it?"

"Unlike you, I am a first generation American." She looked shocked, as if everyone she knew had been descended from passengers on the Mayflower.

I continued, "My parents were born in Europe, my mother in Romania and my father in Warsaw. They only went to the third and fourth grade



in grammar school. I am the first member of my extended family to go to college. My parents were wonderful about it, even though they were practically uneducated themselves. When I was sixteen years old, I ran down the living room steps and shouted, 'Daddy, can I go to college?' My loving father answered, 'I'll sell my shirt to send you.'"

"What an unusual man!" she said. "You should be very proud of him."

I responded warmly, answering: "Oh, I am! I not only went to college but continued on with my education until I earned my Ph.D. and then went on to postdoctoral analytic school."

She said, "That is more impressive to me than all my Mayflower ancestors. You are living proof that one's social origin does not determine the worth of a human being."

I smiled. "Thank you, Meryl," I said. "What a wonderful country America is! Here the daughter of immigrants (me) can help the descendant of people who came over on the Mayflower!"

"I guess you can say that it's what's inside that matters, not where you came from. I'll remember that the next time I'm carried away with my ancestry!" She was silent for a moment, digesting what for her was to become an important change in her thinking.

"Speaking of fathers," she went on, "I guess I should tell you about mine, even though he died a long time ago, in 2003. I suppose nobody is more important in a girl's development than her father. Do you agree?"

"Absolutely."

"OK. Then here goes. His name was Harry William Streep, Jr. My son Henry is named for him. We have as many Henrys and Harrys in my family as we do Marys. He was very handsome. I always thought he looked like a movie star. Maybe that's why I'm in the movies! He was very careful about how he dressed, and always wore a nice, neat suit- navy blue or gray with a subtly matching tie. I like that - in a man, anyway. He was an only child, and very intelligent. He was awarded a full scholarship to Brown University but was forced to leave after a year during the Depression, because he had to support his mother. He worked in the Personnel Department of Merck and Company for thirty years. The

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job was mostly firing and hiring employees, work that was considerably beneath his abilities. He seemed to me to be rather melancholy at times, a disposition perhaps inherited from his mother. But I would be melancholy too if I were forced to sit at a desk all day long and do boring work like his.

“My grandfather was a traveling salesman, and left my father alone with his mother much of the time. I didn’t think Dad cared that much about him, but to my surprise, when my son Henry appeared in a high school production of *Death of a Salesman*, my father cried out, ‘That was my Dad!’ and burst into tears. Like your father, he always encouraged me in my acting and singing,” she said sadly. “I don’t know if I could have done it without him. He still seems very much alive to me, as if he were still around.”

“That’s a very healthy way to grieve, Meryl. May I call you Meryl?”

“What else? That’s my name.”

“I can see that you loved him very much.”

She ignored my statement. “I always thought I’d inherited some of my talent, such as it is, from him.”

I looked at her in surprise and saw that she meant it. She really doesn’t think her talent is such a big deal. When she heard the surprise in my voice, she said, “Some people work in an office, some sell shoes. I make movies. It’s just a job, and not so different from those.”

An important movie star, perhaps one of the greatest ever, and yet doesn’t think it is such a big deal. Not your usual Hollywood narcissist.

“He was a songwriter,” she continued, “and a wonderful dancer. He used to teach my brother and me how to dance in the living room. He was a great pianist when he was young, and when he went to Brown, it was via a scholarship. He never went back to school after he was forced to drop out. That makes me sad, because he had so much potential. Sometimes when I get an award or something, I look up and think, ‘Hey, Pop! You should be here, not me.’”

“He had a terrible childhood and practically brought himself up. His mother was very depressed, and lay in bed most of the time. As I told you, he also had a wide streak of melancholy in him that he caught from her.

So instead of doing what he loved, he spent thirty years in that hiring and firing position. It wore him down. My poor, decent, hard-working father! What a good man he was! He did it all for my family and me. I don't think I could survive if I had to go to work every day at a job I hated. It's hard enough for me to get to work at a job people would kill for! "But to really understand him, we have to go back a generation.

My dad was named for his father, my grandfather Henry William Streep, but he was always called 'Buddy.'

"As I mentioned, Grandfather was a traveling salesman, and really wasn't much of a father. My dad, an only child, lived alone with his mother. Life was rough for them. I guess he had no role model on how to be a father, and I always suffered from it.

At this point, it was the end of our hour together, and I was secretly grateful—I'd had enough of the Streep family to last me a long time.

"I'm afraid we'll have to stop now, Meryl," I said. "I will see you on Monday."

"What! Stop already? I've just begun," she grumbled, stumbling on her way to the door.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in February 1923 and still going strong, Dr. Alma H. Bond is the author or co-author of more than two dozen published books, among them: *Jackie O: On the Couch*; *Lady Macbeth: On the Couch*; *Marilyn Monroe: On the Couch*; *Hillary Clinton: On the Couch*; *Barbra Streisand: On the Couch*; *Michelle Obama: A Biography*; *The Autobiography of Maria Callas: A Novel*; *Margaret Mahler: A Biography of the Psychoanalyst*; *Camille Claude: A Novel*; *America's First Woman Warrior: The Story of Deborah Sampson*; and *Who Killed Virginia Woolf? A Psychobiography*.

Dr. Bond received her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from Columbia University, graduated from the post-doctoral program in psychoanalysis at the Freudian Society, and was a



psychoanalyst in private practice for 37 years in New York City. Following an accident-induced coma from which she was not expected to recover, she “retired” to become a full-time writer.

Dr. Bond is a member of the American Society of Journalists and Authors, the Dramatists Guild, and the Authors Guild, as well as a fellow and faculty member of the Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research, the International Psychoanalytic Association, and the American Psychological Association. She was one of the first non-medical analysts to be elected to the International Psychoanalytic Association.

Dr. Bond grew up in Philadelphia, where she obtained her undergraduate degree in psychology from Temple University, and following voluntary military service, moved to New York, where she earned a graduated with a degree in psychology from Columbia University.

A longtime resident of New York City, she lived for nearly a dozen years in south Florida, and five years in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. She now lives in Allentown, PA.