

CosmoGIRL! of the Year

Our fourth annual awards celebrate girls who have reached out to better their world. Let them inspire you!
By Joanne Gordon and Lauren Brown

Know that feeling you get when a cool idea pops into your head—but you're hesitant to *really* latch onto it? Maybe you think it's too silly or insignificant—or you're afraid people won't take you seriously if you tell them about it. Well, each of the girls who make up our latest crop of CosmoGIRLs of the Year had a fleeting thought. But instead of forgetting about it, they followed through—and turned it into an amazing reality.

Not only did every girl you're about to meet make one of her dreams come true, she also reached beyond herself and nurtured *other* people's souls. And it's that sense of self—

being so true to who you are and what you think that you can't *help* but affect the world around you—that makes someone a true CosmoGIRL!

Each of us (yes, including you!) has a unique gift to offer. And if you have the desire to share it, the focus to develop it, and the tenacity to stick with it, any doubts you may have about what your gift *is* will melt away. So the next time you have a great idea, think of these girls and remember that following your heart doesn't just benefit you—it ripples out to help the entire world. →

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CosmoGIRL! of the Year

THE LEADER

name: Kirsten Dunst **age:** 21

hometown: Point Pleasant, New Jersey

why she’s a CosmoGIRL!: With a starring role opposite Julia Roberts in *Mona Lisa Smile*, Kirsten makes the leap to full-fledged leading lady—on her own terms.

“I remember on the set of the first *Spider-Man*, the crew used to always call me ‘girlie girl’—not Kirsten. And it was easy to be that kind of girl and not have to worry about things. I think maybe it was just the laziness of not wanting to know the deals, the money, and having to read a whole lot of scripts. I used to work, work, work so I didn’t have to deal with things, but now I’m becoming more of a woman in every way in my life.

“This year, I fell in love. And when you fall in love, it just makes you so much more aware of *everything*. I used to feel like I had to be the best at everything, but now I’m more secure. And when I work on projects, I get more involved now than I used to. Because it’s about having control—and when you have control, you emanate it, you just put it out there. Then people don’t want to mess with you. I didn’t have control when I was being called ‘girlie girl.’ But I finally realized that, so one day on set, I said, ‘I have a name—it’s Kirsten.’ And they didn’t call me ‘girlie girl’ after that.

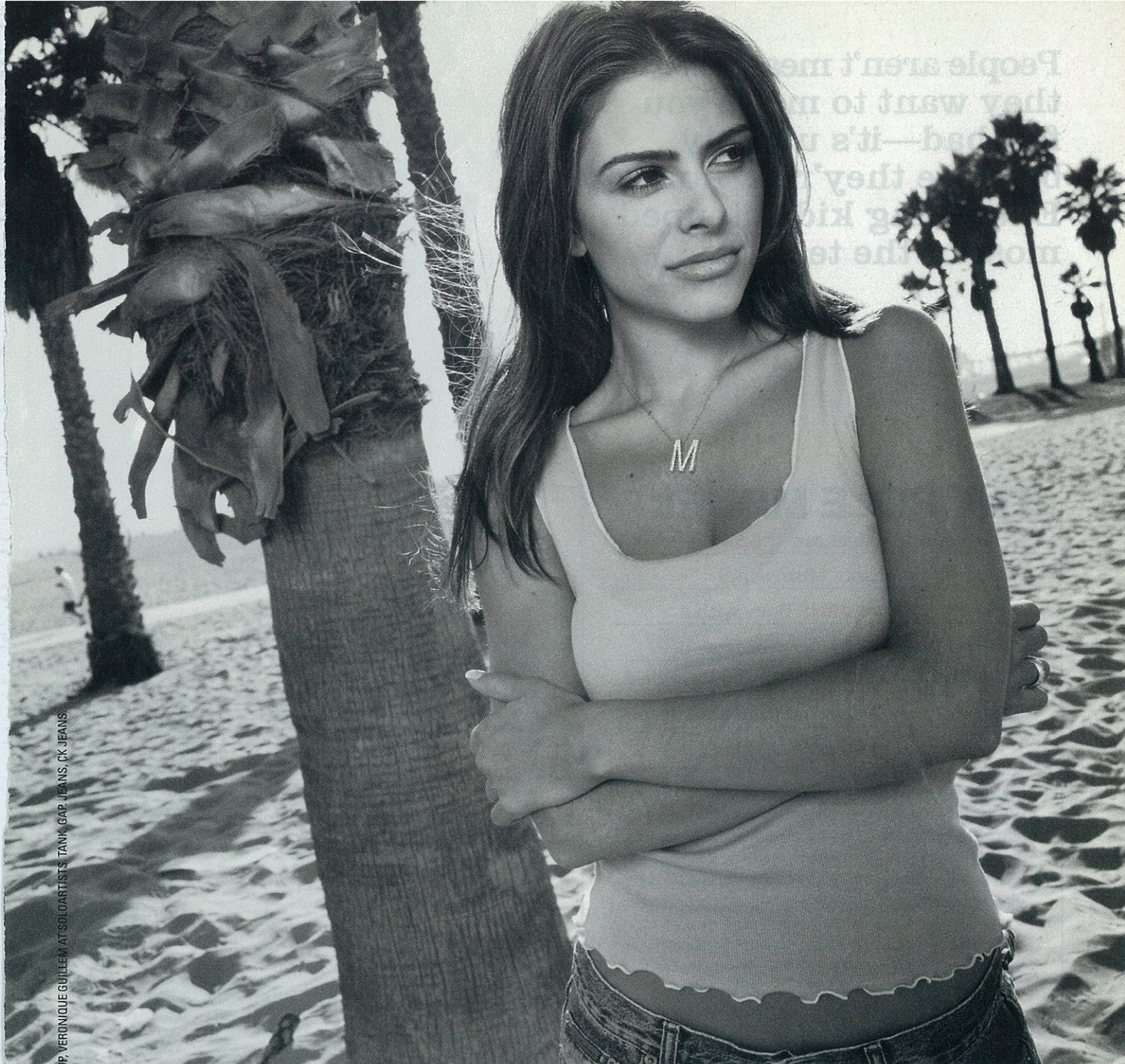
“Since then, I’ve talked to women like Gwyneth Paltrow and Kate Winslet because they’re actresses who I really respect and who have grown up in this business. I feel like I can call them up and say, ‘Listen, I’m going through such and such—what did *you* do?’ When I went back to do the second *Spider-Man*, I built a better relationship with the director, I got to know everybody better, and I just felt better being on the set. And I think that’s all just a part of becoming a woman.” →



Win a Born to Lead T-shirt signed by Kirsten at cosmogirl.com! See page 164 for details.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GEORGE HOLZ





SITTINGS EDITOR, LISA WONG; HAIR, CRAIG GANGI AT SOLOARTISTS; MAKEUP, VERONIQUE GUILLEM AT SOLOARTISTS; TANK, GAP; JEANS, CK

CosmoGIRL! of the Year

THE VISIONARY

name: Maria Menounos **age:** 25

hometown: Medford, Massachusetts

why she's a CosmoGIRL!: The host of *ET*

on MTV/VH1 created Take Action

Hollywood!, a charity that makes movies

about social issues to encourage reform.

"In 2000, as a reporter for Channel One in Los Angeles, I went to South Africa to cover the AIDS crisis and visited a children's orphanage. The next day, a baby with AIDS whom I'd spent time with died. Seeing that tiny casket, I kept thinking about how little love that baby had gotten—and I wondered how I could help prevent other kids from suffering like that. I had always wanted to start my own charity, and my first thought was a clothing drive. But then I started thinking about what my talents were. I had produced a film in college, and I knew that movies, because they reach a large audience, can really promote change. So I created Take Action Hollywood! Our first film is about AIDS, and my goal is to raise as much awareness about the disease as possible." →

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CosmoGIRL! of the Year

THE REALIST

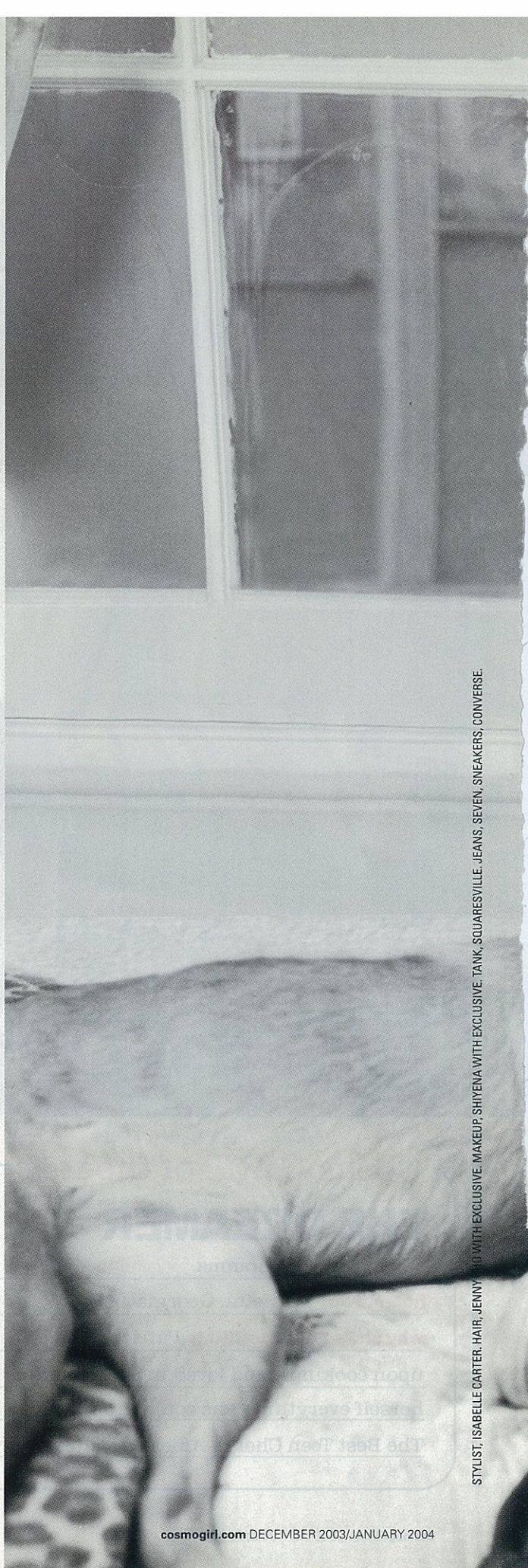
name: Nikki Reed **age:** 15

hometown: Los Angeles, California

why she's a cosmoGIRL!: Nikki cowrote and starred in the award-winning movie *Thirteen*—based on the darkest time in her life—and helped others know that they're not alone.

"When I was 13, I felt pressure to be perfect, but perfection to me basically meant whatever I *wasn't*. Like, I would look at someone's nose and think, Why can't I have that nose? It's perfect—so mine must not be. I didn't understand the concept of looking in the mirror and being happy with what I saw. My whole identity used to be about the people I hung out with. But they made me unhappy, and I became depressed—and I didn't know why. It was like a math problem where you *know* you have the wrong answer, but you still can't figure out the right one. People forget how painful insecurity is when you're growing up. They think it's about surface things, but it's much deeper.

"Watching girls cry during *Thirteen* because of things the character Tracy says to her mom was like a big slap in the face. I was like, Wow! I had no idea that what I was doing every single day could have such an effect on people. Before the movie came out, I had hoped that girls around the world would relate to the film, but I had no idea that girls standing right next to me went through the same things that I did—because we were all so private about it. But girls I hadn't talked to since I was 5 called me up after seeing the movie to tell me how much they related to it. I remember that my uncle once told me, 'You choose how you feel.' It didn't make sense to me at the time. I was like, 'No, I don't.' But now I see that if you're so worried about what everyone around you is thinking, they see it—it's written all over your face. And if you're happy inside, people respect it. So now I make that choice inside to be happy." →



STYLIST, ISABELLE CARTER; HAIR, JENNY; MAKEUP, SHIYENA WITH EXCLUSIVE; TANK, SQUAREVILLE; JEANS, SEVEN; SNEAKERS, CONVERSE.