

SOCIETY

The fascinating life of Neile Adams, Isabel Preysler's aunt who fell in love with Steve McQueen

If the world knows Neile Adams, it is because of his marriage to Steve McQueen, although his biography hides a surprising relationship with Isabel Preysler, who turns 68 today.

BY JAVIER MENDOZA

FEBRUARY 18, 2019



The life of **Ruby Neilam Salvador Adams** (Manila, 1932), alias **Neile Adams** (pronounced Nil), dancer, actress and wife of 16 years of **Steve McQueen** (and mother of their two children), is pure film material. In fact, it is one of the first comments she makes about her from her house in Los Angeles when we begin this interview over the phone.

“Now I am in the process of turning my story into a movie.. I work every day on the script and I have a writer helping me. It's very strange looking for an actress to play myself,” she laughs. Neile Adams's laugh sounds joyous and deep, as if she were spending a few moments contemplating the ironies of fate. She also comments that she is delighted with the possibility of doing part of this interview in Spanish, because there are things that she can only explain in our language and she does not have so many friends to chat with in the language of her childhood.

To the rest of the world, Neile Adams is the long-suffering wife of one of the most attractive Hollywood actors of all time. However, for the Spanish public, she also has an unexpected genetic connection with **Isabel Preysler** . Isabel's grandfather, **José Arrastia** , was a Spanish landowner based in the Philippines with a reputation as a *playboy* , who, not content with having 10 children with his legitimate wife, **Teodorica Reinares** , accumulated offspring beyond marriage. Neile Adams is the product of the relationship that Arrastia had with the dancer **Carmen Salvador** , and this makes her Isabel Preysler's aunt.

It is Neile herself who, without waiting for questions about the matter, brings up the subject openly and in perfect Spanish: **“ Do you know that Isabel Preysler is my niece? Of course she does not like to talk about this, it is a forbidden subject .** I never knew my father. My mother told me that she didn't know he was married until she got pregnant. That was her when she found out that she had a family in the other part of town. They belonged to the high society of the Philippines and my mother did not want to know anything more about him. It is curious, yes, that my grandson Steven R. McQueen is nailed to Enrique Iglesias, but handsome! ”, She affirms with a laugh.





Concentration camp

In the thirties of the last century, Carmen Salvador, Neile's mother, was a dazzling dancer, **renamed Miami**, who galvanized the stages of the Far East with a dance of her own in which she mixed traditional Polynesian and Malay movements with a few drops of flamenco (so that later they say of Rosalía). According to Neile herself in her memoir *De Ella My husband, my friend* (AuthorHouse, 2006), Miami spent much of her time working in nightclubs and delegated her upbringing to a very special member of the family. family. “The person who took care of me was a man named Binoy, whom my grandfather picked up from the streets of Manila because he had lost his family and was lost in the world. It's funny that **this story of an absent father was what most united me with Steve, because he lived through a similar circumstance**”.

When Neile is asked about his childhood memories in the Philippines, he immediately talks about **the war and the Japanese occupation in 1941**. Due to his mother's ties to the guerrillas and an alleged romantic relationship with the American general **Douglas MacArthur**, the family ended up in a concentration camp. “They sent us there, but don't think that life was better outside the camp walls. In those years we learned to survive by stealing food from the garbage and enduring hunger without complaining. I guess I felt immortal, like almost all children. She spent the day imitating Shirley Temple. There, in the long hours of the concentration camp, was where I found the vocation to dance”.

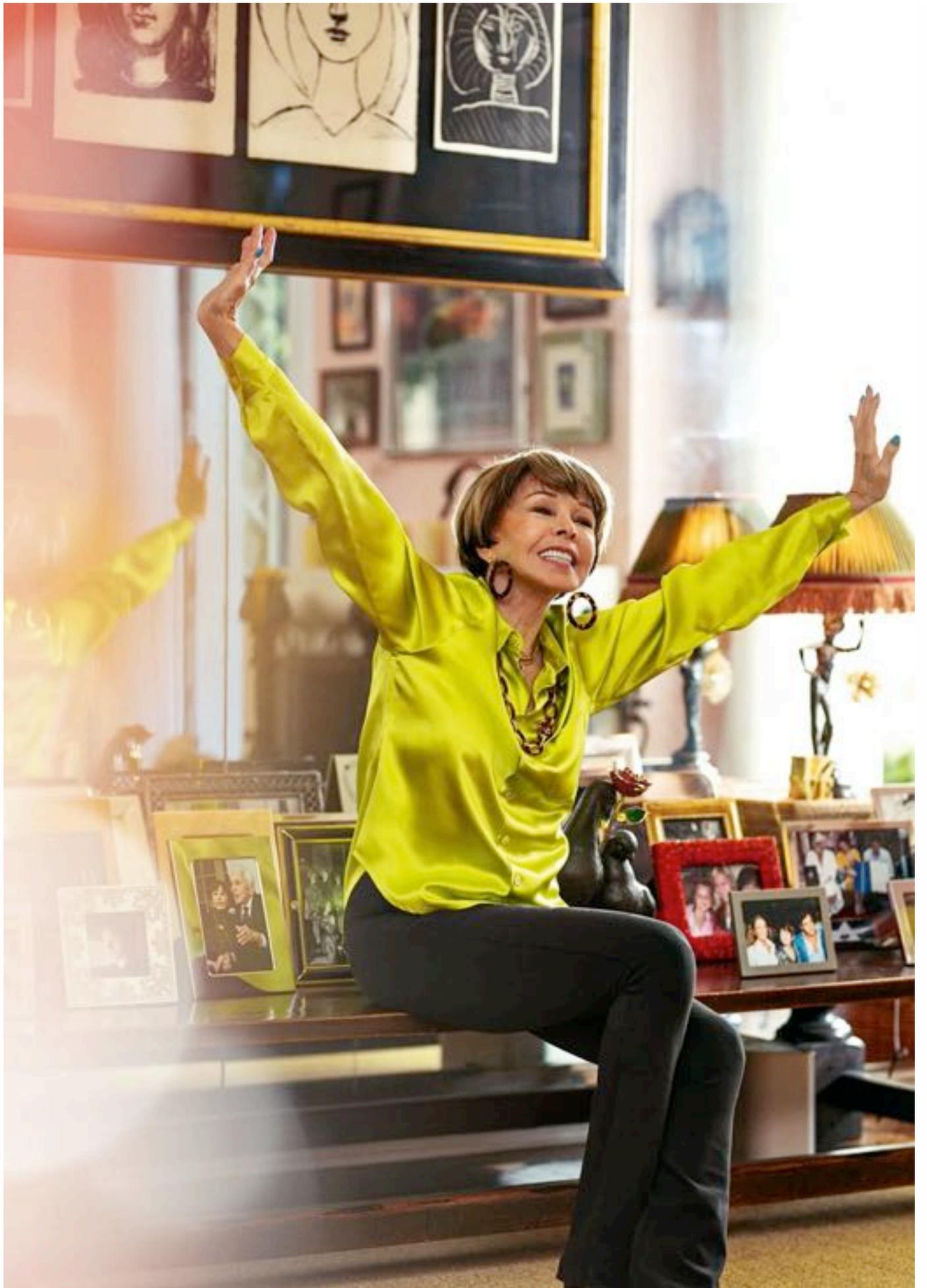
ADVERTISING



At the end of the war, his mother never got on stage again and went into business after meeting a New York lawyer, also married, named Victor Rodgers. **Her mother and daughter moved to Hong Kong and later to New York.** “My mother told me that she was too shy to work in show business, but at the age of 17 I did an internship in a theater and decided to be an actress. The first thing I did was change my last name from Salvador, because **at that time a Spanish name condemned you to playing the role of a maid or a young lady.** My mother told me that my father's middle name was Adams. So I kept it and then I became Neile Adams.”

It was the fall of 1956 when Neile met Steve McQueen . She performed on the Broadway stages, receiving rave reviews. McQueen, for his part, had led an erratic life, marked by the abandonment of his father and an alcoholic mother, who was about to turn him into a juvenile delinquent. He was saved by the discipline of the army, where he enlisted as a Marine. Back in New York, he was one of the young blond actors who were looking for his niche in the city's theater scene. “I was rehearsing a play called The Pajama Game and when I went out to the street I saw a group of vaguely familiar people, I approached them and **I was struck by a pretty attractive blond boy who said to me: 'Hello, you are very pretty' Neil remembers.**“I looked at him and said, 'Oh, thank you very much. You are also handsome', and that was the thing. For a few months, wherever she went, he would appear. Clearly, he was chasing me [laughs]. We started dating and four months later we got married. When we had our daughter, Terry, in 1959, I decided to stop acting because it was so difficult to live in California and work in New York. Then, a year later, our son Chad was born and it was impossible to return to the stage.

Originally, Neile Adams was the one bringing the money home and he talked his agent into giving Steve McQueen his first shot. It was not easy, because the man who would come to be baptized as The King of Cool, or, what is the same, the prototype of masculinity par excellence, dragged along with a terrible insecurity. “ **He had many demons inside. As a child he suffered because he thought that nobody loved him.** When Steve started, I helped him shape his record; he was obsessed with looking like Marlon Brando and Paul Newman.”





©RICHARD RAMOS

The wife of a star

Beginning with the success of the 1959 television series *Randall*, the vigilante, Steve McQueen's fame skyrocketed internationally, forever changing the fate of the family. **"Steve was a real star, which is not just about being a good actor, it's something else,"** says Adams. "The stars are the ones that fill the cinemas regardless of the film because people go to see them. There are currently only three male stars in Hollywood: **Bradley Cooper, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Tom Cruise.**"

In this way, Adams becomes part of the Hollywood aristocracy almost overnight as the wife of the most desired man of his time. A circumstance that will mark her marriage, because the girls literally threw themselves at her feet. **"It was terrible. It became a big problem between us. But the truth is that we had a real relationship until the end.** I saw him as a big boy with a split personality. On the one hand, he was a self-destructive juvenile delinquent, and on the other, a loving father and husband."

In addition, all this coincided with the sexual revolution environment of the sixties. "That's where the whole problem came from, with the hippies and the flower children," recalls Adams. "At that time everything was free love, free sex. **Steve was picking up girls all the time. Sometimes he would drive alone for hours on end to pick up hitchhikers. When I told my mother about the problems I was having with Steve, she told me: 'You make your bed and then you lie in it'.**"

The hippie idyll in Hollywood ended tragically on August 9, 1969, when several members of the Manson family murdered the actress Sharon Tate, the pregnant wife of Roman Polanski, and everyone who was in her house. **Neile Adams and Steve McQueen were about to appear on the death list.** "I didn't want to go to Sharon [Tate's] house, but Steve did. In the end, at the last moment, he met a girl and left with her. This saved his life. That changed us all. Steve started carrying a gun everywhere and he bought me a small one so I would always have it in my bag".

One of the Hollywood characters Neile remembers most fondly is **Bruce Lee** . “I always liked him and it made me very funny that he was so clear that he was going to be a star. **We met him when he was acting in the *Batman* TV series and then Steve hired him as his martial arts trainer .**

Due to Steve's constant infidelities and dalliances with drugs, Neile decided to separate from her husband in the early seventies . However, once again, she **gave her another chance** during the film *The 24 Hours of Le Mans* . A shoot that turned into a real nightmare. "One night, she asked me if she had been with anyone during the time we had been apart," she recalls Neile. “In the end, I told her that she had met an interpreter, **Maximilian Schell** . Steve went crazy and put a gun to my head: 'Why did he have to be an actor?' he was yelling at me. He never thought that I could leave him.”

In 1972, when McQueen fell in love with **Ali MacGraw** , his co-star in *The Getaway* , they had already signed divorce papers. “ **Steve told me about his affair long before the press found out.** At first, I feared for the reaction of Ali's husband, **Robert Evans** , then the most powerful man in Hollywood after producing *The Godfather*. Over time I became very fond of Ali and I felt that Steve did not behave well with her when they broke up.

After separating from her husband, Neile planned her return to show business, but found that hardly anyone remembered her. "I mentioned it to a producer friend who told me: 'You used to dance, right?' Still, she didn't mind starting over.

A wise aunt in Hollywood

At 87 years old, Neile Adams' voice conveys an extraordinary joviality and a mental capacity worthy of praise. She shows that she has reflected on her life to find a way to understand and forgive the mistakes that plagued her in the past. In fact, chatting with her is the closest thing to having a wise and perky aunt in Hollywood with whom to share experiences. When asked about the secret of her vitality, Neile doesn't hesitate: “The most important thing is to stay active so you never get bored. **I continue to do voice exercises every day and now I am preparing a cabaret show that I will present shortly in Paris**”.

Steve McQueen died in 1980 in Ciudad Juárez (Mexico), where he had gone to undergo a cancer operation that had been discouraged in the United States. “That was crazy. **The only thing that consoles me is that he didn't have to live through the death**

of our daughter Terry in 1998, I think he would never have gotten over it." His eldest daughter died of respiratory failure resulting from complications after a liver transplant and left behind a 10-year-old daughter, Molly.

He was 39 years old. **Chad** , the couple's other son, for a time followed in his father's footsteps in the world of acting and acted in the movie *Karate Kid* . Currently, he is engaged in professional car racing.

For his part, Adams rebuilt his life with the director of political campaigns **Alvin Toffel** , who died in 2005. "He was a very good man and he loved me very much, but the relationship was too peaceful," he laughs. Now, in addition to working on her own biopic, Adams continues to do her dance routines, care for her grandchildren Molly, Steven, Chase and Madison and hang out with her friends. ** "Soon I will be going to the birthday of my dear friend Kirk Douglas, who is turning 102 years old and his head works perfectly." **

We leave for the end the matter of his relationship with Isabel Preysler. Neile knows perfectly well that she is famous in Spain, that she was married to **Julio Iglesias** , he even names her as Isabel Boyer, but, on the other hand, he does not believe that the socialite knows anything about her. In some way, the stories of both are like the sides of the same coin. “ **If one day by chance I ran into Isabel, I wouldn't say anything to her, and I don't think she has anything to say to me** . For her family I am a taboo subject, it is possible that she was not very happy to meet me ”. And she laughs again.

TOPICS ISABEL PREYSLER

YOU MAY ALSO BE INTERESTED IN

ROYALTY

Doña Sofía resumes her official agenda in an act with Princess Irene and Isabel Preysler



Queen Sofia yesterday attended her first institutional act of 2022 at the National Auditorium, where she presided over a benefit concert for scholarships.

BY PD



SOCIETY

Tamara Falcó, having a snack at Isabel Preysler's house with Boris Izaguirre and Carrie Bradshaw's heels

The Marchioness of Griñón is in luck after signing with Netflix to make a documentary about her day to day.

BY NURIA HERNANDEZ



LUXURY

Isabel Preysler, spectacular in a red dress by Lola Li (reduced) on her concert night with Queen Sofía

He attended the benefit concert of the Musical Youth of Madrid chaired by the Queen Emeritus together with Mario Vargas Llosa.

BY MARTA MARTINEZ TATO



ROYALTY

Queen Elizabeth II tests positive for covid with mild symptoms

Buckingham has confirmed the contagion of the 95-year-old monarch and his intention to "continue with light tasks in Windsor during the next week".

BY AS

