

Thornhill teen shares spotlight with stars

Commercial shoot lands teen on stage with (gasp!) The Backstreet Boys

BY LINDA JOHNSON
Correspondent

Just wait until 12-year-old Tali Lewin gets back to school this fall.

That's when she'll find out what it's like to be a star, at least among her classmates.

The Thornhill girl spent a weekend in July filming a series of commercials with none other than famed teen singing group The Backstreet Boys.

The Burger King ads, shot in Toronto and rumoured to be among the most expensive ever made, will likely hit TV screens in early September.

No wonder her friends are impressed.

"They ask for my autograph," she laughed, "and say things like, 'Remember me when you're old!'"

Tali, who starts Grade 7 at the Baythorn School of the Arts this September, was chosen from among more than 100 young actors to appear in the ads.

What's more, of the dozens of children who will appear in the ads, only four received speaking parts and the chance to perform with the band. One of them was Tali.

So, for a couple of days, she got royal treatment, her own trailer and, most important, a chance "to hang out with the band."



Tali Lewin

At school, in addition to the core subjects, she takes drama, dance, vocal, instrumental and visual arts. The rest of her time is spent at classes that provide specialized training. At acting workshops, she plays improvisation games and

learns to act in front of a camera. Then there's the musical theatre school, which teaches acting, singing and dancing.

This year, the finale of the 25-week program was an all-child production of *Guys and Dolls* at the Yorkwoods Theatre in North York. In that, Tali played a leading role, that of the long-suffering Adelaide.

"I also do tap, jazz, ballet and acro," she said, "an acrobatic kind of dance."

She feels really comfortable on stage or in front of a camera. She also likes the clothes she gets to wear — in this case, really "funky" stuff.

"Mostly, I like meeting the other kids and talking about what we've done."

"And, the money's good, too," she added.

In fact, what Tali has made on this one commercial will likely be enough to pay for her college education.

Of course, there are down sides. All the standing around, just waiting, for instance. But Tali seems to have more patience than most teenagers.

"There's often a long wait," she said. "But it's worth waiting for. When they start filming, it's really exciting."

Clearly, she knows where she wants her future to be. She'd like most to be a movie actor.

"But if that doesn't work out," she said, shrugging her shoulders a bit, "I want to do dancing, acting and singing on Broadway."

Looking to that time, she easily accepts how little spare time she has now. But she usually does have one day a week free.

"On that day," she said, "I relax."

"The four of us went up to A.J. and told him we were going to be in the commercial and he said, 'cool!'"

"They didn't seem like huge stars with us," she said. "Only two of them came in limousines. They're just normal guys."

While they weren't allowed to "bug" the stars, she said, they did get to exchange a few words.

"The four of us went up to A.J.," she recounts, "and told him we were going to be in the commercial and he said, 'cool!'"

Then there was the encounter with Kevin. He smiled and said, "Hi."

"I managed to choke out, 'Hi,'" she said.

Tali's rise in showbiz has been rapid. Her first love is dancing, which she's been doing since she was five years old. Two years ago, she got a part playing a little French girl in a milk ad.

The same year, she auditioned for the Ford Centre's production of *Showboat*.

"It called for singing and dancing," she said. "I thought, 'I could do that.'"

She not only won a role in the ensemble cast but was also made understudy to Young Kim, the only lead child character in the show.

Since *Showboat*, she has appeared in 10 commercials, often as a principal performer. Of the 37 auditions she has done this year, she's "booked" six of them.

Off stage, too, she hardly stops, learning every aspect of the art of performance.

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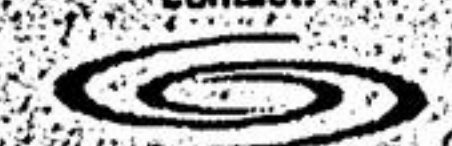
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