

# Showbiz

## A bit close for comfort

Ashley Judd's own bout with depression made her anxious about Helen role

PARK CITY, Utah — First she sobbed, then got scared.

And Ashley Judd wondered, would her own mental health survive?

At issue was the script for *Helen*, about a university professor who seemingly has it all — affluence, a loving family — but spirals helplessly into an all-consuming depression.

For the 40-year-old Judd, the story cut to the bone: In 2006, she sought treatment for depression and codependency.

"When I read it, I was on a flight to Los Angeles," she tells Sun Media. "I was weeping on the airplane because I was so moved."

As compelling as the material was, however, Judd hesitated. Was it too close to her own life? She sought the advice of two people she refers to her as mentors. "I said (to them), 'Do you think I can do this movie and stay safe? Can I play the disease without being in the disease?'" and they said 'How dare you not? You of all people are so uniquely equipped... and you can carry the message in a way that perhaps few others can.'"

Directed by Sandra Nettelbeck, the resulting Canadian/German co-production premiered this weekend at the Sundance film festival. It co-stars Goran Visnjic (*ER*) as Judd's husband, Vancouver newcomer Alexia Fast as

her daughter and Canadian Lauren Lee Miller (*CSI*) as the troubled young woman who her.

Now a year after wrapping the film in Vancouver, Judd says her professional detachment to the character never wavered despite the harrowing subject matter.

"There was only one scene that was triggering for me — where after they called 'Cut' I kept crying. For everything else, I was able to shake the dust off my sandals and go on my merry way. That's not to say it wasn't hard work. I didn't

go out, I didn't go to movies, I didn't go to tea with my friends. I worked on this and that's all I did."

In fact, one presumes the next part might be harder: discussing the movie — and her life — publicly. "I was a little nervous about coming to the festival and talking about these things, knowing I'd be asked," she admits.

Nonetheless, for today's interview in a café on Main Street, she is open and frank about her life-long struggle with depression. "It had always been there, to lesser and greater degrees, since I was a kid," she says. "There was a genetic predisposition and there were environmental factors which I had in abundance."

But it wasn't until she was visiting her sister, singer Wynonna Judd — who was being



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Ashley Judd on her role in *Helen*

RAMIN RAHIMIAN/REUTERS

treated for an eating disorder — that Ashley identified her own illness. "I discovered I had something called codependency and that there was actually a solution. I had been somewhat able to cope with it to different degrees at different points in my life. But this meant I could get relief on a core level and do work on the underlying causes of the condition and have a practical plan of action on a daily basis, which is essentially a spiritual solution."

That said, she adds, "I'm in no way, shape or form try-

ing to be a spokesperson for recovery from mental illness or suggest that my experience represents the whole. That's one of the torturous quirks about depression — it's so hellishly unique and particular to each individual ... It's a really baffling and powerful and cunning disease."

Whether or not she might inspire others to seek help, she says, isn't up to her. "I have to leave the results to a power greater than myself."

One thing in her power, though, is her career. Or at

least her interest in it. Post-treatment, she feels rejuvenated about acting — something she'd once mulled quitting altogether. "I have discovered I do enjoy acting, I really do ... I enjoy being around like-kind. That's why doing the festival is such a nice experience because I do my human rights work and my husband moves in a very different world from mine," says Judd, who is married to race-car driver Dario Franchitti. "Because I have chosen to dial down on my work when I

am with my kind on a film set I find it very animating. I do have a renewed enthusiasm."

She will next be seen in the U.S. immigration drama *Crossing Over* with Harrison Ford and then in June opposite Dwayne Johnson in the family fantasy-comedy *Tooth Fairy*.

Still, her criteria for picking projects hasn't changed: namely, the quality of the material. "It was that way before and it's that way now."

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Ashton Kutcher and Demi

## Demi fine with hubby Ashton's nude scenes

KEVIN WILLIAMSON  
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PARK CITY, Utah — Ashton Kutcher didn't have to worry how his wife Demi Moore would react to all the explicit sex in his new gigolo comedy *Spread*.

She'd already been there for

the filming of it.

"She was on the set," Kutcher told the audience at Saturday night's world premiere, which Moore attended. "So that was a little uncomfortable ... (But) it helps that we're both artists. Communication overcomes all."

In the film, Kutcher stars as

a conniving Hollywood hustler who seduces older women in order to maintain a posh lifestyle. One of them is played by 39-year-old Anne Heche, who shares multiple — and fairly graphic — nude scenes with the 30-year-old actor. Not that she was the only one. Also in the mix is Canadian Rachel

Blanchard who receives a, um, close shave in one scene.

Of course, Moore shares a similarly erotic professional history with Sundance founder Robert Redford: he did, after all, pay \$1 million to sleep with her in 1993's *Indecent Proposal*.

But it was another movie about wealth, power and sex

that inspired Kutcher, also one of *Spread*'s producers, to make *Spread*: Warren Beatty's 1975 classic *Shampoo*.

"I thought this story could be my version of something like that. That's what I was aspiring to."

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