

Mezhgan:

the Beauty Behind the Makeup

By: Ameena Kazem

Between television shows, interviews, and the red carpet, Mezhgan is a woman on the go. Recalling her childhood, she can still hear those vivid words clearly, “Just keep running and don't stop,” Mezhgan's mother shouted. And so, Mezhgan continued running with her family, not knowing what they were running from and where they were running to. This is a very familiar scene for many Afghans who were forced to leave their lives behind during the Russian invasion in 1979. Many families planned their escape out of Afghanistan by paying smugglers to help their families flee the country in privacy. Mezhgan's family of six took the same route. During their journey to Pakistan, her family ran out of food. “Fear started to set in and I was very scared and hungry,” she says. “But every time I looked into my parents' eyes, I would regain that loss of hope and be reassured that our family was going to be okay.”



“EVER SINCE I WAS A LITTLE GIRL, I USED TO WATCH MY MOTHER GETTING READY FOR WORK IN THE MORNINGS AND FOR PARTIES IN THE EVENINGS,”

Even though Mezhgan was forced to leave her life and belongings behind in Afghanistan, one thing she brought along with her to the United States was her fascination with makeup. “Ever since I was a little girl, I used to watch my mother getting ready for work in the mornings and for parties in the evenings,” she says. “I would always find the red lipstick, and before I knew it, there I was, standing at my mother's vanity table, with lipstick all over my face looking like a clown,” she says (laughing). Once Mezhgan and her family moved to Hollywood during the 1980's, that is when the fascination turned into a passion. During the 1980's, hair and makeup were the trendsetters of the era.

“Living in Hollywood, you would always see celebrities walking around with their funky hairstyles and eclectic makeup patterns and something about that always intrigued me.” As Mezhgan grew older, she worked as a part-time makeup artist, while her striking beauty led to some modeling and acting. She did some modeling for MAC cosmetics and played roles on the famous soap operas, *Sunset Beach* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*. She recalls the skepticism she received from her family about her pursuit in the modeling and acting world. “At first I was confused and did not understand why my parents were advising me to be cautious of modeling and acting,” she says. “This was something that I

enjoyed doing and took great pleasure in.” As Mezhgan looks back, she realizes that coming from an Afghan background, it can be difficult to pursue a career in either field. Afghan girls are forced to follow certain norms of the society, and those who choose to go a bit further and tip the scale, are usually looked down upon. However, as Mezhgan states, “pursuing a career in modeling and acting is possible for any Afghan girl, as long as she remains true to herself and her culture and does not portray herself in a manner that would force the community to look down upon her. Anything can be done right, with moderation and within limits.”

Despite her love of working in

ZEBBA GETS AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

What do you like best about your job?
All the people I meet ...and the way they feel after I do their make up.

Who is your favorite client and why?
It's a toss up between my good friend John O'Hurley and the mean Brit...Simon Cowell.

If you were stranded on a deserted island, what five things could you not live without?
My man (who also brought my cell phone!) so that counts as one, right? Buddy, My Yorkshire Terrier Water, and a good hydrating Moisturizer...and a cute swimming suit! Just being honest here!

What is your best makeup tip?
Less is more, and don't forget to blend.

Who is the best looking celebrity without makeup?
Angelina Jolie and Julia Roberts.

Who is your role model?
Oprah, she rocks.

If you weren't a makeup artist, what would you be and why?
An interior decorator, something I still do and love.

How tall are you?
5 feet 5 inches... and 9/16ths...:) but I feel much taller

Who is your favorite designer?
Chanel

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?
Tuscany

If you could go back in time and change one thing, what would it be?
Losing my little brother. (In '84 we were crossing the street in Hollywood and a car hit us while we were walking home with my mom.)

How do your clients react when you tell them your from Afghanistan?
With intrigue, they want to know more about it.

What CD is playing in your car right now?
Justin Timberlake's new one and John O'Hurley's Peace of our Minds; Vol 2.

front of the camera, Mezghan realized that her true calling was behind the camera, doing makeup. "Doing makeup just came naturally to me and it was rewarding for me to bring out the best in women." Mezghan was happy to see her customers walk away from her counter feeling better about themselves. Soon after, she landed her first television job as the key makeup artist for John O'Hurley (Dancing with the Stars and Seinfeld). This was her chance to step up to the plate and prove herself as a talented makeup artist. Apparently, she did too well, as Fox network's American Idol tried to hire Mezghan as the show's makeup artist for its first season. However, she passed the opportunity in favor of Family Feud. And as you can imagine, once American Idol became the most popular show on television, Mezghan recalls saying, "Oh my God, are you kidding me, I can't believe I turned this show down!" Lucky for her, American Idol came knocking on her door again, for Season 2. This time, Mezghan opened the door with open arms. She is now the chief makeup artist

on American Idol and is currently in charge of makeup for judges Simon, Paula, and Randy-as well as the top 12 contestants on the show. Working with the contestants is a bonus for Mezghan, because she is able to establish a relationship and create an image for each contestant. "I get to help encourage their performance and make them feel and look pretty. They will always remember me and I will always be the extra help to boost their ego," she says.

Mezghan is also working on other television shows such as: Family Feud, America's Got Talent, Rockstar With Inxs, Rockstar Supernova, and So You Think You Can Dance. She has also worked on several Red Carpet Events such as the Emmys and the Teen Choice Awards, and many more. Two of her career highlights thus far have been working for American Idol and being nominated for an Emmy for her extraordinary makeup work. With so many shows, you would think this makeup artist puts her tools away once she gets home. On the contrary, she works just as hard at home

making the final decisions for the launch of her own cosmetic line, M by Mezghan. "I want to make sure that I pick the right colors and shades and make it perfect," she says. "I hope to launch my cosmetic line in 2007."

With such a busy schedule, you would expect this glamour girl to forget about her homeland and be wrapped up in the Hollywood glitz. But this isn't the case with Mezghan. As she climbs each step of the ladder, she takes the Afghan women and children with her along the way. She has set up a Non-Profit Organization called The FARAWAY Foundation for the women and children of Afghanistan to help rebuild hospitals and schools. "I watched a video taken by a family friend and I remember being overcome with tears as I saw the poverty and children on the streets." At that point, Mezghan knew that she wanted to give back to her country and help restore smiles on their faces. "My ultimate goal is to build a functional children's hospital that can facilitate to the needs of the children," she says. "I want to help them get



Mezghan with Carrie Underwood



Mezghan with Simon Cowell



Mezghan with David Hasselhoff



Mezghan with Regis Philbin



Mezghan with Kimberly Locke

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Mezhgan with Randy Jackson



Mezhgan with Regis Philbin



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Mezhgan with Randy Jackson



Mezhgan with Fantasia Barrino



Mezhgan with Carrie Underwood

back on their feet and start their path to a bright future." She wants the children of Afghanistan to have the same opportunity in pursuing their dreams. She plans to donate many of her cosmetic products to the women, as well as donate proceeds from her cosmetic line.

Before I let Mezhgan get back to her world of makeup, I asked her which three items are always in her purse. "My lip gloss, eyelash curler, and bronzer," she replied. "When in doubt, I always use my eyelash curler and my bronzer helps add a glow to my face after those long hours,"

she says (laughing). Just as simple as the contents of her makeup bag, so are Mezhgan's words of wisdom for the Afghan girls out there. "Just believe in yourself and pick a career you have passion for, rather than what your parents choose for you. Put your heart, mind, and soul into it and watch your dreams turn into reality."

And so, we meet this talented and successful makeup artist. A woman of beauty, talent, and culture, who's taken her mother's terrifying words during her childhood and turned them into a motiva-

tional lifestyle. Mezhgan will continue to run in pursuit of her dreams and never stop.

They say stars are born in Hollywood and everyone has their fifteen minutes of fame. Well, here is the exception - a Hollywood star born in Afghanistan whose minutes have turned into hours, our very own Afghan Idol, Mezhgan.

For more information about Mezhgan and her foundation, please visit her website, www.mezhgan.com.