

On-line photography contest snowballs into Hollywood photo shoot

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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If you missed the 30-second spot featuring Gothenburg's own Nette Willis on prime-time television, you can still see her image in three national publications.

The face of the 42-year-old grill cook at McDonald's Restaurant in Gothenburg, along with an advertisement about the restaurant, appeared in People magazine, US Weekly and USA Weekend.

The all-expense-paid trip to Los Angeles last March for a photo shoot started innocently enough.

After seeing information on a flyer in the restaurant's crew room about a college scholarship given by McDonald's, Willis went to the company's website to apply.

After submitting her application last January, another item on the website caught her eye.

A photo contest.

"I sent a picture of myself and my grandson as a chuckle," Bevard said. "Then I forgot about it."

In February, a woman from an advertisement agency in Chicago called and Willis found herself "racking my brain to figure out why an ad agency was calling."

The woman asked Willis to resubmit the photo which she did.

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“Two days later she called and said she wanted me to go to L.A. in the middle of the week,” Willis said.

After clearing her work schedule, Willis was on a plane for California. She and six others from other states, who had been chosen for the trip, were picked up at the airport by limousine and taken to a Marriott Suites hotel.

The next day, they were taken to a McDonald’s Restaurant used solely for print advertisements and television commercials.

Participants had their hair and makeup done and were issued new McDonald’s uniforms to wear.

During the photoshoot, Willis said the seven, who all worked at McDonald’s Restaurants, didn’t know whose images would be chosen for magazine advertisements.

Participants were also asked, for a 30-second national hiring day television ad, about working at McDonald’s.

For the spot, Willis said: “If you’re considering a job at McDonald’s, give it a shot. It’s a good place to work.”

After the day-long shoot, the group did some sight-seeing. They visited Rodeo Drive and the Hollywood Walk of Fame and were driven past the Beverly Hills Hotel, the Playboy mansion and homes where Saturday Night Live star John Belushi and pop celebrity Michael Jackson died.

The next day, participants flew home.

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“It was surreal,” Willis said. “It was a nice three days because I was pampered and felt like a celebrity.”

Willis said she also realized how people get used to that kind of spotlight.

“But I don’t think I’d want to,” she said.

About a month ago, the grill cook from Gothenburg appeared on commercials during The Apprentice, Sur-

vivor, American Idol and Minute to Win It.

A friend in Lincoln, while waiting to see a dentist, texted Willis that he saw her photo in an advertisement in People that featured a picture of screen star Elizabeth Taylor on the cover.

Because she was chosen for the television advertisement, Willis is now a member of the Screen Actor’s Guild which means she’ll receive fair pay from advertising residual for her 30 seconds of stardom which has translated into a little under \$1,100.

She also received regular pay from McDonald’s while in Los Angeles and “my name and photo is now out there.”

Willis, who has cochlear implants in both ears because of a hearing disability, was also chosen to do a 30-second spot for a hiring day video shown on McDonald’s website for employees only.

“I don’t know what it’s all going to lead to but what’s the harm?” she asked. “I really consider

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myself to be pretty ordinary.”

Although Willis didn't receive the McDonald's scholarship, she is still pursuing an on-line criminal justice degree with an emphasis in probation and drug court from the University of Phoenix.

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