

THE FEARLESS LEAD SINGER OF ROCK'S MOST LEGENDARY GIRL BAND RIFFS ON SEX, DRUGS & CHAINSAWS

In 1975, Cherie Currie was an average music-loving 15-year-old Valley Girl sneaking into clubs on L.A.'s Sunset Strip. Then fate (and Joan Jett) changed her life forever. Under the twisted guidance of producer Kim Fowley, Currie became lead singer of the all-female group the Runaways. The underage band—which also featured Jett, Lita Ford, Jackie Fox and Sandy West—went on to international stardom. Soon the pressure, abuse and drugs started to take their toll. After just three albums, Currie—raped, addicted and broke—left the Runaways.

Currie tried to launch a solo singing and acting career. Sadly, her efforts were sidelined by out-of-control drug usage. At an age when most people are hitting their stride, 24-year-old Cherie Currie hit rock bottom.

Years of self-reflection and sobriety helped bring the now-fiftysomething (and still-stunning) Currie back into the spotlight to enjoy a resurgence. Her best-selling book *Neon Angel: A Memoir of a Runaway* was the basis for the hit biopic *The Runaways*, and she recently enlisted some of her famous friends to record a much-welcomed album.

Cherie Currie stopped by HUSTLER to talk with entertainment reporter Keith Valcourt about her Runaways past, the comeback record, carving art with a chainsaw and some advice for her 15-year-old self.

HUSTLER: How close was *The Runaways* movie to the truth?

CHERIE CURRIE: I'm going to quote Joan Jett on this. She said, "It's not like I ran out in the street after seeing the movie and said, 'My God, they got it so wrong!'" They had to take liberties to fit two and a half years of craziness into an hour and a half. [Director] Floria Sigismondi, who wrote the script, had her ideas and her dream of the movie. Of course, I would have done it a little different. I would have included the time we were



in Europe and were arrested and some of the really serious and crazy stuff that went on. I was so happy with the performances in the film. I thought it was funny. Floria did a really good job.

Were there any moments in the film you thought were too Hollywood?

I don't think so. I never thought she overdid it at all. People would probably think the scene where Dakota [Fanning, who portrayed Currie] was stumbling around in the supermarket was too much, but that moment actually happened. Dakota nailed it. She's one of my favorite actresses ever.

Did you give her any advice?

I was on the set a lot, and Dakota really wanted me there all the time. There was one particular scene she was doing at the end when her character is getting ready to quit the band. She thought that she wouldn't be very upset. I told her that it was devastating for me when this happened. She took that advice and nailed it.

Was it odd to see your life depicted on the silver screen?

I'm still numb to it. There must be something wrong with me. I've tried, but when I watch the film, I haven't fully grasped the fact that it was *my* life.

Did the Runaways have groupies?

Not that I can remember. (Laughs.) Doesn't mean it didn't happen though.

In your opinion was Kim Fowley, the producer who assembled the band, a creative genius or a creepy, abusive predator?

He was a creative genius. As far him being a predator? If he was, he kept that to himself. We had a couple of run-ins where I saw him being promiscuous, and it grossed me out. He was very standoffish with us. He knew better.

In *Neon Angel* you recount Fowley forcing the band to watch him having sex. Did that really happen? And, if so, didn't you think to get the hell away from him?

It did happen. It was a pretty sickening experience, but you also have to accept that this was life in rock 'n' roll. It happened very early on in our career. What was I gonna do? Say "I gotta get away from this guy and not continue this dream of being in this band with the girls"? No. I wanted to be cool and tough and fit in, but that experience was hard to stomach.

Was Lita Ford as much of a bitch as she seemed in your book and the movie?

Me and Lita just reconciled about four weeks ago. It was the first time I had seen her in 30-some-odd years. We met, just the two of us alone. We walked and talked and went to dinner. We talked about our kids and about the Runaways and what a great band it was. We talked about how much we really want to make music again. I would love to be onstage with her. Lita feels the same way, so we're hoping that the stars align and we can make this happen because the fans deserve it.

Is a Runaways reunion possible?

I would love that. Lita would love that. I think Joan would too. I know we lost Sandy [West, the Runaways' drummer, who died of lung cancer in 2006]. And that's rough. But



Guitarist Joan Jett, bassist Jackie Fox and singer Cherie Currie rock CBGB's in 1976.

THE RUNAWAY RETURNS

CHERIE CURRIE

PHOTO BY LADI VON JANSKY

PHOTO BY REDEFERNS



Cherie Currie is creating a buzz with her chainsaw carvings.

him. Had Bowie not existed, do you think you would have had a career in music?

No, I don't. Talk about stars aligning perfectly. I had just seen him live during the *Diamond Dogs* tour. As I said in the book, I stood there in the audience, and it was like a lightning bolt hit me. I knew what I was supposed to do. Within a month I met Joan and Kim, and the ball just rolled.

What was meeting Bowie like?

I met him just once, and it's still a blur to me. If I met him again now, I think I would faint. (Laughs.)

You survived some pretty horrific things. What is it that enabled you to fight back and heal?

What other choice is there, really? I don't know if it was the way I was raised. My dad was a Marine in World War II, and he told me about the horrible things he went through. There are women who have been through worse things than me. There was a young girl who was kidnapped, and her attacker cut off her hands around the time my kidnapping and rape happened. When I saw she could survive that, I thought, *Who was I to be moaning?* She's my hero. I hope I can meet her someday because she inspired me.

How did you finally beat your addictions?

There wasn't any choice in the matter. In 1984, I was freebasing cocaine, and I was going down fast. I literally had that moment of clarity where I saw my reflection in the mirror for the first time. I was this ashen, gray, bony ghost. I was dying. It was that moment where I turned my life around.

What did you do in your years away from music?

The very first thing I did was work at the mall. I got a job folding towels at Lerner's and became assistant manager. I went from there to become a tech/drug counselor at Coldwater Canyon Hospital for a couple of years. Then I became a fitness trainer because you really burn out on the counseling. They don't recommend that you do it for more than a couple of years if you're a former addict. I got married [*to Airplane! star Robert Hays*] and became a mom, which is the most important thing. Then I started doing some drawing and painting. I ended up doing art for young adult books.

How did you become a chainsaw-carving artist?

I drove past a couple of guys chainsaw-carving at the side of the road, and I couldn't get it out of my mind. I went back there, and this voice in my head said, "You can do this." I've been doing it ever since.

still, I would love to have a backdrop of her playing behind us for the whole show. The thing is Sandy would have wanted it as well. Sandy was an amazing human being. I really miss her. She was the closest to me after the band broke up. We continued to do shows together. It's a tragedy that she didn't get to see this resurgence, but I know she's around. Her spirit is with us.

What about Runaways bass players Jackie Fox and Vicki Blue?

Jackie just reached out to have lunch with me, which I'm going to do. Vicki and I don't really speak. I never stepped on a stage with her. She joined the band after I left. There's no bad blood there. I have issues with her Runaways documentary *Edgeplay*, but it's my fault because I did it on a handshake agree-

ment. Promises were made that she didn't follow up on. We weren't paid, but that wasn't the issue. The issue was having some involvement in the editing, and that didn't happen.

One scene in the film that got people talking showed you and Joan Jett having sex. Were you and your bandmates sexually experimenting with each other, and was that a result of the drugs?

Drugs and drinking promote things. You should know better than us girls. Back then it was the '70s. I was 15; Joan was 16. That kind of experimentation was happening all around. Bowie and Elton John and all that stuff. It was just fun and games. Nobody got hurt, and I wouldn't take it back.

David Bowie was a huge influence on you, and in your book you said you wanted to be

How do you turn wood into art?

Usually people want something specific, so I look at the log. Sometimes I sketch something or have my son [*Jake Hays*] sketch for me. Most times you just see it sitting there in the woods. You start at the top and work your way down. My specialty is sea life and mermaids.

Why have you decided to give music another shot?

I played a show opening for Joan [*Orange County Fair in August 2010*], and I hadn't been onstage in years. I didn't expect that I was going to fall back into it the way I did. It was a magical night with 9,000 people. The reaction was magical. So I thought, *Why not?*

Who's on the new album?

Matt Sorum [*Guns N' Roses/Velvet Revolver*] produced it. Billy Corgan [*Smashing Pumpkins*] wrote a song and sings on it. The Veronicas, Juliette Lewis and Brody Dalle [*Distillers*]. Brody and I cover the Runaways' "Queens of Noise." On that song, Matt wanted it to be a tribute to Sandy's drumming, so he played it exactly as Sandy had. The guitars are a little more ballsy. It's a kickass record.

It would be really nice if something happens with it, but I don't expect it. I'm not banking on it. I'll always have my chainsaw.

You made two solo albums in the past but admitted they weren't the records you wanted to create. Is this new CD finally the one you've always wanted to make?

Yes. I've had to give a lot of the power over to Matt, but I trust him to make this the record I want it to be. We haven't picked a title yet. My son and I just wrote a song for a film. We're going to add it to the album, which I hope to have out by late summer.

Did Corgan write the song "Boulevard of Splendor" for you?

Yes. Billy Corgan, what a sweetheart. I was pretty surprised that he would be as forthcoming with his amazing talent as he was for me. He really wanted to be involved in the record. I'm very grateful.

Will you tour?

Yes. It's got to happen. Jake will be with me again on guitar. I get so elated by seeing my son onstage with me, to be able to share the experience with him—a positive thing instead of going through what I went through. My son is so much more talented than me and Bob [*ex-husband Robert Hays*] put together.

Will you also give acting another shot?

Why not? Sure! I'm open to anything. You only live once. I'm not jaded. I'm just a chainsaw carver from the [San Fernando] Valley.

If you could go back in time, what advice would you give to your 15-year-old self?

"NOOOOOOOOOOOO! You're not ready to do it!" Oh my God! In retrospect, though, I would say, "You've done good. You're still doing good." 🌍