

# SUPERSTAR MELANIE'S ACTRESS HALF-SISTER

# TRACY GRIFFITH

## JOINS THE MALE- DOMINATED WORLD OF SUSHI CHEFS

**W**hen Hollywood's capriciousness got too much for actress Tracy Griffith, she decided to find a second, less frustrating outlet for her creativity. Now, entering the male-dominated world of sushi chefs, Melanie Griffith's flame-haired half-sister has become that rarity, a bona fide Sushi Woman.

"You could almost say that Melanie started this obsession," Tracy says, laughing. "She was the one who first introduced me to sushi. I was 12 when I first came to visit her in LA and she took me to Something's Fishy, a restaurant in Malibu. I loved the sushi so much, I wanted to go there every day. I was possessed! Melanie loves sushi. Our dad, Peter, loves it. Our whole family loves sushi."

Tracy, 34, got her acting break in the 1988 film *The Good Mother*, and had a part in Antonio Banderas and Melanie Griffith's new film *Crazy In Alabama* (opening here next spring).

"Hollywood is a crazy town and this is a crazy business," Tracy says, "and I wanted to find something I could do in addition to acting — something I loved and would have total control over. Sushi captured my imagination. I knew nothing about it, only that I loved it."

Sushi cheldom has its own obstacles, as Tracy found when she emerged from a six-month intensive training at the California Sushi Academy, clutching her certificate and steel knives. Finding a job in the traditional world of Japanese cuisine was a challenge.

“I went for interviews at several traditional Japanese restaurants. They’d listen to me and be very amused that I’d gone to school for only six months. But the fact I was a woman was hysterical. They thought that was the funniest thing they’d ever heard!

“They call themselves Sushi Men, and Sushi Men don’t have Sushi Women in their vernacular. Their attitude is, ‘You think you are a sushi chef after six months? We spend ten years before we get behind the glass!’ – that’s what they call the sushi bar.”

Japanese sushi chefs do indeed spend many years mastering their intricate artistry with raw fish, rice and seaweed. There are few female sushi chefs in Japan because the men aren’t willing to train them. Women were deemed unsuitable candidates for handling raw fish because their body temperatures can run slightly higher.

Cultural differences notwithstanding, Tracy is in awe of the traditions surrounding Japanese food preparation. “Boys start training when they’re teenagers. For a year they sweep the floor, then for two years wash rice.

“I liken sushi preparation to golf. You can learn to play, but it will take you your whole life to be a great golfer. In sushi school I was called stupid more than once. Cutting the sushi is so hard. I practised slicing quickly on a chicken. If you handle the rice too much, you bruise it. It’s also hard not to get rice all over you, which I did. My teacher said he’d never seen so much rice stick to one 