

Documentary 'Pretty Baby: Brooke Shields' is an eye-opening look at the dark side of Hollywood



CHENNAI: A new Hulu documentary on US actress Brooke Shields, "Pretty Baby: Brooke Shields" by Lana Wilson, takes viewers on a dark journey through the disturbing downside of fame.

The documentary is a bold essay on how a teen's vulnerability was exploited by industry insiders, as well as those closest to her.



Brooke Shields is interviewed in the documentary. (Hulu)

There are many, many examples of very young actors being sexualized, but Brooke Shields became a poster girl for this. In fact, the title of the two-part documentary was lifted from a provocative 1978 movie by no less a legend than Louis Malle who gave 11-year-old Shields the part of a New Orleans prostitute's daughter whose virginity is auctioned off in a brothel in the film.

“Sometimes I’m amazed that I survived any of it,” Brooke muses at one point.

The second half of the documentary is not as strong as the first and we are let into Brooke’s friendship with Michael Jackson and her marriage to tennis star Andre Agassi, whom she frames as yet another controlling personality in her life.



A photo of Brooke Shields as a child in "Pretty Baby: Brooke Shields." (Hulu)

The best part of Wilson's work is the brilliant collage of archival footage, including old interviews and behind-the-scenes footage, as well as the general cultural commentary that help the viewer understand the wider world that the young actress was operating in.

The documentary also dives into the actress's unstable home life, especially her alcoholic mother, or mom-ager as we would now class her. The young star was the breadwinner for her two-person family, and the impact that responsibility had on her is thoroughly explored in the new release.

What was it like for a young girl to play hyper-sexualized roles? And, furthermore, to know your mother and guardian put you in that position in the first place? That is the main subject of the documentary, as Shields herself describes years of obedience, compartmentalization and disconnection from her body.

Despite the excess of sour memories, 57-year-old Shields does not seem bitter in her one-on-one interview and is frank about her experiences, with themes of reinvention, resilience and renewal coming to the fore as she speaks about her recent successes.

