

NorthEast Philly Native

Kelly Monaco

by Meredith Landis

KELLY, WHO PLAYS SAMANTHA MCCALL ON GENERAL HOSPITAL, WAS RECENTLY CROWNED THE CHAMPION OF ABC'S HIT SHOW DANCING WITH THE STARS

WHEN I FIRST SPOKE TO JAMI ABOUT WRITING MY OWN COLUMN, I thought it would be a great idea to interview celebrities who are from 'Good Ole' Philadelphia. I'm always pleasantly surprised when I hear that someone I like in Hollywood grew up here, and I know a lot of people feel the same way.

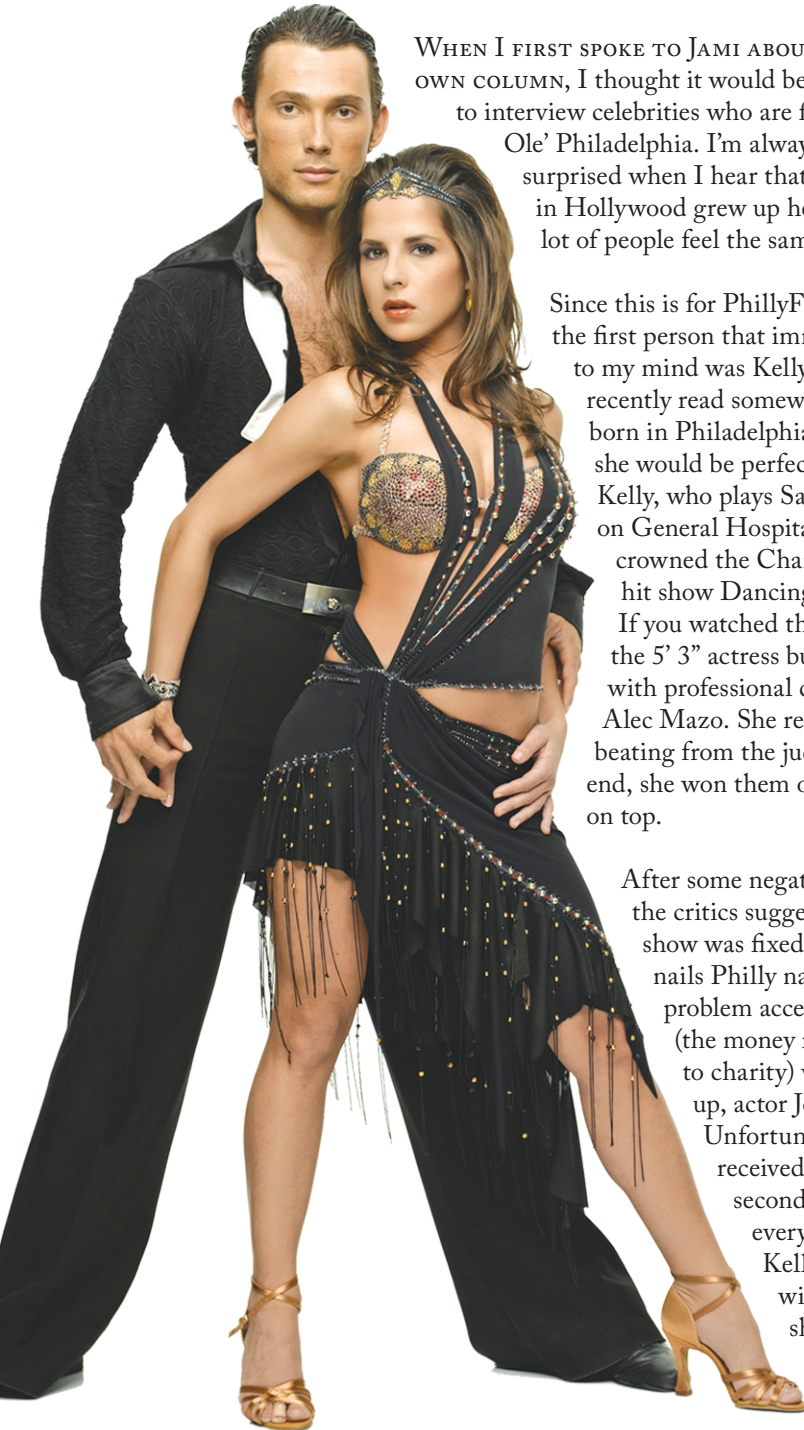
Since this is for PhillyFit Magazine, the first person that immediately came to my mind was Kelly Monaco. I had recently read somewhere that she was born in Philadelphia, so I thought she would be perfect for this column. Kelly, who plays Samantha McCall on General Hospital, was recently crowned the Champion of ABC's hit show Dancing with the Stars. If you watched the show, you saw the 5' 3" actress bust her hump with professional dance instructor Alec Mazo. She really took a beating from the judges, but in the end, she won them over and came out on top.

After some negative press from the critics suggesting that the show was fixed, the tough as nails Philly native had no problem accepting a rematch (the money raised went to charity) with runner up, actor John O Hurly. Unfortunately, John received more votes the second time around, but everyone knew that Kelly was the real winner. I thought she handled the loss with so much grace

and dignity, and I made sure that she knew that. She, in turn, made sure that everyone knew she was proud to be there raising money for charity. Her response was, "We Philly girls have tough skin, and I was not going to let myself stoop to any selfishness." I couldn't have put it any better myself.

This was the first time I ever interviewed a celebrity so I was a bit nervous, but Kelly put me at ease right away. She was extremely friendly when she called me on Thursday night, and I immediately felt like I was chatting with an old friend. I knew that I was going to like her when I heard her two dogs (chocolate lab and Jack Russell, Punky and Ryder) barking in the background. Kelly politely asked me to hold on. "I can't have that, thank you," I heard her say. That reminded me of almost everyday in my house when I can't do something because my two dogs decide to take over.

Kelly grew up in a very close knit Italian family in Northeast Philadelphia with four sisters. She attended Catholic school and a year of public school; when she was twelve years old, her family decided to move to the Poconos. Throughout high school she participated in theater and was interested in acting, but she knew that she was "supposed" to go to college. She went for a year and decided that it wasn't for her. She was so passionate about acting that she decided (with the full support of her family) to take a chance and move to California. Not only was Los Angeles very different from Philadelphia, but since she was part of such a large family, Kelly was not used to being alone. "I put one foot in front of the other, hustled my ass off





and began booking jobs,” she told me. She landed a recurring role on *Baywatch* and had parts in feature films such as *Idle Hands*, *Mumford* and *Basketball*. She started her soap opera career on *Port Charles* playing Livvie Locke and Tess Ramsey from 1999-2003. The show was cancelled in 2003, and in 2005, Kelly landed a part on *General Hospital*.

When asked what she does to stay in shape, Kelly, who has been a vegetarian since she battled food poisoning at age eleven, told me that it varies depending on her mood. Besides working 15-hour days and cleaning her house like crazy, she goes hiking in the Canyons with her dogs. Sometimes, she will “pop in a Tae-Bo tape at home, go rollerblading on the beach or hit the gym.” Prior to *Dancing with the Stars*, she went to the gym everyday for two hours and would do an hour of cardio, a half hour of lightweights and a half hour of sit-ups.

I was curious to know what a person who looks like her eats; you would think that I would have decided that I didn’t like her anymore after her answer, but that wasn’t the case. Besides eating a lot of tofu and mixing it with greens, nuts and strawberries, she’s a “carboholic” who loves pizza and pasta, and her favorite junk food is chocolate Haagen-Dazs ice cream with a little bit of Pepsi. I must have sounded a little repulsed because she said, “It sounds gross, but it’s good; you have to try it!” She also told me that she had just eaten a big brownie sundae the week before.

As we were talking, I wondered if she missed Philadelphia at all. It sounded to me that she was living an exciting life in California. Much to my surprise, she did seem to miss it here. We talked about block parties and how even though Philly is a big city, everyone seems to know each other. She mentioned that if it wasn’t for her wonderful boyfriend and friends, her “rocks,” she doesn’t know what she would do.

I highly enjoyed talking to Kelly, and I can only hope that any other celebrity interviews I do go as well as this one. Although she is working on a few different projects, she couldn’t give me any of the details at this time, but I have a sneaking suspicion that we are going to see this Philly girl everywhere!



Meredith Landis, founded Pulse PR in March 2004 after she came across so many companies who had great products or services to offer, but didn’t know how to market themselves. She knew that it was her calling to help these businesses succeed and decided to go out on her own. After graduating from Temple University and unsure of the path she wanted to follow, Landis was hired as an assistant at Clear Channel Radio Sales. She worked there for six months, but left in 1999 to accept a position at Fusion Public Relations, a High Tech PR firm in New York City. Landis commuted to New York from Philadelphia for two years working on accounts such as Panasonic and Lucent. She decided that she wanted to work in Philadelphia, and in 2001, was hired by UnREAL Marketing Solutions, an interactive marketing and advertising agency based in Narberth, PA to be their PR Manager. She helped the company get the recognition that they deserved by placing them in publications such as Philadelphia Business Journal, Philadelphia Inquirer, Computer User Magazine, New York Times, The Wall Street Journal.