

HANGING WITH ...

Samantha Harris

The E! reporter and cohost of "Dancing With the Stars" goes medieval at King Richard's Faire

BY MEREDITH GOLDSTEIN
GLOBE STAFF

Samantha Harris has the look and poise of a beauty queen when she appears in designer gowns on "Dancing With the Stars."

But she has a secret: She's a renaissance-festival geek.

She spent her formative years speaking old English, wearing chain mail, and hanging out with overly dramatic theater types in tights.

"I always wanted to be with the gypsies," Harris says of the fall weeks she used to spend in Carver at King Richard's Faire. "I would lure the little boys out of their seats."

Last week, Harris kicked off her second season hosting the Emmy-nominated "Dancing With the Stars," an ABC hit that matches minor celebrities such as Jerry Springer and Vivica Fox with professional dancers.

Just a few weeks ago she was walking the red carpet at the Emmys (which she has covered in past years as a correspondent for E!), and

now, on a chilly Saturday in early September, she's the star attraction at King Richard's Faire.

Harris's parents, a dancer and a rock promoter, started the fair 25 years ago, and each fall the family would travel from their home in Minnesota to Carver to run the show. Her dad, Richard Shapiro was the original King Richard and ran the show until he died 10 years ago. Now her mom, Bonnie Harris-Shapiro, runs the renaissance fair, and every fall, Harris and her older sister, Aimee Shapiro Sedley, come to Carver to help.

When they were teenagers, they worked the stands. Harris also used to work the crowd with the gypsies and mingle with the wenches and the royals. At the same time, she was sending out photos, trying to win magazine modeling competitions and get a career going in Los Angeles.

Now a television success, Harris, who says she's "somewhere around 30," is making a cameo on this day in a new fair show called "Dancing With the Czars." To

the jousts and jesters who have watched her grow up, she's just another ren-fair regular.

"Blah, blah, blah," says Arthur Morrison, a man in tights and a beret who interrupts Harris's conversation with another man in tights just to mock her.

"He's hilarious. He's a mud beggar," Harris says of

Morrison, who was recruited by Harris's parents in the early '80s and has been traveling the renaissance fair circuit ever since.

On the walk across the fairgrounds, Harris says she's happy to be out of Los Angeles for a weekend. South Shore native Kate Bosworth was on her flight to Boston, and the two debated if they would be



Harris (left), whose parents started King Richard's Faire, chats up



PHOTOS BY VICTORIA AROCHO FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

... chats up a group of children and dances with King Richard (at right) during "Dancing With the Czars."

allowed to bring frozen yogurt on the plane. "She's dating my boyfriend," Harris says, joking about Orlando Bloom. In reality, Harris is married to a businessman named Michael.

Harris is unfazed by the fact that she's surrounded by audience members dressed in madrigal costumes. This is normal at King Richard's Faire.

At lunchtime, she and her sister pass up the big turkey legs and go for chicken sandwiches at the Castlegate Grill. Harris asks for just chicken — no bun. "There's the difference. I get butter on my corn. She just has chicken," Sedley says.

Harris defends herself, saying she'd rather have a plain chicken breast and

spend quality time at the fair's bakery. She can't have it all because of her television gig, and it's not easy. She was a kid who liked to eat raw butter, after all. "I used to drink half-and-half," she says.

After lunch, it's time to get ready for her second performance of "Dancing With the Czars."

"I'll time you," says Sedley,



who used to trick her little sister into doing something by saying she'd time her.

Little has changed at the fair since she was a kid, Harris says. Her mother sold the Chicago fair her parents started before they launched King Richard's in Carver, but the family's routine in Massachusetts has continued. And even though Harris's celebrity status has climbed, she isn't above this theme park of a place. She's proud her mother didn't let it go after her father's death.

"It's a big endeavor," Harris says. "She could have let it end with him and she didn't."

Behind the main stage, Harris hangs with the "Czars" cast. Out front, performers sing "We Are Royalty" to the tune of "We Are Family."

Harris primps herself for her entrance, which is bound to surprise the folks in the audience who don't know a television personality is in town for the fair. Little do they know that long before she began her reign on the small screen, she was King Richard's princess.

Meredith Goldstein can be reached at mgoldstein@globe.com.