

Discover the Real Cloris Leachman

By Wendy Gray



*Cloris Leachman wearing her own clothing line
Photo by Charles Busch*

She's drop-dead hilarious and wildly unique – that we know. But what does the reigning Emmy Award queen have to say about mothering five children, the truth behind her *Dancing with the Stars* flexibility, and... her innate fear of opium dens? The Oscar-winning funny woman shares insights about turning negatives into positives – and reveals a great deal of her true self in the process.

MORE: Tell us about a time when you made a life-altering decision.

CL: I decided not to smoke cigarettes at age six because I had this wretched picture in my mind of people in opium dens, and I thought that's what would happen to me if I smoked. I made a lot of major decisions when I was six. Some kid spit in my lunch at school – that's when I decided I would never get bitter.

You have such a positive outlook, taking adversity and rejection with ease. What's your advice for people struggling in today's tough climate?

Start breathing. Whenever things go differently than expected, we stop breathing. If we think negatively, we react negatively to our own thoughts. And really, how many times do the things we most fear actually happen? Yes, there's a lot of bad stuff going on, but that's always the case. You can attract good things; you just have to know what you want. Somebody once said – and I think it's so true – “If you're clear about what you want, people tend to want to give it to you.”

You've always been into healthy eating and taking care of yourself. What's your philosophy?

Draw a big O, and put a diagonal line through it. If it's bad for you, don't put it in that hole – your mouth – put it in any other hole but that. (She laughs.)

What drove you to create your own clothing line?

I hate going into someone's closet and thinking, “Oh, God. It's all so stale.” I love our clothes because they're flattering, easy and sexy. They truly work for all ages and sizes, night and day, plus all pieces are under \$50. They're just fun.

You've got some big movies coming out this year. What's next?

I'd love to sing. We were discussing what I would do after *Dancing with the Stars* and I said, “I'll be on *American Idol*.” Then I learned you have to be under 28. So my son said, “We'll just get Gloria Allred and she'll sue them for age discrimination.” (She laughs. A lot.)

Here's a serious question: Who would win a Jell-O wrestling match – you or Betty White?

Oh, without question, I would.

(continued)

Other than expressing disdain for Russell Crowe on *Chelsea Lately* recently, you rarely say anything negative about anyone. How do you avoid gossiping?

Oh, I love to gossip, and I love to hear gossip. But that's all it is. I never want to be cruel, but I'm always noticing people's oddities. As an actress, it's important to be aware of differences, because otherwise you'd play the same character all the time.

What are your thoughts on parenting?

I've never seen any reason to get mad at my children – they're human beings with feelings. We've always had fun as a family instead. Once, my mother was staying with us in our three-story house when the kids were young, and she called out to me, "Bryan is up on top of the roof – how do you want to reward him?" (She belly laughs. For a long time.)

What would be the most important thing President Obama could do for people your age?

Kiss me.

(Well, I'd settle for a hug.)

You've been pressured to change your name and your face. Why didn't you?

When I was a little girl with so many freckles it was ridiculous, I looked in the mirror and said, "Who am I?" I remember seeing that I had a long neck, back and nose. So I thought, "I'm aristocratic." And definitely, in real life, of course, I was a princess – or at least somebody of royal birth. (She laughs.) Also about that time, I was crying and caught a glimpse of myself in the bedroom mirror. God, it was ugly. That's when I became aware that I could look different ways. I didn't even know that was called acting.

How is it that you can still lift your leg over your head?

Stretching. When I say *stretching*, though, it's about the least amount you can do in the world. But I can bend down and touch the floor with my entire hand. It's not so much that I'm lithe – it's that I have short legs.

To what do you attribute your substantial success?

I've had a remarkable, amazing experience – and that's not an accident. When I was a child in Iowa, I woke up every morning to sunshine, a light breeze and meadowlarks singing – heaven. My mother was an imaginative, accepting person. If I'd been criticized as a kid, I never would have arrived where I did. Once, in high school, I stayed out all night. When I got home, Mama said, "I thought you were smarter than that." My God, that meant that she thought I was really smart! That's the message I got, anyway.

Thanks for your time today, Cloris. Is there anything else you want to add?

About that wrestling match with Betty White, the reason I would win is because my legs are *really* strong. I think it's the stretching.

With 58 films under her belt, Cloris Leachman is hotter than ever and has five new film projects currently in the works.

Contrary to Hollywood's focus on the younger set, Cloris achieved acclaimed career success only *after* turning 40, earning an Academy Award and her first Emmy in her mid-40s, and subsequently becoming the most highly decorated actress in Emmy history.

Published in *More* magazine online