Meet Cosmopolitan.com’s Hot Hollywood Reporter

Fun, fearless, and obviously foxy, Taryn Southern, 22, landed her dream job dishing celeb news on our Website. Here, she talks about her glamorous gig.

Growing up in Wichita, Kansas, Taryn had always fantasized about becoming an actress. “I used to act in school plays and hosted a public-access TV show,” says the current Los Angeles resident. Even after graduating from the University of Miami with degrees in anthropology and journalism—she opted for more “realistic” pursuits—the acting bug was still biting. So a year and a half ago, she packed her bags and headed to Hollywood.

After doing a few TV pilots and playing a supporting role in the recently wrapped movie Senior Skip Day, Taryn learned that Cosmo was looking for someone to host its celeb Webcasts.

On the day of the audition, “I read a sample script on the teleprompter, and I guess I nailed it.” Her secret trick: “I speed-read the script before I start speaking, then I keep glancing at key words so my eyes don’t dart back and forth.”

Though Taryn may seem totally at ease doing her Webcasts, her brain is multitasking big-time. “After watching myself on tape every day, I’ve become aware of things I need to work on,” she confesses. “Like, I naturally gesture a lot, so I put my hands on my hips to keep them still. I also have to get rid of my Kansas accent. I tend to condense words, like ‘dontcha.’ It’s really important to speak slowly and enunciate.”

Slowing down is tough for Taryn—her energy level is always on full throttle. “I’m so excited to be part of Cosmo,” she enthuses. She even gets to put her journalism skills to work.

“When I come in to do my taping, I look at the script, which is written by a guy,” Taryn explains. “So I usually make some changes to it, so it’s more Cosmo and female sounding. I just love being able to give the girl perspective.”

“I’M A SURVIVOR”

Everyone faces challenges in life, but Jessica Melore, 25, has been hit with more than her fair share of life-threatening experiences. She shares her inspiring story.

Nine years ago, I was at a restaurant with my family when I got dizzy. Then I felt pain in my chest and neck, and my arms were like lead. A nurse who was also there started asking me about my symptoms, then said “Call 911!” Before I knew it, I was in an ambulance on my way to the ER.
At the hospital, I learned that a blood clot had lodged in an artery and destroyed the left side of my heart. I was young, healthy, and active—how could I have had a massive heart attack? Still in shock, I asked the doctor if I was going to die. He stared at me and said nothing.

The doctors hoped to save me with a transplant, but no hearts were available. So they implanted a mechanical device that pumped blood to my heart. But because of complications from an earlier surgery, my left leg lost circulation and became infected. Within a few days, it was amputated above the knee.

I was devastated. I couldn’t stop thinking about having to relearn how to walk with a prosthesis and how unfair it was. But I tried to focus on the fact that I was alive.

After six weeks of intense physical therapy in the hospital, I went back to school. I worried that my classmates would treat me differently, especially because I had to use a wheelchair while I adjusted to my prosthetic leg. But I was floored by how supportive everyone was.

Right before graduation, I learned that a heart was available, though I was apprehensive about undergoing open-heart surgery. After the operation, I woke up in a panic, clutching my chest to make sure my heart was beating. Two weeks later, I went home, and I started Princeton University on time three months later.

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The summer after freshman year, I was hit with another medical hurdle: I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, cancer of the lymph nodes. Mentally, I shut down. To me, cancer equaled death. I began chemotherapy, and I was worried about hair loss. But I found such a great wig, my friends thought it was real. After three months, I was in remission, and the doctors don’t expect the cancer to return.

Surviving against all odds has led me to reach out to others. I work at the NJ Sharing Network, a New Jersey nonprofit organization that educates people about organ donation. I also give motivational speeches (jesicamelore.com). My message: We can’t always avoid obstacles, but we can decide how we react to them.

Warning to Women

In 2004, Cherrell Edwards, now 23, got the shock of her life when she was diagnosed with HIV...which she contracted from her boyfriend. Now she’s dedicated to sparing other women from the same fate.

Q You founded Collective Care Services. What does the organization do?
A We provide education and support. We want young people in the community to know that the disease is preventable. (collective careservices.org)

Q What frustrates you most as an HIV/AIDS activist?
A Not having financial support because the disease has fallen off the radar. People don’t realize that there are about 40,000 new HIV infections every year in the U.S.

Q Is there one main point you want young women to know about HIV/AIDS?
A It is your responsibility to learn what actions are risky and how to keep yourself safe. It only takes having sex one time with one person. I was in a monogamous relationship for three years...but he wasn’t monogamous—or honest—with me.

DISTURBING DATA

In 2004, HIV infection was the sixth leading cause of death among all women 25 to 34.

SOURCE: CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL