



Photo: [unreadable]

BY JOE RHODES Every raindrop leaves a cold gray mark, dark wet shadows that spread slowly across the felt brim of Tony Curtis's cowboy hat, the one with the silver band and the perfect crease, the one he's owned for 23 years, that he made a point of wearing today, just to let the citizens of Tucson know that deep in his Hollywood heart, he's really one of them.

He's been tipping it all morning, with a nod of his still-famous head and a soft-spoken "Hello, ma'am" or, if he just can't help himself, a grinning, "Howdy, Tex." The clouds don't matter and neither does the wind, blown in from a desert that has lost its warmth.

"Rain? What rain?" he says, whenever anyone apologizes for the weather. You watch him on a day like this, a 74-year-old working the crowd like he's running for sheriff. His long black coat is wrapped around him, and he's wearing black pants, gloves and mid-ankle zip-up boots. "Look at him, the Armani cowboy," says his fifth wife, Jill, supermodel tall, 45 years younger



### CONTEST WINNERS ROPE TONY CURTIS INTO A DAY AT THE RODEO—AND IT'S ALL A GREAT ESCAPE

and never very far from his side. To watch him is to understand why Tony Curtis will always be a star, just as he was in the 1950s when his hair was black and completely his own, an olive-skinned sex symbol who was Leo and Brad, Matt and Ben all rolled into one. You understand why women still melt when he kisses their hand. "I'm Tony," he says to everyone he meets—mayors and waiters, store clerks and security guards. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

The Millers (above) corral Tucson's guest of honor.

Asked if he had any advice for younger, surlier stars, he says: "When



**Jeanine and her mom play escort to a star.** you find yourself famous just because people think you're cute and nice, you just have to sit back and enjoy it. Fame is not a negative thing." He is here, at the 75th La Fiesta de los Vaqueros, Tucson's annual outdoor rodeo, thanks to a contest sponsored by Turner Classic Movies. The cable service shows so many of his films that he has become the channel's unofficial movie-star mascot, ready to promote it—and himself—whenever he can.

"I'm glad I took the time out of my life to make those movies," he had said the day before, smiling at a clip from "Some Like It Hot," his classic romp. "I'm always so glad to see myself."

Bobbi Miller was glad to see him, too. She had entered the Curtis contest on a whim late one November night. She was looking for a rare moment of peace in the two-bedroom apartment she shares with her husband, Kevin, and two of her children—Kevin, 13, and Jeanine, 11. (Her older daughters—Ananda, 21 and married, and Christine, 20—live away.)

Miller, 41, who moved with her family to Arizona from Syracuse just 18 months ago, saw the contest promo from the corner of her eye. All she had to do was write, in 25 words or less, why she ought to win Tony Curtis for a day.

This prompt triggered her memory of a 1960s episode of *The Flintstones* entitled "The Return of Stony Curtis." The plot involves a star-for-a-day promotional stunt that sends a prehistoric movie idol—voiced by Tony Curtis—to Fred and Wilma's abode. Bedlam in Bedrock ensues when a jealous Fred first humbles Stony, then is duped by him into thinking he has enough acting ability to quit his job and sell the house.

In her contest entry, Miller wove in a reference to the shabby manner in which poor Tony (as Stony) was treated by that modern Stone Age family. "The Miller Family would treat him much better, for sure," she wrote.

There were 20,000 other entries, but just before Christmas, the Millers were informed that they'd won. Suddenly terrified that they, alone, wouldn't be interesting enough for a Hollywood star, the Millers suggested the rodeo and its accompanying nonmotorized parade, which Curtis, a horseman of long standing, immediately embraced.

**Curtis, sporting a white hat, plays the good guy.**



He and Jill sneaked into Tucson a day early, flying in from Los Angeles unannounced. With less than an hour's notice, they called the Millers and invited them to dinner at the Tack Room, one of the priciest restaurants in Tucson. Without the pressure of camera crews or staring crowds, the Millers and the Curtises spent the evening like long-lost friends.

He spun tales from his glory days, talked about how difficult it had been to work with Marilyn Monroe, how he still hangs around with Jack Lemmon and Kirk Douglas. He told them how the contest had come to pass, how it was based on the old fan-magazine contests he used to do when he was just starting out, a young pretty-boy actor, trying to get noticed, willing to do whatever the studios asked. In fact, one magazine had sponsored a contest just like this in the mid-1950s, offering the winner—a woman from Walla Walla, Washington—a chance to have Curtis come to visit.

"I was first prize, second prize was a Frigidaire, and I could tell what she'd really wanted was the refrigerator," he told the Millers. "So after I got back to Los Angeles, I sent her one."

"We expected him to be nice, but he seemed really ecstatic to see us," husband Kevin says, describing the gift basket he and Bobbi had assembled for their guest, filled with local salsa, cactus jelly and multicolored tortilla chips. "After 15 minutes, he felt like my uncle."

So this is how Bobbi and Kevin Miller end up in the Rodeo Parade, sitting next to Tony Curtis in a horse-drawn cart, waving to 200,000 people.

It's how they find themselves sitting in the rodeo grandstand, sopping wet, watching cowboys wrestle steers in the mud.



**Curtis (left) and Lemmon, in drag, with Monroe in the riotous "Some Like It Hot."**

It's how the Miller kids get to ride in a stretch limousine with tinted windows and how the grown-ups get dinner with a movie star one last time. There are drinks and toasts and garlic-studded chicken breast with shrimp shepherd's pie.

By the end of the evening, Tony Curtis, who has spent more of the last 15 years painting and writing than he has acting, is drawing pictures for his hosts, regaling the room, holding court. Christine Miller and her boyfriend, Mark, decide where they're going to get married, that they're doing it in Las Vegas and they want Tony and Jill (who are moving to Vegas this spring) to be their witnesses. Kevin Miller, heady from the day, raises his glass and gestures to the star in his family's midst.

"The next time you come," he says loudly, "the trip's on us."

Tony Curtis leans over and wraps Kevin Miller in a hug. "You'll be sorry you said that," he says as he laughs.

And he smiles his movie-star smile. ■

Frequent TV Guide contributor Joe Rhodes wrote about wild man Marty Ingels earlier this month.