



Veterinary student graduates to the TV screen

Pippa Black

For Pippa Black, acting was just supposed to be a hobby while she studied to be a veterinarian. Once she committed to acting full-time, the Melbourne native nabbed a role on the long-running Australian TV series *Neighbours* and scored the Aussie equivalent of an Emmy nomination; since last fall she's costarred in the NBC sitcom *Outsourced*. An ardent animal welfare advocate, Black recorded a video for PETA protesting factory farms, and for the activist group's pro-vegetarian campaign she donned a dress made entirely of cabbage leaves. *VT* caught up with her in Los Angeles.

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Q You became a vegetarian at a young age. Why?

A When I was 6 and found out where meat came from, I was horrified. We were eating a meal of chops and three veg, and I was talking with my parents about where carrots came from; they said carrots grew in the ground. We talked about the other vegetables and got to the chops, and I asked what a chop grew on. My parents looked at each other like, "Who is going to tell her?" I felt betrayed they would make me eat an animal. After that I remember hiding my pet cat, hoping the cat wasn't going to end up on a dinner plate. It was quite a traumatic thing for me at that young age.

Q You were a voice artist for the animated short film *Tegan the Vegan*; what can you tell us about the project?

A The writer/director [Marisa Martin] based the film on her experiences as a child. She got teased at school; there's a stigma that as a vegetarian you're weird. Marisa approached me

because I've never been shy about my passion for animal welfare. The film isn't preachy or in your face; it brings up moral and ethical values in a cute way. I did the voice for Elenore the Carnivore and got in on the peer pressure and teasing. I don't want to say being mean is fun, but I had a lot of fun with the character.

Q How did you get involved with animal welfare causes?

A I studied animal technology in Australia, and I didn't realize a large part of it was geared toward medical research on animals. I had no idea there were horrible experiments on dogs and cats happening in Australia. Still, I'm glad I did the program, to be educated about what's going on; we also covered animal welfare. After I finished a course, I would take home strays that were being dumped. I even brought home a pony once. My poor parents!

Q Do you like to cook?

A I'm in a learning phase at the moment. But I am going to treat myself

to a food dehydrator; I look forward to making little snacky things with it, like kale chips, and alternatives to bread. Here in America, the bread is too sweet. There's like honey or sugar added to it.

Q Any other food differences between Oz and the States?

A I have to give a shout-out to quinoa. I'd never heard of it back home in Australia. It's amazing. I'm replacing rice with it when I make a vegetable stir-fry or a curry or Thai food, which I love.

Q Have you brought something of yourself to your character on *Outsourced*?

A Yeah, I've sort of made Tonya a girl who isn't afraid to eat. You'll notice in a lot of scenes she's eating. It seems like a good idea on the first take—but when you're shooting the scene seven or eight hours later and you have to match it, plowing down all that food is like, "Oh God! I won't have to eat for a day." I suffer for my art! ●