

## People

# Ashley Judd offers a peek into her life

Actress and activist takes the bitter with the sweet in cathartic new memoir

By Donna Freydkin  
USA TODAY

**A**shley Judd is braced for heavy loads. She totes an overflowing eggplant-colored Birkin bag — filled with water, her ever-present iPhone and a bag of jewelry she has brought along for a photo shoot. And the actress turned activist, who is in town to speak at a women's conference, tackles some heavy topics in her memoir, *All That Is Bitter & Sweet*, out today (Ballantine Books, \$26).

Writing the book was cathartic for Judd. "My job was to stay continually willing and to remember that it's none of my business how it turns out or what the outcome may be. I'm just asked to be in the moment and share my truth.

When I stay in that space, things are generally pretty easy," she says. "There's a flow. I had trouble with the family narrative because I have so many memory blackouts. I had to learn to write 'I don't know.' That was, without a doubt, the most frustrating part. But the diaries were there. I had so much material."

Judd, 42, is passionate and articulate. She's vividly in tune with her emotions, saying she'd had a "purifying cry" this morning before speaking on a panel about the child sex trade as part of Tina Brown's Women in the World summit.

Her memoir is equally frank. It deals both with Judd's troubled upbringing and her present-day humanitarian work on behalf of women.

Judd reveals that she felt lonely and dislocated growing up, changing schools throughout her childhood and being left behind as her mother, Naomi, and sister Wynonna cemented their "pathological attachment" to each other and pursued country stardom as The Judds.

She writes that she used to play with her mother's gun, pondering whether "it would be worth it to shoot myself." She recalls that during early adolescence, she was molested by the husband of a family member she does not name. And she says that although she was a cheerleader and went to the prom with a football player, she was, in reality, "living a double life, keeping my loneliness and my deepening depression to myself."

Judd says her family was on board with her decision to dig deep. "My mother has read the book. I certainly gave it to my sister. I don't know if she's read it yet, but she absolutely supports what I've



By Stan Godlewski for USA TODAY

**New roles:** Ashley Judd has written a book and will star in TV series *Missing* and the film *Dolphin Tale*. She also has another college degree.

done. I gave everyone ample opportunity to be familiar with the text."

She finally dealt with a lifetime of emotional issues by checking into the Shades of Hope treatment center in Texas in February 2006. The experience realigned her life.

"I sat there, literally, for forty-two days, everything out of my control, so I could feel the emotions I had worked so very, very hard all my life to avoid and, if that wasn't possible, control," Judd writes.

Today, she says, the change in her is palpable. "I have improved self-esteem. I have healthier boundaries. I know that no means no. No is a complete sentence. I'm able to stand autonomously now with the god of my understanding."

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And she has another college degree. Last May, Judd, who believes in ongoing self-improvement, earned a Mid-Career Master in Public Administration degree from Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

"I loved school. It was a very meaningful experience," Judd says, adding that the degree has fringe benefits. "My mother-in-law has always loved me. She has a new level of respect. She's a recent graduate of the University of Edinburgh. She just got her master's in law. So we're a little smug at the dinner table." (Judd is married to race car driver Dario Franchitti.)

Book learning aside, Judd says she's now ready to go back to work.

"I don't know that I ever worked emotionally sober before recovery, so I'm really looking forward to having that really grueling, intensive acting experience while importing all of my new skills," she says.

Later this year, she's starring in the ABC series *Missing*. "My main objective in the series is to make it really fun. I'm going to suit up and show up and see what happens," she says. In September, she stars with Morgan Freeman in the family movie *Dolphin Tale*.

Judd spends most of her time on the Tennessee farmhouse she shares with Franchitti. They romp with their dogs. They hike. She likes to "poke around" her house and garden. And on truly rowdy nights, she and her husband play charades.

Can she imagine quitting her charity work and living the glam Hollywood life?

"There are more ways to die than simply stopping breathing," she says. "For me it would be a death."