

TV Close-Up: Natasha Henstridge

by Eirik_Knutzen

Soon after wrapping her recurring role as Jayne Murray on ABC's "Commander in Chief," Natasha Henstridge signed a TV series development deal with the Mouse House's Touchstone Pictures division. Given that Disney owns the first three letters in the alphabet, the ABC Television Group and its entire inventory, Disney Studios, a huge amount of cable channels, a luxury liner or two, a bunch of enormous amusement parks and a roadside attraction on the Milky Way, Henstridge considered herself extremely lucky and knew it was only a matter of time before the right project came along.

NATASHA HENSTRIDGE - Former high fashion model Natasha Henstridge plays Taylor Wethersby, an ambitious young San Francisco lawyer, in the TV legal drama 'Eli Stone.' CNS Photo courtesy of ABC. As usual, Henstridge read a vast majority of the pilot scripts that crossed her transom while taking long, hot baths.

"I absolutely love it," said the 5-foot-10 former high-fashion model. "In fact, I do all my reading in the bathtub. For long-range, therapeutic value, I drain off some of the cool water and replace it with hot. ... I come out looking like a prune, but happy."

Given that it was only a matter of time, the Canadian pride of Springdale, Newfoundland, soon fell madly in love with "Eli Stone." Offbeat enough to appeal to her quirky sensibilities, the show deals with an ambitious young San Francisco lawyer given to frequent hallucinations involving Brit singer George Michael.

An excellent screw-the-little-guy attorney while in top form, Eli Stone (Jonny Lee Miller) has a sudden conversion upon the discovery that an inoperable brain aneurysm is causing his illusions (including George Michael crooning in his living room) - much to the displeasure of the august head of the prestigious law firm and fellow high-powered colleagues.

Henstridge portrays the totally delicious Taylor Wethersby, who is fabulously successful practicing family law elsewhere and the daughter of Eli's increasingly skeptical boss.

"I love my character because she's really smart, always wanted to make it on her own, yet remains daddy's little girl," she explained. "Taylor learned everything from him. A type-A personality from an Ivy League law school, she has it all. And is madly in love with Eli."

With 13 episodes of "Eli Stone" in the can (a lifetime in the writers' strike-shortened season), Henstridge also has time to promote her upcoming feature film, "The List" (which may be released as "The Tourist"), a psychological thriller about an exclusive sex club also starring Ewan McGregor and Hugh Jackman.

The good-cop, bad-cop Canadian miniseries "Would Be Kings" is set to go anytime, and she may shoot yet another psychological thriller called "Stevie" in Barcelona, Spain, this summer.

"I love traveling - I think the gypsy in me came out when I was a model - and go nuts when I can combine it with some sort of outdoor sport, like Rollerblading on Venice Beach," mused the 33-year-old actress. "I'm really into snowboarding at the moment, I spent the Christmas holidays doing that in Chamonix, France."

Based in Los Angeles, Henstridge rarely travels anywhere without her boyfriend of four years, singer-songwriter-actor Darius Danesh. Unless it's a school holiday, her sons (Tristan, 9, and Asher, 6) by ex-fiance/actor Liam Waite stay with their father rather than hit the road. Her former husband, Danian Chapa, is out of the picture.

The only reason why the sensual performer was born in Springdale is that nearby Southbrook was too small to support a hospital, but she was raised along with a younger brother in Alberta's Fort McMurray, the hub of a huge oil field "in the middle of nowhere" about a five-hour drive north of Edmonton. While her father got his hands dirty as a contractor, her stay-at-home mom had other ideas.

"My mom is so not a stage mom, but I think she wanted to model when she was younger," Henstridge said. "I

did want to be on covers of magazines when I was a kid, too, and I was always performing in school plays. When I was 14, she sent my name and picture to the John Casblancas Modeling School, which was sponsoring The New Look of the Year contest with Elite a few months later."

At 15, she was all alone (her parents couldn't afford the trip) in Paris for the contest, and came in first runner up. She came back to Alberta with about \$100,000 in her purse, dropped out of school, returned to Paris, then hit New York. In a flash, she did photo shoots all over the world, including Russia and Argentina.

She studied acting with a couple of private teachers in New York, then nailed a long string of national TV commercials before her first movie role in "Species."

Henstridge went on to add the movie "The Whole Nine Yards" and TV series "She Spies" to her many credits.

"What can I say?" she laughed. "I've been really lucky."

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