

# MARIA MENOUNOS

BY JONATHAN SOROFF

**M**edford native Maria Menounos, although still in her 20s, has enjoyed success as an entertainment reporter, journalist, actress, filmmaker and humanitarian. A former model and Miss Massachusetts Teen USA, she studied broadcast journalism and film at Emerson College, where she was the first freshman in the school's history to win one of its Evvy awards for achievement in performing arts and media. She also hosted a Greek-American talk show on WNRB-AM, and during her sophomore year, became involved in a film project, *In the Land of Merry Misfits* (which she recently rescued, providing the financing to complete it). After her junior year at Emerson, she was hired as an international correspondent/anchor for the Channel One Network, which beams a satellite newscast to 8 million students daily during the school year. Her assignments included interviewing President Bush and covering the AIDS epidemic in South Africa—a trip that inspired her to found Take Action Hollywood!, a nonprofit that uses the power of the entertainment industry to effect social change. The group has produced a commercial on AIDS awareness and promoted pet adoption. As a journalist, Menounos is the host of both *ET* on MTV and *ET* on VH1 and appears nightly as a co-host and journalist for *Entertainment Tonight* and *ET Weekend*. As an actress, she recently landed a recurring role on the CBS series *Without a Trace*. She is also working on a joint venture with Miramax Films, promoting *Paper Clips*, a Holocaust documentary. A Los Angeles resident, Menounos volunteers at dog shelters and has four adopted dogs.

**Jonathan Soroff:** You're an actress, journalist, humanitarian, producer. What's left?  
**Maria Menounos:** There's a lot I want to do. Like direct.

**JS:** Ahh, the old cliché. If you had to give up one thing, what would it be, and why?

**MM:** I wouldn't give up anything. I can do it all.

**JS:** So where do you get the energy? Coffee? Red Bull? Cocaine?

**MM:** I don't really drink coffee. I never wanted to be one of those people who can't get up without coffee in the morning. I'd rather use that extra 15 minutes to sleep.

**JS:** Most awkward celebrity moment? Ever call someone the wrong name, or something like that?

**MM:** Sometimes when you're on the red carpet, a publicist will push their client in front of you, and you have no idea who they are, what they're about or why they're there. So you have to do that little dance of, "So...what brings you out tonight?"

**JS:** Most embarrassing question you've ever had to ask?

**MM:** I won't ask anything I wouldn't want to be asked. Even if I'm told by my bosses that they want me to ask something, if it doesn't seem right at that moment, I'm not going to do that.

**JS:** So "How much do you weigh?" is probably somewhere you wouldn't go?

**MM:** Yeah, something totally personal, like Brittany Murphy breaking off her engagement and seeming really upset and really uncomfortable about it—I'm not gonna go there.

**JS:** Hollywood story you covered that you just couldn't get enough of?

**MM:** Oh God, it's the opposite, because we live and breathe it. I'd get calls from my mother, "How many times can we see J. Lo, Maria? Every day, J. Lo."

**JS:** So you get sick of it?

**MM:** During that moment of madness, yeah. You're like, "Enough." And J. Lo was probably saying the same thing.

**JS:** Are you a busybody?

**MM:** As far as caring about that stuff? No. I have no interest in it. I'm not trying to find out the scoop. If I hear something juicy, it usually goes in one ear and out the other, because if I'm hearing it, so is someone else and it'll come out eventually. I'm friends with so many of these celebrities; I'd never want to be the one who brought something like that out.

**JS:** As an actor yourself, do you think you can relate better to the celebrities you cover?

**MM:** I think I have sensitivity because I was acting before I got into journalism. *ET* was kind of a fluke. I studied journalism in college, but I studied filmmaking as well, and I wanted to pursue that. I think my father wanted the journalism thing to happen, because that's what he wanted me to do. Don't get me wrong. I enjoy it. I love my job, but I was more diehard about going on stories as an international correspondent. Interviewing the president, or

going on assignment to South Africa, that was more interesting to me than whose marriage is on the rocks. Their lives are so overexposed as it is.

**JS:** Speaking of interviewing George W., did he make a pass at you?

**MM:** No. [Laughs.] I do think he took a liking to me, though. It was so last-minute, and I was so excited to get the nod to be the one who interviewed him. They said, "He's only going to give you two questions. That's it." OK, fine. I got to ask my two questions, but I think he felt comfortable, because he stayed for like 25 minutes and I got to ask him everything else I wanted to ask.

**JS:** Most appalling trend in the entertainment industry today?

**MM:** I used to think it was wearing Uggs, but then I got a pair.

**JS:** Ever looked at your MTV and VH1 wardrobe and wondered, "Why?"

**MM:** No. Have you?

**JS:** Truthfully, yes. I've wondered why they make you wear such skimpy outfits.

**MM:** When we have ratings that are climbing every day, and a million and a half viewers per episode, I think it's workin'.

**JS:** First thought when you were named one of 2004's 50 Most Beautiful People by *People* magazine?

**MM:** I was completely shocked. It was all these A-list movie stars and pro athletes, and then a few random people like me, so it was pretty ridiculous.

**JS:** When do you think you'll make the cover of *Vanity Fair*?

**MM:** I've got a little time. I'm workin' on it. I don't like to put time limits on things because then you're watching the sand go through the hourglass instead of paying attention to what you're supposed to be doing.

**JS:** When you were *Miss Massachusetts Teen USA*, what was your talent?

**MM:** There was no talent involved. [Laughs.] But I used to joke that if there was a talent competition, I would burp, because I'm really good at it. I can out-burp anyone on this planet. But at some point you have to start acting like a lady. So only on rare occasions, I'll let one out.

**JS:** Your charity, *Take Action Hollywood!*, is supposed to make people in the entertainment industry more socially aware. Does that mean you'll be convincing Russell Crowe not to act like an asshole in public?

**MM:** Ah, no. What it means is that we use the media to effect social change. We just got behind a documentary called *Paper Clips*, which is about the Holocaust, and once I got people there to see it, I had a theater full of the highest-level executives in this industry bowing their brains out. It's an amazing film in that truly speaks to all races, religions and ethnicities.

**JS:** Child star whose career is most due for a comeback?

**MM:** Natalie from *The Facts of Life*.

**JS:** Good answer. Hollywood star you think is most likely to move to Massachusetts and take advantage of gay marriage?

**MM:** Matt and Ben someday, only because they joke about it all the time.

**JS:** Isn't it really sad about Lindsay Lohan?

**MM:** What about her?

**JS:** I don't know. I was just trying to get some dirt out of you. Think there's any truth to the rumor about Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise?

**MM:** What rumor?

**JS:** You just won't fall into my traps, will you? What do you like to do when you come to town?

**MM:** Depending on the season, I go to the Patriots, Red Sox, Celtics or Bruins games. I get all their games on DirecTV, but it's nothing like seeing them play live. I also need to get back to my uncle Nick's little restaurant on the water and see the tribe. Other than that, it's as much Dunkin' Donuts, Brigham's, Papa Gino's or Bob's that I can consume—we don't have that stuff in L.A.

**JS:** OK, three things you miss most about Medford?

**MM:** I miss B-Boys, which are these ridiculous breakfast sandwiches you get at Jim's Market in North Medford, up in the Heights, and you have no idea...and the Steak on Main Street has the meanest steak and cheese subs. And I miss Kelly's in Revere.

**JS:** Favorite childhood memory?

**MM:** Singing in church choir and performing in plays.

**JS:** Dream role?

**MM:** Probably in a musical.

**JS:** So you sing too? Name one thing you can't do.

**MM:** I don't know how to fight a fire. Neurosurgey...

**JS:** You're just that amazing, I-can-do-everything person, aren't you?