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**A Film Director
with a New Angle**
Rick Rosenthal

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FROM BRAZIL TO
BEVERLY HILLS

DR. ROBERT REY

By Caroline Ryder

It is 10:30 at night and Robert Rey, a star of the hit E! series *Dr. 90210*, has just returned home from another day of surgery at his Beverly Hills practice. Six procedures in total – a transumbilical breast augmentation (that's where the implant is inserted via the belly button), a repair of a "totally messed up" breast, a lift, an implant replacement, another lift and then an augmentation for a woman who had a full breast on one side and virtually none on the other. He started his day at around 8:30 in the morning. He should be exhausted, but he's not – he sounds chirpy. "As you can tell, I like what I do," says the Brazilian-born Harvard graduate in a telephone conversation. "I love my patients. If there's one thing in my life that I don't mind doing – this is it." There was a time when Rey dealt with gunshot wounds and birth defects. "It was so sad that I would come home drained. These days, it's just happy surgery."

Dr. 90210, which followed *Dr. Rey's* life as a renowned Beverly Hills plastic surgeon both at home and in the operating room, was the highest rated show in the history of the E! Channel. The show, which continues to air in dozens of countries around the world, receives around 4000 emails a day, 120 calls an hour and bags of mail. "Isn't it amazing that a show which basically deals with medicine has created a cult," marvels Rey, one of three surgeons featured on the show's second season, airing this fall. "But plastic surgery is part of pop culture these days."

It's a far cry from his childhood, spent in one of the poorest and most dangerous cities in the world: Sao Paulo, Brazil. "For 30 years I had the pleasure of forgetting my past,"

he sighs. "Now, because of the show, I have to talk about it again." His father, who was born in America and graduated top of his engineering class from N.Y.U., moved to Brazil shortly after the end of World War II and took a job as an engineer. But, according to Rey, "He was a playboy. Totally irresponsible. He had a big long list of girlfriends, and he was never home." The family was destitute. "No one believes me, but I never slept on a bed until I got to America," says Rey. "I used to sleep in the living room on a broken table."

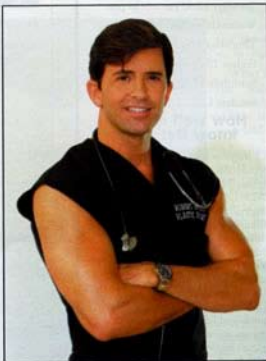
Then one day, two Christian missionaries knocked on the door. They befriended the family and offered to take Robert, then age 11, and his three siblings back to the US, to Utah. The last thing Robert remembers doing on Brazilian soil was robbing a store. "If it wasn't for those people I would be in jail right now. When you take a glimpse into Utah it's almost like it's not real. They were so good, sometimes I almost felt like pinching them."

Incidentally, Orson Scott Card, the young missionary who became Rey's foster father during the early 1970's, is now a multi-millionaire, having penned more than 50 science fiction novels. "This man was blessed for saving me," says Rey, who still donates 10% of his salary to the church.

A few years after starting his new life in America, Robert gained a place at Harvard and embarked on 18 years of medical training, at the end of which he qualified as a cosmetic surgeon. Rey, then 36, told his professors that he planned on going to Beverly Hills – the most com-

petitive market for plastic surgeons on earth. "There are approximately 4,400 board certified plastic surgeons in the world; one out of every 12 are within two miles of Beverly Hills," says Rey. "But I had a dream of bringing medicine and TV together. I also had nothing to lose."

He packed his belongings in the backseat of his old Mustang and headed west, renting a tiny office in Beverly Hills when he arrived. So tiny, in fact, he could lay down on the floor and his feet and hands



would touch the walls at the same time. He spent most days sitting around "twiddling my thumbs" until one day, finally, he got a patient. He carried out a surgery on her that was virtually unheard of at the time – a breast augmentation through her belly button using cameras and robotics. It was cutting-edge stuff. His patient just happened to be a secretary at E! "Every time a producer would walk past her at the office, she would tell them about her new breasts and how she got them. She was a great advertisement!"

It wasn't long before executives from E! came knocking on Rey's door, saying they wanted him to help them make a special on plastic surgery. This was in 2000, before shows like *Nip Tuck*, *The Swan*, and *Extreme Makeover* had hit the airwaves. The special turned out to be the highest-rated show on E! that season, and it led to hundreds of magazine articles and guest appearances on daytime TV. Some years later, he and producer Ric Leed approached a number of networks with the *Dr. 90210* concept. "Everyone slammed the door in our face – except E!" Rey and Leed were assigned Donald Bull, fresh from producing the *The Osbournes*, as their executive producer.

The show was an immediate hit, and life changed beyond all recognition for Rey and his Canadian wife Hayley. Film crews ripped the lights from his ceilings and replaced them with studio lights. His home turned into one big sound stage. "They would be filming us falling asleep or having a fight," says Rey. "It was very uncomfortable at first." But now the family is good friends with the crew. "We'd miss them when they weren't here," he admits.

The show aired for two seasons and has been syndicated around the world – including his native Brazil. At a press conference in his home country, one journalist asked if he remembered the name of the store he had robbed, aged 11, shortly before moving to the US. "I couldn't believe that," he says. (He didn't tell).

But you can forgive the fascination with each and every detail of his story.

It is, after all, a BeVerly Hills fairy tale.

(Dr. Robert Rey is currently the cosmetic surgery correspondent for Entertainment Tonight's *The Insider*, aired on KTLA.)