

# Jeremy Sisto

The *FBI* star talks about his new show, fatherhood, *Clueless*, and more

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“Tai, why would I go with Tai? Don’t you even know who my father is!” -Elton, *Clueless*. It’s been twenty-five years since *Clueless* was released, yet I will forever associate Jeremy Sisto with Elton: the tall, dark, handsome, rich boy from Beverly Hills that Cher wanted to set Tai up with in the 90s cult classic. The film is a pop culture phenom—thanks to the iconic outfits, quote-worthy lines, and memorable cast. However, when it first came out, Jeremy struggled with its success.

“It was a weird life for me, because I was 19 when I did it and I was doing these other dark movies that none

of them did as well. And then, a teen comedy when you’re in your 20s, for me anyways, was something I was afraid people were laughing at me—as opposed to seeing what I wanted them to see. So, there was a period where I guess I was afraid if my career hadn’t continued—like a lot of actors, it just sorta dries up—that I’d be seen as somebody who had a shot and failed.” His feelings about success changed in his 30s. He stopped worrying about it not working out, and embraced the journey. “Now, I’ll do ‘Rollin’ with the homies’ for anybody,” says the 45-year-old actor with a laugh. “I don’t care.”



Jeremy had nothing to worry about. Since then, he has appeared in countless films and TV shows, and has been nominated for Critics’ Choice Awards (*Suburgatory*) and a Screen Actors Guild Award (*Six Feet Under*). “We used to live right here and come here with my two-year-old,” says Jeremy as he points across the street. We are at Oscar’s Place, a tiny French cafe in the West Village. He must be staying nearby as he arrived by scooter. He catches up with the owner, then orders his usual: a waffle.

Much of Jeremy’s time is spent on airplanes flying back and forth between Los Angeles—where his family and he have a home—and New York City, where CBS’ *FBI* films. On *FBI*, Jeremy plays FBI Assistant Special Agent-in-Charge, Jubal Valentine, the man running the FBI command center. Dick Wolf’s drama returned for a second season this fall. “We’ve gained a couple of players. We have a new SAC [Special Agent in Charge], which is our most superior agent in the office, Alana de la Garza, who I worked with on *Law & Order*. She’s such a sweetheart, but she plays a character that is kinda tough. She plays it with a lot of nice layers. We have a new agent John Boyd, who is a great actor, brings a real comedic cynicism... We just have this level of connectivity between other agencies and between each other as agents. The actual FBI out here is a pretty impressive beast—it’s got a really impressive reach.”

To prepare for this role, Jeremy worked closely with one of New York’s FBI offices and got to see firsthand how the offices run and how much these agents love their jobs. “Ebonée Noel, who plays Kristen Chazal, her real-life boyfriend is an FBI agent, and I’ve become friends with the guy and the agent that my character is based on, so I hear from them sometimes about episodes,” he tells me between bites of waffle. The writing is so good that one of the FBI agents told Jeremy that he was going to use his same speech on the show as the intro for his young agents. “I thought that was pretty cool... A big part of it is also just how to make the structure the strongest, the tightest—to be able to siphon hundreds of stories through, because that’s the dream, to be able to have the show around for 10-20 years and it be able to speak to the society at the time. Because society is always changing, so to have a show that can stick with culture over a decade or two is the key thing.”

Jeremy's latest movie premiered last month. He is the voice of King Runeard in Disney's *Frozen II*, in theaters now. "There's an element of the film that is searching through the past, trying to discover where they came from, so I'm the girls' grandfather, King Arendelle." His daughter Charlie was a huge fan of the first movie —it was on a loop at his house— so he was excited to join the cast. "I loved the movie. "Let It Go," I thought was such a great release of that moment in a lot of teenagers' lives when they're trying to break free from the constraints and expectations of their parents and this idea: *I'm going to be everything you were afraid I was going to turn into.*" Jeremy is impressed and surprised by how deep the animated film went. "These directors and filmmakers really wanted to push themselves, so they took some chances," he says proudly.

Though *Frozen* is a musical, you won't hear Jeremy singing in the film. "I think I did audition for *Frozen*, but I came with my guitar and sang Van Morrison's "Crazy Love," and it's not really a song you would find in a musical.... Um, I didn't get it." He flashes a smile. He would like to take on the challenge of a musical one day. "I'd be very nervous about it. I've never done it." He did release an alt rock album about seven years ago under the pseudonym, Escape Tailor. "It's good, but it's not a musical type. There's no part of the song where I'm belting out vibrato," he laughs. "That I would've had to figure out for this. I don't know how to sing technique-wise. I wasn't trained, probably would last a week and then would sound froggy for the rest of the run."

But let's not forget when Elton serenaded Cher "Turn away..." in *Clueless*. Jeremy has done theater and performed in the play *Festen* on Broadway in 2006, but was put-off by how the reviews affect the show's success. "As soon as the review comes out, that is in the air, and the one on Broadway [*Festen*] wasn't a great review, so as soon as it opened, had the bad reviews there and the audience stepped back a little bit. Just seemed a strange dichotomy something that is, as an actor, at least for me, you're going to play to be creatively satisfied, 'cause it's not like it's paying you a ton of money, so then to have it be so judged, more critically than something that y'know you're doing for a wider audience, it seems misbalanced."

These days, Jeremy devotes most of his energy to his kids, Charlie, 10 and Sebastian, 7. He confesses that he's pretty "neurotic" about the way he is raising his children.

"I didn't have the most traditional upbringing, so I often feel like I'm faking it. But I bet a lot of parents feel like that. And it's an interesting time to have kids that are 10 and 7, because it's right before they're about to have their own independence and I don't know what that looks like. I don't know what my life becomes then," he muses. "Might be a good thing, because creatively, I've been a little bit less productive over the last couple of years, and I think it's possibly tied to the fact that they take a lot of energy."

Do you think they'll follow in your footsteps? Do they watch your work? "My daughter and her friends were dressed up as *Clueless* characters for Halloween." He pulls out his cell phone and shows me the photo. He points out that she's the one in red. "Yeah, they, I dunno. My daughter is definitely not as interested in it. I can sorta see my son — it's hard to tell. There's a side of me that really hopes they don't because it does seem that a lot of actors or actresses are searching for something," he laughs, "that they probably won't find. Trying to compensate for something that was lacking in their childhood perhaps. So if I do my job properly, then it will seem kinda weird to them. *Why do you want to get up in front of everyone and do this thing where...* — 'cause it is a weird job." Though this is an industry he knows very well and would be able to help them navigate, he hopes they go a different direction and choose a career path that is "not so up for criticism, so dependent on public affirmation."

Jeremy didn't seek out acting. As a child, his mother took his sister and him along with her to auditions, so they began auditioning too. "We went to a pretty rough school, so we wanted an excuse to get out of there as soon as possible, so we would do these plays and they were really fun experiences —not necessarily for the acting, just because the community was really cool." It all seemed "kinda magical" — a welcome escape, especially since his parents were going through a divorce. Jeremy made his film debut in *Grand Canyon* in 1991 at 16 and has been in entertainment ever since. "It kinda just followed that straight line. I'm still waiting for my jagged line —jet off and become an astronaut," he says with a smile.

But we don't want that, we like watching Jeremy every week on *FBI*. "There are a lot of people that are watching the show. Right now, we have 12 million viewers or something." And there are times when he notices that people recognize him. "I've done a lot of TV shows, so it's a pretty weird reality where sometimes you're walking

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down the street and somebody will look at you like they know you, and it's because they spent a week in bed watching some series you did and they see you and they're like, *What? Is this my friend?* When you've been around as long as I have... I'm going to ride this ship to put these kids in private school, maybe into college, and then I can retire and open a waffle restaurant with my friend, Oscar, here."

The conversation turns to what kids have access to on TV these days versus when we were growing up, and how we relate differently now. "You see something that you used to relate to in such a strong way. It's like the *Joker*. Like the *Joker*, I would've loved that in my 20s. I still thought it was great, but there was also another side of me that was like, What? What? What's the point?" He laughs. "I hope no one sees it like, I'm going to get more attention if I shoot people up. I hope that doesn't happen, but I think it's cool. I think Joaquin is amazing and the filmmaking was amazing. I feel that way about a lot of music, too. In my early 20s, you hear a song and you're like, 'God, this hits my soul, connects me to something so deep.' And now, I'm like, 'It's just a song,'" he laughs. "But now, I get my inspiration from my daughter's smile after she gets a basket at her game and jumps up and down."

We chat about his former residence here in the West Village. He used to live in a brownstone owned by the church. "They hadn't been remodeled since the 1800s. We had these guys put up a plasma flatscreen on the wall. Hammered it and they stepped back, and it immediately crashed to the floor. We looked in the walls and it's like, back then, the technique was to put horse hair in the plaster and the paint is all thick and filled with lead. We had an amazing backyard that went into the courtyard of this beautiful church over here, so you just deal with a little lead. It's New York City," he laughs. In Los Angeles, Jeremy and his family have a lot more space, which is good as they have a house full of pets, including a couple of dogs, bunnies, guinea pigs, a horse, hermit crabs, and baby hamsters. After fifty minutes and a brief lull, Jeremy says in an exaggerated tone, "You take the five smartest things I've said, make them 20% smarter, add a couple of touches here and there, and we'll all be great!" He laughs. **ML**



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### What are your plans for the holidays?

"We were going to just chill and stay at home this season, but my wife is suddenly against that, we always go to see my sister in Portland. My brother-in-law is a cop there. My sister is a chef and they have two kids and my kids love spending time with them, so we usually go up there and do some sledding. I think we have some other plans, but I know not sure. I'm just along for the ride," he laughs. "I just go where they tell me."

### What are you watching on TV?

"I'm watching that really dark HBO show called *Euphoria*. *Succession* is great. People are making stuff that they couldn't have made at another time, so you get some really interesting shit, but you also get some stuff that you're like, *what? Fleabag* obviously is one. Do you watch *Fleabag*? *Fleabag* is super unique. A lot of great stuff on. I'm on a dying animal that feasibly won't be the same in a few years: network television. To be on a show where, we'll do 23 episodes this season, a show that is, like I said, trying to create a structure and create a venue that can remain as the culture evolves through different landscapes: political, social. A lot of shows, the great shows, the reason they're the greatest is they're speaking to right now, they make sense right now in this moment, and that doesn't mean they won't be great later. When I was on *Six Feet Under*, that was such a show that people at that time were like, *Yes! This is so unique*. When I started my career twenty years earlier, that's when *Law & Order* started, so my career span, so there's something to be said for that. I'm at a place in my life where that kind of consistency, longevity is —I'm very grateful to be a part of something like that. I think a lot of people really rely on that kind of entertainment that is consistent and gives them what they want, distracts them from what's going on in the world, while at the same time keeps them connected to a part of them."

### Are you still in touch with the cast of *Clueless*?

"Donald Faison's kids just started at my kid's school, so I see him every now and then. He's a sweetheart. And I run into Breckin [Meyer] every now and then. Alicia [Silverstone] did an arc on *Suburgatory* a few years ago, so I got to hang out with her for awhile. We actually shared a message not long ago. But you know, I've got the kids, it's like my social life does not span too far..." Jeremy would definitely be down for a *Clueless* sequel. "I told you, I'll do anything," he laughs. "I'm easy these days. Those are kinda hard to do, right? *My Clueless was Breakfast Club* —the John Hughes stuff. And I remember in my 20s, I was trying to do a revolving cast live version of *Breakfast Club* and John wouldn't have it. He was very adamant about those things not being recreated in any way."