

Tanya Ronder (Lizzie).

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With those big cute eyes, the character of Lizzie, splendidly portrayed by the Scottish actress Tanya Ronder, is one of the best known faces of the first two series of Survivors. Although she was only nine years old at the time, it was evident to all those around her that she had a true and natural talent for acting. Also, being the daughter of scriptwriter Jack Ronder, she is in a position to share some unique insights into the series.

Does Tanya have happy memories of her time working on Survivors? "Yes, very happy. It was an extraordinary opportunity for a kid of nine. In fact it caused problems when I went back to school. We had spent two years going backwards and forwards and it was like a golden-age, everything else seemed a bit dull by comparison afterwards. We were actually living in Ealing at the time and a lot of the time my mother used to chaperone me, so we would drive out there together and when she couldn't come with me I'd take the train. We had ten day slots of filming and then back again for two weeks. My schooling during this period was a bit sporadic. As I've said we had these three hours of tutoring a day. One of the tutors was Stephen Dudley's old Head Mistress, an old white-haired woman who was very strict. The whole thing was very strange really because they had no idea of where you were really up to at school and Stephen and I were of different ages and different levels. Stephen was only seven years old. Two years is a lot at that age. I'm sure my school-work must have suffered, although it's difficult to tell now."

Was it about this time that Tanya realised that acting was what she wanted to devote her life to? "Yes, I always think it must have been from that time that I decided that. This was my first experience on television. Before that I had done school plays and stuff and had enjoyed them. I think that my dad (Jack Ronder) had put me up for the part in Survivors, because he already knew that that was what I wanted to do. I wanted to act from a very early age. It's strange looking back at it all. That acting experience I had on Survivors doesn't seem to be connected with what I do now at all. When acting as a child you just look at the script, you don't see an option and you just say the line in the only way in which you see that it makes sense."

But being only nine years old, was Tanya actually expected to go away and learn all her lines off-by-heart? "Yes, we were sent the scripts and we learnt the lines! I just sat down on my own and learnt the scripts. For a few episodes we did a couple of days rehearsal at Acton, but quite often they wouldn't call Stephen and me for those probably because they thought, and rightly so, that we would be far less fresh if we rehearsed it all. More often with us two they would run through the scenes and say what was going to happen and where we should be, we would have our lines learnt and they would just go ahead and do it."

How did Tanya get on with Stephen? "Poor boy, he actually didn't want to be there doing it! He was much more interested in other things (such as making weapons and war games). The legacy that I was brought up with was that I was good in the series whereas he was bad. Looking at the videos, I feel so terribly embarrassed because it seems it's quite the opposite! He actually looks very good! I certainly feel embarrassed at the little I've seen so far on video."

Does Tanya remember doing many of the scenes, or is Survivors now very much a blur? "It's very weird really, some scenes I can't remember doing at all, whereas others I have very vivid memories of doing. I have very vivid memories of Gone to the Angels, my first episode. I remember that first day really really clearly and it was really exciting. The scene in the garage shop I remember very clearly. It was such an unusual treat to be told to eat as many sweets as I liked! It was a boast at school."

Were Tanya's parents over-protective of her while on location? "No, they were really quite liberal and generous with my freedom and largely let me get on with what I wanted to do. I think that Stephen's mother was very protective of him, and when my mother was away Stephen's mother would then be very protective of me as well. She was there all the time, and I really resented her interfering in my life because I was given a lot more freedom. As far as the other members of cast were concerned, I remember that different people had different attitudes towards us children. I remember that John Abineri didn't like children and he had quite a resistance, but by the end we got along really well. I remember him really fondly actually, he has a lovely wry smile. Ian and Lucy were brilliant, I got on really well with them, and with Celia too. I would spend hours playing Mastermind with Ian and singing songs with him. Carolyn frightened me at first but she proved to be very nice in the end. She seemed quite austere to a kid. I thought she was very good in the series. In fact I saw her for a bit after the series as I made friends with her son, so we kept in touch for a while."

The director Eric Hills has said that one day while shooting at Callow Hill, Tanya threw a tantrum and refused to work for the entire day! Is this story true? "Yes, I'm afraid it is! I remember having an incident with Eric Hills. I remember being furiously angry with him. I remember he spoke far more patronisingly to us kids than any of the other directors, and it really wound me up! I wasn't in the least, but already at the age of nine I felt so mature! It was to do with the day we had a big party scene (Over the Hills). The problem was to do with the dress I had to wear. They had taken me out shopping and had said to me, 'Choose any dress you want'. In the story, Greg and Jenny would have taken us out and into an empty shop somewhere and told us to pick something off the rail. Anyway, they took us out shopping and had told us to pick anything we wanted which, for a kid of nine was a big deal. So I picked this beautiful long dress. I don't know exactly what happened, but somebody must have changed their mind and over-rid the designer's decision. so when I turned up for the day's filming and went to put on my beautiful dress, there was this little pink one. I said, 'What's that?', and I was told, 'That's the dress you're wearing'. I just had a tantrum I'm afraid! You can see from the photos and the video that I was in a big sulk all day long, so at the party scene you saw a sulky Lizzie!"

Why didn't Tanya carry on into the third series, when her role was taken over by another young girl and did she mind her role being taken over by someone else? "Yes, I minded a lot. The strangest thing was that the new girl, Angie Stevens, was from the same school I went to! My parents made the decision to withdraw me from the series. I don't all together know why they did it, I've probably still got a child's memory of it but I do know that it concerned the Dudley's. There were things that were going on. It probably had something to do with the fact that my father was writing for the series and the producer was re-writing his work and that kind of spilled over into me because I was the daughter. My mother was right in there at the time and would know much more. I was very sad when I left. I think it must have all been going a bit wrong and becoming unhappy by that time because I think if I'd been snatched out of it in the Hampton Court days I would have been incredibly upset because I do remember that as a very happy time. I had this conception of things going on and people being unhappy. My father was very disillusioned at the way the series went."

Which is the most vivid memory that Tanya has of her time on Survivors? "I think the very first episode in which Stephen and I appeared (Gone to the Angels), the one with all the chocolates. Nick Grace was in it too. I remember too that in the script for that episode it says 'Lizzie cries' at a certain point. I panicked and worried for ages and ages over that and finally, after weeks of worrying about this I went to Dad and said 'Will they sack me if I can't cry?' He said they wouldn't. Some actors can cry technically and some can't. I also remember the introduction of the dog who was a very lovely, fluffy dog. I also remember watching the first four episodes of the series before I was actually in it, so I understood what it was all about."

Does Tanya have memories of Hampton Court, which became the base for the community mid-way through the first series? "I loved Hampton Court. I remember wandering around there and I loved it. In fact I've still got a little brandy flask from there. It always captures all those memories for me."

Does Tanya have equally vivid memories of the second series up at Callow Hill? "I don't remember so much of the filming part of it at Callow Hill. I remember Callow Hill itself and the family we stayed with, but my memories of the actual series are much more Hampton Court based. I remember the first broadcast story of the second series (Birth of a Hope), where the community gets burned down. One of them was the character Mrs Cohen, played by the Czech actress Hana-Maria Pravda. Many other characters got killed off as well in that story, which was, I seem to remember, the cause of some grief. That was a producer's decision. I remember my dad being in some torment over that, especially regarding Hana-Maria, because he felt that he had let her down."

Tanya's father Jack had a scientific training, and in fact had worked for many years in industry. What made him become a writer? "He was a chemist by training. He worked as a pharmacist for a while and then he taught science in Edinburgh for several years which is where he met my mum, who was a student there. I think he used to write in the evenings. At the university he was right in there and did a lot of theatre, writing, directing and performing. He was a playwright initially up in Edinburgh, then when we moved to London, which was only two or three years before Survivors, he started writing for television; Z Cars and similar things."

How would Tanya compare television today with television in the 1970's? "Having watched the videos of Survivors, the thing which really struck me was that the scenes were allowed to happen and the camera would stay on somebody's face after some huge revelation, and nowadays the revelation would be shown in an instant. It may seem dated but it relies much more on the actors to actually carry the thing through. It's more like Testament of Youth, which was after Survivors but still quite a while ago, where the camera

really stays with the actors for longer. I have done smaller bits of telly since Survivors, and the scenes are all just so quick!"

How did Tanya continue her acting career after Survivors? "After Survivors had come to an end I did another of my father's work, but it was after he had died (1979). It was called The Lost Tribe which was a six-part series that he conceived and wrote, and starred Bill Patterson and Anne Raith. That was when I was fourteen. The next thing I did was a play at the National Theatre, which I did during my summer holidays. There was then a break when I was finishing school and doing more and more at the Edinburgh fringes and then I had a couple of years of working and travelling and then went to Drama School, RADA, for three years. We had a good time there largely and it was a good training. I met my husband

and several other good friends there. He's now a director."

Did the fact of being a 'child star' hamper Tanya's later career? "I think that in reality it's made no difference whatsoever. For me, I felt it hampered me at times. I felt quite jealous of the people who had found their careers totally independently of their families; people at college who had just found a passion for acting which was all their own and nothing to do with their families. I was brought up in such an artistic environment that it was just like the natural thing for me to do. I kicked against it a lot when I was older, saying, 'I don't want to do it, I don't want to do it!', and kept trying to turn myself away from it and look for other things. But there is nothing else I actually want to do so I keep coming back to it. I'm sure I wailed and kicked against it more than I might have done if it hadn't been so easy for me to tumble into it. I felt at times that maybe I should become a mathematician or a scientist; an accountant would have been the most unusual thing I could have come up with in my family. My father may have encouraged me to look at other things, but sadly he died before I was even into 'O' levels. That was really sad because he was such a bright and academic man and my brother and sister who are older than I benefited more from that than I did. I don't know whether the two years I spent on Survivors with all the gaps in my education have anything to do with it, but I don't boast any particular academic skills! It's an interesting question that we talk about from time to time."

If there is ever another series of Survivors, would Tanya be happy to be a part of the team again? "Yes, I guess I would really. It's strange but I think I felt embarrassed about it for a long time because I was so young and it was so different from how I know acting to be now, because it had really come for nothing for me then. But I'd love to be on it again. I must say I was amazed that it wasn't repeated around the time that nuclear power was really at the height of everyone's concern, because the series seemed so pertinent. Maybe it was too downbeat and close to the bone."