

Bruce Willis spent most of his Hollywood breakthrough film—the 1988 blockbuster *Die Hard*—running around barefoot carrying a gun. Today there's certainly no gun in sight, and he's wearing a few more layers, plus boots, a blue plaid flannel shirt and a navy wool skullcap. Then again, this isn't balmy Los Angeles. It's Hailey, Idaho (pop. 6200), and a sudden blizzard has socked in the northern ski town. Willis is on the cell phone. "The plan," he is saying, "is we're all gonna meet up at the theater."

It's Friday night in small-town America, a place where Willis feels utterly at home. He and Demi Moore, his wife of 13 years, now his ex-wife of more than a year, sought sanctuary in this remote place, moving here a decade ago. And it's here they now spend the Hollywood spotlight. "I can go to the supermarket and not be hassled," says Willis. "I grew up in South Jersey where I could walk out my back door and be in the woods in two minutes. You can do that here. That's a great gift to give kids."

Though the world is kept at bay in Hailey, Willis remains open to change, professionally and personally. In his new film, *Hart's War*, he plays an American colonel, the senior officer in a Nazi POW camp, who struggles to do the right thing when a bitter racial conflict breaks out among his men. Willis, now nearing 47, talks with *New York Times* film critic Elvis Mitchell about *Hart's War*, and about some of the battles he's fought himself.

READER'S DIGEST: What was it about the character in *Hart's War* that appealed to you?

BRUCE WILLIS: Lately, there have been a few films I've chosen to do—not counting *Bandits*, which was a different kind of film altogether—where I've been attracted to the quietness in the characters, to the behavior and the acting that goes on when you're not speaking. Have you seen *Hart's War*?

READER'S DIGEST: No.

WILLIS: It's about a prison war camp and what goes on there. It deals with racism during World War II. There was a great [video] on World War II that was done by Time-Life, I think, that had a whole segment on racism during the war. They had riots on army bases in the United States that the military tried to squash, completely tried to hush up. There's a whole racist issue inside the film [that plays a large role in the] surprise ending.

But there's a sense of dignity to this guy [I play] and a sense of honor. He's fourth-generation military, fourth-generation West Point. Most of the people in the film make a point of saying to this guy that the war is essentially over, but for my character, it's not. The war is still going on. I still believe that even though I'm in this camp that it's my duty to continue to try to fight the war any way that I can. When you see the film, you'll understand.

READER'S DIGEST: A "code of conduct" seems to be pretty important to a lot of the characters that you play.

WILLIS: Yeah. When I first started, I was doing those action pictures, *Die Hard* in particular, where there's that hero's code of what you can and cannot do.

READER'S DIGEST: I was even thinking about *Blind Date*, where your character is trying to be the right guy.

WILLIS: Trying to do the right thing. And long before I ever identified it as such, I had found my own code as a man. Anyway, I can tell you that in the end of the film, I get killed. I probably shouldn't give that away, 'cause it's a nice little surprise at the end of the film.

READER'S DIGEST: Did that appeal to you, too?

WILLIS: Yeah, because how that comes about has a lot of dignity to it, and a sense of honor, both for my character and for a character that I put in jeopardy, played by Terrence Howard. I come back and take responsibility for my own behavior, and save his life and save Colin Farrell's character's life, when I could have just as easily escaped and completed the mission. My character comes back and sacrifices his own life for these guys, who are about to be killed. I'm not sure we want to give

that away in the magazine...

READER'S DIGEST: This is obviously not the first time you've played a military man. You played one in *The Siege*, which turns out to be a pretty interesting movie to have been in these days, doesn't it?

WILLIS: Uh-huh. How about that? I did an interview not too long ago, where the cat read me a quote from 1996 in which I said, "The next war that our country will be involved in will be a war on terrorism. It will be fought mostly with jets. It won't be any ground war as we know it." And I had completely forgotten that I had ever said that, and now here we are.

READER'S DIGEST: That movie was a real departure for you. You were not the hero.

WILLIS: You can only play the hero so often, and then you want to do something else. I'd see other films, and see bad guys, and go, "Man, they can do whatever they want."

It's nice to mix it up. It's nice not to always have to follow that hero code. In *The Siege*, my character did what he had to do to—in his own mind anyway—to accomplish the mission. Not a good guy, not a nice guy, not a hero. That was really Denzel's movie. He was brilliant in that. He's doing great work these days, and he was really great in that. Annette Bening was really fantastic, as well.

READER'S DIGEST: You must have thought about that movie on September 11.

WILLIS: Yeah, I did. And it has come up since then. But the World Trade Center didn't go down in that film.

It's difficult to fight any war in which one side is bringing their religious ideology into it, and that's

where we are now. It's hard to fight a guy who is prepared to run into you, hang on to you, and jump off a cliff and kill you both. He's prepared to sacrifice his life, because his religion says that if he dies killing his enemy, that he ascends immediately to the right hand of his God. This country is having a difficult time getting their head around that concept. For me, it's still wrong—no matter what your religion is or what it tells you is right and wrong. To kill somebody—whether it's seven thousand people or only one person—in the name of your religious ideology is not okay. I know that these guys all think it's their right, but... America has had blinders on a long time about terrorism. Going back to Oklahoma City, people are like, "Wow, terrorism exists in the world." Terrorism has been going on for thousands of years. The war we're fighting now has its roots going back to the year 500. It hasn't just started since September.

READER'S DIGEST: It's got to be interesting for you, because I thought of *The Siege*. But I also thought of *Die Hard With a Vengeance*, which takes place in downtown New York and has a lot of carnage, not dissimilar to what happened there.

WILLIS: Right in that same area.

READER'S DIGEST: What does that make you feel like to see that many parallels between your movies and real life? To see them all come together at one point?

WILLIS: Art imitates life and, sometimes, life imitates art. It's a weird combination of elements. Terrorism has been alive and well for many, many years. There are a lot of people who believe that because Clinton didn't go into Bosnia, it allowed terrorist cells to come into Europe. I talked to a friend of mine in Washington when I was doing homework for *The Jackal*, and he said then that they knew where all the terrorist schools were. I said, "Well, why don't they just go in and wipe them out?" He said, "Because you cannot slap these guys one time and think they're gonna stop. You've got to slap them and keep slapping them until it's done." And my own point of view is that there's

never been a better time for the free world to unite and say, "It's going to stop now, whether it takes five years or ten years, or whatever it takes to try to eradicate terrorism." To at least say, "We're not going to take it anymore. We're just not going to let it happen anymore."

READER'S DIGEST: In the second *Die Hard* movie, the plane actually goes down, killing a number of innocents. It's terrorism for money, basically, in those pictures.

WILLIS: Yes, but it's still terrorism.

READER'S DIGEST: So, between those movies and *The Jackal* and *The Siege*, that's a pretty big chunk of your career.

WILLIS: Yes. Well, those are the ones that have gotten more noise made about them, but I've done other small films in between.

READER'S DIGEST: You've worked a lot, obviously. But having those kinds of things brought up, having your name evoked in these news accounts, what does that do to you?

WILLIS: It's a weird thing. Like it or not, I am part of the pop culture of films in Hollywood. I did an interview for the Actors Studio...

READER'S DIGEST: Did you cry?

WILLIS: I didn't cry. Good question, though! They do get them crying on that show, but I didn't cry, no. Because he asked me a couple of questions about *Die Hard*, they decided to move the release of that episode of the show. There was a lot of sensitivity about terrorism at that time. I think, to a certain degree, it's calmed down a little bit. But America had blood in their mouth, and wanted blood.

READER'S DIGEST: And what about you?

WILLIS: I would like to see a war on terrorism fought. I don't think it's about one guy. I don't think it's ever about one guy. I think it's about an ideology. Look, I don't commit crimes. I don't put a gun to somebody's head and say, "Give me your money." I don't kill someone in the name of my God. So it's difficult for me to even think about condoning it. I don't wish death on anyone, and I don't really believe in retribution for the sake of retribution. I'm much more interested in seeing... it's a very evil thing that is the equivalent of what Hitler was doing in 1933: a very small group of wealthy, influential, government, military leaders taking control. And obviously, this has been in the works for a long time. It wasn't like they just said on September 9, "You know what we ought to do, we ought to . . ." And if the plane that they were trying to crash into the White House had hit its target, it would have been a hundred times worse. It would have been just chaos. I don't wish death on anyone. I believe in justice, and I believe in people being held responsible for their actions.

READER'S DIGEST: It has got to make a pretty interesting contradiction for you, because you're somebody who's stated an aversion to violence in your private life, but there are these movies.

WILLIS: One is a form of entertainment, and one is real life. And I think that the moviegoing audiences today know the difference. Look at the news: Those are real dead people. Nobody walks out of any of my films, or any action film, or any film where anybody gets killed, thinking that someone actually got hurt. Audiences are just too hip. They're just too smart. And they know that it's a form of what films have always been about: a couple hours of getting out of your own life and escaping into a dark room where they flash light onto a white screen. And, hopefully, if the film's good, within fifteen minutes, you're out of your life for a couple hours, into the life of what you're watching on screen.

But I've been asked that a lot, because the magazines and the critical media are always trying to find a hook—it's their job. For a long time, there was a big thing about how violence in films generates violence in real life, and I just don't think that it's true. The "Hutus" and "Tutsis" killed each other with hatchets and hoes and machetes, and I know that none of those guys ever saw my films. We live in a violent world. It's always been a violent world. This country was founded on violence, and on racism and genocide. It was a tragic thing in World War II that six million Jews were killed in a horrific manner. There were whole other groups of individuals that were also exterminated: homosexuals, Gypsies, Russians. They killed twenty-one million Russians.

READER'S DIGEST: Basically, anybody that wasn't an Aryan.

WILLIS: That's right. And the thing that I find really hypocritical is that you never hear anyone talking about the fact that in this country, after the Civil War, for about ten years, they tried to exterminate the Native Americans, and they killed something like 19 million Native Americans in ten years' time. That's genocide. You never hear anybody talk about that, and I've talked about it a lot in various interviews, and they never write about it. I never see it in print. Some editor always says, "No, we can't put that in there. We can't write about that." But there was a five-dollar bounty on Native American scalps. And when they couldn't find Indians, they would go into Mexico and kill Mexicans just to get the scalps.

READER'S DIGEST: You're living in a state that had a lot of Indian land.

WILLIS: That's right, and look at how the Native Americans are still being treated, are still being screwed over. It's like we have European white men show up and say, "Well, we have some bad news, we have some really bad news, and we have some very, very bad news. One is: We're here and we're not leaving. Two is: We're gonna take all your land, not give you anything for it, and lie to you and swindle you out of treaty after treaty. And the really bad news is: We're gonna try and exter-

minate your entire race.”

READER'S DIGEST: The questions that you get asked most often are probably more about your private life.

WILLIS: I'll use my own life as an example of what the media has become for a lot of Hollywood actors. My private life is entertainment, whether it's in the tabloids or *People* magazine, which is really another tabloid. It's just a little slicker. But that's what it is. It's my private life as entertainment for the masses. When I first started out, I railed against it, and I said, "This is unjust, this is unfair. All I want to be is an actor. Why does this have to happen?" Well, I have since gotten a really great education on why it happens: Because it is entertaining. Because everything is entertaining. Sports is entertainment. Politics is entertainment. Hollywood has always been entertainment, but everything is entertainment. The war, to a certain degree, is entertainment. I mean, they couldn't wait to get that headline "America Under Attack." And all these electronic news stations have to compete with each other. So if news station A wants to compete with news station B, and they know that they're showing something that is really horrific, then they've got to show the same kind of horror or they're not gonna be able to compete. So that, in a way, becomes entertainment. It's hard to find a newspaper or a news station that doesn't try to capitalize in some form on the tragedy.

READER'S DIGEST: What's interesting, though, is that for a long time studios controlled all that stuff. They controlled the information that got out about their movie stars. Do you think part of this coverage now is just a reaction to the pendulum having swung the other way?

WILLIS: I just think it's because the braking mechanism has been removed. They can pretty much write or say anything they want now. The tabloids certainly do, and you have to sue them to get them to take it back. It takes six months and a couple hundred thousand dollars in court costs to get them to print a tiny little retraction that shows up on the last page of the thing somewhere. I don't

need a retraction anymore. I've given up on trying to explain myself, or trying to set the record straight, or trying to get people to understand what I'm really like as a man, outside of my acting, outside of my job. I could talk for a whole year, and people wouldn't be that much closer to getting to know who I am. I bet I meet less than forty new people every year. And yet I am, for good and bad, world-famous. So everybody else who hasn't met me, who doesn't know who I am or what I'm like as a human being, has kind of a holographic construct of who they think I am based on my films, my TV work, interviews, tabloid stuff they read. And by and large, it is so far from who I really am as a man, and I've given up trying to explain the two things, trying to get people to understand who I am. I work as an actor. I enjoy trying to entertain people. It's a good job, and now more than ever, I take real pride in entertaining people and taking them out of their life for a couple of hours.

READER'S DIGEST: Speaking of entertaining movies, *The Sixth Sense* contains a lot of those silences you spoke earlier about.

WILLIS: M. Night Shyamalan [the director of the film] is a really special case. Most movies that you see now come out of modern novels. Some bestseller book immediately gets turned into a film, or you see films that are remakes of old films, or remakes of TV shows from the '60s. What Night does that makes him completely unique is he makes the stuff up out of his head, writes it down, and has made two brilliant movies that just came out of his head. And it just so happens that both those characters happen to have a solitude about themselves, each for their own individual reasons.

READER'S DIGEST: Even *Wide Awake* has that same kind of guy-as-an-outcast thing.

WILLIS: And that's Night. He is—and I don't use this word very often—a genius. He's a consummate storyteller. He's my favorite kind of film director: Great with actors. Loves working on those little tiny moments in a film. And I got to work with great actors, too. I would put Haley Joel Osment up against any male actor working today. This kid is just brilliant. And in *Unbreakable*, I got to work with

Samuel L. Jackson. I got to work with Robin Wright Penn. I got to work with Spencer Treat Clark. All great actors. All working hard every day, showing up prepared, coming in with great ideas, and working off two really well-written scripts. When I read *Sixth Sense*, I was as fooled when I turned that last page, that last couple, the last three pages of that script, I was blown away by the fact that my character was dead. I didn't see it coming. And that's what made me want to do it. I went, "If we can pull this off, it would be brilliant." And no one thought we could. We didn't think we could. We worked so hard every day on the arithmetic of how to fool the audience. And even when we were done, we still didn't quite know whether or not we were going to be able to fool the audience. The remarkable thing about *Sixth Sense* was that after the audience had seen the film, they didn't go out and tell their friends the end. For whatever reason, people kept their mouth shut, and said, "No, no, you just got to go see it." And people went back to see it immediately to see how they got fooled, to see how we tricked them. And once you see it, you go, "Oh, yeah." And Night just handled that so well.

READER'S DIGEST: It's interesting because you talk about being a shy kid, and I wonder if acting for you was a way to sort of build up confidence with other people.

WILLIS: It was. I had a horrible stutter when I was a kid, from the time I was 9 until the time I was about 17. And a miraculous thing happened when I was in high school. I was doing this goofy play. It wasn't a goofy play, we just did it in a goofy way. *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. And when I got onstage, I stopped stuttering. When I stepped off the stage, I started stuttering again. And I went, "This is a miracle. I got to investigate this more." And I was always entertaining people in class, much to the dismay of my teachers.

READER'S DIGEST: Were you a different guy as "the entertainer?" Would the stutter go away then?

WILLIS: Hmmm. A little bit. I think my sense of humor derived from the fact that I did stutter. As if, "Well, yeah, I stutter, but if I can make you laugh, maybe you won't be so aware of it." You know

what I mean? It's a painful thing. I don't know if I was shy. I had friends, I was elected student council president. So I was popular in that sense, but inside I was really shook up by the fact that I couldn't get rid of this stutter.

READER'S DIGEST: At what point did you realize that you could get past it? Was it just from that play?

WILLIS: Well, that was what first brought it to my attention. I don't really count the work that I did in high school as acting. It wasn't—it was high school plays. Nobody was really teaching us about the craft of acting. It wasn't until I got to Montclair State College, which at the time had a great theater department. There were two really great teachers there that would bring in directors from New York to do stage plays. The first stage play I did at college was *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. I did that play, and I thought, "This is it, I'm home. This is what I want to do." And I never looked back. I never thought about doing anything else other than acting.

READER'S DIGEST: So, when you worked as a security guard at a chemical plant, you knew this was just a beat?

WILLIS: Yeah. I couldn't afford to go to college right away. I had to work for a year or two to save up enough dough to go away to school. And I had some cockamamie idea that I wanted to major in communications. Well, in a way, I'm doing that. I'm communicating in a certain way, but not quite what I thought communications was.

READER'S DIGEST: What'd you think it was?

WILLIS: I don't know. News. Broadcast stuff.

READER'S DIGEST: Did you want to be a newscaster?

WILLIS: No, no, it wasn't even that specific. What I know now about myself as an actor, and about why I continue to act is this: If I could paint, I would do that. If I could sculpt, or do any other artistic form to express myself, I would do that. In acting, I am trying to get something out of myself. I'm trying to express myself creatively. I'm still learning how to act. I'm still learning how to be an actor. I'm still learning how to find moments, and how to make something, how to keep it honest, keep it real. I learn from every film, and I've learned from my mistakes in films. About ten years ago, I knew my best work was still ahead of me.

READER'S DIGEST: You talk about the quiet things, but your strongest moments—and I wonder how much this is you—are when you show hurt, which you did in *Fool for Love*, and in early *Moonlighting* episodes. I wonder if you felt at those points that you were really getting a sense of what you could do by waiting, instead of jumping in?

WILLIS: In stage work, especially, quiet onstage just sucks the audience right in. Also, *Fool for Love* is a big, noisy, slamming, banging, violent, relentless play, but there is pain in that and quiet moments in that, and Sam [Shepard] writes those in. He says, "Long pause," and he means it. He means the actors continue to behave as the characters, but no one is speaking. And I've just always been fascinated with that kind of acting. To translate that into film, with the cameras way up here, and you're up on a forty-foot screen, is a little different set of muscles, but it's my favorite kind of acting. And I continue to experiment with it, and find out how little I can do and still be interesting. And still be making active choices, and yet be sitting completely still. There's a scene in *Sixth Sense*, where I'm telling Haley Joel Osment that I can no longer be his therapist, and I'm sitting completely still, talking to him. That was a difficult scene for me, because the first five or six takes were really wet. I was crying, he was crying, and I said to Night, "Let me get this out of me first." I said, "Let's not use this. I don't think this scene should be wet. This scene should be intense, and should be

loaded with emotion, but not necessarily a scene about me crying.” I just had to get that out of me first, so I could get to the take that ended up in the film. And Night said, “Yeah, right. That’s right. That’s what I want.” But it was an emotional scene, and that kid gave me so much. There’s another scene in the film where he’s telling me a secret. He’s lying in the hospital bed, and it’s about a six-and-a-half-minute scene, and about three minutes into that scene, Haley Joel Osment was required to cry. Now normally with another younger actor, they would stop the scene and put the fake tears in his eyes. This kid, every time, at the exact right moment, started crying organically. And my side of that scene is me sitting there amazed that an 11-year-old boy has the chops to do something like that. Now, it works for the scene, because I’m supposed to be astounded by what he’s saying to me. But I used the fact that I was astounded at this 11-year-old boy nailing it at the right moment every time in every take.

READER’S DIGEST: To hear you talk about this, it sort of contradicts what’s been written about you—that you say you’re “a man’s man.”

WILLIS: I never said that. [*Moonlighting* writer and producer] Glenn Gordon Caron first said that about me. But I don’t think about myself like that.

READER’S DIGEST: How would you describe yourself as an actor?

WILLIS: Telling the truth has always been the most important part of acting, not being afraid to tell the truth. Still, I tend to stay away from describing what I do as an actor, because part of a performance is the mystique of how actors do what they do.

READER’S DIGEST: Do you think it’s just bad for you to try to even figure it out too much for yourself?

WILLIS: Yeah. I mean, I figure it out for each role, but I don't really have an overall explanation of my raison d'être of how I see myself in my work. Other than, I still enjoy acting a lot. I enjoy suiting up again, and for me now, having done over forty films, the hardest part is not repeating myself.

READER'S DIGEST: Does that become a way to sort of get out of your life, too?

WILLIS: Oh yeah, and it's a cool thing. I don't know how well I would do at a job where I had to do the same thing every day, year after year, and I don't have to. Every film is a brand-new character, a brand-new set of muscles, a brand-new test of "can I do it?" And a lot of times I take roles, because I'm not quite sure if I'm gonna be able to accomplish what the script calls for. I'll read a script, and say yes to it, but I don't know when I say yes how I'm gonna play a scene that's sixty pages down the road, that's two months down. I just rely on and trust my instincts that hopefully I will, by the time we've gone through sixty days of shooting, I will know what to do in that moment.

READER'S DIGEST: Is it tough for you to try to exercise those muscles when you're going through a difficult personal time? What is that like for you?

WILLIS: It's hard. The goal is to leave your life at the stage door, and come in and do your work. But, yeah, I've gone through tough times in the last five or six years, that sometimes I have to specifically and physically force myself to focus on the work and leave Bruce at the door. There were a couple of tough years in there, but we've all gotten past that and come out the other side pretty healthy, I think.

READER'S DIGEST: How have your feelings changed as you've aged?

WILLIS: Everything's changed. How I thought about everything in life when I was 20 was different by the time I got to be 25, and what I thought was right and what I thought I was about when I was

25 changed by the time I got to be 30. It changes all the time, and hopefully will continue to change, and that's growth, that's continuing to live. When you stop trying is when you start dying. That's not my quote, I think Bob Dylan got it from somebody else. Who said it, Nietzsche? Eliot? "He who is not busy being born is busy dying."

READER'S DIGEST: It's Eliot. Considering what you've gone through, do you still have any belief in marriage as an institution now?

WILLIS: I think it certainly has its place if you're going to have kids. There was a time when I said, "I'm not going to marry." At least now, I allow for the possibility. I don't know if it's going to happen or not, but I haven't slammed that door shut and bolted it.

Romance dies hard. It's what we're about as human beings. It's a big part of it. What I have come to understand a lot better is the mythology of love, the mythology of romance, which is taught to us from the time we're kids, from books we read, from films we see, from songs on the radio. One of the myths is: love at first sight. It continues to change for me, and I allow for the possibility of romance.

READER'S DIGEST: You talk about that mythology of romance, but you're a part of that, too, aren't you, in creating that in film?

WILLIS: Well, sure. I am part of the culture that propagates a lot of that mythology. I'm just talking about myself, and what I have come to know about the mythology of love and romance. Here's another one: When you meet the right person, you'll know it instantly—that there's only one right person for you. There's only one soul mate for you. And I don't think that's true. I think you have a lot of different soul mates. Someone steps off a bus in New York and you see them, and bang, it's love at first sight. Well, what if you stayed in the store an extra five minutes, and you missed that

bus, does that mean that you missed your soul mate forever? I just don't think that's true, that when you meet the love of your life, all the hard work is over. The hard work has just begun. You've got to keep working on it all the time. "Love and marriage" is like a little garden that needs to be tended every day. And this is just my own education, just stuff that I've gone out and discovered for myself.

READER'S DIGEST: Obviously this has changed, too, since you had kids?

WILLIS: Absolutely. Before I had kids, when we were getting ready to have Rumer, people said, "Having kids is gonna change your life"—as if that were a bad thing. As if something was going to be taken away from my wife and me. The opposite was true. In having kids, I got more love in my heart. I was able to accept love more, to give love more, because kids just bring that out in me. The love that exists between parents and children is a truly unique type of love, because it's unconditional love. And it is the only relationship in the world where I think unconditional love really exists. I would throw myself in front of a car for one of my kids. I'm not sure I would do that for anybody I've been in a relationship with.

I think you always pretty much know how much you're giving to any relationship. With kids it's just wide open. There are no limits to it. For me, anyway. I know that there are parents who don't do as well. I don't understand how a man can bring a child into the world and not take responsibility for him or her. I know it happens all the time. I just don't agree with it, and I don't understand it. I just can't imagine, having had kids myself, how somebody could do that and just walk away from this tiny little child who needs your help, who needs a role model, who needs love, who needs nurturing. I just don't get it.

READER'S DIGEST: What are your kids like? How are they different from each other?

WILLIS: They're three unique individuals. They all have great senses of humor, individual senses of

humor.

[Someone hands Willis a cigar.] There's another example of hypocrisy in the United States, that because it's not politically correct to have open trade relations with Cuba, that you can't smoke these, which is just crazy.

READER'S DIGEST: Just for the record, we're not smoking these.

WILLIS: No, these are Jamaican cigars.

READER'S DIGEST: No, Dominican. Even better than Jamaican. Let's talk about that, though, because you get asked about your politics all the time, because they aren't conventional Hollywood politics.

WILLIS: There are a lot of things that I disagree with about politics. I think the goal of politics, of trying to serve the country, is a good goal. For the most part, I think it happens. I don't think anything's going to really change in the government until they get the lobbyists out of Washington. Every year, hundreds of millions of dollars are brought into Washington and are left there by special-interest groups who are trying to get their bill passed to help their company. Until they do away with that, until they take the money out of politics, I don't think anything's really going to change that drastically. I've been accused of being a staunch Republican, but in truth, I have just as many Democratic ideas as Republican ideas. I'm a Republican insofar as I believe in small government. I believe in less government intrusion into our lives. I also believe in taking care of the needy. I believe in taking care of the elderly.

READER'S DIGEST: And social programs to do that?

WILLIS: I believe that the foster-care program needs to be completely overhauled, and I'm working on that with the government now and a really great woman named Nancy Daly Riordan, who has done a lot of great things in the state of California. The foster-care program is a federally funded program. It is also one of the most antiquated programs in the government. The files are all still handwritten. The states don't talk to each other, so someone who takes a foster child and abuses them or even kills them, could just flee to another state, because there's no communication between the states, there are no computer files. That guy could go to another state and do the same thing. It really needs to be overhauled, and that's a Democratic idea.

Feeding the poor is a Democratic idea, I think. So my politics are a combination of a lot of different things. There's a guy named Arlen Specter, who ran for President a couple of years ago, and he had a great idea. He held up an index card and said, "This could be your tax return. One single card." And when he said that, I thought, "Wow, that's it. That's right." Now it may take 20 years until something like that happens. They could just take the taxes right out of your check, like they do with Social Security. They know if you make this much, you have to pay this much. It doesn't have to be this huge bureaucracy, but it would mean firing a lot of people in the government. Now, my idea is, don't fire them, just give them a different job. Take the people that now go after income-tax evaders, and sic them on big chemical companies who continue to pollute rivers and the air. Give them another job where they can use the skills they have now. Here's a really screwed-up thing in the United States. I'll use my dad as an example, or anybody's dad. You take out a 30-year mortgage when you buy a house. At the end of 30 years you own the house. And then your dad dies, and if the kids don't have enough money to pay the estate tax, the government gets to take the house, thereby negating the American dream that anybody can own their own house one day, and that's just wrong. That just needs to be changed. Now that's not about me saying taxes should be lower. That's just about that the estate tax laws need to be overhauled, need to be addressed.

READER'S DIGEST: Are you a fan of President Bush?

WILLIS: I think he's doing a really good job. He is facing his biggest test right now, and how this gets handled will determine the remainder of his political life. I'm glad he's there, and not the other guy. And I'm glad that President Bush was smart enough to surround himself with really brilliant people, brilliant military people, guys that have had a lot of experience. I'm glad Colin Powell is there. A lot of people don't like Dick Chaney, but I'd rather have him there. I'd rather have a guy that's had experience than guys that haven't had experience. Clinton never was in the military.

READER'S DIGEST: That bothered you?

WILLIS: Yup. He's the Commander in Chief. How can you command troops when you never were part of the troops? How can you expect to lead the armed forces if you never were in the armed forces, and tried as hard as you could to stay out of the armed forces. That bothered me, and then there are the obvious things.

READER'S DIGEST: You talked about foster care. Are there other causes like that that you're a big supporter of?

WILLIS: I've aligned myself with that one, because I think it's solvable. It may take 10 years. It may take 20 years, but it needs to be overhauled. There are kids that are getting killed. There are kids that are being neglected. There are kids that are just being rotated in and out of that system, and nobody's paying any real attention to it. And I'd like to be a part of that solution. And I've talked to the White House, and I said, "I volunteer. I want to work with Nancy Daly Riordan on a nationwide level to try and overhaul this system." And I think it can be done. It just may take awhile.

READER'S DIGEST: Are you close to your own siblings?

WILLIS: Uh-huh. I lost a younger brother this past summer, but I'm very close with my sister and my other younger brother.

READER'S DIGEST: Is that the brother who worked with you?

WILLIS: Yes. Film producer, great film producer. We had a very close relationship.

READER'S DIGEST: How protracted was his illness?

WILLIS: He died six weeks after he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. There's no screening process for it. It's a painful death. That's the bad side of it. The other side of it was, everyone got to say good-bye to him. Most people die suddenly. Most people are surprised by their own death, and for those who live on, there's a lot of pain when somebody dies and you don't get a chance to say good-bye. My family got a chance to say good-bye, and that was a good thing. And my brother Robert is now at peace. For a long time, he lived an unhappy life, and he's at peace now.

READER'S DIGEST: Does what you do become a way to work through your feelings on this?

WILLIS: I did a stage play, *True West*, at the same time my brother Robert was going through all this. Another Sam Shepard play. It was about two brothers. The character that I played, Lee, has just come off living by himself for three months in the desert. So I allowed myself to explore that kind of loneliness. And some doors that were locked and closed forever, I opened up and took a look in there.

Had you told me a year ago that being world-famous could be a lonely way to live your life, I would have laughed and said, "No way." But it is lonely, and there is a certain amount of isolation from the rest of the world when your private life is treated as entertainment for the masses. There are only

200, 300 actors who know what that feeling's like, to be isolated, to be viewed as something other than just a regular human being, who have a pretty unique job. But there have been times when I have been very lonely, and this play opened that up in me, and allowed me to look at it, see it and work through it.

READER'S DIGEST: Does the isolation of celebrity make it harder for you to trust people?

WILLIS: To a certain degree.

READER'S DIGEST: You talk about being like a veritable jackpot for people wanting stuff from you.

WILLIS: Yeah, it's difficult to make new friends. I know that part of life is to put yourself out there and try and trust people, but when I've done that, the majority of the time I've been saddened when that trust has been broken. It's been written about a lot, about how much I make for a living, about how much other actors make for a living, the top 10 guys, the top five or six women. People think it's all just a big glamorous, glitzy life, and they don't want to hear that we're human beings. They don't want to hear that part of it. They want to hear that it is a big, swinging lifestyle, and it's not. It's a great job, but it is isolating to a certain degree.

READER'S DIGEST: Does it make it that much harder for you to have had such a public marriage? I mean, because you were married to another celebrity.

WILLIS: Sure. The media and the tabloids, especially, predicted the demise of our marriage at least two or three times a year for every year we were married. They were always saying, "It's gonna end now." It was a very public marriage. Does it make it any harder? No, it's just as hard being single. Demi and I have a very unique relationship. We're as close now, I would say, as we ever were. We talk three, four times a day. We talk about the kids. We talk about what's going on for them. We still

raise our kids together. There are a lot of examples that I've seen—and I'm sure that you have too—where it's not that kind of ending, where there's a lot of resentment and a lot of hatred, and where the parents don't talk, and they use the children as tools to get at each other. We don't play those games. Our kids come first, and our kids' self-esteem comes first.

READER'S DIGEST: Does Demi spend a lot of time here?

WILLIS: Yeah, she makes her home here. Demi is a great mother. She's done a fantastic job with these girls, and I still love her. And I'm very proud of how we're raising our kids.

READER'S DIGEST: Could you not see raising them any place besides here?

WILLIS: Well, this is a really great community for kids. There are great schools here. It's a little isolated, but it's always been a sanctuary for us, and I think it's a sanctuary for our kids. My kids like cities. My kids love New York. They love L.A. They love Vegas. But it's safe here. The school systems here encourage parents to be involved with the school, to be involved with their kids' school life, and I take advantage of that. I'm up there a lot. My parents never came to my school unless I did something wrong.

READER'S DIGEST: Did that happen a lot?

WILLIS: As I got older, yes.

READER'S DIGEST: People think you're a guy who likes to cause trouble.

WILLIS: Well, I just never would tolerate b———. I know you can't put that in *Reader's Digest*. What's another word for that? Anyway, I didn't tolerate it when I was in school. I stood up for myself.

I stood up for my friends. Friendship even then was important to me, and is really important to me now. Not just friendship, but the cultivation of friendship, to keep friendships alive, and keep friendships going, is an important thing to me.

READER'S DIGEST: Isn't that hard to do in this place that isolates you from a lot of people?

WILLIS: I get out. I travel. I go to New York. I go to L.A. That part of the isolation of it is good for me. I can go shopping here. I can go to the supermarket here and not be hassled. I can go to the hardware store and talk to people, and they don't make a big deal out of it.

READER'S DIGEST: But you could probably do that other places too?

WILLIS: I can't go to the mall.

READER'S DIGEST: Do you want to go to the mall?

WILLIS: Yeah. Kind of. I get about a 20-minute window at any mall before clamor.

READER'S DIGEST: When was the last time you went to one? What mall did you go to?

WILLIS: Probably the Beverly Center. I lasted about 20 minutes, and then had to get out of there.

READER'S DIGEST: What were you doing in the Beverly Center?

WILLIS: I think I was doing Christmas shopping. But this town doesn't have a mall, which is a cool thing about it. It's got individual little stores. And I really like shopping locally and supporting stores here. I just think it's a cool thing to do. I'm not a fan of big chains.

READER'S DIGEST: But you're a part of the business here, though, aren't you? I mean, don't you have a lot of business here?

WILLIS: I did. I have a nightclub here. I'm about to re-open the restaurant that was a part of the nightclub. I participate in the local community. I love this town of Hailey.

READER'S DIGEST: You were talking earlier about how you found it. You said you came here in '87.

WILLIS: Yup, in '87. I was still single then. Met Demi in '87, got married later on in '87, and moved here, I guess, a year or two later, 'cause I still had to stay in L.A. for *Moonlighting*. Once that ended, I realized I didn't have to live in L.A. I think L.A. is a pretty toxic place to raise kids in a lot of ways. I'm a big fan of letting kids be kids as long as possible, 'cause God knows they're gonna be out there in the world soon enough, and they're gonna know all the bad stuff that happens in the world soon enough.

I grew up where I could walk out my back door, and be out in the woods in two minutes, in the country, in South Jersey. And you can do that here. And I think it's a great gift to give kids, as opposed to growing up in say, New York City or L.A. It's a good thing for them to be able to walk outside and experience nature and see wild animals.

READER'S DIGEST: They don't get that kind of connection you had, though, having the woods, but also being close to New York City.

WILLIS: No, they don't. The nearest city here, I guess, would be the state capital.

READER'S DIGEST: Growing up that close to New York, I've got to figure that's where your connection to R&B came from.

WILLIS: Well, I also grew up in a time when Motown was at its height. When I was in the fifth grade, they would take us out of school on Wednesdays and Fridays, and take us over to the YMCA, and we would have dances. And how old are you in the fifth grade, 10 years old?

READER'S DIGEST: Yes.

WILLIS: I learned how to dance when I was ten years old, man—to Motown, to whatever dance music was out then, but it was mostly Motown. And that is my sensibility of music. There would be no Prince without Jackie Wilson. There would be no Prince without James Brown.

READER'S DIGEST: No Stevie Wonder either.

WILLIS: That's right, that's right. Every new hip thing, whether it's music or a new slang, comes out of black culture. I watch Saturday morning cartoons with my kids, and I see kids' cereals, kids' toys, kids' products being sold by these little hip-hop cartoon characters.

READER'S DIGEST: Isn't that amazing how that's happened?

WILLIS: It's just amazing. All that new stuff comes out of black culture, and nobody ever comments on it, but it is alive and well in the pop culture.

READER'S DIGEST: In that way, perhaps, racism has ended.

WILLIS: It's getting there. You know, you go down South and it hasn't ended. It's never talked about,

people behave as if it's somehow over, or it has somehow ended, but it hasn't at all.

READER'S DIGEST: Why do you think that people act like that?

WILLIS: Because nobody wants to deal with it. Nobody wants to deal with how ugly it is, how nasty it is, and how it's alive and well. In the South, in Mississippi, it's like it's a hundred years ago, two hundred years ago. And back when I was in high school, we had race riots every year I was in school.

READER'S DIGEST: Oh, my.

WILLIS: I don't necessarily think it was as much about racism as it was about 17-year-old and 18-year-old young guys that just had all that testosterone, and just had to fight. It was easy to make it about blacks against whites, but I don't know if that was the kind of racism that we're talking about right now, where white people try to make black people feel like they are less than them, which is my definition of prejudice. It is judgment prior to investigation. And it still goes on. It's still happening all the time.

READER'S DIGEST: You obviously had a big interest in black culture very early on. And Jersey wasn't known—it still isn't known—as being one of the most liberal of places.

WILLIS: I don't know what liberal is. Where are the liberal places? New York, maybe. New York is probably as liberal as any place in the United States, I guess.

READER'S DIGEST: But you know what I'm talking about, that kind of mix, where people are just sort of in it.

WILLIS: I don't know, man, at the Friday dances blacks and whites were out there dancing together, so music was the equalizer. There wasn't any white music you could really dance to in those days.

READER'S DIGEST: Young Rascals?

WILLIS: Hard to dance to. Good music, but hard to dance to.

READER'S DIGEST: There'd be a good slow dance going on. I mean, that's what that was all about, right?

WILLIS: Well, slow dancing was about something completely different.

READER'S DIGEST: Yes. I won't dispute you on that one.

WILLIS: Music is a good equalizer in that sense. I mean, my kids don't know they're listening to rap music or hip-hop music. All they know is you can dance to it. So, in that way, it does equalize it to a certain degree. Racism will end when parents stop teaching hatred, and that's a possibility.

READER'S DIGEST: Did that come up in your neighborhood?

WILLIS: Yeah, absolutely, and South Jersey still has a lot of racism going on, but little kids aren't born hating, aren't born to say that person's different, or that person's brown or black, or Asian or whatever. Kids aren't born to hate. The hatred is taught. And when parents stop teaching that, that's when it's going to end.

READER'S DIGEST: I want to ask you about *Moonlighting*, because I know that in one of Brandon Tartikoff's books he writes about wanting to derail *Moonlighting*, because the original casting was

Robert Blake?

WILLIS: I don't know. I think Robert Blake came in and talked to Glenn Caron about it. I'm not sure if Robert Blake was ever really seriously considered for it. I know they were having a hard time finding the guy.

READER'S DIGEST: What was that all about?

WILLIS: Well, I was in the last group, man. They had seen like three thousand guys, and I had just finished *Fool for Love*. I went out to L.A. to see the '84 Olympics. I had just gotten an agent through *Fool for Love*, and the L.A. office of my agent calls and says, "Hi, we're your agents, and we want to send you out." And I went, "Oh, wow, great." I think *Moonlighting* was the third thing they sent me to. At the time, ABC was run by Aaron Spelling—it was the Aaron Spelling era of all those TV shows. And I did not fit the Aaron Spelling profile of a TV star. I had a bad attitude. I came out there with my New York attitude, and my just-don't-give-a-damn attitude. I think I got the job because of that. I went in, didn't look the part—I'd just cut off all my hair with scissors. I had three earrings in, and went in wearing fatigues. Went in, did the audition, read the script, and I never thought I was going to do TV. I had that New York actor, snotty attitude about TV, and it wasn't any good. But Glenn Caron's writing really turned me around. It was great writing. And I said, "I know this character. I know this guy." And it took me about five episodes of that show to really learn how to act in front of a camera, which I had never done. It's very different than acting onstage. And the fifth episode, we did what was called a mid-season pickup. We were supposed to do six episodes, and we ended up only doing five, and the fifth episode I went, "Oh, this is what it's supposed to be. This is who this character is."

READER'S DIGEST: I thought it would've been maybe the sixth episode, "Brother, Can You Spare a Blonde?" which is really the one I was talking about.

WILLIS: That was the first of the next full season, and that was all Glenn Caron. He got me the job, and ABC did not want me. I had to go back seven times, and they cleaned me up. They let my hair grow out, and they put me in a suit and tie, and I finally screen-tested with Cybill Shepherd, and there was about a two-week period where they said, “Okay, we’re not gonna hire Bruce, and we’re not gonna do the show.” Glenn had me come back out to L.A., and do one more screen test with Cybill, and after that, ABC said okay.

READER’S DIGEST: But this stuff you’re talking about, with the R&B and everything, a lot of that seemed to have come from you, too. That stuff that your character, David Addison, did.

WILLIS: Yes. I brought that in and Glenn said, “Yeah, let’s go with that.” There was a lot of improv going on, but the first couple years we pretty much stuck to the script. And Glenn Caron really was the guy who took it in a different direction. Those first couple years, we did shows that weren’t just about—if I can compare it to a show like *Remington Steele*, which was on at that time—two detectives that kind of had this romantic thing going on. But Glenn started doing shows like “Atomic Shakespeare,” a black and white episode, and “Big Man on Mulberry Street,” which featured big production numbers. The show became about more than just these two characters and their romantic interest.

READER’S DIGEST: Well, it seemed like that mystery stuff was always incidental to the relationship between them, unlike *Remington Steele*, where it was always about the mystery.

WILLIS: The mystery stuff was the least important part. We made fun of it. We made fun of the TV show aspect of it, of being a detective. We never detected anything. It was all about just trying to make people laugh. And the first couple years, man, I would hold up a few of those hours of TV against anything that’s ever been on.