



Of her time spent on the boat she and husband **Phil Donahue** own, **Thomas** says, "We love it more than anything else. Phil is the captain and I'm the crew. He yells at me morning, noon, and night."

Marlo Thomas

Who's That Girl?

by Emily Brooke

Personal Picks

Pet Cause: St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

Woman's Best Friend:

Three golden retrievers: Huey, Dewey, and Louie

Comfort Foods:

Hummus and Spaghetti

Bedside Reading:

Biographies; "I'm reading Brando's book right now, and I've read everything about Winston Churchill."

Designers Of Choice:

Ralph Lauren, Donna Karan, and Giorgio Armani

Anne Marie (*That Girl*) of 2002:

Jennifer Aniston's character, Rachel, on *Friends*. "She is single, speaks to her generation, and also leads her generation."

Favorite Actors:

Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift, Al Pacino, Robert De Niro, Sean Penn, and John Cassavetes

Favorite Actresses: Meryl Streep,

Katharine Hepburn, Vanessa Redgrave, Gwyneth Paltrow, Jennifer Aniston, Jennifer Jason Leigh, and Mary-Louise Parker

Person She'd Most Like To Work With:

Director Sam Mendes

Comedienne Role Models:

Carole Lombard and Jean Arthur. "They were very real and romantic, representing sort of the feminine side of comedy."

Top On-Air Television Shows:

Donahue, *Friends*, *Law & Order*, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*

Music To Her Ears:

Dave Matthews and The Beatles

Best Purchase:

"A Mercedes that I bought in 1971 and still have."

Fitness Regimen:

Running three or four miles five days a week and lifting weights

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When **Marlo Thomas** was invited to the White House for the first time, with her father, actor **Danny Thomas**, her slip fell out from under her dress. "I was sixteen years old, and all dolled up for this special occasion. I was wearing a big crinoline slip and without warning, it dropped to the ground," she recalls, blushing at the mere thought. "I said, 'Daddy, what do I do?' And he replied, coolly, 'Step out of it and walk away.'"

Perhaps it was this humbling experience that taught **Thomas** to be a survivor and planted the seeds for her extensive career as an actress, producer, author, and social activist. Perhaps it was in her blood.

This evening, fresh from her performance as one-half of the cast of **Anne Nelson's** off-Broadway play *The Guys*, **Thomas**, who shares homes in Southern Connecticut and New York City with her husband, newsman **Phil Donahue**, is dressed in a black t-shirt and knee-length, multi-colored skirt, which flatter her petite frame. She wears minimal jewelry—hoop earrings, a silver watch, and a gold wedding band on her left ring finger. Open-toed black sandals expose neatly manicured red toes. And her barely there make-up and perfectly placed blond highlights showcase a bright, welcoming smile.

Over a small salad (she's having dinner with **Donahue** later), red wine, and biscotti, at *Arqua*, an intimate Northern Italian bistro in TriBeCa, **Thomas** is easy to talk to, discussing her life as the daughter of a television star, her own career, why she never wanted to get married, and her new best-selling book.

Born **Margaret Thomas** in a suburb of Detroit and raised in Beverly Hills, she attended USC, where she studied to be an English teacher. But teaching was not her passion. "I always really enjoyed acting. I was in all of the school plays and received the best actress awards, but my father discouraged it," she says in her trademark raspy voice. "He just thought acting was a really rough career, especially for a woman. We were raised in Beverly Hills, sent to good schools, and he wanted me to be a teacher or a senator."

Undeterred by her father's concerns, **Thomas** pursued acting. A college graduate, she headed to New York City to study her craft and finally got her break when **Mike Nichols** cast her as the lead in the London

production of **Neil Simon's** *Barefoot in the Park*.

But it was prior to this role that **Thomas** unknowingly embarked on a journey toward the role that would catapult her into superstardom and immortalize her as a television icon: *That Girl*. "I had made a pilot for ABC, in which I played a model married to a young man. When I screen tested for it, there were five blondes up for the part. I thought, 'Why would I get it if they have five blondes?' And then I got the part, and it didn't sell," she says with a knowing smile. "But my agent said that the head of the network would like to see me. He called me in and said, 'You could be a TV star.'"

"He started sending me pilot ideas, and they were all the same old thing—the wife of somebody, the secretary of somebody, the daughter of somebody. So I suggested doing a show about a young woman like me." And that's how *That Girl* was born.

"Although we made the pilot, nobody would commit to it for five years. Finally, I formed my own company, *Daisy Productions*, after my favorite flower at the time. I produced and starred in the show."

The first series on television to portray an independent single woman living alone, *That Girl*, debuted in 1966 and ran for five seasons until 1971, paving the way for *The Doris Day Show*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and *Julia and Rhoda*. "I was just a young actress of twenty-two and young women all over the country started writing to me about their problems. From teenage pregnancy to spousal abuse, it was something I hadn't expected. I tried to find places for them to go for help, only to discover that there weren't many," she recalls. "It really politicized me and turned me into a feminist. I became part of the women's movement."

A living personification of everything she fought for,

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Marlo Thomas

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Thomas ran her show and signed the checks. "I commanded the total respect of the network and my colleagues, just like any male producer. However, I did not take a screen credit as producer, because at the time, women didn't have that kind of power, and I was sort of intimidated by it all. It took me years to realize that I was embarrassed by the power. Today, a woman in her twenties wouldn't think that way."

But, Thomas is quick to point out that women still have obstacles to overcome. "Powerful women in today's society are vilified. Look at the backlash against **Martha Stewart**. She is more hated than any of the men involved, who did much worse things," she says, pounding her fist on the table. "There's this contempt for women who get to the top. Look at the way people go after **Hillary Clinton**. I admire Hillary. I'm not her best friend, but I am a friend of hers. She has made mistakes, but she doesn't deserve the amount of criticism that she receives. There are plenty of men in Congress who are more flawed. They don't get this kind of crap. I used to tell a joke in my speeches that, a man has to be Joe McCarthy to be called ruthless, but a woman just has to just put you on hold."

Despite the obstacles that face powerful women, Thomas has successfully combined her career of producing and performing. She has appeared on Broadway and off-Broadway stages, in television films and sitcoms (most recently *Friends* and *Ally McBeal*), in feature films such as *Playing Mona Lisa* and *The Real Blonde*, and produced, with her partners, **Carole Hart** and **Kathie Berlin**, *Leap of Faith* and *Taken Away*.

But success on stage, screen, and television wasn't enough for Thomas. "*Free To Be* came about when I was reading to my four-year-old niece. I said to my sister, 'These are the same stories that you and I read, the same old stuff about how the prince comes along and makes life okay.' So I decided to put something together myself, to show little girls that they can make it without a prince. I just had in mind a little record. I had no idea that it was going to turn out to be this phenomenon."

She created, produced, and co-hosted the groundbreaking television specials *Free To*

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Marlo Thomas

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ment, and the way she explores the material. You expect a certain degree of professionalism from high caliber actors, but her preparation and openness to what's happening in the moment, are exceptional." He adds, "When I look into her eyes during a performance, sometimes I'm afraid I'll get caught. They are like deep wells and if you fall in, you may not be able to crawl out."

Even though Donahue has not been able to see the play because he is busy taping his own show, she encouraged him to return to television. "We discussed it, but I really thought it was his decision. I didn't push him, because it's a big commitment, every night, five nights a week," she says. "It was just apparent that he had this need to debate, and he's the right person to do it. Phil's a very informed person. In the total time that he's been off-air, he's been watching C-SPAN, CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, NBC, and CBS. He reads the *Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Observer* every day. You know how some people can't miss their soap opera? Phil runs to the newspaper like that. If he can't get today's paper in whatever strange country we're in, the man has a fit," she laughs.

"But wherever we are, we're in this great place. Our marriage is based on our need for each other. We're physically attracted to each other, like being together, and tell each other secrets. Phil is the most

decent person I've ever known other than myself. He's kind, loving, very curious, and he has a good heart just like my dad."

In Donahue's eyes, "Marlo is still this Catholic school girl. She blesses herself in turbulence on the airplane. She's got her eye on God and she always will." **WAG**

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Marlo shares "very close" relationships with her siblings Terre and Tony.

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Biggest Splurge:

Landscaping; "I'm constantly saying, 'Let's just put one more cherry tree here.'"

Ideal Vacation Spot:

Italy; Venice, Florence, and Capri

Favorite Flower:

Pink Peonies

Makeup Tip:

"Apply very lightly. Show as much skin as possible."

Favorite Fragrance:

Rive Gauche

Cherished Childhood Memento:

"I still have this little ivory statue of the Blessed Mother that my godmother, Loretta Young, gave me when I was twelve years old for my confirmation. I take it with me everywhere in my travels, even though the little hands have broken off."

Most Surprising Trait:

"I'm very gullible. My husband says to me, 'Why are you always in a constant state of surprise? At your age, don't you think you should have figured out that everybody's not going to do what they say they're going to do?' But, I can't grab it."