

MODELS *of* CANADA

REAL TALK WITH LIZ BELL: BUILDING A CAREER, A COMMUNITY, AND A LEGACY IN FASHION



From being scouted as a young waitress freshly arrived in Canada, to strutting the catwalks of New York and Europe during the iconic fashion era of the 1980s, Liz's entry into the modeling world was anything but conventional. What started as a chance encounter turned into a thriving international career and later, a powerful role behind the scenes as one of Canada's leading modeling agents.

Her story is one of transformation, perseverance, and deep respect for an industry that, while glamorous on the surface, demands grit, patience, and heart.

In this exclusive Models of Canada interview, Liz pulls back the curtain on her journey, sharing the magic and the mess, the wins and the wake-up calls. She reflects on how the fashion landscape has shifted over the decades, what it takes to truly make it in the business today, and why modeling is far more than just a "pretty" job. With a memoir on the way and a roster of rising stars under her wing, Liz is on a mission to instill authenticity, gratitude, and passion in a fast-paced, ever-evolving world.

Whether you're an aspiring model, a curious fashion fan, or someone chasing their own unconventional dream, Liz's words offer a refreshing mix of real talk and inspiration reminding us all that success is about more than being seen. It's about showing up, standing out, and staying true to who you are.



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Models of Canada: Liz, can you take us back to the moment you decided to pursue a career in the fashion industry? What was that defining moment for you?

Liz: It was January 1982 and I had just moved to Canada from South Africa. I was planning on going to art school, but was scouted by an agent as I worked as a waitress, and the rest is history.

Models of Canada: The fashion industry has seen a lot of changes over the years. From your perspective, how has the landscape of modeling and fashion shifted, especially in Canada?

Liz: The 80's I felt were the heyday of modelling. Models were divided into show models and print models, with a little crossover. I was a show girl and did the circuit of fashion weeks in Europe and New York every season. The fashion world was out there and not in Canada. Toronto did have the Festival of Fashion, where all the big Canadian designers showed and Canadian models like me walked in all those shows. The likes of Alfred Sung, Clothesline and others I can't remember.

Models of Canada: What are some of the most important lessons you've learned in your journey within the fashion world, and how have those lessons shaped your approach to working with models today?

Liz: I have actually just finished writing my memoir which speaks to all of these questions. In retrospect I realize what a truly incredible opportunity modelling was and still is. You get to visit cities as someone on the inside and not being there as a tourist. You are welcomed into the cabins and studios of the top casting directors and designers. This is such a luxury and an honour.

Models of Canada: As a leading agent, what motivates you every day to keep pushing forward, even when facing challenges or setbacks in the industry?

Liz: I have to be honest; I have always found it hard as an agent to impart this sense of awe to a lot of the models getting into the industry. It's kind of like "You don't get it or appreciate it till it is all over." It is a unique opportunity, that requires so much patience, trust in the process and letting go. I mean that in the sense of relaxing into the way the fashion world works. The easier going and "cooler" you are, the more the clients will love you and want to work with you all day long.

Models of Canada: The fashion industry can sometimes be seen as cutthroat and highly competitive. How do you maintain a balance between ambition and compassion when managing your models and your team?

Liz: Everything is competitive in life, and a model has just won the genetic lottery, but there is so much more. Nobody is interested in just a pretty face... you must have more going on. You need to have personality, being altruistic, humble and not to mention, fun to be around. And as I say every single day "we don't make money till a model makes money" which sounds like the worst business model.... But it is true!! So of course we take on a model we believe in. Believe in their potential, develop them, teach them everything they need to know, and then hopefully international agencies, clients and casting directors get our vision. We want it to work just as much as the model wants it to work.

Models of Canada: What are some of the biggest challenges you've encountered in your career, and how have you overcome them while still staying true to your values and vision for Canadian fashion?

Liz: The challenges I find these days, is that society itself has changed. Now with everything being so immediate and accessible, and with social media being so important, it has made everything all too disposable. The younger generation perhaps doesn't have the patience anymore to wait for things to happen... needing instant gratification instead, and if things don't happen right away, they tend to give up too easily. I get it as there are so many options these days, especially being able to continue your studies online while you are travelling for work. I say you can have it all.

Models of Canada: What role do you believe diversity and inclusivity should play in the future of fashion, and how are you actively fostering that change within the models you represent and the industry as a whole?

Liz: I absolutely love how much the industry has changed for the better. Being more inclusive and diverse has made the job as an agent more exciting as well. In fact, Covid was a really great time for us here in Canada. With the border closed to the US, the clients were unable to bring models in for even the smallest jobs of fittings and unrecognizable shoots.

We were able to show the clients that we had everyone here in Canada they need. We pride ourselves on our diverse roster and are continually looking for that special person we perhaps do not represent already.

Models of Canada: If there's one change you could make to improve the fashion industry in Canada, what would it be and why? How do you believe it would shape the future of the industry?

Liz: Unfortunately, we cannot control what our clients do, but we have so many incredible clients from coast to coast who tend to take their operations to big fashion centers like NYC or LA, once they are established. It seems like they feel Canada is perhaps not the center of the industry. However, I do think things will change, and more clients will return to Canada, or not leave in the first place now that we are dealing with tariffs and are all about buying Canadian products only and Canada Strong!

Models of Canada: In your opinion, where do you see the Canadian fashion industry heading in the next 5 to 10 years? What trends do you think will define its evolution, and how will models and agents be adapting to that shift?

Liz: Canada has always produced so many talented people who are innovative and forward thinking. Here on the West coast, I feel the trend will continue to focus on a lot of outerwear brands, brands that help facilitate people's passion for extreme sports and getting out into the great outdoors and wilderness. We have an athletic division, and therefore are able to facilitate those bookings with clients who are looking for someone with a very particular skill set.

Models of Canada: Has there ever been something you've wanted to share with the public about your role in fashion, your models, or the industry itself that you feel has been misunderstood or under appreciated?

Liz: This is a multi-trillion dollar business, and sometimes the models are perhaps made to feel by their friends and family, that is not a "real Job" that they need to do something else to be taken seriously. For instance, I had a model who had been nominated for the CAFA Awards. A highly coveted and respected nomination. The week before the event they had booked a big job in Europe for tons of money, and in talking with them in a social setting before the awards, they mentioned that they didn't really know what to do for a career. Like modelling was NOT a career, but at the same time they had just earning close to \$100,000 at the young age of 18 or so. This really struck a chord with me, as I never want to try to justify the business, or what we do, or even the great opportunity to set yourself up in life. It's a question of, being too young to understand the opportunity, that so few people ever get in life. I am constantly saying "You can lead a horse to the water, but you can't make them drink."

Models of Canada: For those aspiring to follow in your footsteps, whether they want to become a top model, agent, or industry professional... What advice would you give them that goes beyond just technical skills, but rather focuses on their mindset and personal growth?

Liz: My advice is to be true to yourself, to trust the process, pay your dues, and remember that it is all about reputation, how you treat people and your values in life. Use this business, don't let the business use you.

Written by: Models of Canada