

JAMEELA JAMIL

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Talking to Jameela Jamil feels like chatting with one of your best friends. She's warm and personable in the most authentic way possible. Right from the off, she's asking about my day and we're swapping tips on the best vegetarian Indian restaurants in London. Although Jamil is now based in L.A., she spent most of her working life in England's capital, but she says she prefers her life there. "I love English food and I love English people and our sense of humour," she says, but laments it was the entertainment industry that was getting her down and part of her decision to move. "As a woman, I felt very limited in my opportunities. It's a very small, male-dominated industry. I was told explicitly to my face that girls just weren't funny. It felt like my options were to go on *Strictly Come Dancing* then hope to host a show I wouldn't be interested in because you're running out of options."

Jameela Jamil rose to fame in the U.K. through a successful presenting career on TV and radio. British millennials will remember the affable Jamil brightening their screens on Channel 4's T4 alongside Nick Grimshaw, and subsequently over the airwaves hosting The Official Chart Update with Scott Mills on BBC Radio 1. With such a natural hosting ability, it may come as a surprise that Jamil, who's now more known for her role as Tahani Al-Jamil in NBC's *The Good Place*, sort of fell into it all. "I've never had a plan," she says candidly. "My whole career has been a mistake."

Jameela's decision to leave England came after a pivotal moment in her life. She found a lump in her breast. "It turned out not to be cancer but I realised I had quite a lucky escape. I thought about what I would have regretted in my life if it had been cancer," she recalls.

"I grew up with zero money so I have the mentality of a rapper. I felt like I had to hustle all the time to make sure I was never poor again. I worked without a holiday for seven years but I realised I was missing out on so much and I wasn't growing as a person. So I booked a one-way ticket the day I got my results, quit my job at Radio 1, broke up with my boyfriend and left. I just thought I'm not going to turn 30 and not have tried anything new."

That wasn't the first time Jamil had a life-altering moment, either. "I got hit by a car when I was 17, broke my back and thought I would never walk again," she says. "Every 10 years I get a reminder that I'm not doing enough of what I would love to do."

The plan when she moved to L.A. was to become a writer, so Jamil set about sending her work around, got an agent, and was later signed by a producer. In the meantime, however, fate had other ideas. An audition for a new Mike Schur [*The Office*, *Parks and Recreation*] how came about through her agent, with Jamil being told that the role had been 'made for her'. Having no idea what the show was and painfully aware of her lack of acting experience, she went for the audition, fully expecting to be "found out as the idiot fraud." "Once again, my low self-esteem carried me through," she says, with self-deprecating humour. "I was so comfortable in the room because it was such a no-brainer to me that it would never go any further. Before I knew it, I was signing my name on a 7-year deal. It happened over the course of 10 days." Since then, Jameela's confidence on set has grown exponentially, thanks to all of the "beautiful, brilliant people" she works with, and would even consider acting in something else after the show.



“I’ve learned that Kristen Bell is one of the most under-rated actors. She’s so good that even after three years of working with her, I literally clapped during the rehearsal like a seal!”

She shares Bell’s sense of humor. “I’ve learned not to eat American craft services if you’re going to be acting all day because the gas is just unbelievable,” she jokes. “I feel like I could have fuelled America. I’m sure I made a hole in the Ozone layer.”

After two seasons, Jameela seems to be having the time of her life on *The Good Place*, and gushes about the supportive environment and diverse cast, something that she notes is quite rare. “Mike Schur is my moral compass,” she says. “I actually consult him on my own moral dilemmas. Everyone’s very grateful to be there, even Ted [Danson], is still grateful after all these decades to be on a set. It feels like we’ve won a competition, honestly.”

Jameela’s feelings towards TV back in the U.K. though, are far less positive. “I left at 29, hoping that by the time I came back they would have opened the doors for women and women of colour more than they have so far. America isn’t without its flaws but ageism isn’t as rife here. You turn on the TV and you have a fabulous 50-year old, curvaceous, African-American, intelligent, woman as the main host. It just felt like there was more opportunity to be a woman over 25 here,” Jamil says. “There’s not many TV shows that are inclusive of multi-ethnicities. It’s hard to even find a show as diverse as *The Good Place*. I love British content, but for brown people, there just isn’t a lot of room in acting. There’s not a lot of Pakistani or Indian people at the forefront of British television.”

Discrimination within the entertainment industry is a matter that Jamil feels very passionate about, and she’s become known for being outspoken on social media. She regularly calls out other celebrities on their patriarchal toxicity - namely DJ Khaled’s comments about there being ‘different rules’ for men and women in regards to oral sex, and Kim Kardashian’s post on Instagram advertising appetite suppressant lollipops. “I’d rather go down in flames rather than say nothing or do nothing,” Jamil says passionately.

“I never planned on having a public profile, but I’ve always been very passionate about the mental health of young people and women. Sometimes I feel like I was given these opportunities to use them as a platform to speak out and make a difference.”

“I was the victim of bad role models,” she explains, frankly but passionately. “When I was 15 I had an eating disorder. I’d say 90 percent of it came from what I read in the media and what I saw on television. The social conditioning that you had to be thin at any cost in order to be worth something. So I didn’t have a period for three years because I was starving myself. If I hadn’t have been hit by that car and shocked into realising how much I should look after my body, I would for sure still have anorexia now.”

“I don’t do any fad diets or talk about my body in magazines unless I’m talking about confidence. I don’t allow airbrushing any more. I have what I have and I say to magazines that I will be personally offended if you take it upon yourself to change the way I look. It’s really rude to photoshop someone. It’s so mad that they will shoot an older man in high definition but will photoshop a woman within an inch of her life.”

In a world that tells us not to love ourselves unless we look a certain way, self-love is an act of rebellion. It’s this sentiment that led Jamil to set up her *I Weigh* movement (@I_Weigh). The Instagram account encourages women to feel valuable and see how amazing they are by looking beyond the flesh on our bones. With over 40k followers and counting, Jamil regularly shares photos on the account of women who have joined the movement, each post celebrating what makes them wonderful and unique. “Don’t let this world make you forget about the other parts of your life and only focus on what’s skin deep,” she affirms. “I feel like everything has just become so look-centric, so airbrushed, and there’s this fantasy that nothing else matters apart from that. Instagram’s just not about life any more.”

“This concept of perfection is killing women,” Jamil continues. “It’s killing young girls because they’re starving themselves to death and it’s breaking the self-esteem of women worldwide. Women need to fight back. Women need to get loud and people at the top need to listen.”

