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Where in the World Is Carmen Carrera?

by Winnie McCroy
EDGE Editor
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Carmen Carrera first made her name as a competitor on Season 3 of "RuPaul's Drag Race," where she showed her mettle -- and lots of skin -- in barely there drag costumes. Her success on the show inspired Carrera to start the gender reassignment process, and gave her the courage for her continued fight to become the first transgender Victoria Secret model.

EDGE first met up with Carrera in 2014 in Cleveland, as she performed a show during a press junket for the 2015 Gay

Games. We spoke again recently about her marriage, motherhood and her fight for HIV prevention and transgender rights.

EDGE: You first made your name during the third season of "RuPaul's Drag Race." How did that jump-start your career?

Carrera: "RuPaul's Drag Race" definitely put me on the map, but more than that it was a turning point in my life when I realized that the character I'd been portraying on stage was a true part of my overall being. I realized that I wanted to transition. I had been contemplating whether or not to do it for so long before, but I was nervous I wouldn't be accepted by my family or among other drag performers, as trans performers are not always accepted in drag. I knew that a change needed to happen, and I was glad to step forward with the support and love I received after going on tour. That's why I was so happy when you saw me in Cleveland. The LGBT community has always shown me love.

EDGE: You are well known for your "nearly naked" style of drag, showing lots of skin and letting clever appliques cover the rest. How did you start that?

Carrera: Embracing my femininity took a long time to curate, because I had been suppressing it for so long. So when I had the opportunity to do so, I studied how I wanted to express myself and my sensuality. The illusion of being nude took me a while to master, but it's definitely my trademark: it's always going to be known as the "Carmen Carrera look."

EDGE: You worked hard in 2013 to become the first-ever transgender Victoria's Secret "Angel" model, even getting thousands of signatures on a Change.org petition. Were you upset that it didn't take?

Carrera: Of course I was upset, but honestly I feel that with social media, people expect things to change overnight. I think the petition would have gotten way more signatures if they let it be unlimited, instead of stopping at 50,000. But ultimately I wasn't so disappointed, because I am really focused on myself and saw how I needed to fit the bill. It's all about the aesthetics -- for fitness or lingerie, they are looking for commercial models. It was a different aesthetic from what I was doing in my shows. So I started being more about fitness and modeling. This year I have so much opportunity, and that door is still open. I will do it for my fans; they were there for me during my transition. In the meantime, I have a campaign with Target, I'm doing work with L'Oreal and more. It's just about continuing to build my portfolio.

EDGE: You married your partner, Adrian Torres, in June 2015 during the show "Couples Therapy" with Dr. Jenn. Did the show help rejuvenate your relationship?

Carrera: Honestly, if it wasn't for the therapy, I don't think I'd have been as aware of taking care of my relationship as I am now. In the three weeks we spent shooting, I learned so much about myself and



(Source:Alexandre Paskanoi)

communicating with others. We now have a deeper understanding of who we are, rather than who we thought we were. We had this image and these expectations of each other that would never be met, and we had to accept each other as who we are, not just for the magic spark we have organically. We love each other, but there's more to a relationship than just love. Soon it will be a year since we got married [last summer], and it's been great! There were some bumps in the road, but nothing major, and we're focused on raising our two kids.



(Source:VH1)

EDGE: How is it being a stepmom?

Carrera: Me being a trans person is interesting, because you look at parenting differently. But I'm excited that I get to prepare these little girls for the world, and give them the skills they need to understand themselves and other people better. Ahsia will be 13 soon, kind of at that scary age. Leeah reminds me of myself; she stands up for what's right. Their personalities are great! This is a good time right now. I am savoring the moments, because once they are teenagers, you don't know what's going to happen, so I'm just trying to hold on to that innocence. I want them to be aware of the genuineness and beauty in their hearts. There's hormones, pressure from school, everyone wants a cell phone... it's just a game of keeping up, being a parent and having them trust me enough to take my advice.

EDGE: You are also very active in AIDS activism and awareness. Why is this important to you?

Carrera: Ten years ago, if you weren't what society wanted you to be, you went to the gay clubs. I got to know a lot of people who were infected and afraid; so much fear was wrapped around this illness. Nobody wanted to talk about it, or protect themselves; even a lot of my sex worker girlfriends had contracted HIV. I was only beginning to learn about myself, but I knew my dad's history: he was a drug user in the '80s; he caught HIV from a needle infection and passed away quickly because there was no treatment. If he was alive today, he would be benefiting from these benefits and organizations that help families affected or people infected to survive. So I have worked for the MAC AIDS Fund and done drag shows to help raise money. Now, as the times are changing with marriage equality and the transgender movement, I want to do for our community members who are not taking advantage of these changes.



EDGE: Young gay men are getting infected at a staggering rate. Do you support PrEP?

Carrera: I support anything that's going to keep our community healthy, but I think it shouldn't be as easily accessible as it is. There should be some kind of program to monitor people's usage so it doesn't become abuse. When you're part of an oppressed community, you start to believe you aren't good enough, that you don't deserve wellness, that these opportunities are not for you. I would hate for someone to not use protection or be careless with their health just because there's a pill that can prevent [HIV].

EDGE: You also worked with David LaChapelle for the Life Ball, a charity event for HIV held in Vienna, Austria. How was that?

Carrera: It was amazing! I don't think I've ever experienced anything like the Life Ball. My picture with David LaChapelle raised a quarter-million dollars for HIV! The party was absolutely divine, and I felt like a princess in a castle. I got to collaborate with this creative genius, go to his house and do

(Source:David LaChapelle)

garden with both genitalia, to show that beauty has no gender. Mind you, it was kind of awkward when I got off the plane, but once the event happened and I felt safe, it was great! The people of Austria were amazing, and I went again last year. I have to wait to do something really big again, because it's not happening this year.

EDGE: Do you enjoy traveling for your job?

Carrera: Whenever I'm outside of the country, I like to do a special striptease fantasy, like burlesque. The U.S. has seen so much of Carmen Carrera that I like to give others a good show. I want to do something great the next time I'm in Austria, like fly down from the ceiling. I have been obsessed lately with my Latin American culture; I went to Mexico, I did a shoot in Brazil. I want to bring trans awareness and acceptance to Latin America.

EDGE: Transgender rights are another big issue. What's most important now?

Carrera: Health care should be our No. 1 concern. Equal rights and protection laws would be great, but honestly, from a trans person's day-to-day perspective, I care more about living a

healthy life than worrying about something that's not in front of my face. Our health care is messed up; they throw you whatever medication they think may work, pat you on the back and say "good luck." I don't want to get some crazy cancer because I'm taking too much estrogen. When you get your sex organs removed, it changes your brain; mental health is also a big issue.

EDGE: Who are your icons?

Carrera: Janet Mock and Laverne Cox are huge inspirations.

EDGE: You did a photo shoot with them for Candy magazine. How was that?

Carrera: It was honestly amazing! Everyone had different call times, so only the main girls -- Cox, Mock and myself on the cover -- worked together. But people often invite us to do

things, so I'm familiar with them, and we had a great time! I'll always be able to look back on that.

EDGE: You're a New Jersey native. What's your favorite thing about the Garden State?

Carrera: Northern New Jersey is such a mix between country, because it's so green and so gorgeous, right on edge of mountains, and we have some beautiful views! But at the same time, we are less than eight miles from New York City, and so life has a heavy NYC influence and vibe. Northern New Jersey is so fly! I am so proud to be from New Jersey; I would never live outside of it. Everyone's educated, and we all do our thing. We have that stability from early age but have the fun and influence of New York.

EDGE: What are you focused on now?

Carrera: I'm doing a speaking tour of different universities, and I'm wrapped up, going to South America, fighting for Latin acceptance of LGBTs, because there are still very old traditions. Our country was built from a mish-mash of people, but when you visit Mexico, Brazil or Peru, their ancient customs are still going on. To try and break their perceptions of the LGBT community is hard, but I will do my best with this speaking tour of my Latino heritage.

For more information, visit facebook.com/carmencarrerafans.



(Source:NYC DHMH)



(Source:Candy Magazine)



(Source:Queerty)

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Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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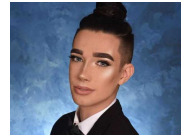
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