

THE BIG CONVERSATION

Eva Longoria, actress and Honorary Chair of the Global Gift Gala, joins Karen Ruimy, dancer and philanthropist, to talk about Eva's beliefs and values, and what makes her feel spiritually rich

Eva Longoria

“I don't care if I fail. Perfectionism prevents progress. People stop themselves because they won't even try. I'd rather my guiding principle was success, achievement and hope”

PHOTOGRAPHS JEFF LIPSKY/CPI SYNDICATION



>>> Last year, Eva Longoria invited me to co-chair the Global Gift Gala that she organises every year in nine cities around the world including Paris, Cannes, London, Marbella, LA and Mexico. Since its beginnings in 2011, the Global Gift Gala has benefited more than 10 foundations and raised over \$12m. Last year, the Gala honoured The Great Initiative (thegreatinitiative.org.uk), the charity I established with Mariella Frostrup, fighting for gender-equality around the world.



Eva Longoria with friend and colleague Karen Ruimy

The gala presents the work of the charity it is supporting and part of the proceeds are generously given to it. The gala is the epitome of glamour and entertainment and Eva throws all her enthusiastic energy into it. She presents the people and the causes, she helps at the auction – and boy, is she good at it. She puts her name and her fame to the service of the gala. She usually invites other big names to attract donors, too. This year at the gala in London, Victoria Beckham will be honoured for her charity work.

It is a fantastic philanthropic venture. Spending time with Eva, I discover that she is a truly passionate philanthropist and is dedicated to many causes. She finances schools for disabled children in the US; she became a public figure for the Latin-American community, and was an official supporter of the Obama presidential campaign. Now, she is passionate about dedicating her foundation to gender-equality, which is why we work so well together. Here, I pick her brains on what drives her and what nourishes her.

BIOGRAPHY

Born March 1975 in Corpus Christi, Texas
Wins Miss Corpus Christi beauty pageant, 1998
First break Lands regular role on *The Young and the Restless*, 2001
Breakthrough role As Gabrielle on *Desperate Housewives*, 2004
Awards ALMA for Person of the Year, 2006; Golden Globe nomination for Best Performance by an Actress in a Television Series, 2006
Relationships Married actor Tyler Christopher (2002 to 2004) and basketball star Tony Parker (2008 to 2011)
Academic Completes master's degree in political science from California State University, Northridge, May 2013
Philanthropy Founded the Eva Longoria Foundation, 2012; Honorary Chair of Global Gift Gala, 2013

Karen: From the very first time we met, we bonded over our spirituality. I was struck by how openly you talk about your beliefs.

Eva: Yes, I have strong spiritual beliefs. The one question everyone asks me is: what advice would I give others to live a fulfilled life? Meditate, I say! I was very blessed because I learnt how to meditate with Deepak Chopra. I was going through my divorce at the time and there were a lot of changes happening at *Desperate Housewives* and he told me that I needed to meditate every day and centre myself more.

Karen: How did you find it?

Eva: At first, I thought 'no way!' I'm

a busy woman; I work and there's no way I can find time to meditate. I can't clear my mind. But I went to the Chopra Center in San Diego and learnt the history of meditation and how this wisdom has been around for thousands of years. I learnt to centre my energy.

Karen: How often do you practise meditation?

Eva: Every day for 20 minutes in the morning. I don't meditate at night though; I just like to wind down when I get into bed and I don't want to associate meditation with sleep.

Karen: Did religion play a part in your upbringing?

Eva: Yes, I had a traditional Catholic upbringing in Texas and I was very sheltered. When I moved to LA in the '90s, I suddenly came face-to-face with Kabbalists and Buddhists for the first time in my life, and I was very curious about different theologies. I wanted to know what they believed and why. Even though I may not share the same beliefs, I think they are all different ladders that take us to the same place.

Karen: What values do you live your life by?

Eva: My golden rule is: do unto others as you want them to do unto you. I'm



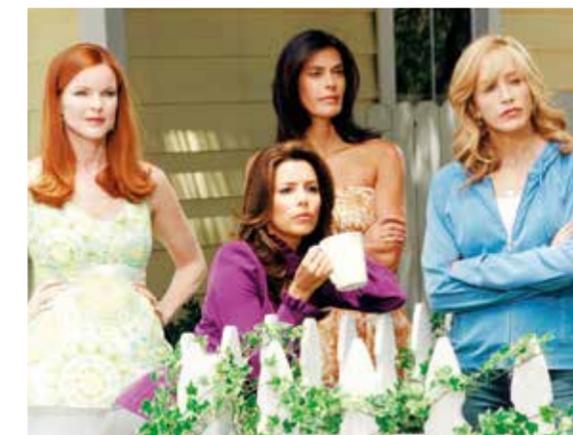
Eva with Victoria Beckham at the Global Gift Gala in London in 2013



Receiving the humanitarian award at the Taormina Film Festival in June this year



With musician and actor Ricky Martin and rapper 50 Cent at the Gala in Dubai in 2013



Eva with fellow co-stars Marcia Cross, Teri Hatcher and Felicity Huffman in *Desperate Housewives*



Eva presenting an award at the Global Gift Gala in Paris in May this year

also a great believer in potential. People don't understand their potential and they underestimate themselves. I had a lot of people tell me while I was growing up that I had potential – and that worked a miracle! That's why I think mentoring is very important. I was lucky, I grew up in a family of strong, smart women who said: 'you are going to get your education and you're going to be successful.'

Karen: I think everyone on this planet comes with a sole purpose and the potential to express it – and nobody can take that away from you. We need to learn to listen to that inner voice. But you need to use it like a muscle.

Eva: You need to exercise it.

Karen: Exactly!

Eva: It's not that I don't stumble and get it wrong. I stumble all the time, but I think the difference between me and someone else is that I'm not afraid of failure.

Karen: The good thing is, it doesn't show!

Eva: I don't care if I fail. Perfectionism prevents progress. People stop themselves because they won't even try. You live with fear guiding your life, as opposed to hope, and so you fear failure. I'd rather my guiding principle was success, achievement and hope. I've believed this since I was little. If I was going to be a cheerleader, I wanted to be head cheerleader. If I'm going to play clarinet, I'll be the first chair of the clarinet.

Karen: But many of us don't become successful straight away. You need to learn the dance steps or how to play the clarinet. What if at the beginning, someone says to you: 'your cheerleading isn't very good?'

Eva: I have a really thick skin. I love to get things right and I love being organised, but I don't let perfectionism prevent my progress.

Karen: Have you ever failed?

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PHOTOGRAPHS: REX FEATURES

>>> **Eva:** Gosh, all the time. And every time I've failed, I've grown. I know that sounds like a cliché, but in Catholicism, we say the tree is being shaken to its foundation, so the leaves fall off and all you're left with are the roots. But the leaves grow again and all you were doing was shedding the dead weight. They say when you create gold, the impurities rise to the top and you have to ladle them out. You have to go through intense fire to remove these impurities, so the fire is the trial of life, and often it's the only way you remove impurities.

Karen: Often we become complacent and have to dig inside to find the next piece of gold.

Eva: You won't have that self-reflection unless you go through something tough. But I think women in particular find it hard because of the social construct of gender that society has put upon us: 'you should be this/your limits are this/this is the road you should take as a woman'.

Karen: We need women who are leaders – strong and authentic. However, so often, the way we are portrayed focuses on our looks or our clothes. Do you ever get fed up of the superficial world of celebrity?

Eva: I think it's a misconception that our entertainment industry is superficial. Yes, there are the tabloids and the fashion and red carpets, but I think entertainment has a place in the world.

Karen: Storytelling is very important.

Eva: Yes, storytelling and creativity. Innovation comes from creativity. If you don't have that aspect, our society will suffer. We need the arts to understand abstract thinking and how we approach the world. The world is not a linear place.

Karen: I've read that the future belongs to the storytellers, because in a world where we are bombarded by information, anyone who can grab our attention will be powerful. Politics and storytelling could be a very powerful combination.

Eva: Ronald Reagan was an actor before he became president. There's a great biography of him called *The Role Of A Lifetime*, which I loved.

Karen: Do you have any aspirations in politics?

Eva: No. Despite studying my masters in politics, I think there's so much you can do as a citizen that's way more powerful than any politician. Every great movement in the last 100 years in the US has not begun with politicians. From women's right to vote, to the civil rights movement and freedom of slaves – all of that came from the people themselves. It wasn't a politician; it was a movement of people that created that change.

Karen: When we support each other, we can all be very powerful.

Eva: I've been asked if I ever get starstruck by meeting

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famous people but I get starstruck by real people who have done amazing things. I get young kids coming up to me, saying: 'I want to be famous just like you.' And I say: 'go and be an astronaut then or a doctor.' There are many ways to be famous. You don't have to be an actor. I'd rather be famous for something ground-breaking that contributes to society.

Karen: But you are contributing massively already. Look at what you're doing with this gala.

Eva: A little bit at a time. My main passion and my charity is based on the idea that the only way we can all make our way through life is education. The only way to economic mobility is by having an education. I love studying. I'm very curious about life. I became interested in studying politics when we had the whole immigration debate in the US and I wanted to know the history – why it's so complicated, why it's a problem. By educating ourselves, we can be part of the solution. And I loved going to university. I was the annoying person in class, raising my hand all the time, asking questions. It was fun.

Karen: It's fantastic to see you build a life founded on your beliefs and values. You express your gifts, but you find the time to give back by creating this amazing charity. It is fascinating to see you living a full life between art, charity, political involvement, friendship, family and always so cheery and smiling, giving energy to all those around you. A life lesson in the flesh!

Eva: Thank you, Karen. I think we all need good leaders. I'm not talking about politicians but community leaders and charity founders. We all need to step up.

The Global Gift Gala will be held on 17 November in London. Visit globalgiftfoundation.org or follow the gala on Twitter @globalgiftgala. Karen Ruimy will be appearing in her new dance show ZIK'R at Union Chapel, London on 21 November. For more information, see karenruimy.com.

