

in the mix

As a rebellious teen on the streets of Chicago, Marisol Nichols was the kind of girl you didn't want to mess with. "I would go into anger when I walked home by myself at night," she confides. "I'd be talking to myself, yelling, 'Who the hell does he think he is!' as if I was mad at someone. I'd walk past the toughest guys, but they left me alone. They just couldn't confront that."

Who knew that those late-night walks would provide training for her role as a New York homicide detective on ABC's *Blind Justice*?

As Detective Karen Bettancourt — a lone Latina in a squadroom full of guys — Nichols has to devour grit for breakfast, lunch and dinner. She's *the girl* in the newest Steven Bochco drama and, as such, she has to be as tough as the hoods she used to rattle. "You come at it with a certain hardness," she says, "a certain suspiciousness."

As a youth suspicious of authority, Nichols resisted convention. "I didn't like this idea that you *had* to be a cheerleader or *had* to be part of this team or that team. I didn't like that I *had* to get up at 8 a.m. and go to some science class that held no interest for me. I wanted to experience life."

The experience she got was not one she bargained for. She was shipped off to a children's psych ward under the heading "behavioral disorder" — orange jumper and all. "You were told you acted out because your parents didn't love you or because you wanted attention from your father," she says. "No! I acted out because I was a kid, because I was an artist, because I was creative."

Today Nichols is a spokesperson for the Citizens Commission on Human Rights, decrying unwarranted drugging of children diagnosed with ADD and ADHD, among other disorders. "There are 8 million kids on Prozac and other [antidepressants]," she says. "That's insane. Don't parents realize they're giving their kids Class 2 narcotics, which are in the same category as cocaine and speed?"

It's a fiery topic for Nichols, the daughter of a Mexican-American mother and Hungarian-Romanian father. In addition to her spirit, the hard-to-pigeonhole looks she inherited have held her in good stead: Nichols has played everything from a Middle Eastern princess (the NBC telefilm *The Princess and the Marine*) to a passionate Latina in Showtime's *Resurrection Blvd*. For a small film shot in Italy, she portrayed an Italian maiden whose English is not very good. To no one's surprise, she learned enough Italian to do the job right.

—Kathleen O'Steen

Black jersey and leather three-quarter-length coat by David Rodriguez; silk charmeuse blouse with double cuffs by SHAKTI by Jacquelyne Love

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JUST CAUSE:
Marisol Nichols of *Blind Justice*, survivor of some tough early years, speaks out on behalf of children.