

WINGMAN
MAGAZINE

LOVIN' LAKIN

The Captivating
CHRISTINE LAKIN
Steps Behind The Lens

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or many years in entertainment, the dream girl celebrated by movie going and tv watching men usually fell into one of two categories; the sexy bombshell, or the American sweetheart. Offering little room for anything in between, both limiting titles were pretty much all that were poised when it came to attracting the attention of the male viewers – a female could be the sweet girl you bring home to mom, or the smoke show siren you leave the good girl for – with very little wiggle room in between for a female to find their own voice, and deeper relatability within a character. And while there have been a few groundbreaking women to channel those stigmas throughout the history of entertainment, it should also be noted how much the dazzling Christine Lakin served as a game-changer to the world.

Coming into fame as a child star on the beloved modern classic “*Step by Step*,” the un-boxable actress defied many expected labels as she portrayed a character that was a far cry from both the bombshell and the sweetheart. As AJ Lambert, Lakin puts forth a headstrong, uncompromising, and unapologetic tomboy that could easily and happily roll in the dirt with her brothers, and still kick the shit out of all of them. While mostly wearing overalls and a backwards cap, the impressive actress gave new meaning to the girl next door as she displayed characteristics that were seen as far from girly, and if anything almost masculine in nature. A far cry from a sweetheart, there was nothing frilly, cutesy, or sweet about her, and even if in her later years she never grew into a sexy siren either. She stayed completely true to herself at all times, making her one of the most celebrated tomboys of television history – and Lakin, should very much be applauded for that.

But really, through the character, the innovative actress actually did so much more for society than as a whole. Again, refusing to be boxed in to one of the accepted and glorified stereotypes of what a dream girl in entertainment should be, Lakin would not succumb to the pressures of building a brand based around the attention and attraction of men – and still, through her authenticity, she managed to achieve it in spades. While most of the other nostalgic dream girls of the time very much fitting in to one category or another, Lakin scored legions of adoring male fans while being this nonconforming headstrong character. Through AJ Lambert, Lakin defied what a dream girl could be, and offered up a new revitalized version for the moniker that male audiences swooned over just as much as the sweet or sexy It-girls of the time – in fact, in many cases, maybe even more so. Without ever altering herself to appeal to men, but always achieving their appeal, Lakin inspired a new version of what young women were allowed to be seen as on screen, while also waking men up to the idea that these kind of girls deserve their attention in real life – while also giving other girls who refuse to conform to societies’ standards, a relatable voice for themselves, as well as hope that they too can be themselves and be just fine. In many ways, Lakin paved the way for women like Sarah Michelle Gellar to be appreciated as a kick-ass slayer on “*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,” and for wholesome tomboys like Katie Holmes’ Joey Potter on “*Dawson’s Creek*,” and still, both of those characters, and very few since then have really demonstrated quite the same combination of strength and masculinity in a female, while still possessing a relatable vulnerability. In truth, the character that Lakin plays was far from a standard troupe tomboy character, and really, she is very much in a league all on her own.

And a major part of that is how much of a true talent the gifted thespian actually is. The real deal in terms of the acting chops to deliver a performance that makes you feel, Lakin was able to tap into the complexities and vulnerabilities of a nonconforming female at an inspiringly young age. Many actors aren’t able to find layers that complex in a character even later on in their careers – and certainly not usually on a family sitcom, and still, Lakin was able to achieve this even before she hit her teenage years. Raw and sincere, the magnetic actress always managed to deep dive into the nuances of her character and find a more riveting truth there than could ever have been imagined – all while still always appropriately landing every joke. Innately talented, the persevering performer displayed early on that she had what it took to be compelling in front of the camera – even if the boundaries of Hollywood made many sharply refuse to see it long after she left her beloved role.

Like most child stars who get their beginnings on family sitcoms and entertainment aimed toward youth, the dedicated starlet had just as hard of a time in getting Hollywood executives to take her seriously – a struggle that is still very real to this day. Make no mistake – the boxes actresses are allowed to fit in in

terms of entertainment are still just as limiting – and those designated toward child stars are even more debilitating. After growing up in front of the cameras and giving this business her all and then some, Lakin was frequently stigmatized, knocked down, and debilitated by those around her that would insist she stay inside the box built for her. But Christine Lakin always had a way of taking her designated box, breaking through its glass ceiling, and building up a castle for herself while paving the way for all those that would follow.

Truly intuitive and business savvy in a way that even the most touted actors in Hollywood never seem to achieve even late in their careers, Lakin has proven to be quite the clever sponge that soaks up the knowledge of this business and turns all expectations on their heads. Persevering to a fault, the entrepreneurial and creative artist is a genius at finding the back doors of the industry and breaking them down to let herself in. Like most child stars, Lakin has been devoted to showing the world that she is far more than her first role – and really, for those who have refused to see it, she has way more than proven her worth. Without any ego, the brainy beauty was smart enough to not wait for the next leading role to come to her, all while taking on smaller side roles that continued to keep her working and show what she can do. If there is a single word that can define her; resilient is that word. Christine Lakin simply does not give up.

And the same way she changed expectations for what a girl should be in front of the cameras, she has really begun to do the same behind them as well. In the ebbs of her career, while still always knowing that she wanted to stick with show business, the resourceful talent managed to get booked as a choreographer behind the scenes – a role that would pave the way toward her being a pioneer of the women behind the lens movement as she now also directs and produces stories of her own.

Crafty as can be, Lakin is one of the few stars that actually learned something about the business while growing up within it – and she has really dedicated herself toward breaking down doors and shedding stigmas for all around her. From podcasts, to branding deals, to subversive new storytelling like her tongue in cheek cult hit *"Hollywood Darlings,"* Lakin clearly learned a thing or two from TV mother Suzanne Somers – who might as well own the word resilience. Taking every knock as a boost, Lakin has utilized every box she has been put into, there will be each one higher and higher as she creates an empire with them that no one could have predicted. Outstandingly talented, commendably hard working, and savvy as fuck, Lakin always seemed to find a way to break free from the box, defy stigmas and expectations, and build a better Hollywood not just for herself, but for all that will follow.

Like most of those that grew up with her on their screens, we here at *WINGMAN* have loved Christine Lakin for what seems like our entire lives, and it is always tremendously thrilling to watch her succeed – and even more thrilling to get her in our pages to talk about those successes and how she achieved them. So, to find out what she had to say about her tv beginnings, her directorial efforts, and what she would like to do in the future, read on to the following interview to see what Lakin had to say!

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WINGMAN: You are an excellent actress with great comedic timing, but recently you have become a force to be reckoned with behind the scenes as well, and you have served as a director on quite a few projects. What inspired you to take the jump behind the lens, and how was that process?

CHRISTINE LAKIN: I've always been someone uniquely interested in the production of theater, television and films. As an actor, I would study call sheets, hang out on set, ask people about their jobs. I loved being a part of the "backstage." For me growing up, it was my team sport. I started working professionally when I was 8, so by the time I was in my late 20's, I started to search for something more. I wasn't content to just audition and get hired or rejected based on the subjective criteria that entailed, and rinse and repeat that cycle. Don't get me wrong - I love to perform, but the in between time didn't sit well with my type-A personality. So, I started paving my own way. It began with a digital mockumentary series called "Lovin' Lakin" that I created and starred in, which I eventually sold to Hulu, then an underground storytelling show called "Worst Ever," which became a TV pilot for POP and eventually, after I had kids, a podcast. Shortly thereafter came "Hollywood Darlings," which I helped create, pitch and Executive Produced. Simultaneously, I had this side hustle choreographing film and TV - I was a competitive dancer as a kid before I was acting full time - and after many years working with actors in that capacity, I found myself as a resident choreographer on "The Goldbergs." I was sitting on set behind the monitor, watching many of the great directors they have, and had this A-HA moment where I was like, "why am I not doing THAT job?" Having 30+ years of experience in this business is a short-

hand in production you can only really learn by doing, watching and absorbing and that's a big part of the learning curve for new directors that I innately already had. So, from there I started shadowing everyone I knew and shooting as many of my own projects and other people's projects as I could, gaining practical and technical experience. I was supported by a wonderful organization, WeForShe, which advocated on behalf of up and coming women filmmakers and directors and eventually I made enough fans in "The Goldbergs" camp that they trusted me to give me an episode at the end of 2018 - 7 weeks after I had my second kid no less! I really feel like I finally found the thing I'm meant to do. I love actors. I love crew. I love the details of story and character and collaborating with other artists at the top of their games. It's the best, honestly. And I've been blessed with the opportunity to direct nearly 20 TV productions since then, for ABC, Apple and Disney+. I can't wait for the next one. It's been a very gratifying run.

WINGMAN: In general, as a storyteller, what kind of stories do you seek to tell?

LAKIN: My background is in comedy, so that comes easy. I worked with some incredible comedic talent growing up and watching first person the skill, timing and command of physical comedy giants like Patrick Duffy, Doris Roberts, and Don Knotts had (really giving you some TV history here!) was my training ground. So, when it comes to comedy, the best joke, the best reaction, the best improv wins. Sometimes that's on the page and sometimes we're finding it on the day. That's fun. I love watching an actor on the monitor and having a different idea for a reaction, asking them to try something new and then watch as we all crack up. It's like sitting around trying to make your

friends laugh and when the vibe is good and everyone's down to play, it's truly a high. As far as stories I find interesting, for me, it all starts with character. I love complicated people. Anti-heroes. Good folks set in impossible circumstances. Bad folks who are compelled to change but struggle to do so. What's the stuff that makes us all tick, turns us on, live outside the norms of expectation? Human behavior is fascinating. So, I like to bring that to the page and talk about the why, the before and after of the scene. I think, especially in the fast-paced world of television, those conversations aren't had enough, or at least that's been my experience as an actor. For me, if the character isn't truly developed and deeply thought about in all ways, something will ring false, fall flat, feel... meh. And that's when the audience stops caring. Whether we are pursuing a drama with comedic moments or comedy with a dose of tears, for me, the same rules of thumb apply: How does this affect the character and why? Do I believe it? Do I care? If you can't answer those questions or you don't like the answers, it's time to start over and reevaluate.

WINGMAN: You grew up in front of the camera, and now, as a director you direct many child actors who are in positions that you know very well. What do you tell these kids, and has anyone really impressed you thus far as a superstar of the future?

LAKIN: Good God; yes. I love working with young actors especially because I understand that unique and highly specific niche. It's not an easy road to navigate, it comes with its own set of pressures to perform at work and school and socially... not to mention fame, which is a whole other level that sometimes feels completely foreign to the job you actually do. I feel blessed to have had a great experience as a child



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actor and I think a lot of that has to do with the grounded reality my parents kept me in. I think it's important to keep it all in perspective. If it's not fun, don't do it. Life is more important than Showbusiness and fame is a construct, not who you are. The work, the artist- that has to come first. For anything to be worth what you give up to have a career at a young age, putting the emphasis and focus on the artistry of your craft is what grounds you in meaning for what we do. Long hours, missed birthdays and holidays and vacations and school events- it's a big decision that many young people don't really know they are making. It's important to carve out time for normal things that have no connection to the biz, time for other artistic pursuits, education, and time to be a real person. Because all our choices as actors come from a well of deep experience, feeling, desire, empathy... you name it. You can't get that scrolling your social media and waiting for the phone to ring. It has to be deeper and more meaningful for you as an artist to create a deep and meaningful career with longevity. I think it's also important not to train your ego to marry your job. Many actors, especially young actors, get entrenched in that high/low of getting and loosing jobs and in turn, personalizing it, which is unhelpful and leads to a desperation rollercoaster. I try to (gently) impart my wisdom when asked which is, enjoy it and be grateful while you're doing it, save your money and find something else outside of this you love that makes you feel good. I recently worked with the lead of this new Apple+ show "Life By Ella," Lily Brooks Obriant, who comes from theater roots, has an impeccable work ethic and such a deep well of emotion she can tap into, it's remarkable. She's 15 and I see big things for her. I also recently directed the cast from "High School Musical, The Series" and I cannot say enough positive,

glowing things about them. Warm, generous, beyond prepared, they sing, they dance!, they act- honestly, they got it all in spades. It was a humbling experience to watch them work and collaborate with them.

WINGMAN: When you were a child, you had a masterclass in terms of seasoned veterans that you worked with, with your TV parents being played by Patrick Duffy and Suzanne Somers (who has been in WINGMAN before.) What did they teach you, and what advice from them do you most keep with you today?

LAKIN: They both taught me so many things, but the biggest takeaway was watching two, very famous people, at the top billing of the show, be so incredibly kind and generous and *EUN*. It all starts at the top, and I'll attest this is true time and time again. When your stars and your producers conduct themselves in a certain way, it sets the tone for everyone else to follow suit, whether that's graciously or deplorably. And no crew, working 12 to 16 hours a day, is happy for long if the vibe is bad. And in my opinion, that affects everyone and so it ultimately affects the product. There were so many kids looking to Patrick and Suzanne for how to behave and they both could not have been better examples for any of us. We also witnessed two very talented people who genuinely enjoyed and respected each other, so it's also nice when your fake mom and dad get along.

WINGMAN: Every show seems to have a reboot at this point - particularly 90s nostalgia shows that people love. Any chance that Al from "Step by Step," might meet a man with three kids and form a blended family for a reboot?

LAKIN: You never know! I've been

saying for years there's a reboot in there somewhere. Stacey and I have talked about it. Patrick even said he'd come back in some capacity. I think there's an avenue for it, and watching the show back with Stacey as we record our new podcast "Keanan and Lakin Give you Déjà vu," I will say, some of it holds up conceptually. I'd be down. Can I pull a Bateman and direct a few?

WINGMAN: Do you still keep in touch with your former co-stars? Staci Keenan is now a District Attorney!

LAKIN: She sure is! We do keep in touch, and it's wonderful. Like any relationships, as we've gone separate ways in career and family, we get sidetracked, but it's always like no time has gone by when we hang. We have such an incredible shared history, so, it's comforting to be together. I'm sure other child actors can attest to this dynamic. Stacey did many episodes of my former podcast, and as we start this new one, one of the greatest things has been the set scheduled time together. She's one of the smartest people I know, and incredibly driven. I've always admired her. Patrick and I email and Facebook, and Suzanne has found Instagram so she comments now and then- which I love! Hip and cool forever, she is!

WINGMAN: You recently had Staci and Patrick guest star on your hilarious comedy, "Hollywood Darlings," as well as other 90s favorites such as Will Friedle and Andrew Keegan - who have both been in WINGMAN magazine before, as well as many more. Were there any other guest stars you would have liked to get on the show?

LAKIN: We got a lot of folks we reached out to really, and it was such a blast to reconnect. From Soleil Moon Frye, to Matthew



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Lawrence, Marla Sokoloff, Andrea Barber, Tatyana Ali- everyone brought something so unique and funny, and I think they got a kick out of playing a heightened version of themselves. It really was incredibly liberating and easy in a way to improv our way through the scenes. The hardest part was not cracking each other up because it would end up being a ten minute shut down while Jodie and Bev laughed/cried, and makeup would have to be reapplied. Super fun gig. I miss it.

WINGMAN: "Hollywood Darlings," was really so good. Who came up with the idea for the show, and were you, Jodie, and Beverly the only choices for the leads?

LAKIN: I got a call from my agent saying Jimmy Fox wanted to meet with me. He's a producer from Main Event Media, and he had the idea to get a dream team of women from the 90's together for a show. He started taking meetings with actresses- I'm not certain exactly who was on his list, but once we met and discussed "Lovin' Lakin," I think my sense of humor was the obvious tone he was looking for - irreverent, not afraid to play a version of myself, self-deprecating. At one point the network wanted a 4th "Darling," and we did meet with Keisha Knight Pulliam, but she had some conflicts with other business ventures, and eventually that idea died, and it ended up just us three. Which, in comedy, is usually a better, more conflict-ripe dynamic anyway.

WINGMAN: Speaking of other quintessential Hollywood darlings of the moment, you also worked with both Paris Hilton and Lindsay Lohan during the hype of the wild aughts on the "Hottie and the Nottie" and "Georgia Rule," respectively. Did you ever party with them?

Were you by any chance someone they were meeting at the club when taking that famous picture in the car with Britney Spears?

LAKIN: That was certainly a unique time in my acting life, and probably in pop culture as well. It was fascinating to witness because social media wasn't huge- everyone still had a BlackBerry and online photos and blogs were the thing. I only worked with Lindsay a few days, and I don't have much to say other than it was clearly a troubling time for her personally. To have one's personal life played out for public consumption daily I think would be an impossible way to live, or try to get control over at that age. She seemed really on her own, and not particularly interested in anyone's guidance at the time. Paris, I really enjoyed working with. People have one impression of her that I don't think is wholly accurate. I found her to be gracious, and charming, and really sweet. She's incredibly shrewd and adept at creating and sustaining the business model and empire she's built, and I give her a lot of credit for that. We had an absolute blast when we went to Sundance together. It was a wild night I'll never forget that included sledding in dresses, karaoke, and front row to Velvet Underground with Slash on guitar. She's hilarious and magic like that.

WINGMAN: While you have become a very respected director, you are still quite the beloved actress. In terms of acting, what type of roles would you like to play, and who would you love to work with?

LAKIN: At this point in my life, I welcome anything that sounds fun, different, and unique. I don't care for roles where women are eye candy or standing around to reinforce stereotypes as nagging

wives, or bitchy friends. Lead comedic roles written for women in their 40's that are genuinely funny, speak to the truth of who we are and the time we live in, excite me. Half the female characters I see these days on TV I don't relate to. I think it's past time to dig past the old tropes and give more women writers a voice. Women in their 40s are funny and sexy and nuanced and complicated, and women like me want to watch that. I'm always excited to work with improv and theater trained actors- people like Wendi McLendon-Covey, and Mindy Sterling, and Erinn Hayes, and Stephanie Courtney- who can do everything, make everything funnier, and listen and collaborate with those around them. I felt the same way when Beverly and Jodie and I were together - that kind of dynamic, that kind of shared history- it's truly special. Give me my 90's homies any day - Danielle Fishel, Tatyana Ali, Nicholle Tom, Marla Sokoloff... those women are bankable, beautiful and the real deal. Sign me up!

More of those Hollywood Darlings where we can love us some Lakin? Don't have to ask us twice! ■