



HEART TO HEART WITH HORSE MAD TV STAR AMBER MARSHALL

Many of our HW readers have already discovered the terrific horsey TV series called 'Heartland' on ABC 2 in recent years. Set against the stunning backdrop of the Alberta Rocky Mountains in Canada, Heartland is now in its fourth season of filming and has now become an international success story; boasting hundreds of thousands of dedicated viewers and horse loving fans around the world.



The series revolves around the Fleming family and young Amy Fleming, who grows up on the Heartland ranch. When she is a young teenager, early in the first season of Heartland, Amy's 'horse whispering' mother is killed in a terrible traffic accident and Amy is left to live with her older sister Lou and Grandfather Jack. Having inherited her mother's gift with horses, Amy and her family do their best to try and heal the horses (and people) that come to their ranch.

HW recently caught up for a chat with Heartland's leading lady Amber Marshall, who plays the role of horse loving teenager, Amy Fleming.

Amber grew up in the city of Ontario, Canada, surrounded by two large dogs, a couple of cats and some pet rabbits. Amber says she spent most of her days playing with her pets, but horses were never far from her mind! At the age of ten, Amy began doing English hunter jumper riding lessons and sooner after, was given her first horse to ride.

"Most girls around that age get the horse bug," Amy says, "and I was just so fortunate to have a stable nearby and be able to ride every day after school. I definitely caught the horse bug early!"

Amber's 'lucky break' came when her 'acting agent' in Toronto heard about some auditions for a new, horse orientated TV series called Heartland.

"My agent thought the role was well suited to me," Amy explains, "because of my horse experience and love of animals. So I auditioned for the role of Amy and it seemed like the perfect fit! Luckily, those casting me thought so too!"

Amy believes her experience with horses was a real bonus for her Heartland role, as most of the cast had to learn how to ride and handle horses for the show.

"I've learned SO much at Heartland," Amy explains, "about natural remedies and horse training. Horses are just such remarkable creatures and the ones at Heartland are amazing! The lead horse, Spartan, has become very close to me and we spend so much time together. We just trust each other

so much! I guess you'd compare it to any other work place relationship, but the trust we have for each other means everything."

In fact, Amber says the horses at Heartland not only realise they are 'TV stars' half the time – they even know where they should stand during filming!

"The experienced Heartland horses are so funny," laughs Amber, "and they definitely know their job and that they are famous! They know exactly what their role is and what they are supposed to be doing and when. We have tape marks on the ground to show us where to stand during filming and the more experienced horses will actually stand on it themselves. You can almost hear them saying 'Oh yeah, there's the big yellow X – I'm meant to stand on that.'"

In fact, Amber admits she may just have about the best horsey job in the world!

"I love what I do – 100% - and even though we sometimes have trouble getting certain animals to perform, mostly, it's an incredible job and an incredible life! I always knew there was something special about working on Heartland and now I'm getting fan mail from all around the world from viewers who love the show as much as I do!"

Of course, working with horses and animals always has an element of risk. While Amber likes to do most of the riding work on Heartland herself, she can't do all the stunts herself.

"I do have a riding double," Amber explains, "as some things are a little too risky for me to do. If a scene requires me to fall off on a harsh ground surface or jump really high, that's when my double steps in – but I still get to do most of my own riding on the show. Some days we do the riding scenes back to back and we're in the saddle all day and then there are other days with no riding."

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"My average work day usually begins quite early and I wake up around 4:30 or 5am and go out and feed my own animals on my own ranch. Then, I get picked up and driven to wherever we are going to be filming that day. Then it's time for hair and make up and wardrobe (I'm usually half asleep during that) and then we start rehearsing for the scenes we are doing that day."

As well as her work on set, Amber makes plenty of guest appearance throughout the year to promote Heartland in Canada and the US. But her involvement with the Calgary Parade in 2010 was particularly special for her, as being in a 'real live horse parade' has always been a special dream for Amber.

"Ever since I was young, I wanted to be the kid riding through the parade. I always thought 'that's so cool!' Just to be able to be a part of some 500 horses in that Calgary parade – and be that girl on the horse – that was amazing!

"I also made up my mind the first year that I came out to Heartland that I wanted to live on a farm. Alberta is farm country and it is just so beautiful to wake up and see the mountains and my own horses outside and take in the fresh air."

Amber, who says Australia is No. 1 on her list of international places to visit, says the best advice she can give to HW readers is to always follow their dreams.

"I think you should set out your dreams and goals and if it is something you really believe in, you will achieve it! Build up to that goal gradually – so don't make up something that is just completely out of reach. Just follow your dream, step by step."

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The cast of Heartland. From left, Shaun Johnston (Jack Bartlett), Jessica Amlee (Mallory Wells), Amber Marshall (Amy Fleming), Chris Potter (Tim Fleming), Graham Wardle (Ty Borden), Nathaniel Arcand (Scott Cardinal), Michelle Morgan (Lou Fleming) and Kerry James (Caleb Odell).



Photographs © Rescued Horse Season 3. Photography by Andrew Bako and David Brown.

Indeed, given her amazing new life in Alberta and her dream job with Heartland, Amber admits a lot of people joke that they don't know whether she is really Amber or Amy anymore!

"I am basically living the life of Amy!" Amber laughs, "I wake up on the ranch and see my horses and then go to my fake ranch and see my other, fake horses. Every day, I'm preparing for my role on the show, but I'm just living my life and loving every day of it!

And in case you're all wondering - in 'real life' - Amber has three horses. But her favorite one is a one year old, buckskin horse she got just last year.

"I just love him to pieces," Amber says, "and even though he is only a year old, I still bring him in every day and

brush him down and spend quality time with him. I'm literally chomping at the bit to be able to finally ride him and go into the mountains on the trail with him. I can't wait until that day!"

Along with this issue's SUPER SIZE Heartland poster, and thanks to the folk at Heartland and the ABC, we also have **10 copies of the 'Heartland Series Two, Volume One' up for grabs!** This totally 'horse-ome' DVD is now available at ABC Shops, ABC Centres & abcshop.com.au. Send your entries to 'HW Heartland Comp', PO Box 260, Pambula, NSW 2549, Australia (by April 15th, 2011) to be in the running to win! This competition is open to all HW readers in Australia and NZ.