



Deborah Harry

Like most people's careers, mine has followed an interesting path, taking unexpected directions at key moments in my life. I became interested in modeling at the age of 16. As I was 6' tall and only 125 lbs, the natural and most obvious route to achieve that goal was through being a runway model.

I TOOK A MODELING COURSE AT THE Jeffery Charles School of Modeling in Niagara Falls, but I lived in Queenston Heights, a small town in Southern Ontario. Therefore, opportunities to pursue my new found career were not abundant. But shortly after the completion of the course, my runway career got a jump start when I was asked to do my first runway show in the big city of Toronto. I got a job with a photographer, Giancarlo Frasca, as his house model/make-up artist and sales person. I learned a lot about the fashion industry through this hands-on experience. Giancarlo asked me to go to Europe for a one year journey and assist him as his make-up artist. He was shooting for some of the world's top magazines, which of course gave me the incredible opportunity to appear on over 20 fashion magazine covers across

Europe, and participate in numerous runway fashion shows with amazing fashion designers. This was truly a turning point in my life. While I was in Europe I decided that upon my return to Canada, I would move to Toronto to pursue the opening of my own modeling agency. In 1987, at the age of 20, I opened up Mode Models Inc.

With the financial assistance of a "first time business loan" through the Royal Bank, Mode Models found a home in downtown Toronto at Yonge and Dundas. Through the generosity of my family and friends I had a 20' runway ramp built with wall-to-wall mirrors, along with a make-up room and a photo studio. I trained all the models I recruited, styled their hair and make-up and assembled their portfolios. I contacted all the talent agencies I worked with in Europe and inquired

how to get work for my clients overseas. Within three months I had my first 3 month contract with a top modeling agency in Milan Italy. I operated Mode Models for 8 years in Toronto. I enjoyed the challenges of commenting and coordinating various fashion shows and booking clients for runway, print, catalogue, showroom, and overseas contracts.

I got my feet wet in the film industry when I had the chance to book five of my clients as runway models for the feature film *The Freshman*. This gave me incentive to do research into the film industry. I was advised by the staff from *The Freshman* to get into background bookings, so I started an extras agency within Mode Models.

After eight years of working without a break, I went on vacation to Vancouver. It was July, and with no effort I fell in love with the city.

Three days into my holidays, I got a condo on 12th and Granville, and spent the rest of my vacation decorating it. In Toronto I shut down my business, packed up a van and my boyfriend (Rob Gillam, now my husband), and drove across Canada to start a new venture in Vancouver.

After settling in, I started doing research into the fashion industry and soon realized that there wasn't a market for models in Vancouver like there was in Toronto. This was obviously fate, as it pushed me to investigate the direction I really wanted to take. I was advised to talk to Andy Krieger at the UBCP (Union of B.C. Performers.) I booked an appointment with Andy and explained my desire to help others realize their dreams. He talked to me about how to get started in the film industry. He suggested that I book background extras for film and television and gave me the UBCP Extra form to follow as an example. He told me to get my business open, sign 50 people, print off at least eight books for the extra casting directors and come back to him when this was done. He said that he would give me all the names and numbers of all the extra casting directors in town and I could use his name as a reference. I was back in his office one week later with my eight books and 50 clients ready to go to work. A new extras agency was born, and it was called The Extras Solutions Group.

I was in business for a month when I got my first break. Cyd Chasmar booked 25 of my clients for a month of work for the movie *Car Pool*. Over the next three years I built my business from 50 to over 500 clients. I was regularly booking for feature films, M.O.W.'s, TV series and commercials.

Then another life-changing event occurred. I took a course called Flash Forward that was offered through Women in Film and Video. At this time, I was looking to make a change from booking background talent to the booking of principal talent. Through the Flash Forward course I had the chance to see how I could realize this goal. I closed my background agency and opened up Talent Solutions Group Principal talent agency.

At first it was very difficult because I had to develop all new relationships with the casting directors in town. To get accepted for the Breakdown Service (a forum where all upcoming projects were listed) I needed to get three letters of reference from casting directors stating that they would support me as an agent. I was very fortunate because

when I took the Flash Forward course I met casting director Coreen Mayrs and had the opportunity to show her my book and ask her for a letter of reference. She even contacted a few other casting directors to do the same, and I was on the Breakdown Service only one week after the Flash Forward workshop. (Thanks Coreen). After reaching my one month goal in one week, I changed my company's name to Deborah Harry Talent.

In 1998 I was nominated to run for the board of directors for Women in Film and Video in Vancouver (WIFVV) and was on the board for a two year term. I enjoyed the experience and the chance to meet and work with such amazing women as Joyce Thierry (who was president my first term) and Tracey Friesen (the president my second term). I had the opportunity to organize several WIFVV parties and workshops within my tenure. During my term, we increased the attendees from 15 to 70 people for the WIFVV Breakfast Club meetings. I became known in the industry as the host of the meetings. At the 2001 WIFVV AGM I was given the award Volunteer of the Year.

After a one year hiatus from the Board of WIFVV, I decided I really missed the hustle and bustle, so I ran once again for a seat, and got the position of vice president while Jacqueline Samuda was President. This was a great learning experience since this is very much a working board; the average time commitment for each of the board members is around 10 to 15 hours a week. This organization has been essential to my growth as a talent agent here in Vancouver. It gave me a chance to build solid industry relationships, especially within the independent film community which provided my clients the opportunity to build their resumes. In 2003 I added a voice-over department to DHT. It is currently under the successful management of Wayne Bernard.

When I was asked by the Art Institute in 2003 to teach a 12 week Talent Management Course, I found it very challenging because there are no actual courses offered on how to become a talent agent. As I assembled a 12 week course outline along with an exam, it really made me think, and brought me back to where I started. I found it to be another turning point in my life as I reflected on what I have learned over the past 20 years. I wanted to pass on this knowledge, and to have the opportunity to assist others with their hopes and dreams, providing

them with the information they need to succeed.

Following the success of a couple of short projects, I realized the potential for representing more writers and directors and helping them get their projects off the ground. One of the writers on my roster, Kraig X Wenman, has written some amazing horror scripts which have now been optioned to several US production companies. We just sold and shot his first feature film through Asylum Pictures.

Last March I teamed up with a great group of creative producers, Johnny Cantiveros, Tammy Gillis and Wayne Bernard, to create the "Building Bridges" monthly industry event. Each month we bring in recognized industry professionals to guest host. The nine events we produced in 2004 at the Sky Bar proved to be a great vehicle for our local talent to showcase their work and meet industry professionals in a relaxed atmosphere. Our generous sponsors made it possible by giving away amazing door prizes.


I just signed a five year series option for one of my youngest clients, Conchita Campbell, for the new TV series *The 4400*. I am also busy producing a trailer for another client, Kiara Hunter, for her feature film *Hunter Girl*. Once again I have the opportunity to be the creative producer and package a wonderful project, *7th Gate*, with Tom Raycove and Colin Yardley.

To help me achieve my long term goal of being a full time producer, I applied for the Zed Drama Prize offered through the National Screen Institute (NSI). Their mentorship program is unparalleled and has jump-started several film careers. I partnered with one of my writer/director clients, Nastasha Baron, for the 2006 NSI Zed Drama Prize. Recently, I received a phone call from the NSI that our short film, *Mitigating Circumstances*, was short-listed.

I have pressed the reset button several times during my career. I'm not afraid to start over and explore new beginnings. I believe that the best is yet to come. I'm very blessed to have surrounded myself with amazing people who constantly stay positive. It helps me to move forward as well as attract other positive people, which is the only way to survive in this industry. You have to build strong and lasting relationships. Helping others is the key to enjoying a long-term business.

I am honored to be receiving the "Sharon Gibbon Life Time Member Award" from

WIFVV and would like to thank all the people who over the years have helped me realize my goals. I'd also like to pay special homage to my husband, whose love and patience made it possible for me to believe in

myself and follow my dream. I have been blessed time and time again with the chance to collaborate with talented and generous people. I look forward to continuing to build new relationships. I think 2005 is going to be an incredible year! 

Article taken from the March/April REELWEST MAGAZINE