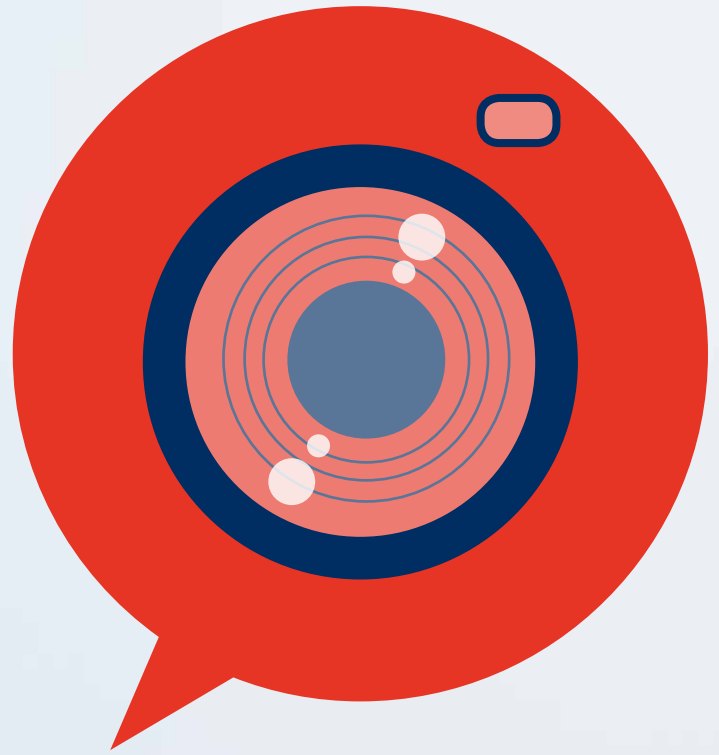


# A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS



## AN INTERVIEW WITH SHARI BELAFONTE

by James Zervios

**I**n this article, I had the privilege to interview American photographer, actress, writer, singer and former model – Shari Belafonte. Widely-known as the daughter of Harry Belafonte, famed musician and actor, Shari is best known for her role as Julie Gillette on the popular television series, “Hotel.” While her onscreen accomplishments are many, Shari has spent just as much time behind the camera. She is an accomplished photographer, commissioned by various magazines including *Discovery Channel* and *National Geographic Magazine*, and has staged photograph exhibitions in major cities throughout the United States.



**“I KNOW I AM  
MAKING THIS  
DIFFERENCE  
FOR MY  
HEALTH!”**



*photo: ©Mark Andrew Gonzales*

One thing that many folks do not know about Shari is that she's recently taken charge of her weight and health, and it all started with her talking to her doctor about her weight. As you will see in this interview, Shari, like many Americans, realized her weight was impacting her health and made the decision to do something about it.

### **WHEN DID YOU REALIZE THAT YOU NEEDED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR WEIGHT?**

It was a combination of things. When I was younger, I was a bit of a jock; however, diabetes and weight issues ran rampant throughout my family. I never really worried about weight when I was younger, but as my life became more sedentary; my weight crept up little by little. I realized I had to do something at my last physical. My doctor weighed me, and we both decided that I needed to do something. We had the conversation of weight, which is very important.

### **YOU SAID YOUR FAMILY BATTLED WEIGHT. CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT THAT?**

My mother, who passed away, had diabetes, although she did not die from it. My older sister is heavier and has diabetes.

I have numerous family members that have died from heart attacks. Everyone in my family, including me, has high cholesterol.

For me, my weight was never a big problem. Although, after a couple physicals where my weight increased, and my concern with my cholesterol, both my doctor and I agreed that I needed to start a medical weight management program and utilize obesity medications to improve my overall health. I can proudly say that I've done very well on the program.

### **WHAT ARE YOUR MOTIVATIONS TO STICK WITH THE PROGRAM?**

For me, I was experiencing such joint pain due to the excess weight. Being able to reduce my weight and lessening the pain really has been quite motivating. I also feel better.

I know I am making this difference for my HEALTH, and that is important to me, as I will turn the big 60 in September. I know my motivation for managing my weight, and that's what's important.

**FOR MY NEXT QUESTION, I AM VERY INTERESTED IN YOUR OPINION NOT ONLY AS SOMEONE BATTLING EXCESS WEIGHT, BUT ALSO AS A CELEBRITY. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE WAY OBESITY IS PORTRAYED IN POP CULTURE (MOVIES, TELEVISION, ETC.)?**

I have mixed feelings on this topic. I've never been asked this question before. When I first started in this business (entertainment), I had directors tell me that when you're making a statement in a film, "a picture is worth a thousand words." The entertainment world is interesting because it plays in to stereotypes, which can be hurtful; however, it makes the point in the story. Unfortunately, we still rely on stereotypes to get that message across to the audience.

I remember working with John Candy, and he was this jovial guy that everyone just loved to be around. Jonah Hill is my godson, and he's battled weight his entire life. I've always supported him in any role he played – as long as it didn't impact his health. It's hard because the big guy is the lovable guy.

I have friends who've utilized their weight (obesity) to make a living off of it, but yet, I have friends who have died from complications of obesity, like John Candy.

**WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST DIFFICULT PART OF YOUR WEIGHT-LOSS?**

Well, the one thing that I've cut back on drastically is my gluten intake. My doctor and I were both concerned that could've been contributing to my joint pain. Being on medication for obesity, I just noticed that I am not as hungry as I used to be.

**WHAT WOULD YOU TELL SOMEONE WHO WANTS TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THEIR WEIGHT?**

I would say that you need to have the conversation with your doctor. My doctor and I had the talk, and he prescribed me an obesity medication. Thankfully, it has worked well for me. The best thing someone can do is educate themselves on what's



out there for treatment. You want to go in to the doctor's office armed with information needed for you to make an informed choice.

## **IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO TELL OUR READERS?**

Get a physical. Go to your doctor and find out your weight, your blood values, etc. It's important to have this information to start your weight-loss journey. It's also the small steps that count. Don't expect to lose 20 pounds in one week. Lose one to two pounds per week, safely.

The topic of weight is not an easy one. Individuals battling this disease often find themselves struggling not only with the weight itself, but where to start as well. The OAC is a firm believer that the most important thing you can do is have the conversation of weight with your healthcare provider. To learn more about the disease of obesity, please visit [www.ObesityAction.org](http://www.ObesityAction.org) today.

### ***About the Author:***

*James Zervios is the Director of Communications for the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC). He has more than 10 years of experience working in patient advocacy and is a graduate of the University of South Florida.*

*photo: ©Mark Andrew Gonzales*





# ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

## LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

### Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
  - Community Discussion Forum
  - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



**JOIN TODAY: GO TO [OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN](http://OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN)**

[info@obesityaction.org](mailto:info@obesityaction.org)

(800) 717-3117 | (813) 872-7835 | Fax: (813) 873-7838



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