



Emily Bergl

Written by Erica Berthe Levin

“You can take the girl out of the Northshore, but you can’t take the Northshore out of the girl,” Emily Bergl laughingly reflected on herself. Everyday, Emily goes to the Vancouver set of the hit ABC show *Men in Trees*, which fictionally takes place in Elmo, Alaska. However, this strikingly attractive actress is really just a girl from Glenview who drives a black Jetta and loves her Fluky’s cheese fries (of which there are “no good ones in LA”). For someone with a huge role in a major primetime television show, there is no pomp, there is no arrogance, but there’s a whole lot of smarts.



I met Emily at her parents' Wicker Park home where we made ourselves comfortable in the living room. We sat on the couch sipping Pellegrino and noshing on crackers, carrots and Irish Dubliner cheese. Alright, since I mentioned it, we're going to have to talk about cheese for a second. Ms. Bergl, who shows absolutely no physical evidence of excessive cheese consumption, counts the dairy product as one of her guiltiest pleasures.

She passionately asserted:

"I'm on a quest to taste every cheese in British Columbia. I also have a fondue club in New York."

To which my immediate response was an incredulous:

"Really?"

She proceeded:

"It's a Fondue Preservation Society. It's about preserving fondue. Yes, we have meetings and it's even become a little competitive with the influence of Iron Chef and all these reality shows. Lately, we've been having all these competitions."

I asked:

"Do you make the fondue yourself?"

She replied:

"Different people make fondues and then you have to make a speech about them."

I couldn't help it. I had to ask:

"Are you joking?"

"No, I'm not joking. It's not just about the taste any more, it's about the whole concept - like the last time I lost, I was a little angry because, really, my fondue tasted better but my friend made this cheddar beer fondue and said in his speech how his fondue was 'of the people' and that it was the proletariat fondue."

It makes sense that this cheese-loving club would require a speech on the side. Or maybe it just makes sense because Emily is one of its members. She has been performing since she was a little girl, more along the lines of Annie, however, than of politically charged, cheese-lauding sermons. "I was always putting on plays with the neighborhood kids and casting myself as the lead," she said. "I'm a total megalomaniac."

One of her constant co-stars was her older brother. "He inspired me to be an actor," she stated. Right now, he's not doing any acting. He's a primatologist. After typing that word, I realize just how easy it is to look at the root and gather its meaning. At the time, however, it was a bit different.

"A primatologist?" I dubiously questioned.

"He studies gorillas. It's intense work, but I'm so proud of him because it's a truly competitive field. The jobs are just very limited. My brother just finished his PhD and got his job right away. That's really rare. He's head of conserva-

tion at the North Carolina Zoo and he works in the fields tracking gorillas."

I'm sure her brother is equally proud of Emily's successes. He would have had no way of knowing just what was in store for her when she left the suburban, play-producing neighborhood to attend Grinnell College in Iowa where, believe it or not, she almost majored in math. Numbers only get you so far, however, and she chose a double major in theatre and English. I asked her about the first post-collegiate step she took.

"I temped during the day and waitressed at night for a summer to make enough money to move to New York. After that summer, I drove this U-haul to New York in a blizzard in November. My agent here wanted me to be an elf at Marshall Field's and I remember saying to myself, 'I will not be in Chicago by the time that happens.' I just did not want to be an elf."

Well, she may not have been destined for elfdom, but she certainly was fated to play her current role of Annie on *Men in Trees*.

"I remember picking up the script and saying one of her lines and this voice just came out of me that was shaky and slightly higher than I speak. So I felt that she was living inside me already. Sometimes you have to dig for characters and sometimes they're just there waiting to come out. I was really drawn to her because she's not somebody's girlfriend or the quirky girl or the girl next door. She's a lot of different things and I find that in television, you sometimes get pigeonholed. I really liked her because she's also very earnest and very sincere and positive and I find that lacking on TV. Everything is so arch and flip, I find it refreshing to play somebody who is really sincere."

It's also quite refreshing to work with a crew that displays such grace during times of adversity and when they have every right to be anything but graceful. I'll explain. From what I gather, Emily was quite the braggart (as well she should have been) when the Chicago Bears were heading to a little game in Miami known as the Super Bowl. We all know what came of that, I don't need to mention it and I refuse to discuss it any further. Before our disastrous loss (and now I'm officially done discussing it), Emily was quite confident that the Bears would win with Rex Grossman tackling, throwing and kicking the path to victory. She was neither shy in displaying her pride nor bashful in rubbing the Vancouver-based crews' faces in it when Chicago beat the Seahawks:



“Oh my gosh. Oh god. I’m telling you, I spent so much time in Vancouver defending Rex Grossman. Our executive producer is also from Chicago so we went to this Vancouver sports bar every week and I defended Grossman to our crew every day. And the great thing was when I went back to set after Super Bowl Sunday, they didn’t rub my face in it. It was so sad and they were so respectful and they just kind of told me they were sorry for my loss.”

“It was such a sad, sad loss,” I lamented.

“The first 20 seconds were great,” she halfheartedly added.

That was the end of that conversation. I will most certainly not be discussing any Cubs wins with Emily later in the season either because she is so not a fan:

“To be honest, I’ve never liked the Cubs. I’ve always wanted to like the Sox, but it never really stuck. I probably shouldn’t be saying this...but I’m now a Yankees fan. When I went back to my high school reunion, people were really disappointed in me. I gotta tell ya, I moved on to the Yankees.”

“My parents, as New Yorkers, were devastated when I ditched the Yankees for the Cubs,” I said.

She accurately retorted:

“It’s worse to go the other way though.”

And so it is. The Cubs need every fan they can get. Emily, however, is not wanting for any. She has had a dedicated following since appearing in *The Rage: Carrie 2*. Ironically, she went from playing one fair red-head to the other, however unnatural the progression from Orphan Annie to maniacal Carrie may be. But it worked. Believe it or not, *Carrie 2* was the very first piece of film that Emily ever did, including commercial work or television pilots. Now that’s not a bad average.

As a former theatre major, I had to ask:

“Were you worried about being typecast?”

She adamantly replied:

“Carrie was about seven or eight years ago and, to this day, people still just want me to do horror movies. I say no all the time because I thought I’d rather have a theatre career and play the kind of roles that I want to do on a smaller scale than have a big, cheesy horror career. It’s just not what I want to do.”

That statement right there is the reason (of which there are many) why Emily will be around for a long time to come. She certainly sticks to her guts and lets her heart lead the way in the most intelligent of manners. I think people lose that a bit when they enter a field as volatile as that of acting. The art of acting, either by career choice or by hobby, is never easy. We can trace that all the way back to high school. And Emily did:

“Growing up, the pinnacle of acting at the time was to be in a high school play. That was it. I will have made it if I get into the Glenbrook South Variety Show.”

My vehemently, yes-bobbing head reacted to that statement both empathically and, sadly, quite emotionally. I told her about the tragic day my senior year in high school when the part of the Leading Player in my favorite musical *Pippin* was stolen out from under me by a dancer in the ninth grade. I ran to my car, tears streaming down my face as I raced through those locker-filled halls and sped out of the parking lot – right past the security guard – who is placed just so to specifically prevent incidences of this runaway fashion.





It was her turn to vehemently bob in agreement:

“In junior high, I so wanted to be Nancy in *Oliver* and I got cast as her sidekick, Bette. I remember finding out about it and going home. I think I cried for about three hours. The crazy thing, though, was when I finished crying I said to myself, ‘I’m never going to cry about not getting a part again.’ I actually think that was a really good thing I did for myself because I kind of shielded myself against future rejection. I think that’s been helpful for me. That’s the biggest issue in this business for actors. Your biggest enemy is going to be yourself.”

Ms. Bergl has some definite theatrical prospects in the near future, just none that she can disclose at this moment, but she did say this:

“I’m never going to go too long without doing a play. If a play comes up in Chicago, that would be my dream. My best friends and my parents are here. I feel this void as a Chicagoan that I have never worked in my hometown. My heart is in the theatre.”

So there you have it: a brief glimpse into the life of a family girl from the Northshore with a penchant for primates and a passion for performance. I am very anxious/excited to see what Emily will do next. Maybe she’ll win an Emmy or maybe, just maybe, even more importantly, she’ll win the coveted crown at the next meeting of the Fondue Preservation Society. I think she’d be okay with either.

Photography: Jack Perno
Stylist: Stacia Mayfield for Ford
Hair/Makeup: need name