

I'm very gassy," says Tyra Banks, telling Janet Jackson about her irritable-bowel syndrome. "But I feel like I can telegraph my farts. . . . If it is going to be funky I'll let it out and I'll be like 'Dang! Who did that?'"

It's another day on the set of *The Tyra Banks Show*.

Stunning Tyra, wearing boots and jeans, a black vest cuddling her famous Victoria's Secret cleavage, and a lustrous weave—"It's looking hot," she observed of herself before the show—starts peppering Janet with "20 Questions You've Never Been Asked."

"Have you ever faked an orgasm?," Tyra says.

"On every album," Janet purrs.

"You go, Ms. Jackson!" someone screams, and the audience—multi-ethnic young women also in boots and jeans, some of whom have flown clear across the country to see Tyra here at the CBS Television City studios, in L.A.—erupts with the sound of wild girl bonding, clapping, woo-hooing.

Tyra flashes her fierce, feline smile.

America is having a Tyra moment. From the daily girl party of *The Tyra Banks Show* to the weekly bitchfest of her other program, *America's Next Top Model*, it feels like Tyra, Tyra, Tyra all the time.

"She connects with women on a very visceral level," says Hilary Estey McLoughlin, president of Telepictures, the division of Time Warner which syndicates and co-owns *The Tyra Banks Show* along with Tyra's own Bankable Productions. "She plays against type for a model, and it's, like, fascinating to watch."

"She's a fantastic producer," says Benny Medina, Tyra's power manager. (He guided the early careers of Will Smith, Diddy, and J.Lo and now also manages Mariah Carey and Nicole Richie.) "We're owning 18-to-39"—the most coveted female demographic—"knocking it out of the park. I think Tyra is the future of talk for this generation."

If, 10 years ago, America's real top models had participated in a competition to see who would be America's Next Top Entertainment Mogul, probably few would have bet on Tyra Banks. Then 23, she had just come into her own as a model, having appeared on the covers of *Sports Illustrated's* Swimsuit Issue and *GQ*—the first black woman to do either. In 1997 she received modeling's Michael Award for "Supermodel of the Year."

The front-runner would have no doubt been Cindy Crawford—"a role model," Tyra says demurely—who by 1989 had already moved from the runway to TV as host of MTV's *House of Style*. But "Cindy" is now a Malibu mom. "Kate" (Moss) remains one of the top



models in the world but is still "just" a model. And "Naomi" (Campbell), Tyra's onetime nemesis (their rivalry rated No. 16 on E!'s *30 Most Outrageous Celebrity Feuds*), though still modeling too, is beset by so many legal battles involving charges of assault that she has taken to wearing a T-shirt that says, NAOMI HIT ME . . . AND I LOVED IT.

Meanwhile, Tyra has become America's new best girlfriend, sparking the inevitable comparison to Oprah. "That's my mama!," Tyra protests loyally at the buzz. She was a "youth correspondent" on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* between 1999 and 2000, and considers the still-reigning queen of daytime a mentor. "I've learned the most from watching her," she tells me. "And Charlie Rose."

"What are you insecure about?" she asks Janet, near the end of their interview. She clearly studied hard at Oprah University.

"I never found myself attractive," says Jackson. (She has a new, svelte body to show off and a new album—*20 Y.O.*—coming out, and looks luminous in a skintight black dress.) "I looked in the mirror and I immediately started crying."

"Well, I think you're absolutely beautiful," says Tyra with a reassuring squeeze. Janet smiles gratefully. Tyra's audience goes crazy.

"She's down-home," a woman from Minneapolis says of Tyra, after the show. "She's someone I could hang out with."

One morning, early, before a day of taping shows, Tyra arrives at La Conversation, a café in West Hollywood. She's wearing yoga pants, a Windbreaker, a tight black scarf on her head—the first two are freebies, she tells me. "I'm cheap," she's often said on her show.

Her income last year was reportedly \$18 million. Her Bankable Productions also owns 25 percent of *America's Next Top Model*, which is currently

syndicated in 110 countries around the globe, but she won't reveal her net worth. "Sometimes I feel guilty for how much money I have," she tells me.

She grew up middle-class in L.A.—her mom was a medical photographer, her dad a computer consultant—and now lives alone in an apartment in Beverly Hills. No boyfriend at the moment. "I swear, I swear, I swear."

She orders and eats a full plate of pancakes, sausage, and eggs as we chat. "Food," she says, "is like really, really important to me." Although narrow-bodied and slim, she is, as she often reminds fans, 30 pounds heavier than the average model, with a perfect ice-cream scoop of a behind. She's said she has "issues" with it.

"I have had cellulite for so long," she shared on her blog, at tyrashow.com. "I HATE IT!!! Back in my modeling days, I'd be on the set with Gisele Bündchen and she'd be in a G-string with smooth thighs and a muscle booty and I'd be sooooo jealous. She'd jump up and down and her booty still wouldn't

FOR EXCLUSIVE VIDEO FROM THE TYRA BANKS PHOTO SHOOT, GO TO [VF.COM](http://VF.COM).

LEFT: DRESS BY OSCAR DE LA RENTA; SHOES BY MANOLO BLAHNIK; RIGHT: DRESS BY MOSCHINO; SLEEP MASK BY MARY GREEN; FOR DETAILS, SEE CREDITS PAGE

CONTINUED ON PAGE 186

# Renard Memo

government paid 100 percent of all health costs, so that all Americans can look as good as Speaker Pelosi."

I'm still efforting this one. I'll try to work something up on the 16-hour plane ride back home.

(4) Faith-Based Gambling. (Clients: Gaming Ministries of America; Christian Casinos Corp.)

Part of the problem is that our late, lamented colleague Jack Abramoff—did we send him a holiday card?—seems to have given gambling a bad name. (B.T.W., let's watch those e-mails. Please don't refer to our beloved clients as "monkeys" or "morons" or "Cro-Magnons," O.K.?)

But, that said, let's not overlook the fact that our new best friend, Senate majority leader Harry Reid, is from—drumroll, please—the great state of Nevada.

The problem is, our clients' churches, with their basement slot machines and roulette tables, aren't located in Nevada. As soon as we get back, I'm going to propose to the clients that they immediately open churches in Nevada. (Nothing big. They don't have to be "mega," just a chapel, as long as there's a blackjack table or keno board.) Then let's see how the majority leader feels about tax

exemptions for church-based gaming revenues. And then we hit him up for a national church-gambling policy.

So much for existing accounts.

We also need to get out there and bring in new clients. I know that I'm the chief rainmaker here, and I'm dancing as fast as I can. But rest assured that every one of you is part of the same inclement-weather system. (I'm using a figure of speech.)

Not so long ago, we could afford to pick and choose our clients. Last year I was approached by the C.E.O. of some company out in California that had devised a way of turning kelp (the stuff sea lions use to floss with) into high-protein food. He wanted our help getting NASA interested in the stuff so they could feed it to astronauts. (Three-two-one-ignition-vomit, but whatever.) I said to the guy, sort of archly, "Well, that's all really fascinating but not exactly what we do here at Renard."

Anyway, the second thing I do after we get back from this—let's be honest—hellhole is call him up and tell him that Renard is going to put its best team, its top thinkers, on getting his disgusting kelp biscuits to be the official food of the first manned mission to Mars. We're going to make kelp the Tang of the New Millennium. (Joe, Marcy: see me soonest on this—must be an F.D.A. angle here...)

We've all heard a lot about the big changes coming. But there's an old French saying that goes, "The more things change, the more we will need lobbyists."

Sure it's the Democrats' turn up there. For now. In the meantime, what's really changed?

The Democrats didn't just land here in a spaceship. They're people, though Republicans are better at reaching for the dinner check.

If you prick them, do they not bleed?

Aren't they too already running for reelection and in desperate need of campaign funds?

Don't they too need bridges to nowhere?

Are the words "earmark" and "Democrat" mutually exclusive? I don't think so.

Somewhere up there on the Hill are Democratic Randy Cunninghams, Bob Neys, and Tom DeLays—just waiting to be introduced to our clients.

So let's make it happen, people. If we do, then this time next year, when we hold our annual retreat, you'll be sucking up margaritas somewhere in Scottsdale on your way to a hot-stone massage instead of trying to explain to someone who doesn't speak English that you've just been attacked by some bat that damn well ought to be endangered and where can you find the antivenin, and, *por favor*, hurry! □

## Tyra Banks



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 170 dimple up!" On one episode of *The Tyra Banks Show* Tyra even bared her own "dimple booty" (in black panties) to show her audience it wasn't flawless.

"I want the shows to provide social commentary," she tells me over breakfast. "The shows I'm producing aren't just hair and makeup and 'Oh, your heart is broken'—it's racism and inter-racial dating. One thing is beauty and body image... I feel like it's my responsibility to do something about it because I was in fashion for so long projecting an image that's so hard to live up to. An image that is manipulated and tweaked.

"I feel like I have a responsibility. I really, really do. I don't even know if I have a choice—it's just like this is what I'm supposed to do.

And I try to be as naked with my guests as possible. I try to show them what I look like without my makeup, and it's quite different.

"I even touched up myself a little bit for you so you wouldn't be like, Oh, she walked in here, she had dark circles under her eyes."

Her green-green eyes still look tired. She does 185 shows a year.

In one episode of *The Tyra Banks Show*, entitled "My Breasts Are a Burden," a Beverly Hills plastic surgeon gave women breast exams "to see what he could do to help." In another episode, Tyra herself underwent a sonogram to "put a decisive end to the rumors" that she had breast implants. "I got fake hair, y'all. I got fake eyelashes," she told viewers.

In another episode, "Panty Party," Tyra and her audience exuberantly stripped down to their bras and panties (a scene you probably won't see on *Oprah*) to get an "expert's" advice on their underwear selection. "The va-jay-jay"—vagina—has "gotta... breathe!" counsels the *Tyra Banks Show* Web site.

"I really do like going undercover," she says of the shows where she has posed as a fat woman, a homeless person, a stripper (although she wouldn't strip), and a man. "We'll do a lot of things with social experiments. So it's more social commentary right now," she says again.

Tyra is on a "mission," she says. She even

has a "Mission Statement," which her Endeavor agent, Nancy Josephson, later e-mails to me: "It's important to make people feel good, to show compassion, to be uplifting," it says, which all seems rather at odds with the message of *America's Next Top Model*, still Tyra's more successful show.

*America's Next Top Model*, which Tyra brought to UPN in 2003, was the flagship program for the launch of the CW network (created through a merger of UPN and the WB last year). If you happen to have missed it, unlike untold millions from Minneapolis to Malaysia, it's a reality-style competition in which a group of aspiring young models, handpicked by Tyra, live together in a stylish residence (decorated by Tyra with blown-up photographs of Tyra everywhere) and compete in a series of grueling and often humiliating challenges (posing with live snakes, or in freezing water, or naked), conceived of by Tyra, after which they are evaluated by a panel of judges, helmed by Tyra, with the goal of becoming... the next Tyra.

The Tyra of *A.N.T.M.* is an exacting diva styled in heavy makeup and *Dynasty*-ish getups for whom greatness in modeling is something akin to virtuosity in piano playing. And she is Vladimir Horowitz. She has told young models, "The texture of your skin

# Tyra Banks

she says, "I was like, Oh my God, it's going to be so much easier now because they're going to see my personality and see that I'm normal and goofy and fart, and so I'll knock down that veneer of the supermodel."

She pauses for emphasis. "It's worse... I always tell a guy that I'm dating: I don't need you, I want you. But a lot of them are like"—alarmed face—"I want you to need me. I don't want you to want me!"

I think, but don't say, that maybe Tyra's true romance now is with the young women of America.

She says, of her audience, "I'm trying to get them interested in issues. Things that affect their future, you know? My talk show has totally changed me and opened me. I used to just be about being a good role model and helping women, but I didn't realize in the vast way that I could do it. It's made me more aware.

"I'm addicted to Jon Stewart now!" she says. "And I even watch Bill O'Reilly. And I would never in a million years watch that stuff. I wasn't an idiot, where I was totally closed off, but this has just really opened my eyes.

"You don't understand," Tyra says. "Just a year ago I was a model, you know what I'm saying? Walking down the runway in my

friggin' panties for Victoria's Secret." (She officially retired in 2005.) "And now *Time* magazine is saying I'm one of the most influential people in the world?" She mugs as if taken aback.

"I've definitely grown up this year," says Tyra. "I'm feeling like more of a woman. I don't know if I felt like a woman before I started this talk show. I had this girl thing. But with this show, I'm like, You know what? I'm not a girl. I'm a woman and I need to start acting like one, start opening my eyes to the world."

And with that, she gets into her chauffeured car and goes home.

She says she still has a lot of work to do. □

# John McCain



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 162 modifying his views—going into reverse evolution.

"Yes, he's a social conservative, but his heart isn't in this stuff," one former aide told me, referring to McCain's instinctual unwillingness to impose on others his personal views about issues such as religion, sexuality, and abortion. "But he has to pretend [that it is], and he's not a good enough actor to pull it off. He just can't fake it well enough."

When it comes to the rough-and-tumble of practical politics, as opposed to battles over political principle, McCain's apparent compromises are just as striking. Six years ago, McCain was livid when Sam and Charles Wyly, a pair of Texas businessmen friendly with the Bush campaign, spent \$2.5 million on a nominally independent advertising effort attacking McCain. He called them "Wyly coyotes," and implored an audience in Boston to "tell them to keep their dirty money in the state of Texas." This time, McCain accepted money from the Wyllys. The Wyllys gave McCain's Straight Talk America political-action committee at least \$20,000, and together with other family members and friends they chaired a Dallas fund-raiser for the PAC. (The Wyly money was later returned because the brothers have become the subject of a federal investigation.) In 2000, McCain denounced the Reverend Jerry Falwell—and others like him—as "agents of intolerance." Last spring McCain gave the commence-

ment address at Falwell's Liberty University.

Two years ago, McCain was unsparing in his criticism of the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, who slimed his friend and fellow Vietnam veteran John Kerry. Kerry felt close enough to McCain at the time to make multiple and serious inquiries about McCain's interest in running for vice president on a national-unity ticket (and McCain basked in the courtship, even if he knew nothing could ever come of it). So the alacrity with which McCain joined in demanding an apology from Kerry—whose "botched joke" last fall about George Bush's intellect came out as a slur against American troops in Iraq—was surprising, if not unseemly. Once upon a time, the two friends would have talked about the issue privately, and McCain might well have given Kerry his frank advice. As of mid-November, they had not spoken since McCain's statement condemning Kerry's "insensitive, ill-considered, and uninformed remarks"—which McCain once again read from a piece of paper, by the way. When I asked McCain if he thought Kerry was really trying to insult the troops, he answered only indirectly, and with some annoyance: "I accepted it when he said, 'I botched a joke,' O.K.?"

The battle between Bush and McCain in 2000 was bitter, with Bush supporters in South Carolina spreading rumors that McCain was insane and that he had fathered a black child. (McCain and his wife, Cindy, are the adoptive parents of a girl from Bangladesh.) Bush and McCain traded insults involving each other's moral standing. A year later, with bad feeling still so high that strategist John Weaver had been virtually blackballed from working in Republican politics, Weaver went so far as to sound out Democratic Senate leaders about the possibility of having McCain caucus with them. This would have put the Senate, then divided 50-50, into Democratic control. Aides to two senior Senate Democrats say it was

never clear how serious McCain himself was about the proposal, and any possibility that it might actually happen was short-circuited when another Republican, James Jeffords, of Vermont, made the move first, in 2001.

That was then, when memories of the Bush camp's gruesome, dishonest attacks on McCain were still fresh. When I asked McCain how a rapprochement with Bush could ever have been achieved, he began by saying, "For 10 days I wallowed," then made it clear that the best balm was his realization that the campaign had raised his stature. "We came out of the campaign, even though losing, enhanced nationally, with a lot of opportunities in the Senate legislatively, with more influence, and eventually, if necessary, to be able to go at it again." Whatever the psychic or political specifics, the ultimate result was the celebrated McCain-Bush campaign hug of 2004, in which McCain found himself enveloped in a back-wrapping embrace and upside-the-head smooch. Since that moment McCain has borrowed from the Bush political playbook, aiming to make himself the prohibitive front-runner for the 2008 primaries, and happily snapping up former Bush aides and supporters from key states such as Iowa and New Hampshire, including Terry Nelson, an Iowan and political director of the 2004 Bush campaign. Nelson, now a private consultant in Washington, approved the most widely condemned negative ad of the 2006 midterms, produced by a quasi-independent group financed by the Republican National Committee and aimed at the black Democratic Senate candidate in Tennessee, Harold Ford Jr. In the ad, a sultry white actress says she had once met Mr. Ford at a "Playboy party," then cradles her outstretched thumb and little finger to her ear and coos, "Harold, call me." After the ad sparked an uproar it was taken off the air. Given the racially charged campaign of innuendo deployed against McCain by Bush supporters six years ago, and McCain's outrage at such tactics, the McCain camp's