

A LOVER & A FIGHTER

Now here's a woman you want in your corner. Gina Rodriguez takes on body shamers, Instagram bullies, social injustices—yet does it all with a smile. Ready to be inspired? So much positivity jumping off these pages!

By Kate Williams

PUMPED UP
Gina's favorite way to blow off steam? Getting in the ring! Her tips, page 89.

STYLING: GABRIELLE PORCARO, HAIR: PAUL NORTON FOR JOICO/TRACEY MATTINGLY, MAKEUP: CARISSA FERRERI FOR DIOR ADDICT/TRACEY MATTINGLY, MANICURE: KAREN GUTIERREZ FOR FORMULA X IN PYROTECHNIC NAILING HOLLYWOOD, RYCA T-SHIRT, CAMP COLLECTION SHORTS, TITLE BOXING LLC AUTOGRAPH GLOVES, ADIDAS ORIGINALS BY RITA ORA



Gina Rodriguez has quite the bodyguard. Okay, full disclosure, that bodyguard is a plant. But it's a hulking piece of shrubbery, and it's meant to give the star some privacy during our interview on the set of her hit dramedy *Jane the Virgin*. Too bad our girl, the quintessential people person, will not be contained. She ducks around the leafy beast to call out staffers by name and crack inside jokes or ask about wives, kids, families. "Hold on, baby," she says, interrupting herself to point at a guy shuffling past with a walkie-talkie. "That man survived cancer. Bad. Ass."

It's a bit of game-recognize-game here, because Gina practically earned her B.A. in Bad-Assery. Though the 31-year-old is known for her unflinching optimism, she's struggled with a debilitating health condition for more than a decade. At

age 19, while studying acting at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, the Chicago native was diagnosed with a thyroid disease that eroded her energy and essentially shut down her metabolism. Though she had zero appetite, her weight ballooned and she was gripped by an exhaustion so crippling, she slept for 18 hours a day. To Gina, it seemed like a death sentence for a career that had barely begun. "Like, if being brown wasn't hard enough, here's another obstacle," she says of the condition, which she eventually learned was Hashimoto's disease. "Then I thought, *How much greater is my story? This is going to be a journey of accepting who I am within societal norms of what a lead actress looks like.* The second I stopped feeling like I wasn't enough was the second I realized I was capable of doing anything."

Sounds like the makings of a motivational poster—except Gina actually made good on it, and then some. After The CW show's first season, Gina took home a Golden Globe for Best Actress in a TV Comedy. She saw the win not only as a personal triumph but also as a victory for women who, like her, don't

see themselves fitting into some elusive beauty standard. "In our society, it's easier to sell somebody the idea of not being enough versus 'You are enough.' It's like we women consciously decide we're going to be mean to ourselves," she observes. "But you're your own hero, not some image you can't live up to."



WHAT A KNOCKOUT
The high-tops and sweat dress aren't bad either.

A million fist-bump emojis for that sentiment, right? No wonder a few *WH* staffers legit cried when they found out Gina was going to be on our cover. Her empowering message is so contagious because it's not just about her. Instead of tweeting *at* her followers, she engages regular folk in real conversation and genuinely cares about what they have to say. The actress has absolutely nothing to hide, and maybe that means she'll never be Hollywood enough. But Gina is pretty familiar with the myth of not quite measuring up. Listen in as she dismantles four too-common refrains.

NOT HEALTHY ENOUGH

Ever have that nagging feeling you're not doing all you can to be the healthiest version of you? The pressure's overwhelming, right? Gina's been there too. When her thyroid problems first surfaced, she became so frustrated by her own body that she rebelled against the diagnosis by skipping her meds. "I would almost not be conscientious about my health because I wanted to be accepted the way I was—as curvy," she says. Gina initially thought that by defying her illness she'd prove that top-tier actresses don't need to be a size 2, but she ultimately realized that instead of making a social statement, the decision was just screwing with her well-being.

She got on board with her doctor's plan in her early twenties, but eventually her body stopped responding to the synthetic drugs that regulated her thyroid, so she turned to holistic, natural ones. "I've also had to buckle down and stop eating certain things that don't do well with my body. Now I look at foods I'm allergic to, like strawberries and blueberries, and say, 'You don't play well with me, so I have to stop messing with you.'"

The small changes have had a major impact: She feels healthier and more energetic. "For so long I was like a horse with blinders, fighting for my dreams to come true, and that was my only focus," she recalls. "Now I have to be constantly balancing that with being good to myself, taking time to rest, and taking time for personal relationships. Balance is necessary—that's how you have longevity."

NOT SKINNY ENOUGH

Gina rocks her figure proudly on the red carpet, but it's far from a daily lovefest with her mirror at home. In fact, her struggles with body acceptance have been some of the biggest hurdles in her career. "This *Women's Health* shoot was probably the most challenging one I've ever done," she says. "I look back on other photo shoots, and even if I'm wearing something super tight, I'm not showing my skin or the real pieces of me—like that little bit of extra booty that hangs off the other part of the booty."

At the beginning of the day, she'd psyched herself up with a pep talk ("Today is a great day! You can do this!"), but her resolve started to falter as soon as she took a peek at the photos. "In my head, I was like, *That's ugly, that doesn't look good.*" It took her a minute (and a few deep breaths) to put her inner critic in its place. "I thought, *Nope—not today. Your perfect is your perfect, not anybody else's, and not this illusionary perfect curve.*"

She's not just preaching this stuff in her own head either. On social media, she's cutting through all the hyper-filtered crap to bring back a healthy dose of reality post by post. And if haters get in the way or start spouting negativity, she bites back fast and without hesitation. Case in point: When Instagram trolls attacked her toes—of all



FISTS OF GLORY
Wraps protect fighters' hands, wrists, and knuckles in a sparring match.

things!—she urged her followers (who she refers to as "warriors") to say #NoToKeyboardCourage, the term she coined for the safety a person feels when they decide to take down someone online because they'll never have to meet them in real life. Most of the time, though, Gina prefers playing offense and taking a positive tack: "I'm trying to use my social media as a way to communicate that I'm flawed and that I'm okay with it," she says with a wide smile. "It's a

very strange feeling to be okay with a little cellulite or a little extra anything. I don't look at it and feel terrified anymore, and my confidence changed because of that. I carry myself differently."

NOT LATINA ENOUGH

The same platform that prompted her to take a stand about body image also inspired her to speak out about race, especially after commenters criticized Gina,

who is of Puerto Rican descent, for not being "Latina enough." All because she made grammatical errors in a photo caption she'd written in Spanish.

Now, almost a year later, the incident still makes Gina's eyes roll. But while she views the slights with a sense of humor, she's determined to do something about inter-Latino racism and lack of unity. In 2015, she used her Golden Globe acceptance speech as an opportunity to begin the conversation and call attention to the fact that the award symbolized "a culture that wants to see themselves as heroes."

A few months ago, she started #MovementMondays, a weekly post on her Instagram that highlights actors and actresses of underrepresented ethnicities. She's also using her reach to encourage Latino audiences to understand how their spending (or lack thereof) affects onscreen representation. "Every marketer, every studio I talk to wants to know how to cater to this demographic," she explains, acknowledging that it's a highly diverse group. "I want Latinos to understand

where their power lies. Think about how crazy a movement it would be if Latinos just stopped watching until they put a Latino or Latina lead in *Fantastic Four* or *Robocop*."

But Gina being Gina, she's thinking even bigger: She wants to be the Latina Oprah. "Why not?" she says with a laugh. "You have to start with a dream. Oprah unified a community to feel their honor, their grace, and their power, and to fuel it positively. Latinos do feel segregated, even within the community itself, so let's get together and show people how strong we are."

A big part of what's enabled Gina to feel her own power is the education she received, and she knows it can do the same for others, which is what spurred her to join The Hispanic Scholarship Fund's board. The organization helped Gina and her two older sisters attend college, and she hopes to use the position to pay it forward. "It's something that nobody can take away," she says of the drama degree she earned in 2006. "I know I can enter a room and deserve to be there, and I would love children everywhere to have that same feeling."

NOT SUCCESSFUL ENOUGH

When you're as driven as Gina is, there's always more you want to achieve. And while it's easy to draw motivation from comparing your accomplishments to those of others (a potentially dark and twisty rabbit hole many of us know well), Gina harnesses the strong work ethic instilled in her by her parents and turns her attention to what more she can do to improve her craft and, ultimately, to help others.

In the midst of auditioning for *Jane*, Gina invited an actor friend from college—a single mom—to live with her in her one-bedroom apartment. Gina felt powerless: She could help with a place to live, but not with auditions or a job, and how was her friend going to find work if neither of them could afford to watch the baby or pay for child care?

Gina recognized her friend's dilemma as just one example of a larger issue and became determined to do something about it. Soon after she booked the show, Gina met Catalina Giraldo, who was launching a lingerie company, Naja, that

would employ single mothers in Colombia and help them learn a skill and earn money to support themselves and their children. "The timing was so serendipitous," says Gina, who, as a cofounder, is making sure the company's undergarments also reflect her stance on body image—every piece is designed to ensure women of all body types feel proud and sexy.

Then there's We Will, the nonprofit foundation she recently founded with her sisters to improve arts-education access and funding for underprivileged kids. Oh, and the book she's writing about the life lessons she's learned from her dad (the foundation name comes from a common saying of his). Kinda makes your head spin, huh?

Thing is, each of these projects really puts the focus on others, and that's what keeps Gina so grounded. "I realize this is amazing, this is wonderful," she says, gesturing to the massive set around her. "But it doesn't make me better than anybody. When people are like, 'It's crazy how humble you are!' I'm like, no, no, no, no. I shouldn't be applauded for being a good person. That should be standard." ■



The Art of Kicking Ass

Gina's dad, Genaro Rodriguez, is a boxing referee who taught all three of his daughters how to own the ring, and Gina still sneaks in a few rounds whenever she can. Crib her tips, then get ready to ace Round 1.

LOOK FOR A COACH.

"Boxing gyms can be terrifying, so finding a trainer might make you more comfortable. If you can't, then scout the best person in the room and watch them."

BEFRIEND THE JUMP ROPE.

"It'll help you with speed and stamina. If you can jump rope for one round, then you're one step closer to fighting for a round."

PREPARE FOR BOTH ENDS OF A PUNCH.

"To land a punch, you want to hit downward—turning your fist so that your last two knuckles, your pinky and your ring finger, hit last. To take a punch, don't flinch! It doesn't hurt as much as you think it does. Just take it. It ain't gonna kill you."



RVCA TOP; SEE U SOON SHORTS; EVERLAST HANDWRAP