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Riverdale actress wins BRIO, three NY Emmys

by Maya Rajamani

It was April of 1996, and Diana Henry had just left Manhattan's 30th Street Theatre after that night's performance of *Reckless*, a play by Craig Lucas, in which she played Rachel, Mia Farrow's character in the film version of the show.

As she walked home to her apartment in Chelsea, snow fell, covering the city streets.

"I felt really good about the show and I remember thinking, I'm acting in New York, and it's snowing in April. It felt like one of those unique moments — 'I like where I am right now,'" she said.



Diana Henry in the Emmy Award-winning 'The Lineup.'

Photo courtesy of Diana Henry

Since that April evening, Ms. Henry, a 2014 Bronx Recognizes Its Own (BRIO) winner for acting, has not lost her passion for the performing arts.

The actress, a regular on the ABC show "Primetime: What Would You Do?" recently won three New York Emmy Awards for her role as the presenting host on an eight-part panel discussion series called "The Line Up: Best Sports Movies."

"If you're fundamentally creative... if you have that in you, you kind of have no choice. If that's a part of you, you have to make room for it in your life," said the actress and voiceover artist.

Ms. Henry, who met her husband Matt Salzberg while acting on the set of a film he wrote, called *Fortunes*, has lived in Riverdale with Mr. Salzberg and their two children, Elena, 10, and Benton, 8, for the past 11 years.

A native of Indiana who grew up acting in local community theater and high school productions, Ms. Henry received her acting degree at Miami University of Ohio, after which she completed an MFA at Rutgers University's Mason Gross School of the Arts.

Soon after, she moved to Manhattan to pursue theater, TV and film roles. She received her Screen Actors Guild (SAG) card for a role on *Law & Order* — a rite of passage for New York actors, she says — in which she played a woman kissing a co-worker in an elevator, who hears gunshots in the office as the elevator doors open.

"It was really exciting; it was my first TV role," said Ms. Henry.

SAG card in hand, Ms. Henry went on to act in several other *Law & Order* episodes over the years. She also starred in a number of off-Broadway and regional plays and several films.

She played Cinderella in a production of *Bite the Apple*, which focuses on life after the Disney ending for six fairy-tale princesses. The play, written by Riverdale writer Linda Manning — a 2011 BRIO winner — made it into the New York Fringe Festival in 2012.

Her kids, she says, stay up on Friday nights to watch her act and improvise on “What Would You Do?”

“It’s not a typical acting experience,” she says of the hidden-camera show, which puts real people in ethical dilemmas, unaware that they are staged.

In one episode, she played a single mother who asked fellow shoppers to help her when she could not pay for her groceries at a supermarket. In another, she and a colleague pretended to steal a family’s belongings from their open house. One of the attendees, she said, stopped her as she tried to make a run for the door.

Ms. Henry said the show has taught her the importance of questioning things around her — inquiring after the well-being of a stranger who seems to need help, or speaking up for herself.

“The show’s kind of changed me... [it’s] given me some courage,” she said.

Ms. Henry has managed to continue her acting career while maintaining a full-time job as an executive assistant at Madison Square Garden, where she has worked for the past 20 years.

She is also a founding member of a theater group called The Drawing Board — a group of artists who assist writers by work-shopping their scripts.

For Ms. Henry, the rehearsal process is as rewarding as the final performance.

“It’s like a playground,” she said. “You have a real moment to exercise with your fellow actors.”

While she aspires to a role on Broadway or in another TV series in the future, she says she feels fortunate to be where she is now. She recently got a chance to speak to her daughter’s class at the Spuyten Duyvil School (P.S. 24) about her acting career.

“That was a cool moment, to go in and talk to her peers about what I do,” she said.

“I just know that she was really proud of that... and she’ll have a memory of that.”