

## Photography

# Marilyn Monroe Nude Photographer Lawrence Schiller: Our Interview

By Jena Ardell Tue., Jun. 19 2012 at 1:04 PM

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Lawrence Schiller

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One of the most memorable moments of accomplished photojournalist, *New York Times* bestselling author and director Lawrence Schiller's life was spent parked outside of Schwab's Pharmacy on Sunset Boulevard, where he sat with Marilyn Monroe, inside her car, drinking Dom Perignon, after having photographed her nude -- and he owes it all to skid marks.

Throughout high school, Schiller chased automobile accidents in order to photograph the skid marks on the pavement. Schiller learned how to use light by studying the variable positions of the sun, burnt rubber and oil slicks in relation to his camera. Manipulating these variables produced different photographs.

"I learned about lighting, believe it or not, from 15, 20 or 30 automobile accidents," Schiller told a captive audience packed inside of Taschen Books in Beverly Hills recently. "My ego will tell you, because I have a very big ego, that I became an expert on lighting."

At age 16, Schiller had enough money saved to buy his first car, thanks to the money he earned selling photographs of skid marks.

"Skid marks tell a story. They became valuable to insurance companies because by the time the insurance companies would send a photographer or somebody the next day, many other cars and trucks would run over the skid marks and they weren't valuable anymore," Schiller explained.



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#### Outside Taschen Books

Now Schiller is telling his story on the 50th anniversary of Monroe's death, with his memoir, *Marilyn & Me*. Schiller also teamed up with Taschen to release a limited-edition, coffee-table version of his memoir, which includes many images that have never been published.

*Marilyn & Me* provides an intimate look into Monroe's downfall, including an uncomfortable exchange of words Schiller had with her the night before she died, and reflects on how Monroe helped launch his career via symbiotic exploitation.

The inherent sense of entrepreneurship that brought him to create a memoir is the same one that, early in his career, helped Schiller sell one of his nude photographs of Marilyn Monroe to Hugh Hefner in 1962 for \$25,000, then the highest price ever paid for a single photograph.

Despite being dubbed a "pro at 16" by *New York Times* writer Jacob Deschin and earning the National Press Photographers Picture of the Year award the year he graduated from college, Schiller didn't consider himself a good photographer and would hide his age from prominent magazines.

"Everything was a challenge to me. One day, I could be shooting portraiture; the next day, I could be shooting tits and ass for *Playboy*; the next day, I could be shooting sports," Schiller told us in an interview before the signing.

"I didn't think I was really good at any of it because there was always a better sports photographer than me. There was always a better portrait photographer. There was always a better photojournalist than me, because I never refined it. That's why I never looked upon my pictures or myself as being a good photographer. I think I was a hard worker, and I enjoyed the challenge of obtaining pictures that nobody else could get."

Schiller obtained these rare moments by conjuring exclusivity, placing cameras where

nobody else would put cameras and "being the Avon salesgirl" who convinced publications to let him shoot political events.

Being a sports and celebrity photographer taught Schiller an important tool for his career in photography -- anticipation. He knew he should focus on where the action was headed, instead of trying to follow the action.

At age 25, Schiller was assigned by *Look* magazine to shoot Marilyn Monroe on the set of *Let's Make Love*. Armed with ambition but lacking experience, Schiller realized Monroe

knew more about photography than he did. Schiller mentions this realization in his memoir, *Marilyn & Me*:

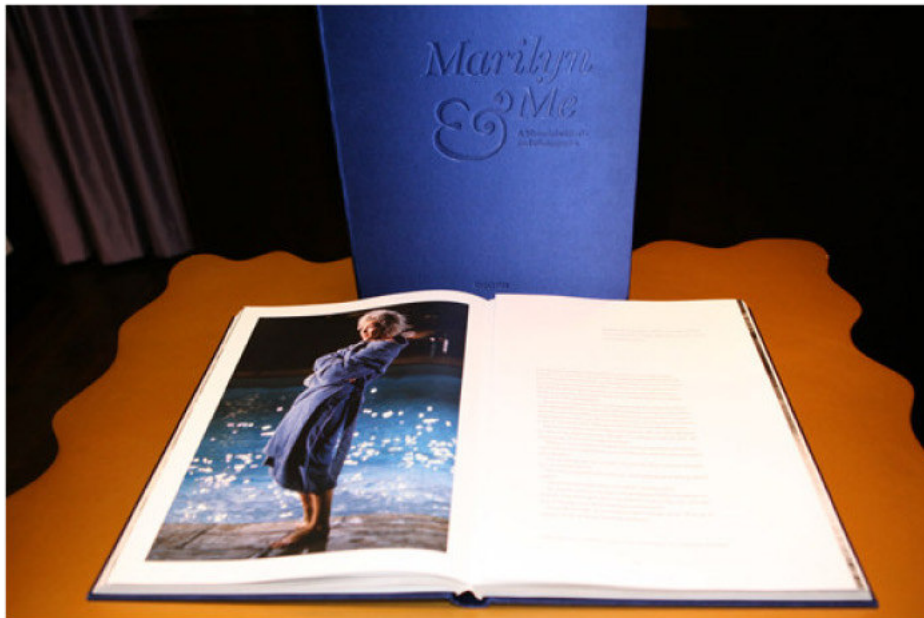
"Marilyn, who had final approval of my images, caught my eye in the mirror and, without turning around, said, 'That's not the best angle for me. If you go over there' -- tilting her head slightly, indicating a spot to the left -- 'you'll get a better photo, because the light will be better.'"

When the second opportunity arose to shoot Monroe, on the set of *Something's Got to Give*, Schiller was more prepared. In fact, Schiller was something of an accomplice.

Schiller was aware of Monroe's plan to exit the infamous swimming pool scene nude; he was shooting images of Monroe in her dressing room when she told him the idea. Monroe, who was hellbent on garnering more publicity than Elizabeth Taylor, knew she had to prove to 20th Century Fox that she could create publicity for herself:

"I've been thinking about this scene," Monroe told Schiller. "I'll have the bathing suit on when I jump in, but I'm thinking about coming out without it."

"Well, Marilyn," Schiller said. "You're already famous. Now you're gonna make me famous."



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**Schiller's Marilyn & Me: A Memoir in Words & Photographs**

"I was insecure," Schiller added. "I wanted to have money and I wanted recognition. I was running down two tracks at the same time, but I was also a shrewd businessman."