

# Acting

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Actress **Ashley Judd** finds a fiery voice in a moving new book and her continued work in Washington championing the plight of women and children worldwide.

**Ashley Judd leads** a remarkable life. And no one knows that better than Ashley Judd.

BY LAUREN PAGE KENNEDY

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cratic Republic of Congo, India and other nations in her role as a global ambassador for D.C.-based Population Services International (psi.org). PSI provides healthcare for women and girls around the globe who are subject to the world's worst abuses: sex trafficking, forced labor and rape as a tool of warfare.

The organization is allowed access into brothels and war-torn areas with impunity because its role is not to rescue, but to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and to offer other essential medical services. Judd was first asked in 2002 to lend her celebrity clout for the group's initiative YouthAIDS, with the mission of global education and prevention. As her passion for the cause escalated, so did her travels with PSI; she became a board member in 2004.

"The genesis of the book comes from the diaries I've written [while traveling]," Judd tells *Flyer*. "I started sending emails to a group of friends, and they took on a life of their own. Before I knew it, my attorney said, 'You need to save these in case they become a book one day.' And by the time I'd visited 13 countries, I had 650 pages of diaries."

aid for the world's most vulnerable peoples or for the ethical treatment of animals.

She spends her summers living in a castle in the highlands of Scotland, her winters on a rolling farm in Tennessee. Then she trails her race-car-driving husband, Dario Franchitti, on tour as he tears up tracks around Europe. She's done the Cambridge-grad-student thing, where she earned her Masters in Public Administration at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government in 2010. And her high-profile acting gigs take her to such far-flung destinations.

But Judd never forgets her humble beginnings, which saw her boomeranging back and forth between California and Kentucky, Florida and Japan, sometimes living in safe and decent housing, sometimes not, as her mother, Naomi, chased dreams of first becoming an actress, then a country superstar with Ashley's half-sister Christina, now famously called Wynonna.

As the globetrotting star of "Kiss the Girls," "Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood" and "High Crimes" currently embraces nomadic wanderings that encompass geographic and economic extremes, she seems to understand that if anyone was born to be an experience-seeking, truth-telling gypsy, it just might be her.

**A Story to Tell**

In her new memoir, *All That Is Bitter and Sweet*, the actress and activist, 43, traces the evolution of her wanderlust and social conscience to her own hard-knock, often lonely childhood.

The book, which hit bookstores in April, was born from a series of emails Judd wrote to friends and colleagues while traveling through Cambodia, Thailand, Nicaragua, the Demo-

These 650 pages included the heartbreaking tales of women and young girls whose vulnerability left Judd feeling "shattered." Their collective disempowerment also tapped into something deeper—Judd's own sense of powerlessness growing up.

As a child, the actress was uprooted countless times after her parents' divorce, attending 13 schools before graduating high school. Only sporadically seeing her father due to the intense acrimony between her parents, Judd movingly writes of how she and her mother and sister bounced from town to town, apartment to apartment, and school to school. There was neglect; there was abuse. "With Mom," Judd shares in the book, "the punishment never fit the crime and even telling the truth earned a spanking ... or worse, the dreaded 'silent violence' of more neglect."

As Ashley was hitting puberty and "The Judds"—the stage name Naomi and Wynonna famously adopted—were experiencing a heady level of success in and out of Nashville, she found herself the outsider looking in, a forgotten note to their musical duo. She battled depression and isolation.

While compiling her passionate emails into a memoir, Judd reveals she had to be "pushed hard" by her publishers to open up and get personal.

"I had real trepidation about my own narrative hijacking the story, or becoming a distraction or being inappropriately used by others as the focus of the book—which it is not—but I was assured by those I decided to trust that it

would help the book make more sense," she says. "For example, the impotence I felt growing up when my sister was being treated terribly... and, of course, my own disempowerment as a child. All of it, in the aggregate, is how I arrived at this point. It's how I make my meaning, and why I make my life an act of worship."

And a serious "act of worship" it is. Judd is no superficial celebrity endorser who lends her name without walking the walk.

"Ashley is dedicated and serious," says Marshall Stowell, PSI's director of corporate marketing and communications here in Washington, someone with whom Judd has traveled to half a dozen countries on official PSI work. "She's thoughtful in her approach, respectful and educated on the issues. She goes on trips, meets with presidents and prime ministers, and speaks to the media. She has an unusual mix of compassion and intelligence, and her struggles in life only add to her dedication to help girls and women. She's one of the smartest people I've ever met."

**Passionate DNA**

"It's interesting," Judd says now, "but I just filmed an episode of [NBC's] 'Who Do You Think You Are?' They've been working on my genealogy for a year... I wanted to know why I am the way I am—thought it would be interesting to know if there are folks in my [family's] past who were equally fired up as I am... and the answer is resoundingly yes. People who were imprisoned and reviled for believing the way they believed, and for looking for a better life. [Empathy] just might be in our DNA."

Between her work on the memoir and its promotional tour, her frequent travels and her Washington engagements, just how does the actress manage to find time to, well, act?

Recently she's dipped her toe again in Hollywood waters, teaming with Morgan Freeman for the third time in the upcoming family drama "Dolphin Tale," and by joining ABC's highly anticipated "Missing," a new series that sees Judd playing a CIA agent scouring Europe for her missing son.

With plot points that take her rogue agent across the Czech Republic and Italy (she begins shooting in Europe this summer) as she uncovers the underbelly of Europe's crime rings, "Missing" hits very close to home—which is why Judd is so excited about it.

"There will be storylines that pertain to my feminist social justice work, absolutely," she says. "Very salient and compelling—and just good, emotional drama. Good fun. I'm gonna give it a whirl!" Once a nomad, always a nomad, it seems. Judd is already packing her bags. ☺

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