

JAMIE LEE
CURTIS



WHAT I KNOW NOW

WORKING IN HOLLYWOOD
FOR MORE THAN 40 YEARS,
THE ACTRESS, ACTIVIST
AND AUTHOR HAS LEARNED—
AND EARNED—SOME TOUGH
LIFE LESSONS. SHE WOULDN'T
HAVE IT ANY OTHER WAY

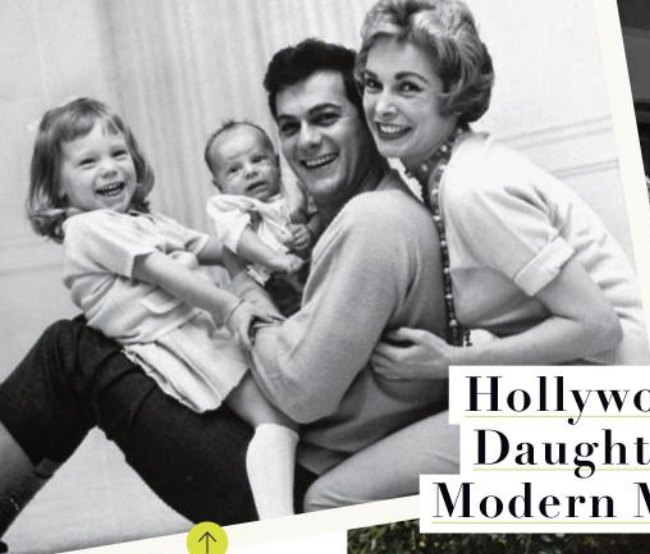
By JASON SHEELER

*J*amie Lee Curtis is thinking about dying. “Not in a morbid way!” she says with cheer. “I’m trying to manifest my destiny. What do I want to put out into the universe before the clock stops ticking? When you’re 61, you go, ‘Oh f---. Wow. It’s so much closer than I ever thought.’ It is, just numerically.” So this past year I started thinking, “If not now, when? If not me, who?”

Curtis is Hollywood progeny—one of two daughters of Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh—and for more than 40 years she has spent as much time in front of the camera (in horror films like *Halloween* in 1978 and iconic movies like *A Fish Called Wanda* in 1988 and last year’s whodunit *Knives Out*) as she has just being Jamie Lee Curtis everywhere else. As a writer. As an activist. Pitch person. Producer. Director. The woman knows how to maximize her impact—and how to pivot. “That’s my favorite word,” she says, “‘pivot.’” And she has, nimbly, from schlocky flicks (*Terror Train*) to major blockbusters (*True Lies*) to even yogurt commercials—without ever losing her humor. “Hey, those commercials let me stay home with my kids,” she shrugs. With her daughter Annie (33, a dance teacher and

‘Keep Your Footprint Small’

“When I mentor young people,” says Curtis (at home in L.A. with her dog Runi), “I say, ‘Keep light, keep lean. Don’t get laden with objects.’”



Hollywood Daughter, Modern Mom

Silver-Screen Family

Curtis as an infant, with sister Kelly (who also became an actress), father Tony Curtis and mother Janet Leigh, in 1958.

Her Happily Ever After

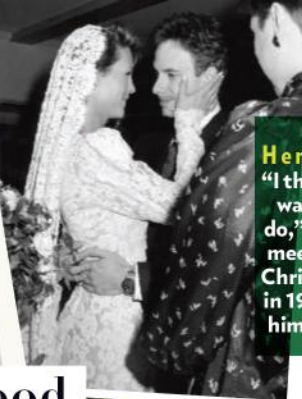
Curtis and Guest with son Thomas at Annie's wedding last year. "Proudest MOB," Curtis posted about being mother of the bride.



choreographer) now married, her son Thomas (24, a game developer) engaged, her husband (director Christopher Guest) somewhere around their L.A. home, and her dog Runi in her lap ("He's secretly the love of my life"), she's experiencing a surge in creativity. Just in the past few months she's launched a podcast, *Letters from Camp*, cowritten a screenplay for a horror film called *Mother Nature* that she plans to direct and founded a charity benefiting Children's Hospital Los Angeles. While she's not really one to give advice—"I think advice is a hostile act," she declares firmly—she is willing to share her experience. "I'm a truth teller."

I've always tried to be my authentic self.

I was a little quirky growing up. I was a bit of a smart aleck, quick to joke. I never thought I was particularly pretty. I certainly have no discernible talents. It's not like I can sing. I can dance a little bit. But I am very much my own creation—I've always felt that my individuality was important. The reason I'm saying this is that I think the more I ended up working [in Hollywood], the more important it was that I had some sense of who I am. Early in my career I didn't know how to play the



Her Funny Guy
"I thought the guy was cute—I still do," Curtis says of meeting husband Christopher Guest in 1984. "So I gave him my number."

game. I didn't know how to fight for something.

I followed in my mom's footsteps, just not how you think.

I never thought I'd be an actor. I thought I was going to be a police officer! I could barely get through high school. I got into the only college where my mother was the most famous graduate [University of the Pacific] and studied criminal justice—like *Intro to Corrections 101*. Then my freshman year I ran into somebody who suggested that I audition for *Nancy Drew*. It was a total accident.

But for years I'd watched as my mother was incredibly philanthropic. She [worked with] a group of Hollywood wives who started an organization called SHARE—Share Happily and Reap Endlessly. It was a very small group who understood their power. They were married to big stars—of course, my mother was a star in her own right—and these women banded together and used their power. Over the years they've raised more than \$50 million to support children's charities.

Seeing her devote so much of her time had a huge impact on me. Philanthropy helped me find myself. At 30, I started really owning my voice, to try to help in certain areas. I wrote my first book. Then, 10 years later, I got sober. [Curtis has been open about her struggle with addiction, which began with prescription painkillers, and her recovery.] And I think the combination of writing 13 children's books and 21 years of sobriety has given me an absolute sense of my own power. Now I am putting my money, my time, my creativity toward things that matter to me.

I try to avoid the word 'should.'

The minute I'm saying that to somebody, I'm somehow saying that I know what someone needs.



How She's Helping Kids

"I've been closing letters with 'My hand in yours' for years," Curtis says. In August she launched myhandinyours.com to benefit Children's Hospital Los Angeles. Artists such as Anne Ricketts, who made the sculpture at left, and Cathy Waterman—Curtis underwrites all costs—create everything from jewelry to journals, with proceeds helping families in need afford medical care.

Loving Legacy
Curtis's advocacy was inspired by Katie Westbrook, 15, who died of cancer in 2001: "I wear her pink wig when I do any hospital work."



'You know I invented Instagram, right?'

Curtis was quick to recognize the power of photo sharing: "When iPhones were invented, I got one immediately. I realized that you could take great pictures with them. Friends of mine who were photographers, we formed a Blogspot that exists to this day. It was Instagram before Instagram." She isn't a social media advocate, however. "I think it is poison. You can change your face and all of it. It's just everything we can do to not be authentic. I don't want to be that caricature of an old woman sitting in the corner going, 'They should burn it all!' But I think it has resulted in more damage than good."

I don't know what anybody needs! That has especially applied to my relationship with my children, because it's not my life, it's theirs.

The best gift my kids gave me? Their honesty.

Children are like paparazzi. They take your picture when you don't want them to, and then they show it to you. Early on in my parenting, I was kind of copying, like we all do, my mother. I was working all the time. I felt like I was making it all work, but of course I wasn't. Both of my children said to me, "That doesn't work for me. You need to show up in a deeper way." My daughter Annie probably has been my most significant teacher because she has had the courage to say she wanted more from me. That's not something I ever had the courage to say. I was raised as sort of a very good girl. I had a nice relationship with my mother. I respected her, but we weren't particularly close. And I wasn't close to my father at all. Maybe if I had demanded more, [things would have been different]. Because my kids pushed, we have built a real relationship, rather than some bulls--- hierarchal one. My children are people. I am a person. They know me, and I know them.



'I am so in my skin, on my feet, where my feet are right now'

Never Perfect
James Corden tried to reunite Curtis and John Travolta from the 1985 cult fitness classic, but then the pandemic hit. "I did not [think], 'Holy s---, girl, you are smokin'!'" Curtis says of the role.

At night I ask myself, 'Did I love well today?'

I met Princess Diana the summer she died. I'd been in London shooting the s---ty sequel to *A Fish Called Wanda*. And then we exchanged a few letters. When she died, I remember turning off the TV right away and sitting on the edge of my bed. Next to my bed were the kind of books you keep so if someone comes over, they think you're really smart. And there was a little book on meditation by Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield I'd never looked at. I opened the first page and read that someone who has tried to live a mindful life, at the time of their death, asks themselves two questions: "Did I learn to live wisely? Did I love well?" I thought of Princess Diana and how she got out of a sham marriage. I thought of that picture where she's down on her knee, and her hands are outstretched, and her kids are running toward her. She lived well. She showed those boys love. So now every night I ask, "Did I learn to live wisely today? Did I love well?" I make sure that I check those two boxes, and then I go to sleep. ●