

A Matter of Degree

E! reporter chased her dream job to Hollywood but found getting hired required more than a glamorous

By Clifton Barnes



Gorse says she knew she wanted to work for the E! Entertainment Network from the time she was in middle school.

Ashlan Gorse '02 has no problem chatting with Meryl Streep, George Clooney or Oprah, but the self-proclaimed “Carolina girl” did get a little tongue-tied once.

“At a signing, I got Dean Smith to sign a book,” she said. “You know I love to talk, and I honestly couldn’t say anything. Finally, all I got out was, ‘I love you,’ and I shook his hand.”

Reached on her phone for a chat from Los Angeles, the busy E! Entertainment Network reporter was moving things — including a pair of Tar Heel window flags and a UNC alumni license plate — to a new car.

“I’m so darn proud to have gotten in that school and spent four years there,” Gorse said. “It was the best four years of my life.”

The past four-plus years haven’t been bad either, as the 6-foot former teen model has become a celebrity herself at E!, a well-known face on the red carpets of Hollywood covering the Oscars, Emmys, Golden Globes and Grammys. Millions of viewers watch her weeknights as a correspondent and fill-in anchor of E! News. She has nearly 17,000 Twitter followers and even gets autograph requests, which makes her giggle. “It’s still all kind of weird and surreal to me.”

E! ambition started early

Gorse was still in middle school in North Carolina when she started trying to figure out how to get E! to hire her someday.

“There was an E! show back in the day called *Wild On with Brooke Burke*, and she would go to these beautiful resorts and vacation destinations and do fun things,” Gorse said. “I thought, ‘Man, that seems like the best job evvverrr.’ ”

Her first step was to get her face out there. “I’m kinda tall, so I did the modeling stuff hoping to get noticed and get my name out there,” said Gorse, who became a print and runway model at age 14.

Her next step was to go to journalism school. “I was lucky enough to get accepted into Carolina, which has one of the top five journalism schools in the country.”

Once at Carolina, she joined the staff of *Carolina Week*, the student TV news program. But she knew all along she didn’t want to do hard news. “I’m the kind of person that starts crying while reading greeting cards in the aisle at Target,” Gorse said, laughing. “I didn’t think I was cut out for hard news.”

Instead, after graduation Gorse went to New York and was an NBC page on shows such as *Saturday Night Live* and *Late Night with Conan O’Brien* as part of a one-year training program. Next she became a production assistant and field producer for *Access Hollywood*. She quickly rose to the position of reporter and segment producer for entertainment shows on MSNBC.

After a stint as a coach on the reality MTV show *Made*, in 2006 Gorse made her way to Hollywood, where she became an editor for *Life & Style Weekly* and made appearances on many TV news and morning programs as an entertainment expert. A year later, E! hired her as an on-air talent. She had her dream job.

‘People in college want to study this and get out and do it. The problem is there aren’t many jobs. I’d say there are probably 25 people in New York and L.A. that do what I do.’

Ashlan Gorse, correspondent for E!

Evening gowns and snow boots

“What I do for a living is kind of the hot job right now,” she said. “People in college want to study this and get out and do it. The problem is there aren’t many jobs. I’d say there are probably 25 people in New York and L.A. that do what I do.”

Gorse said good looks, celebrity or experience in some other area of show business aren’t the deciding factors in getting such jobs, where the competitors might be pageant winners, centerfolds or reality TV personalities.

“I really think it’s been my education that’s made me stand out. ... I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been at an audition or a job interview and they ask if I have any experience. I say, ‘Yeah, I went to The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and I’m a journalism major.’ ... You can see their face totally change, and they know that I’m not just some dumb blonde who wants to be on TV — that I have the schooling, the skills and the whole background to back it up.”

While she sometimes likes to joke with the celebrities she interviews, Gorse says she’s still working. “For instance, I covered the *Vanity Fair* Post-Oscar Party, and all the big names were there — Madonna, Robert Downey Jr., Victoria and David Beckham, Oprah. But the problem is, I’m on the red carpet, it’s freezing outside, and I’m in a strapless gown with snow boots underneath my dress hoping no one notices,” she said. “I am waiting behind a rope, yelling at people, begging them to come talk to me. ... It’s not all glamour. As a matter of fact, most of it is not glamorous.”

To the extent that she has gained fame, she still has a grounded perspective about her work.

“I’m not curing cancer, performing brain surgery or changing people’s lives,” she said. “What I’m doing is giving people their entertainment news, their inside look at pop culture and, hopefully, after a hard day of work they can come home, watch my stories and interviews on E!, and be entertained.”

(Printed in the December 2012 Issue of Carolina Alumni Review.)



to dress casually in
s a celebrity reporter
g gowns (sometimes
cealing snow boots).

COURTESY ASHLAN GORSE '02

Ashlan Gorse '02 gets to dress casually in her private life, but as a celebrity reporter she's often in evening gowns (sometimes carefully concealing snow boots).