



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“The whole goal for me with this was just that people would look at it and go like this, ‘Oh, I get it. She’s real. She’s just a person like me.’ And that was my whole goal. Look how happy I am, because I was so free. I was so happy.”

-Jamie Lee Curtis, in
“Extremely Perfect,” CBS
Worldwide, August 2,
2003

In 2003, Jamie Lee Curtis bared her forty-three-year-old self (she was wearing only a sports bra and underwear) in a *More* magazine photograph. There was no makeup, no touching up, no airbrushing, no soft and flattering lights – simply Jamie Lee Curtis as she was. Like thousands of other women, I was impressed and thrilled to have a celebrity hand this gift to us because, by doing so, she was letting everyone know that photographs in magazines do not necessarily represent reality. The perfection of models isn’t true to life; or, as it says in the article, “No matter how beautiful or how thin the model, she’s often retouched in some way to make her even more beautiful and thinner still. What the magazines are selling, Curtis says, is a beauty that is largely unattainable.”

So when I heard that Curtis was going to speak at the recent American Library Association conference, I went to hear her. The line started an hour before the talk, the room was packed

and various library awards were given out for about 45 minutes before she talked, but finally she appeared on the stage. She was vibrant, funny, passionate and opinionated – and the audience loved her. “Why am I here?” she wondered, as she looked out at the huge crowd of librarians. “You are the gatekeepers,” she told us, “and you have let me in.”

She talked about her SAT scores (a combined total of 840) and asked us: “What do you do when you can’t do anything else?” She paused, then answered: “Act.” She gave us her opinions on reading – “Reading should be the key to everything...read a book and you’re sitting on top of the world...it’s really the book that’s the freedom.”

She expressed her concerns about the state of the world, especially the “vulgarity and profanity on the radio” and the pornographic images readily available on the web. I know you understand what I’m talking about, she declared and,

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as librarians, we do. What we didn't tell her about, though, is the struggle we (especially public librarians) have as those very gatekeepers, because we have to balance what we believe in – the freedom for everyone to access the information they want – with the protection of our public. Her outrage is real and legitimate, but it is so difficult to draw lines for others.

Curtis is the author of 8 picture books for children and she gave us some background on how she got started writing. The first one came from her experiences with her then young daughter and she wrote it, sent it off to an agent and requested an illustrator she admired, Laura Cornell. I'm not sure if this process would be so simple for someone who was less well known, but her books have

been well received. And, according to the young teacher who sat next to me, children love them.

Curtis ended her talk by holding up her newest book. "I'd show you the illustrations," she told us, "but you wouldn't be able to see them." Once the

audience pointed out the two huge screens on each side of her, she was thrilled. "Can you pull the camera in tighter?" she called out.

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"And tighter?" They obliged – and she started to read: "*Big Words for Little People...*"