

Jamie Lee Curtis is everything and everywhere

Hollywood super child Jamie Lee Curtis is everything and everywhere all at once

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Jamie Lee Curtis is your new best friend, tapping your hand, patting your thigh. She's a sharer. A two-hour interview stretches into four. Curtis, 64, keeps talking.



Other actresses inspire awe, hovering above us. Cate Blanchett, Nicole Kidman, Meryl Streep, Curtis's Everything Everywhere All at Once co-star Michelle Yeoh. But Curtis is the movie star next door.

She's baked a lemon pound cake nestled in goo. It's Oscar season, “the season of shiny things” as she calls it, when nominated actresses commit to celery and clavicle-to-ankle Spanx. Curtis feasts on cake. It's her first nod in almost a half century of acting. She's probably the first nominee ever who spent seven years hawking yogurt that “makes you poop,” her words, grist for parody on Saturday Night Live. Lo and behold, she recently won the Screen Actors Guild Award.

Curtis was long known as much for her body as her body of work. Consider Trading Places (1983, seven seconds topless — she clocked it), Perfect (1985, Curtis as the over-aerobicized titular ideal) and True Lies (1994, her striptease in lingerie and heels).

But that's no plan for the long game. Curtis combined a pixie quality and an infectious smile. She shone in movies like *A Fish Called Wanda* and *Freaky Friday*. She refused to stay in a box.

Curtis is the daughter of actors Janet Leigh and Tony Curtis, and never saw herself swimming in the big pool. A journeyman, not a major player. An Oscar presenter, never an Oscar nominee. In recovery for 24 years, she takes little for granted. Her dictum: Live where your feet are.

"I've been a hustler my entire life," she says. It's what she admires in other people. Photographed on the morning of her nomination, in pyjamas with bedhead, "I was in complete shock. This is not someone who knew this would happen. What you see is ugly crying."

Curtis finds herself flexing more creative and financial muscle than she's ever had, in part because of her success as a popcorn-tub star. Curtis is a scream queen in a genre that costs little to make. She's the "final girl" as they're known in the industry, of the Halloween empire, which dates to 1978 and the start of her career. Curtis's past three Halloween movies grossed nearly US\$500 million; *Halloween*, the 2018 sequel, marked the largest opening with a female lead over 55.

Her Comet Pictures scored a production deal with Blumhouse and has multiple projects in development: an Amazon series titled *The Sticky*, about the great Canadian maple syrup heist; a movie about the 2018 Paradise fire, based on a book by Lizzie Johnson; and eco-horror movie *Mother Nature* that she co-wrote with Russell Goldman, which inspired a graphic novel to be published in July.

In a licensing coup, Curtis also landed the rights to Patricia Cornwell's bestselling Kay Scarpetta murder mysteries.

"I have always been an idea girl," Curtis says. "I wanted to be a producer. I wanted to be a creator. My intention is to tell stories."

Curtis's return to the Oscars comes as a nominee for a movie that initially befuddled her. *E.E.A.A.O.* incorporates a Chinese laundromat, the multiverse, hotdog fingers, a nihilist everything bagel, an imperious turtlenecked IRS auditor (that would be Curtis) and googly eyed rocks.

The first day of shooting *E.E.A.A.O.*, began almost three years to the day it received 11 Oscar nominations.

"It was made fast and for very little money," Curtis says of the five-week shoot and under \$20-million budget. Then came the pandemic, which afforded directors Daniel Scheinert and Dan Kwan (known to all as the Daniels) time to tinker as they held it for theatrical release.

"I didn't understand the movie. But I so knew her. And I loved Deirdre because I know how lonely she is and I know how forgotten she is. I understood what a garden exists inside her," says Curtis.

"I figure I have 15 years left," Jamie Lee Curtis once professed. This was in 1993.

She was talking about "the showoff business," her term, but she was in the midst of a 10-year addiction to Vicodin and alcohol.

"Everyone in my family was a prisoner of alcohol," she has said.

Curtis might have washed up, or worse.

She embraced sobriety in 1999. Her days begin well before dawn, with recovery readings and text chains with several sober groups. By her own projection, her pastsell date in entertainment should have happened in 2008.

Yes, she is the child of Leigh and Curtis, both Oscar nominees. Yes, she was the goddaughter of Lew Wasserman; for decades, a top Hollywood talent agent and studio executive. Yes, Jake Gyllenhaal is her godson. And yes, she is married to Christopher Guest, also an Oscar nominee.

What did it get her? "I've never worked for a friend of my family's. I've never worked for Rob Reiner, who is my husband's best friend and whose house we got married at. Never worked for people I grew up with. Nothing. I've worked for strangers. Strangers have hired me," she says emphatically. "The assumption is that there's this fast track like Disneyland. I'm not saying you might not cut a line a little bit, maybe by 10 people, because you have a famous pedigree because people are curious."

But that won't put you in prestige pictures, she says, or keep you there.

Curtis felt compelled to watch the Oscar announcements at 5:30 a.m. "Why?" Guest asked. "Because I have to exercise your movie *For Your Consideration*, a movie about people wanting, longing, fantasizing and dreaming about wanting an Oscar," she told him. "It's hilarious and it's heartbreaking. Because it's a fiction and I have to face the reality."

And so she did. Oscar-winning producer Debbie Oppenheimer dropped by, because she didn't want her friend to be alone and, just in case, to document the moment when Curtis's name was called.

Guest remained upstairs as though it was just another Tuesday. He didn't descend to her office off the kitchen until 6:05 a.m. Curtis recalls, "A half-hour has gone by of me screaming and crying, and he asks, 'What happened?'"

Well, everything.

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