

In step with Hollywood Residential's Cheryl Hines

by Eirik_Knutzen

Wearing a flesh-colored body suit and screaming her lungs out, Cheryl Hines made her professional acting debut being stabbed with a long knife by a shadowy character while in a running shower 12 times a day in the "Psycho" soundstage attraction at Universal Studios in Orlando, Fla. Although she was always dripping wet, Hines considered playing Marion Crane (Janet Leigh in Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 motion picture version) a fantastic gig complete with decent weekly paychecks for a couple of years. Nobody really knows what happened to the succession of faceless actors portraying Norman Bates, the insane motel proprietor with an unnatural attachment to his mother.

CHERYL HINES - Cheryl Hines had a supporting role in her last feature film, 'Waitress.' Now she plays herself in the sitcom 'Hollywood Residential.' CNS Photo courtesy of Starz. But lured by the klieg lights and promises of much higher wages in Hollywood, Hines finally loaded up her car and traded sunny Florida for sunny California in the mid-1990s. Never giving up her day jobs, she spent years studying sketch and improv comedy as a member of L.A.'s famed Groundlings Theater.

Hines made her extremely modest screen debut in a dog called "Swamp Thing," then followed it up with microscopic guest shots on such TV series as "Unsolved Mysteries" and "Suddenly Susan."

"My first break in Hollywood was the HBO special that launched 'Curb Your Enthusiasm' seven years ago," she said, "when I was able to quit my day job as the personal assistant to Rob Reiner."

After a brief audition along with a dozen or so other actresses for the role of Cheryl David (the real-life Larry David's screen wife in the one-hour special), a producer for "Curb Your Enthusiasm" called a few hours later to announce that she got the job.

"I was ecstatic," she recalled, laughing, "even though I thought it was just a one-off job. And I was a total unknown at the time."

Confusion reigned supreme during the early years of the show as the very wealthy David, co-creator of "Seinfeld," essentially plays himself in a "cinema verite depiction of his life" surrounded by a handful of actors playing themselves (including Ted Danson and Mary Steenburgen), sprinkled in with another handful of actors (Bob Einstein and Vivica A. Fox) portraying regular characters.

The past season of 10 episodes heavily dealing with David's off-screen divorce throes after 14 years of marriage to Laurie David closely paralleled Hines' depiction of his split with his on-screen environmentalist wife. Somehow the drama never ends in David's strange mind.

"Right now, I don't even know if there will be another season of 'Curb,'" sighed Hines.

"As far as I'm concerned, we need another season to resolve the divorce mess Larry and Cheryl are in," she said, laughing. "I desperately want to know what happens, hoping they will get together again. And I'd love to do another 10 episodes, anytime.

"But the uncertainty is nothing new. Larry always makes it seem like he doesn't want to do it anymore, then does one more season," she continued. "Why? I don't know. Of course, he's a very neurotic and wildly eccentric man. I think the reason we get along so well is that I don't take anything he says personally. My attitude is, 'It's his show, so let him do whatever he wants.'"

Idled by the Hollywood screenwriters' strike, the cool, sophisticated, 42-year-old performer is currently going nuts while wearing out the carpeting between her living room couch and the kitchen - either pacing or helping her 4-year-old daughter Catherine Rose (with manager/producer husband Paul Young) with finger painting and coloring books.

Hines had a supporting role in her last feature film, "Waitress," which was a big sleeper hit, and she has a healthy number of new projects to promote in the immediate future. They include voicing two animated

movies, "Space Chimps" and "The Legend of Secret Pass," plus small parts in the feature films "Henry Poole is Here" and "The Grand."

And she is in the process of editing her first motion picture as a director, "Serious Moonlight," a comedy starring Timothy Hutton as a cheating husband duct taped to a toilet seat by his wife moments before their house is invaded by burglars.

The Miami native raised in Tallahassee, Fla., along with three brothers by middle-class parents and educated at the University of Central Florida also has become an executive producer of "Hollywood Residential," a near-zero-budget sitcom.

"The show came about because a bunch of friends got together with me and said, 'Let's make a TV series!'" she said, only half-joking. "Hollywood Residential" is the result, starring Adam Paul as bloated, frustrated and terrible actor Tony King, convinced he can break into big-time show biz as the (totally inept) host of a low-profile cable network series dedicated to celebrity home makeovers.

Hines also plays herself in the show, along with such guest stars as Paula Abdul and Carmen Electra.

"Suddenly I see a number of options in my future," she mused. "Hopefully, it will always include acting."

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