

Hands Across the Ocean

Some celebrity philanthropists set out to clear the air on their causes. Meanwhile, actress Tanna Frederick wants to clear the water.

BY ELYSE GLICKMAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANA FINEMAN

“The message I want the public to receive through ‘Save Our Surf’ programs is that nine-, ten- and eleven-year-old kids are some of the best stewards of the planet anywhere,” Tanna Frederick says of her initiatives benefitting and educating youth about the environment.

TANNA FREDERICK TAKES CHANCES. As a budding child actress in Mason City, Iowa, at Stebens Children’s Theatre, the precocious Frederick boldly asked the producers and director in the affiliated adult theater company for an opportunity to appear in “Night of the Iguana.”

When she arrived in Hollywood and heard about how independent filmmaker Henry Jaglom sometimes gave roles to actors who were fans of his work, she took a risk of writing him a letter and set up a meeting. Although she had only seen twenty minutes of his film “Déjà Vu” prior to that meeting, Jaglom appreciated her initiative so much that a long-standing professional alliance grew out of it.

More recently, while surfing in Santa Monica, she was prompted to reach out to Shaun Tomson, one of the world’s preeminent surfers, to get the influence needed to power “Project Save Our Surf” (PSOS), a nonprofit that promotes clean oceans and water.

“The idea came to me when I was surfing on one of the local beaches with a girlfriend and a condom floated by, followed by a group of kids at a surf camp,” she recalled. “Around that time, I had gone to my ear doctor for the umpteenth time to get antibiotic ear drops because the local waters were giving me infections. With all of those realizations coming together, it dawned on me that kids should not have to swim or surf in this.”

She suggested to Tomson to stage a “polar bear surfing” fundraising competition inspired by her memories of polar bear swim outings in the Midwest and received his hearty, “Yes!”

In other words, ask, and you shall receive. And in Frederick’s case, when she asks, other people may end up receiving and benefiting in the process.

Although Frederick has built up a steady theater and film career in Los Angeles, she said the secrets to her personal, professional and philanthropic success stem from her Iowa upbringing, as does her reverence for the environment.

“When you come from a family of farmers, there’s no way you cannot be attuned to the land, shifts in nature and the impact chemicals and pollutants have on that fragile balance,” she said.

“The message I want the public to receive through the Save Our Surf programs is that nine-, ten- and eleven-year-old kids are some of the best stewards of the planet anywhere.”

With initiatives including Camp PSOS and ConSURFvation Camp (benefitting and educating kids and teens about the environment) and a water filtration project, PSOS touches communities around the world, most recently in Vietnam.

“Whether the kids we’re working with live in Los Angeles or Vietnam, we are putting the world’s future into their hands,

empowering them and doing it in a way that is both responsible and effective,” she noted.

On her recent journey to Vietnam with her father, they worked with others to install one hundred and fifty water filtration systems. She knew that the experience would prompt bonding between the two.

“Perhaps this would give my father a kind of ‘environmental therapy’... an opportunity to right a few wrongs by helping people in the communities near where he had shot and been shot at thirty years earlier,” she reflected. “As it turned out, the outcome of that experience was profound and brought us closer. I got to know a dad I didn’t previously know, just through the act of getting water filters installed. [It] brought us closer.”

Frederick has also stayed busy beyond an acting career by initiating a film festival and an arts organization (she is founder of both the Iowa Independent Film Festival and Project Cornlight) and pursuing numerous athletics (competitive surfing, marathon running and Taekwondo). Frederick offers the following advice in order to make everything work and flow seamlessly: “Don’t complain, just go out there and make something happen.”

Her professional life is keeping pace with her philanthropic one, as she has two films with Jaglom slated for release (“The M Word” with co-star Michael Imperioli and “Ovation” with James Denton), as well as “Garner, Iowa,” for which she serves as a producer. Her work in local theater also keeps her busy, as she made her directorial debut in Claire Chafee’s “Why We Have a Body,” and, more recently, The Edgemar Center for the Arts’ production of “The Rainmaker.”

“Having to go to hundreds of auditions to keep my career moving forward is not that much different than going out there promoting the nonprofit and asking strangers to donate money for the causes of clean water and sending underprivileged children to camp,” she said.

“Every small victory and defeat pushes you forward because you’re learning something. As a runner, I see all of my individual pursuits as a marathon and not a short sprint.”

It is clear that she is winning the race.

“It was instilled in me that I had to take responsibility for the earth and the environment,” she said. “As I live in Santa Monica and spend lots of my free time surfing, running and basing my lifestyle in Malibu, I take my responsibility of watching out for the well-being of the land and coastline very seriously. I never get discouraged; [it’s] something that’s a part of my greater job as a citizen of this community and the world at large. It’s the right thing to do.” ■