

# Traversing TERRAINS

**FLY ENTERTAINMENT ARTISTE  
VANESSA VANDERSTRAATEN HAS BIG DREAMS,  
BUT SHE BELIEVES IN TAKING REALISTIC STEPS  
TOWARDS ACHIEVING HER GOALS.**



Born and raised in Singapore, Vanessa Vanderstraaten, 31, is an actress, host and scriptwriter rolled into one. The multi-hyphenate has guest-starred in local TV dramas such as *Code of Law* and *Spouse for House*, earning the most recognition for being in the *Lion Mums* series. She was also the co-presenter of the first season of reality-singing competition programme *The Final 1*.

More than just a pretty face, Vanessa has successfully ventured into behind-the-scenes work, including writing three episodes of Channel 5 drama *Titoudao: Inspired By The True Story Of A Wayang Star*.

The starlet shared about the shenanigans of an artiste's life and what she loves about the Bishan Street 12 neighbourhood, where she has spent all her life, in a candid interview with *Life Storeys*.

### **How did your acting career begin?**

When I was in university, I joined Singapore Repertory Theatre's (SRT) The Young Company Actors training programme. I loved — and still love — working in theatre, so I decided to see how I could make a career out of acting. That was when I met actor-composer Shane Mardjuki, who put me in touch with FLY. Like many people, I started out as an extra!

### **How did the opportunity for scriptwriting come about?**

I was working on a number of Ochre Pictures projects,

when director Jean Yeo, who is also the creator of *Lion Mums*, urged me to give scriptwriting a go. I've been very lucky to meet people who are willing to give me a chance, and to learn from amazing writers and executive producers. I enjoy writing a lot, so I'm thankful to be able to diversify my skills.

## **What do you like most about being an actress, host and scriptwriter?**

It is a privilege to work with seasoned actors. When I was filming *Lion Mums*, I tried to absorb as much as I could from veterans like Andie Chen, Nurul Aini and Lina Ng. When it comes to writing, it is more fluid and creative in the sense that I am building a world from scratch, together with fellow writers and producers. We create characters and scenarios, and I think the best part is definitely during the development stage, when anything and everything is possible. The sparring of ideas with the scriptwriting team is really fun! With hosting, the most rewarding moment is when I see people enjoying themselves. It can be nerve-racking but also very satisfying when I connect with the audience and see their smiles.

## **What do you do when you're not working?**

I'm actually working all the time! Even when I'm cleaning the house, reading a book or watching TV shows, I may still be thinking about my scripts and forming other ideas. But the good thing is, I love what I do. I've also discovered some new interests, such as yoga and building miniature dollhouses. I also enjoy a good game of mahjong!

**You've lived in Bishan for over 30 years.  
What's your favourite part about the estate?**

I love the convenience of Bishan's location. And I'm glad that my neighbourhood — like many other HDB estates — feels very safe, so I don't worry when I come home late. I also have a soft spot for study corners at void decks. This stems from my university days, when I did a lot of my assignments at the study corner below my block. I tend to fall asleep when I'm in my room while the study corner is quiet and helps me focus. Without any available power socket, I only had the duration of my laptop's battery capacity to finish my work! I recall a stray kitten that kept me company every night for one month — and I eventually adopted it as my pet!

Vanessa posing for a photo with her *Lion Mums* co-stars Nurul Aini and Lina Ng



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## **Has COVID-19 affected you in any way?**

It definitely has had an impact, in terms of the number of hosting gigs being cancelled and meetings that have been moved online. The industry has been hit severely and there are many freelancers out there who are having it tough. My advice for them is to be calm, stay safe and healthy, and have faith that this will come to pass. Meanwhile, use this time as productively as you can. If you are a writer, work on your craft; if you have tangible skills (such as camera skills), improve on them.

With the Circuit Breaker measures in place, I've been keeping myself occupied at home by taking online classes on MasterClass, a platform that allows you to learn from the best in various industries. For example, you can sign up for cooking lessons by multi-Michelin Starred chef Gordon Ramsay. I'm taking courses by American television producer Shonda Rhimes and Hollywood star Natalie Portman, and there's still a long list of classes that I want to get through!

## **What do you hope to achieve in the new decade?**

It may sound like a wild dream, but in the 2020s, I would love to work towards becoming a showrunner. I hope to follow the path of people like English celebrity Phoebe Waller-Bridge, who create, write, direct, and act in their own TV shows.