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Web TV hosts hangs out with Canadian Jews in L.A.

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Samantha Gutstadt learns something new about herself every day. The 30-year-old actor, producer and web TV host recently signed up for Google alerts about herself.

A note lands in her inbox any time her name pops up online, such as recently when her name appeared on a website dedicated to celebrity dating gossip.

"Dating? I'm married," Gutstadt says with a laugh.

She laughs again talking about the alert that told her some random person on the Internet Movie Database added her to a list of the hottest Canadian women in Hollywood.

It has been about four years since Gutstadt moved to California to make it big as an actress, but a funny thing happened along the way: Gutstadt, a Toronto native, has made a name for herself as a web TV host on *This Week in Fashion* and on the website RealTVFilms, for which she covers film festivals worldwide.

"I think sometimes our paths and careers come by accident. I came out here wanting to act. I started booking hosting work... It started as a way to make money and not bartend," Gutstadt says on the phone from California.

Now, Gutstadt sees herself hosting for years to come, producing more films and continuing with her acting and modelling career. And she'll do it all her way, an extension of her fashion sense that can only be called the Samantha Style.

As an eight-year-old, Gutstadt would



lay out her clothes for school. Not once would she don a dress, not even for picture day at Leo Baeck Day School. She couldn't be like any other little girl at school — she had to be Sam G.

Today, the Samantha Style might be a dress with a tie, or a cuffed suit with studs. There's a sense of old and new that gives you an insight into her personality.

"Clothes are an expression of our personalities. Style is about who you are," Gutstadt says. "I'm a bit of classic... with a bit of edge."

It was the Samantha Style that drove her to California in 2007. If she was going to make it as an actress, she felt she had to be in Hollywood to make her dreams come true. It was a decision she made despite knowing what accompanies such a dramatic move: Jewish guilt.

"You have no idea. We did something weird. We moved to L.A.," Gutstadt says, referring to her husband of more than four years, Ron Nayot. Gutstadt jokes that her parents were concerned that once in California, Gutstadt would end up hanging out with Lindsay Lohan and turning into a Charlie Sheen "winner."

"None of that happened... We literally moved out here to hang out with Canadian Jews," Gutstadt says with a laugh. "Anyone who is Canadian and Jewish in L.A., I know."

"Here, you meet one person and then you meet everyone. I never appreciated the global community of Jews."

Understanding Gutstadt begins with understanding her parents. Her father, Eli, is a lawyer who was born Germany and grew up in New York and Toronto. Today, he lives on a farm in Caledon, Ont., retraining retired racehorses.

Gutstadt's mother, Janice, introduced her daughter to the arts, relying on her background in dancing from York University, her career as an English as a second language (ESL) teacher and love of writing. And they played tennis, which Gutstadt excelled at as a child and continues playing to this day.

"My whole childhood was being part of the Richmond Hill Country Club," she says. "I was part of a non-Jewish tennis sporting world, and Leo Baeck."

Today, Gutstadt is very much a part of the show-business world, landing commercials, acting roles and hosting gigs — Gutstadt is the Tampax Pearl girl with the dress problem and the one destroying the silence in the Hearing Foundation of Canada's mellow yoga class.

She has also attracted attention for her work as a producer on her dark

comedy short, *Shiva*, which airs on Bravo TV in Canada in April.

Shiva is the story of a woman who goes to shivahs in search of true love in the arms of widowed husbands. The idea for the short came from her step-grandfather. He told her that an unknown woman showed up to a shivah with a casserole in a bid to woo the recently widowed husband, in this case Gutstadt's step-grandfather.

"It was sad because she was also widowed," Gutstadt says. "He didn't even really know her. She was literally crashing the shivah, and she was trying to get him to take her out on a date. Apparently, she did it to other men, too."

"Of course, there's comedy in there, but there's also a darkness."

Despite leaving the comfort of her hometown of Toronto for Los Angeles, Gutstadt says she feels more connected spiritually with her Judaism, leaning on it as part of the personal growth someone goes through when they become a stranger in a strange land.

She said she's organized Passover seders with her friends for the past two years. "It's special," she says.

The late actor Corey Haim was invited to last year's seder. Gutstadt got to know the Toronto native during her time in California, inviting him over years earlier during Chanukah. They grew closer during their time spent together on the set of the 2009 feature *Shark City*. Gutstadt text-messaged Haim with the Passover invitation the night he died.

"I woke up Thursday hearing the news that he died," Gutstadt says, becoming quiet. She wonders if he got her message. Her humbling silence reveals the soft side to Gutstadt's edge. It's that soft side that tugs at Gutstadt's heart and makes her believe that she may be back in Toronto one day.

"Right now, I'm undecided. It's going to be L.A. or Toronto. Until we have kids, we're going to be here," she says. "I want to get to a certain place with work, but having a kid in L.A. without your family around and when you're not settled with work seems horrifying to me," she says. Los Angeles, she adds, is "a tough place to have a traditional anything because it's not a traditional place. It creates challenges."

Talk long enough with Gutstadt and you get the impression that she can handle any challenges California can throw her way. Her diversified career portfolio might leave a lesser person exhausted, but Gutstadt thrives on it.

"I don't know if it comes from my parents, but I just love it. I wake up and make a list about what I have to do today," she says. "I have that fire in me. No one needs to push me."

That's the Samantha Style.



Samantha Gutstadt



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