

Lynne McNamara



THE BACKLOT

Tanya Memme is still in her 20s, but she's already lived a pretty big life.

Presently host of KABC Television's magazine show, *Eye on L.A.*, co-host (with Ahmet Zappa) of The Learning Channel's *Robotica* and the face of U.S. satellite television's DirecTV, the former Miss World Canada now calls Santa Monica home.

Memme made her first trip to Vancouver last week to visit her mother, Beverley, a painter/sculptor who lives in Qualicum, and her brother Jeremy, from Victoria.

We met up Friday afternoon at the Cactus Club restaurant at Broadway and Granville, where 10 guys in cowboy hats at the next table strained to peek as the glamorous but low-key Memme ate shrimp while we chatted.

Growing up on a sod farm in very rural Wainfleet, Ont., the competitive tomboy was always interested in television.

Not watching it — being on it.

Recently, she found an old home video — “And there’s me at nine years old, as soon as the video camera comes out” (She makes a grimacing camera face and laughs.)

At seven, she began taking dance classes. One day, while performing at a local seniors’ home, she spotted an elderly woman, entranced.

“The light in this woman’s eyes just from seeing this show,” she says, beaming at the memory. “I realized, wow, I can actually take people away from their problems, and it was the most enlightening experience.”

That’s when she decided show business would be her life.

Moving to Thorald, Ont., in her teens, she became involved in drama and modelling.

At 16, she entered the Miss Teen Niagara pageant, where the judges asked her to tell them everything she knew about euthanasia. She’d never heard the word and rambled for several minutes about youth in Asian countries. “Needless to say, I didn’t win,” says the dark-haired beauty.

But a couple of years later she entered the Miss Niagara pageant and won. Soon afterward, her boyfriend proposed and she accepted. They planned to get married and settle down in St. Catherines.

But a chance to attend the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New

Tanya Memme was about to tie the knot when ‘an ache inside’ convinced her to pursue her career. The same thing happened when she won Miss World Canada

York changed all that.

Three weeks before the huge Italian wedding was to take place, with 700 invitations in the mail, she called the whole thing off. “I had this ache inside of me to pursue this career,” she says.

But school had to wait. She won the Miss World Canada pageant, part of the Miss World circuit. (Miss World Canada has since merged with Miss Canada.)

A few months later, with little of the promised support from a sponsor coming in, she would back out.

“I gave up my crown and I never looked back,” says Memme. “I’m not really a pageant girl, I never really was.” She saw it as a way to open doors to an acting career.

She tells a hilarious story of the so-called sponsor arriving to pick up the crown. “We’re eating dinner (at the family home in Thorald) and he practically knocks down my front door and comes in and takes my crown. That’s the only thing I regret,” she says, collapsing in laughter. “My crown, I wanted that darn thing, it’s worth \$13,000, aaaaah!”

The story never did hit the press — but she’s now writing about the whole mess and hopes it might some day be a movie-of-the-week.

Finally, in 1994, she headed to New York to school, going from wearing a crown to working two under-the-table cocktail waitress jobs to pay the bills. She’ll never forget the day someone came into the bar and recognized her — “I was sweeping the floor at the time,” she says with a smile. “I went home that day very depressed.”

After graduation, she got an agent, started getting work, moved to L.A. and a few months later, discouraged, quit and moved back to Toronto.

Then, DirecTV called her with a long contract offer. Back she flew to Los Angeles, and today, things couldn’t be better.

She gives motivational speeches to teen girls, has done some sports reporting for CBS, hosts and attends red carpet events, has a lead in small indie film, as well as the work with DirecTV, *Eye on L.A.* and *Robotica*, whose third season on The Learning Channel begins July 28.