

Adventure continues in Las Vegas for 'Land of the Lost' star

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January 1, 2012 - 2:03am

All roads lead to Las Vegas. Even the one from "Land of the Lost."

Just ask Kathleen Coleman, who dodged reptilian green Sleestaks and assorted dinosaurs while portraying wholesome, pigtailed Holly Marshall on the kids' TV favorite in the mid-'70s.

Coleman, 49, has been a Southern Nevada resident for only a few months, but her introduction to Las Vegas took place in 1972 -- when she was 10 years old and singing with the Mike Curb Congregation, a pop group that opened at the Riviera for Burt Bacharach.

It took Coleman long enough to make it back to Las Vegas, but she's now eager to make herself at home.

To that end, this month she joins the personal-appearance rotation at Art of Music's locations inside Mandalay Bay, The Mirage, the Monte Carlo and Planet Hollywood Resort.

A veteran on the celebrity autograph circuit, Coleman also participated in November's Hollywood Show: Vegas, held at Harrah's.

"You can't believe how much ('Land of the Lost') meant to people," Coleman says. "You were their crush."

And fans who willingly pay \$20 for each autograph tell Coleman "how much I was their girl," she notes. "You got your Marcia Bradys" -- as played by Maureen McCormick on "The Brady Bunch" -- "and I had my crew."

These days, at personal appearances, "they bring me games and toys and books and coloring books" they've been collecting since "Land of the Lost's" initial 1974-76 NBC run.

"One guy handed me a baseball, and I told him 'I don't play baseball,' but he said, 'Just sign it,' " Coleman says with a chuckle. "I don't care if you want to bring me a broom -- I'll sign it."

A green-gilled, bug-eyed Sleestak head accompanies Coleman on her autograph sessions, providing another reminder of her signature role on "Land of the Lost."

The brainchild of "H.R. Pufnstuf" creators Sid and Marty Krofft, "Land of the Lost" detailed the adventures of ranger Rick Marshall (played by Spencer Milligan) and his kids Will (Wesley Eure) and Holly, who are white-water rafting when "the greatest earthquake ever known" (to quote the show's theme song) zaps them into the title realm, where they meet not only dinosaurs but the furry, "missing-link"-like Pakuni -- and the perpetually menacing Sleestaks.

Before joining the show, Coleman -- the youngest of 10 children -- made dozens of television commercials and did two national tours with the Mike Curb Congregation.

"I was a ball of fire as a kid," she recalls. And when people told her mother she should be in show business, her mother acted on the suggestion.

"It's not an easy life, being in showbiz," Coleman reflects, remembering leaving the house at 4 a.m. to get to the studio. With schoolwork to do and lines to learn -- plus time in the makeup chair and on the set -- "my day didn't stop until about midnight."

Still, there was adventure aplenty as she and her co-stars explored caves, jungles and other make-believe realms, shooting scripts written by some of the same sci-fi writers who worked on the original "Star Trek."

She and co-star Eurythmics, who contributed commentary to the show's DVD release, shot cameo appearances for the 2009 big-screen spoof starring Will Ferrell, but their scenes were cut from the final release.

Which suited Coleman fine, considering how disappointing the movie version turned out to be for her -- and for fans of the original show.

"Parents took their kids, thinking it was wholesome" -- and were unprepared for the adult language and suggestive humor, Coleman says of the movie, which ended up "winning" Razzie Awards for worst movie and worst actor.

"Don't blame me," she says. "I wound up on the cutting-room floor."

Coleman prefers to remember the original; part of the fun of those "Land of the Lost" years came from acting alongside her real-life best friend Philip Paley, who played the youngest Pakuni, Cha-Ka.

Even now, "I talk to him all the time," Coleman says, noting that he's "on his way to becoming a lawyer."

Coleman, meanwhile, is on her way to putting down roots in Las Vegas following the breakup of a 12-year relationship, which prompted her move from Southern California.

With several family members in the area, Las Vegas seemed a likely relocation spot -- but it's not the first time she's been a Nevada resident.

Coleman was 14 when "Land of the Lost" ended its initial run.

And while "I landed a few jobs" following the show, she recalls, she found herself competing with 18-year-olds who could play younger teens -- and didn't have to abide by child labor rules.

By the time Coleman turned 18, she "got married and started having babies right away." Her 19-year-old spouse was a member of the Bell family, one of Southern California's most prominent; his grandfather founded Bel-Air and his father was a longtime congressman.

But the family also owned a large dairy and hog farm in Fallon, where Coleman and her husband relocated -- until, after five years, they broke up.

When she left, Coleman took her two sons with her, although they remained close to the Bell family.

"The kind of richness they gave to us, you can't pull that out of a wallet," Coleman says of the "close-knit, loving family."

A second, "very violent" marriage took Coleman to Mexico -- another chapter of a life she details in "a doozy" of a memoir she titles "The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing But the Truth -- So Help Me, Kathleen."

She and her sister Colleen, who serves as her manager, are looking for a publisher, Coleman notes.

In the book, "I talk very candidly" about life in and out of show business, she says. (One of her sons followed her into show business; he's a rap musician known as 40 Keys.)

"It's a very up and down kind of business," Coleman says of performing. "One minute you're real hot -- and the next minute you're not."

This may be one of those "not" times, but Coleman's hoping that will change -- in part with the help of local cosmetic dentist Joseph Willardsen , who's donating his services to help restore her signature smile.

After all, "her smile is such a trademark," Willardsen says -- as he well knows, recalling how, as a kid, he watched her on TV "all the time."

And while "it's hard not to call her Holly," he admits, Willardsen is glad to discover that the woman behind the smile he remembers so well is "just a really nice person."

A person who's "eager to get busy in this town and get some work and get connected," Coleman says. "I'm kind of starting from scratch."

But she's hardly the only one who remembers her "Land of the Lost" exploits.

During a recent visit to a local deli, she notes, comedian Louie Anderson spotted her and immediately greeted her as "Holly! From 'Land of the Lost'!"

Proving that, perhaps, she's back from the "Land of the Lost" for good.

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