

*CBS Mornings*

05/30/23

8:00:43 a.m. [TEASE]

8 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Model & Activist Geena Rocero]

TONY DOKOUPIL: We will speak with model and trans rights activist, Geena Rocero, who's telling her powerful life story in a brand new memoir.

(...)

8:11:05 a.m.

19 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Model & Activist Geena Rocero]

DOKOUPIL: Still to come, Geena Rocero made it big as a New York model after leaving the Philippines, but for nearly 10 years, she kept her transgender identity a secret from everyone including her modeling agent. We will talk to her about coming out and her new memoir. It's out today. It's called *Horse Barbie*. We will ask about the title as well.

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8:25:04 a.m. [TEASE]

7 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Model & Activist Geena Rocero]

NATE BURLESON: All right now look who is in our Progressive greenroom, model and transgender advocate Geena Rocero is here to tell us about a new memoir, *Horse Barbie*.

(...)

8:35:30 a.m.

6 minutes and 37 seconds

DOKOUPIL: And speaking of excited, we're very excited about our next guest. The award-winning producer, model, and transgender rights advocate, Geena Rocero. Geena immigrated to the U.S. from the Philippines when she was a teenager and rose to the top of the New York City modeling world. For nine years, she kept her transgender identity a secret, however, not even her modeling agent knew she had been assigned male at birth. Then in 2014, she came out publicly in a TED Talk. Take a listen from that.

GEENA ROCERO [in 2014]: I was assigned boy at birth, based on the appearance of my

genitalia. I remember when I was five years old in the Philippines walking around our house, I would always wear this t-shirt on my head and my mom asked me, how come you always wear that t-shirt on your head? I said mom, this is my hair. I'm a girl. I knew then how to self-identify.

DOKOUPIL: Geena Rocero's new memoir, *Horse Barbie* is out today and she joins us now. Geena, thank you very much for being here.

GAYLE KING: Yes.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Becoming Geena Rocero; Model, Producer & Trans Rights Activist on New Memoir "Horse Barbie"]

DOKOUPIL: We have so much to talk to you about including the title of the book, *Horse Barbie*. That's an unusual one. There are so many lines in the book I love like, I learned to be trans in the Catholic Church.

GAYLE KING: Yes.

DOKOUPIL: But first start with that TED Talk because that was your big coming out moment. You were so poised on stage. But I've got to imagine inside, you're feeling something different. So what was that like?

ROCERO: You know, people have asked me that about what was that moment? Certainly, I think, it got at that point after being living, you know, stealth for eight years, when I decided that I'm going to do this in the biggest stage as possible. I was just so ready that my sense of purpose was so much bigger than my fear. I'm ready to tackle that, and I wanted to share my story.

KING: One of the things you said in the TED Talk that I never thought about, we get our driver's license, we take it for granted. You said for you your driver's license wasn't just to drive, it was also saying that you could live.

ROCERO: Yes.

KING: Why? Because on your driver's license, when it said gender, it said F for female.

ROCERO: It's just an affirmation, right? I mean, like, as you said, it's the most basic thing that we tend to forget.

GAYLE KING: Yes.

ROCERO: I mean, like trans people just want to live our lives, to feel affirmed, and certainly as someone who was born and raised in the Philippines, we didn't have access to be able to change name and gender marker in legal documents, so when I moved to America, it was my way to like, oh, here I can be legally recognized as a woman that I am.

BURLESON: And speaking of that, your mom was very supportive in that process and she is in the Progressive greenroom right now hanging out. Shout out to mom.

DOKOUPIL: Hey.

KING: Hey, mom.

ROCERO: Hey, mom.

BURLESON: What is it like though having that support system behind you every single step of the way?

ROCERO: You know, I couldn't ask for a better parent, my mom who just truly loves me. This is a devout Catholic woman who loves her trans daughter.

KING: Daughter.

ROCERO: And for her to be able — you know, she left the Philippines. We were separated for five years. But you know, when it got to the point that, okay, I'm ready to finally move to America, she is the one that told me that here in America, you could be legal — she researched that policy, the gender recognition policy.

KING: Go, mom. She's also the one that gave you the name Geena with two E's. She said as a way to stand out. Your mom. Your dad, too, who is no longer with us, who was also very supportive. But I wonder what it was like for you? Because in the Philippines, they knew.

ROCERO: Yes.

KING: But you lived your life when you came here just mortified. Oh my God, I hope they don't find out. You're in the John Legend video for *Number One* back in the day. You're living with this big secret. You tell a great story. You're in a New York cab where you have this big moment, but yet it was a high for you because you'd gotten a big deal, but you felt so empty inside. Why?

ROCERO: You know, in the Philippines, trans people are culturally visible, right? We're a part of mainstream culture.

KING: Yes.

ROCERO: But we are not politically recognized. There are no rights, you know, for gender recognition policy, but when I moved to America, it was the other way around. I was legally recognized as a woman, but there was no cultural visibility. Thus, you know, when I moved to New York City in 2005, I had to go stealth, you know, where my mother —

KING: I like how you say it is stealth. Yes.

BURLESON: Stealth.

ROCERO: — and you know, in the book, in *Horse Barbie*, I detail sort of like — I felt like, now I look back, why I like the spy genres, because I felt like I was a spy in kind of an operation.

BURLESON: A secret agent.

DOKOUPIL: Yes.

ROCERO: Exactly. For eight years.

BURLESON: It's the biggest secret ever.

ROCERO: Yes, and in that moment in the book, because as a fashion model, I entered this industry that is all about the power of imagery, but I was not being seen. Every day of my life for eight years, it was this constant — I was so visible, right. I was in covers of magazine, billboards, but I was also consciously invisible at the same time.

KING: Yes.

ROCERO: So managing all of that for eight years took its toll.

DOKOUPIL: The title, *Horse Barbie* comes from what your competitors would call you on the pageant circuit in the Philippines, but I actually want to talk about the visibility, right, because so much has changed culturally in America. Your book is out, you've got a major publisher, you've got a TED Talk that went viral, right? People know you, and yet you also describe the situation here in the U.S. for trans people as nightmarish. Talk about that dichotomy, those two worlds.

GEENA ROCERO: I really felt like I've been like living — because I've lived half of my life in the U.S. — I mean, half the life in the Philippines, half year in the U.S. So it's just this constant navigating the different cultures, because what we have in the Philippines and what, you know, I've experienced in the Philippines, now we know that visibility is just one component and finding equity. It should be all of that, right? The equity access to the most basic rights, the visibility, respectable.

BURLESON: Right.

ROCERO: Nuanced, dignified visibility for trans people, all of those things, and I think even in this moment that we're seeing right now, the attacks on particularly trans youth, the most vulnerable in our country, we need to honor their lived experience. I want to tell them that there is nothing wrong with them, keep living your life, be who you are, as what I have detailed in my book, you know, I —

KING: You say on Page 243, and this is how we should end it, that trans joy can never be fully extinguished and that really is the message that you're putting out. I think your book will help

many people —

ROCERO: — thank you so much.

KING: — who may be struggling, who may be curious, who may be wondering and —

BURLESON: In any walk of life.

KING: — yes, exactly. You educate people, too.

ROCERO: I think there's something powerful with trans people like we know who we are —

KING: Yes.

BURLESON: Yeah.

ROCERO: — and in the world that tells us — that doesn't give us space, we still choose to be who we are. There's nothing more courageous than that —

[INAUDIBLE CO-HOST]

ROCERO: — and I just want to honor that, particularly the trans youth that are wanting to just live their dreams. I honor them.

KING: *Horse Barbie*, you have done that.

DOKOUPIL: You have done that. Yes.

KING: You have done that.

DOKOUPIL: Stories are a resource and this is one. *Horse Barbie* is the book. Geena Rocero, thank you very much for being here.

ROCERO: Thank you.

DOKOUPIL: It is on sale wherever you'd like to buy your books. There's the cover.

BURLESON: Go and get it.