

FRAN DRESCHER

# Taking Back My Life

AFTER YEARS OF  
BURYING HER  
PAIN, THE STAR  
SAYS SHE HAS  
FINALLY FOUND  
INNER PEACE

By **CHRISTINA  
DUGAN**

**Her Happy Place**  
“As life unfolds, you get wiser and  
more grounded,” says Drescher  
(with her dog Samson near  
her Malibu home).

*Photographs by*  
**CHRISTIAN WITKIN**

Fran Drescher isn't easily ruffled. Take, for instance, her approach to notoriously horrific Los Angeles traffic. Curled up in the plush master bedroom of her beachside Malibu home, the actress and comedian remains philosophical. "You could get road rage and think, 'Oh God, I've got to get to where I'm going!' Or you can think as Buddhists do: Look around, take that in, and maybe see something that will surprise you," she says. "It helps you to accept life as it presents itself and be grateful for it."

Yet finding calm amid chaos certainly didn't come easily for Drescher, whose unmistakable laugh and thick New York accent have brought joy to fans for decades. Reflecting on her darkest moments—including a terrifying rape in 1985; a very public divorce from her husband of 21 years, Peter Marc Jacobson, in 1999 (after which he publicly revealed he is gay); and a uterine cancer diagnosis in 2000—Drescher, 62, says comedy was her way of masking her hidden pain and insecurities. But now Drescher—who is starring on NBC's new comedy series *Indebted* and developing a stage musical adaptation of her hit '90s sitcom *The Nanny* for Broadway—says she's taking her life back one day at a time. "In order for me to be well-rounded, I have to sometimes make it about me," she says.

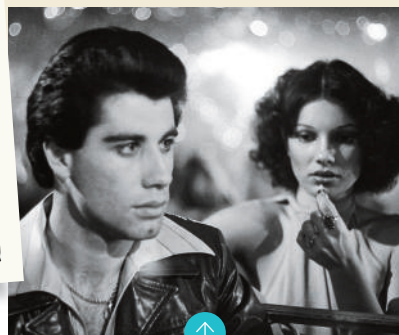


CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: RON GALELLA/GETTY IMAGES; DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/GETTY IMAGES; TRAE PATTON/NBC/EVERETT; MAHMOUD/NOBIL; SHUTTERSTOCK; SEHR POPPEL/EVERETT COLLECTION LIBRARY

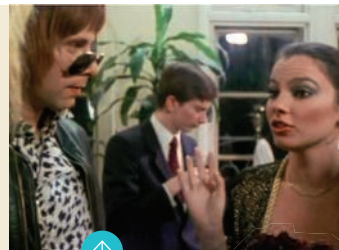
## Rise to Stardom



**Meant to Shine**  
"I was always intrigued by acting," says Drescher (in 1975), who studied theater in high school.



**Saturday Night Fever**  
In her first notable role, in 1977, Drescher as Connie asked John Travolta's character about his skills in bed.



**This Is Spinal Tap**  
Drescher played publicist Bobbi Flekman in the 1984 film—and reprised the role on *The Nanny* years later.



**The Nanny**  
Drescher became a household name as Fran Fine for six seasons (from 1993 to '99). "It's okay that I don't have Meryl Streep's career," she says.



**Indebted**  
"It's funny and has a great energy," says Drescher, who plays a grandmother named Debbie on the new NBC series, premiering Feb. 6.

"I have to be able to ask for help. I have to be vulnerable. I can't just be strong."

Having grown up in Queens with a father, Morty, who worked with computers, and a mother, Sylvia, who worked behind the cosmetics counter at a local drugstore, Drescher says her "joyful" home shifted the moment her older sister Nadine fell horribly ill (Drescher declined to elaborate on the nature of the illness). "That pivoted the family's focus and balance onto [my sister]," says Drescher, who didn't want to be "an additional burden" to her parents. "At a very early age I got the message to feel bad if something was about me. And that's probably why I'm an actress, because at the end of the day, nobody becomes an actor if they don't on some level want to say, 'Look at me, Ma.'"

Determined to find purpose and a sense of self, Drescher chose to follow in the footsteps of television icons such as *I Love Lucy's* Lucille Ball and *I Dream of Jeannie's* Barbara Eden and started landing minor TV and film roles, including her first major break, in *Saturday Night Fever* alongside John Travolta. "I decided I should try and make my living out of something that comes really easily to me and doesn't feel like work," says Drescher, who was once told by a theater teacher she would have to change her high-pitched, nasal voice if she ever wanted to be successful in the industry. But in 1993 Drescher (along with Jacobson) created *The Nanny*, which she wrote, produced, directed and starred in as Fran Fine; the show wound



**Love Not Lost**  
"We were best friends," says Drescher of ex-husband and still close friend Jacobson (right, in May 2019). "We had the same dreams and made each other laugh."



up running for six years. "That definitely changed me significantly," Drescher says. "I wanted to do it all, and I did. It was a very fertile time creatively."

Despite the success, Drescher was dealing with a secret, unimaginable pain. In 1985, at age 28, the actress and a friend were raped at gunpoint, while Jacobson, then already Drescher's husband of seven years, was forced to watch. "After the rape, my friends knew, but I couldn't even call my parents and tell them. I had my sister tell them," she recalls. "I never wanted to be any additional stress for my parents, having seen how traumatized they were from when my sister was young and having health issues. So I'd go into my room and be by myself and quiet for hours. I didn't want to ever have to tell them something was wrong with me."

From there Drescher and Jacobson's marriage spiraled downward over the course of the next 14 years. "I wasn't feeling as happy as I thought I'd feel with money and fame and creative control,"

she says. "Peter started to have control issues that I found somewhat suffocating, and only in hindsight do we now understand that he was working so hard to control his authentic self, his true orientation." Two years after the marriage ended, Jacobson told Drescher he was gay, but their love for one another never faded. "I now lovingly refer to Peter as my gay ex-husband," she says. Drescher, who met Jacobson in high school, compares leaving the relationship to "walking through fire." "I had never done anything for myself that was against the will of somebody else that I cared about," she says. "And that was part of my problem. I kind of had a back seat in my own life. I was making everybody else happy but not really myself."

One year after her divorce was finalized, Drescher was diagnosed with uterine cancer—a diagnosis that required an immediate radical hysterectomy, which also opened her eyes. Her old habit of not asking for help "became like a real mental block, and I had to break through it," she says. "I think that getting cancer was my opportunity, because I couldn't do it alone. It opened me up to realizing that helping and supporting and advising other people gives you a false sense that you have your s--- together. But that's really the distraction of it all." Drescher says she was able to "gain a lot of clarity" in therapy: "I was in such crisis and feeling feelings that I never really allowed myself and saying out loud things that I felt guilty about just thinking, for my growth as

a human being. Now I'm not really obsessed with being the best, most needless, ever-there caregiver. Turning pain into purpose pivots you back into the driver's seat."

**'Everything that happens to you is an opportunity'**  
—FRAN DRESCHER

Now relying on her faith in Buddhism and the lessons she's learned has helped conquer more than gridlock: Drescher says she has a newfound love for the woman she's become. "Getting really connected to myself has been a great journey," she says. "Now I'm not even feeling like I have to be in a relationship, because I'm in a relationship with myself. And it's going quite well." ●