



“You’ve got
to keep the
flame alive”

By Margot Dougherty
Photographed by Brian Bowen Smith

Jada Pinkett Smith knows that keeping the passion burning bright is essential to a strong marriage. But she also firmly believes that feeding your own flame is just as important.

HE SMITH RESIDENCE

in the San Fernando Valley is on a serious piece of property. As I bumble along a path that doesn't, as it happens, lead to the front door of the sprawling, low-slung adobe-style home, a walkie-talkie-equipped member of a plainclothes security detail appears to guide me to the entrance. Framed by masses of potted succulents, the Moroccan-inspired wooden door leads to a large open foyer, a preamble to an airy sunken living room where Southwestern and African elements blend comfortably and the window looks out onto a large pond. The place is grand, but warm and eclectic. I am led to the dining room, where the table has been set.

When Jada Pinkett Smith arrives, the first word that springs to mind is *petite*; her body is lost inside black sweats and a giant black T-shirt with a heavy-metal band's logo splashed in red: Mnemic. It takes only a few minutes of conversation, though, for Jada to become larger than life. "I don't know what's in here," she says, using chopsticks to airlift one of the intricately bundled dim sum dumplings left on platters for us by her cook. "All I know is it's not pork and it's not cow. I don't eat those." Her conversation swoops and glides from the serious to the silly, her voice from barely audible to dinner-party loud. Profound observations about relationships and motherhood are leavened with a laugh, and when an idea tickles her, she claps her hands and hoots. You can imagine that both she and her audiences had a blast when she toured with her metal band, Wicked Wisdom, a few years ago.

In addition to her metal credentials, 37-year-old Jada is an alum of the late '80s/early '90s Bill Cosby series *A Different World*. Since then she has focused on film roles—the steely Niobe in two *Matrix* installments, the voice of the sassy hippo in both *Madagascars*, a tightly wound prosecutor in *Collateral*, and a gay author in last year's *The Women*. But now she's back in front of the TV cameras in TNT's new dramedy, *Hawthorne*, about a hospital nursing staff led by her character, Christina Hawthorne.

Wife to Will Smith, mother to their children, Jaden, 11, and Willow, 8, and stepmom to Trey, Will's 16-year-old son from his first marriage, Jada is also an actively engaged writer-producer-actress and, through the Will and Jada Smith Family Foundation, a philanthropist. Suffice it to say she's busy. Not too busy, though, to give us a peek into her world.

We gave her a camera, and here she shares the personal snapshots she took over several days, as well as her thoughts on playing the ultimate nurturer and shattering the concept of the ultimate wife. Welcome to life through Jada's eyes.

What appealed to you about the character of Christina Hawthorne?

She is the über-caretaker and wears her heart on her sleeve in a profession where you're not really supposed to. She's sacrificing herself in every episode. Every last one of us wants a hero—a stranger, lover, father, husband, sister—somebody who will put everything on the line for you. And that's what Christina does. She's relentless.

What about her do you have a hard time wrapping your head around?

How she deals with loss—she's just lost her husband. She's in a deep state of denial and doesn't know how to take care of herself like she takes care of her patients. It's hard for me to understand that denial.

Because you're more likely to address issues head-on?

I try my best to confront situations because I know, at the end of the day, you can deal with *it* or *it* will deal with you. I've had enough experience to know that that's how it goes down. There's no going around it.

How did you get so strong?

My only thing in life is, I really just want to be better. I'm fascinated by human interaction. I was looking at this Leonardo da Vinci documentary the other day. He would try to capture the soul and moments of emotion as they move through the flesh or pass through the eyes. That's what inspired me to take the photos of Will's and the kids' eyes. Human spirit, things that aren't tangible, fascinate me, so I'm always researching mind, spirit, soul. I'll say, "Will, how did you feel in that moment, when that person said that to you?"

Not all men could answer that.

Will's really smart. He's very conscious and present.

Was he like that when you first met?

No, I think that's something we've learned to be together. There's a certain amount of safety you have to create for someone

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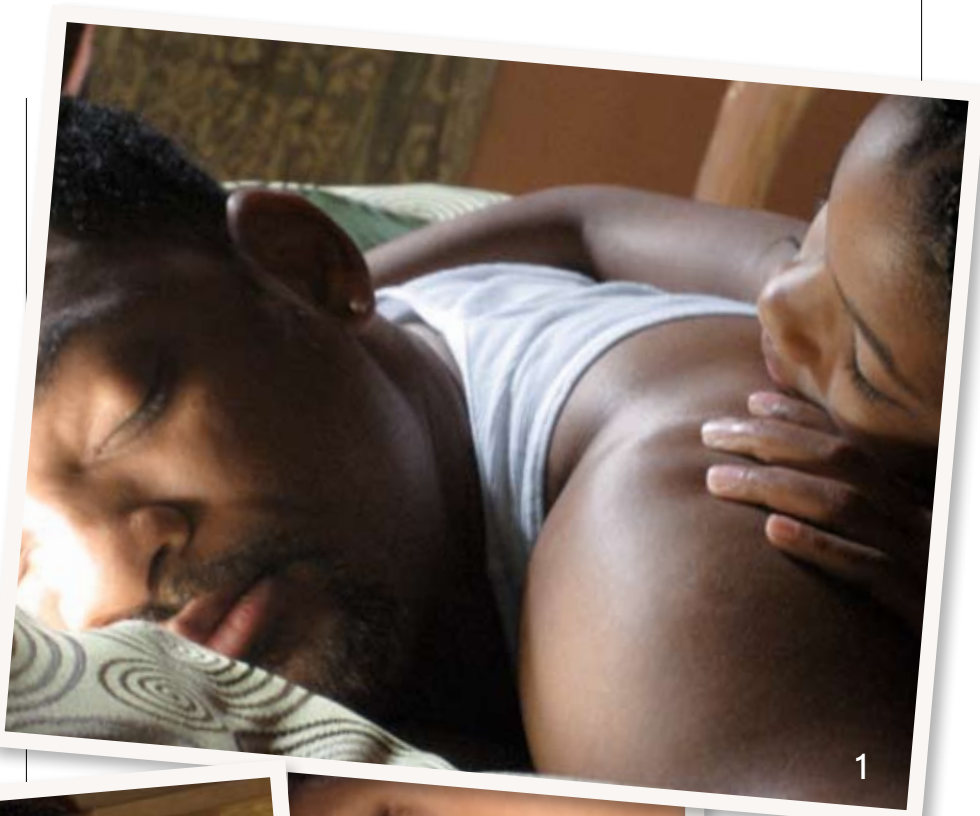


to feel like they can be open to you in that way. That's something we forget in marriages and relationships—they have to be places of safety, because they're where you are most vulnerable. If you're not allowed to be safe, I don't know if you can reach the depths of connection that support commitment. You can be committed to somebody because of ego: *I said I was going to be with this joker for the rest of my life, so I'm just going to do it.* Or you can be committed because you have a deeply rooted connection.

How do you keep that connection?

Talk. Or the other day, because I've been working a lot, I said to Will, "Be ready at 2:30." He said, "Where are we going?" I said, "Don't worry about it." I try to make Sunday a day to reconnect—with friends, family, husband.

So I put together a picnic basket and drove us to this hiking trail that I'd taken him to when we first met. No Secret Service, nothing. I got the idea because that morning he'd been reading a book on architecture, and he told me that it said the only replenishment for the soul is nature. Now, I've always known that's true for me, but for a dude to say "nature," I'm like, "Wow!" I said to myself, *I'm going to take him on that hike.* So we went up and had a really nice afternoon. We were there for about an hour, just sitting on a bench overlooking the canyons. I'm getting teary just thinking about it. We were both replenished and so happy and connected in that one hour. It doesn't take a lot of time. Once again, it's just being aware and present enough to know what that other person wants. What does *he* want today? ▶



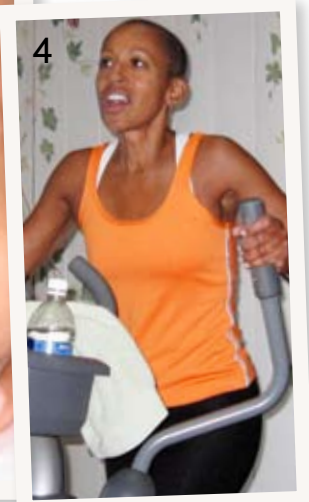
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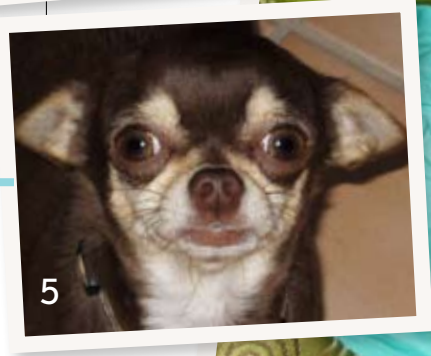
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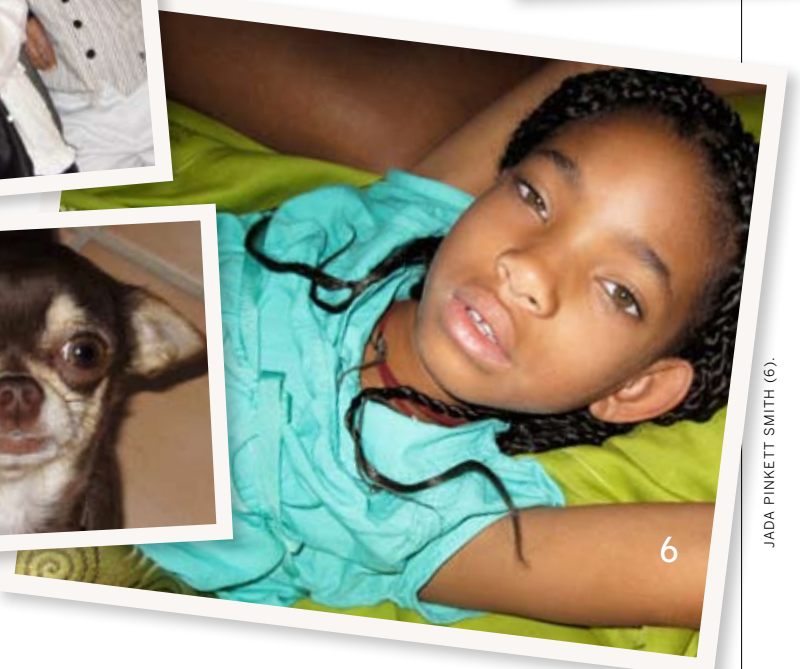
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JADA'S FAMILY ALBUM: 1. Will and Willow take a catnap. 2. Trey, Willow, and Jaden are ready to support their dad at an award ceremony. 3. Willow's eyes. 4. Jada's mom, Adrienne Banfield-Jones. 5. Jada's dog Bitz. 6. Willow.

JADA PINKETT SMITH (6)

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ROCKET SCIENCE: For a school assignment, Jaden and Will (that's Will's foot) test the theory that Mentos dropped into a soda make it explode. Jada caught the whole experiment on camera.

Surprises are important, aren't they?

That's part of the reason we've been able to be together the way that we are for so long. We're constantly surprising each other. In relationships you have to be elastic. If I say "black," Will says "white." That's just how we work. No matter what side of the scale one is on, the other will switch to keep the balance. We crack up about it all the time. We hardly ever agree on anything, and we've learned to really respect that in our relationship. You might have an idea in your mind of what a marriage is supposed to be, and you're driving, driving, driving toward this ideal picture. But you have to be open to the fact that your relationship is meant to be something else.

Do you see yourself in your kids?

Oh, yes. I see myself in Willow and Jaden—and in Trey, and he's not even my biological child! It's amazing because you can see the most beautiful parts of yourself in your children. That's what I love most. When I look at my kids, I go, *I hope to God they don't get my ugly parts. Get your own ugly stuff, not mine!*

Willow's a wild child like me. She's got this snake, Beauty. I've always loved snakes but was afraid of them. But Willow had wanted this one snake forever. She'd go into the pet store and pick it up and wrap it around her. I'd never touched a snake before, and I put out my hand, and Beauty [*mimics the snake slithering up her arm*]. I've been in love with her ever since. I said to Willow, "You did Mommy a big favor. You helped me overcome a fear."

What do you do to regroup when the career-family-life merry-go-round spins out of control?

When I'm tired, I rest. I say, "I can't be a superwoman today." I'm really trying to work on the receiving part, on how to give to myself. When I need a minute, I just want quiet. I need peace. I like being alone. I get up every morning about 5:45 and meditate for 20 or 30 minutes. The house is silent, and the sky is just about to break. And then I go out and I run the canyons. That's been really good for me, a good way to start my day.

After 11 years of marriage, any tips for keeping a relationship hot?

Nice outfits and high heels! And talking. And making time. You've got to make time. Our men want to feel important. We want to feel important. So it's about establishing an environment in which that can happen. It can be hard because we get caught in the grind of life. Establish relationships with family members or friends and take turns with each other's kids so you can make that time for yourselves. It doesn't take a lot of money—wallets are tight right now—so just simple stuff. A night walk? Man, do I love those. Or pack a lunch and go to the park, like Will and I did. Even a drive—and then pull over on the side of the road! Think of places outside that are comfortable to have sex. Does he have access to his office? Have a fantasy date. Be his secretary! Be sneaky. Your girlfriend's house at a party. The bathroom! A guest bedroom! Just switch it up. Anything like that can keep it going. Anything it takes to keep the flame alive. **®**