

ON-SCREEN HERO, REAL-LIFE BADASS

Candice Patton's Heroism Is Anything but Fictional

WRITTEN BY: **JORDAN NISHKIAN**

PHOTOGRAPHED BY: **MICHAEL WESLEY**

STYLED BY: **TERESITA MADRIGAL**

HAIR BY: **LAUREN CLARK**

MAKEUP BY: **CRYSTAL TRAN**

CANDICE PATTON

@candicepatton

Photoshoot Location:

LA SERENA VILLAS

339 S Belardo Rd

Palm Springs, CA 92262

760.832.8044

www.laserenavillas.com

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For Candice Patton, playing a leading role on a superhero show was a dream she never thought would be possible to achieve. “I think just being a black woman, it didn’t seem very possible,” she reveals. “So I don’t think that I had those dreams.” But after landing a main role on “The Flash,” Patton began to discover that this was only the beginning of discovering her true power.

Born in Jackson, Mississippi and raised in Plano, Texas, Patton was taught from a young age how important it is to be driven for success—especially as a woman. “[My mom]’s always been the person that I’ve tried to be like. She was a working mom and I think she inadvertently instilled this idea of working hard and achieving for yourself. My dad worked, too, but I think it was really nice to see my mom also contribute to the household.” From there, that simple yet powerful example that her mother gave influenced Patton to become the woman that she is today. “It was a no-brainer that that’s what I would do. I would go to work and achieve for myself—so I’ve never really looked to a man or any other person to support me.”

After completing her education and receiving her BFA from Dallas’ Southern Methodist University, from which she graduated Summa Cum Laude, Patton followed her dreams and moved to Los Angeles. After a string of roles on various films and TV shows, some including *The Guest*, “The Young and the Restless” and “The Game,” she landed her most noteworthy role yet: Iris West.

“Career-wise, I’m proud of not giving up. It’s not so much about where I am but just the sheer tenacity to stick with it,” Patton says. “Cause, of course, there were times I wanted to just quit and pack up and go back home and just do something else, but looking back I’m really proud that I’ve stuck with it.”

All of her hard work and self-proclaimed tenacity has paid off. Through her role as Iris West, Patton has proven herself to be an integral part of DC’s TV domain. Even though she is the love interest of

Barry Allen (aka the Flash), West goes through her own character development and never wavers in her personal and moral strength. “She’s very strong-willed and strong-minded so we’ve always shared that in common,” Patton says with a smile. “She’s definitely a character that I have a lot of respect for and have fun playing.” Throughout the past five seasons of “The Flash,” West goes through her own trials, tribulations and even some surprising transformations (no spoilers here!).

Not only is Iris West a hero in her own right, but she is also an incredible role model. “For her to not have powers and still be a hero, I think is really empowering to a lot of young women.” And she would be correct. The superhero world is predominantly made up of male characters with either natural-born powers, such as Superman, or with powers that have manifested via an external force like Green Lantern’s ring or a freak accident at Barry Allen’s lab. While superheroines appeared in American comics in the 1940s (around the time Rosie the Riveter made her debut), it took a while for the characters to be treated with the same heroic aptitude as their male counterparts—even a version of Wonder Woman was pushed into the homemaker role after the end of WWII saw most American women go from factory worker to housewife.

In truth, superheroines weren’t really ‘commonplace’ until around the 1990s, but even then most leading, non-super female roles (especially love interests of the main hero) were often used as damsels, no matter how brave or strong of a character she was. Think about it—even the fearless and determined Lois Lane was regularly being caught mid-air by Superman after a villain had flung her off of a skyscraper.



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Who Ran the World?

• “Feminism to me is just humanism. It’s about having the respect for anyone and everyone and giving everyone equality and a platform to achieve their dreams,” Patton says.

Every Hero Needs an Anthem

• Patton’s personal anthem can be found on her social media pages as well as some talented fan art: “Do no harm, take no shit.”

What’s in Her Bag?

• Five things Patton always has handy are: “a charger, my earbuds, some form of moisturizer, my Nintendo Switch and probably a journal, which I never write in, but just in case.”

"I encourage everyone, but especially women, to continue to speak up even if it's hard, even if your voice is shaking, even if you're terrified."

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Needless to say, female characters who played the hero’s love interest were oftentimes (and to no fault of their own) a form of weakness for the main hero.

But thanks to a recent push in serious girl power, these roles are changing, and Iris West is an excellent example of that. “She’s pretty fearless despite not having any powers,” Patton explains. “I think we’ve done a good job showing over the past five seasons that she never lets that get in the way with her trying to get involved and be heroic in her own right, which I think is really, really cool.”

For Patton, playing West’s character isn’t just about representing women—it’s also about representing women of color. “I was a huge Batman fan growing up and I love the idea of a superhero, but yeah, it wasn’t really something that I thought was possible [for me],” Patton says, remembering how most superheroes that she saw on TV were, for the majority, white males. “It’s kind of crazy that I’m here and that so many girls who look like me are believing it’s possible for them because they see so much more [representation] now.”

“The reach that [the show has] had—that I’ve had—gets lost on me because we shoot in Vancouver and we’re kind of isolated up there,” says Patton. “But as soon as we land at Comic-Con or any of these huge events you see how much this show, these characters [and the representation of diversity] mean to people, and how it’s changed the industry and how it’s changed the superhero genre—yeah, it’s pretty incredible when I really sit back and think about it.”

But Patton’s passion for making the future a better place for her fans didn’t stop there. “Caity [Lotz] and I, she’s on another DC TV show, we just wanted a way to connect with our fans in a more genuine way other than seeing them at conventions and only being able to give them a quick autograph and a hello and goodbye,” she explains. Upon meeting their favorite TV idols, “these girls would come up and share their experiences and tell [Patton and Lotz] how much [their] characters meant to them as young women.” Not only was it empowering, it was also a strong foundation for what Patton and Lotz did next: “We wanted to be able to give something back to them and to show them examples of how

we deal with life as women, and it’s become a community where people in general just share their experiences as women no matter what walk of life they’re from.”

That community that Patton’s referring to is Shethority, an online community which she and Lotz established in order to create a safe, positive, empowering space for women (including “cis women, transwomen, genderqueer women and non-binary people who are significantly female-identified”) to share their experiences and support each other. Not only does Shethority serve as a day-by-day hub for anyone looking for a healthy dose of girl power, but the online community also sells merchandise such as Girls Not Brides, Girls, Inc. and Girl Forward.

Through this site, Patton’s main goal was to do her part in changing the dialogue of how women interact with other women. “I think media has pushed this idea that we are each other’s adversaries and I think the opposite is actually true,” Patton explains, saying that she believes that women, by supporting other women, create a stronger, healthier experience for everyone. “There’s just always been this narrative that women are in competition with each other and so I genuinely want to be a part in any way that I can to change that narrative by showing that anytime women come together and work together, it’s for the good of everyone involved.”

And this is an idea that Patton hopes to continue and represent through all aspects of her career as well as her life. She wants her struggles and her successes to pave the way for the girls of the future. To the girls of the next generation, she wishes to offer this message: speak up. “I think as women, throughout history, we’ve been taught to be quiet and say less and there’s this movement of speaking up in general—whether it’s sexual assault or bullying or speaking up about things that you believe in,” says Patton with her head held high. “I think that’s where our power is and where it will be in the future. So I encourage everyone, but especially women, to continue to speak up even if it’s hard, even if your voice is shaking, even if you’re terrified. There’s power and freedom in speaking your truth.” ■



Land of the Rising Sun

• “I really want to go to Japan. I’m obsessed with the culture, the people and how polite they are. I just think that I would love Japan.”

Take Two

• “I’ll often walk on set misbuttoned, or my pants are unzipped, or I’ve put on two different shoes, or I’ll have one earring on and I’ll literally go to camera; we’ll do a whole take and I’ll just look [like] a hot mess.”

Keep on Pushing on

• For Patton, there’s no such thing as being comfortable or satisfied. “I’m happy for the trajectory, I’m happy for where I am, but I’m also very eager to see where I’ll go,” she says.



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