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Full of *Glee*

Jennifer Aspen takes a comedic turn on Fox's musical hit

BY JOAN TUPPONCE
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Richmond-born actress Jennifer Aspen gets a kick out of playing Kendra Giardi, her character on Fox's smash hit *Glee* — a woman who delights in dishing out twisted advice like, "Dishonesty is food to a marriage. It will die without it," to her sister, Terri, who faked a pregnancy in a doomed attempt to hang on to her husband, dreamy glee-club director Will Schuester. Aspen's other credits include her stint as comedian Rodney Carrington's wife for two seasons on the ABC comedy *Rodney* and her role as Daphne Jablonsky (a stripper who has a baby with Charlie — played by *Los's* Matthew Fox) on *Party of Five*. Offscreen, Aspen lives in Los Angeles with her husband, actor David O'Donnell, and their five pets — cats Hero, Maggio and Kaia and dogs Luca and Frankie.



Paul Smith photo

Q: Where were you born in Richmond?

A: St. Mary's. I have pictures of me as a toddler walking barefoot down our sidewalk. My parents left Richmond when I was 2 and moved to Prescott, Ariz. When they divorced, my mom moved to Santa Cruz, Calif. My parents were not Southerners, but I am absolutely positive I am.

Q: When did you start acting?

A: As a kid, I was always performing and creating characters. I would dress up and go out on the street and say I was my twin sister Julie and swear that I was. I didn't realize I was acting.

Q: What motivated you to be an actress?

A: When I was in high school in Santa Cruz, I was in detention and heard a song. The kids were rehearsing a monologue [for *How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*]. A friend walked me through a part and I got the lead. When I was on stage, it was like a light illuminated from within. It was so special, like falling in love.

Q: Any great anecdotes from your guest-starring roles?

A: When I was doing *Friends*, Jennifer Aniston and Brad Pitt were together. I was getting ready to do my first scene where I have to come into the coffeehouse crying. I am preparing to do the scene, and they call action. I look over my shoulder, and Brad Pitt is 15 feet from me. I froze. I went into shock — the kind where you feel nothing. I had to make something happen, so I did. We had to do the scene again, and I had to recuperate.

Q: How does being a series regular and guest-starring differ?

A: It's harder when you guest-star. When you are on a series, the set becomes a family. You spend an enormous amount of time together. As a guest star, when you walk in, you are walking into a family. You have to mind your manners and not overstep.

Q: How much did you enjoy starring on *Rodney*?

A: I loved that show. When that was over, I cried so hard. Rodney and I are still great friends. We felt like we were cut loose too soon — like we had so much more to do.

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Q: What went through your mind when you read the script for *Glee*?

A: When I read the pilot, I said they are going to shoot this pilot, and they are going to pick it up right away and premiere it after *American Idol*. I knew it would be a huge hit and win a lot of awards. I was looking for a script that was new and different with a lot of life in it. I said, "Yes, this is what I was looking for."

Q: How do you like playing Kendra?

A: The character is so great. She is a completely different person than me. I love it because it's so crazy and you have so much freedom. You can say and do anything, and because it's Kendra, anything goes.

Q: What do you think about Kendra's wardrobe of cowl-neck sweaters and stirrup pants?

A: It's unbelievable. Talk about swallowing your pride. Once I put the wardrobe on, I became Kendra. I walk different. I talk differently.

Q: Will we be seeing more of Kendra in the upcoming season?

A: Yes. Terri is living with Kendra now. There are some hijinks that are definitely about to occur.

Q: What do you think of the talent on that show?

A: It's like exquisite talent. It's crazy. Shows like *Glee*, *So You Think You Can Dance* and *American Idol* are getting people back into the arts, which weren't popular for a while.

Q: What was it like when *Glee* won the Golden Globe for best TV musical or comedy this year?

A: We freaked out. We were at the Golden Globe viewing party. When none of the acting awards won I started to go maybe it's not going to win. We were sitting next to the folks from *Modern Family*, who were s—t-talking us, saying, "You are going down." I thought, "Oh, my God, this is going to be embarrassing." When the category came up, we stood on top of our seats holding hands. We went crazy when they announced *Glee*. It was a great feeling.

Q: What's your favorite Kendra line?

A: "You gave me too much Pitocin, and it made me have creepy ginger kids."

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