

An interview with Leighton Meester

Gossip Girl, the new talked-about teen TV series, has made 22-year-old Leighton Meester an overnight star. Listen to an interview this actress has given about her life and career.

How did you start your career?

When I was 12 we moved to New York City, and I began working as a model. Up until that time I had been an ordinary Florida kid. When I was thirteen, I got a part in the TV series *Law and Order*.

What's *Gossip Girl* about?

It's based on a set of novels about the lives of two of Manhattan's privileged high school students. I play one of those girls, Blair Waldorf.

So how would you describe your character - Blair?

She's really dramatic. Everybody thinks she's terribly unkind and that's really fun to play up. She's complicated, having been brought up with a lot of wealth and privilege. But she's also smart and well educated, and deals with a lot of problems that ordinary girls have. Blair's mistakes result from her many insecurities. She feels all this pressure to be perfect: to be the most beautiful, the most popular, the most loved.

Do you identify with her at all?

Mm... in one way or another, I can definitely relate to her. The more I go on, I can't tell if I'm becoming more like Blair or Blair's becoming more like me. I've had to put myself into her so that I like her. I couldn't play a character I didn't like or sympathise with. Then there are other things I don't relate to - like her insecurities and self-doubts.

The *Gossip Girl* books are a big hit, but the TV show has got mixed reviews. How does this affect you?

I've learned to take things as they come. If people say negative things, I couldn't care less, but I let it give me a boost of confidence if they're saying nice things. Whatever the press says, I see it as a plus. At least people are paying attention and watching the show. The acting business is hard and discouraging. But I think you can grow out of that, especially if you realise the only way you can succeed is to figure out what works for you and what doesn't.

You recently had to deal with a personal ordeal ...

Yes, my younger brother was diagnosed with a serious illness.... When something like that happens, it's meant to show you that something very special, very important can be taken away from you so easily.

One final question: What do you do to relax?

Writing poetry is one of my favourite things. I also love listening to music. When I'm in New York City I like getting my nails done, having lunch and going to the movies. I don't feel guilty at all if I'm just lying around.