

Lindsey Vuolo



Photos courtesy of Playboy Enterprises

by Aliza Davidovitz

The brunette beauty let the robe slip off her soft bare shoulders and fall to the floor. Confident of her youthful, supple, naked body, Lindsey Vuolo walked gracefully toward the bed and arranged herself in a fetching pose. The camera clicked. She repositioned herself. The camera clicked once again. The 20-year-old siren soon forgot about the five staffers present and her staccato movements eased into a flowing seductive narrative that engaged the photographer into a clicking frenzy. The synergy came to a climax six months later when *Playboy* magazine hit the newsstands and Lindsey Vuolo unfolded as Miss November, 2001, Playmate of the Month.

As readers devour the pictorial delight and peruse the "Playmate Data Sheet," which includes the centerfold's measurements and personal pictures, it may very well be the picture of Lindsey at her bat mitzvah which grabs one's curiosity and has many asking: "What's a nice Jewish girl doing in a magazine like this?"

"Being accepted into *Playboy* is one of the greatest compliments a girl can get," says Vuolo in her own defense, who was chosen from among hundreds of wannabes. But Miss November said that she posed for a much more practical purpose: to pay for college. "It was a great opportunity to finish school and I'd have been crazy not to take it," Vuolo says. She has no regrets.

the bare facts

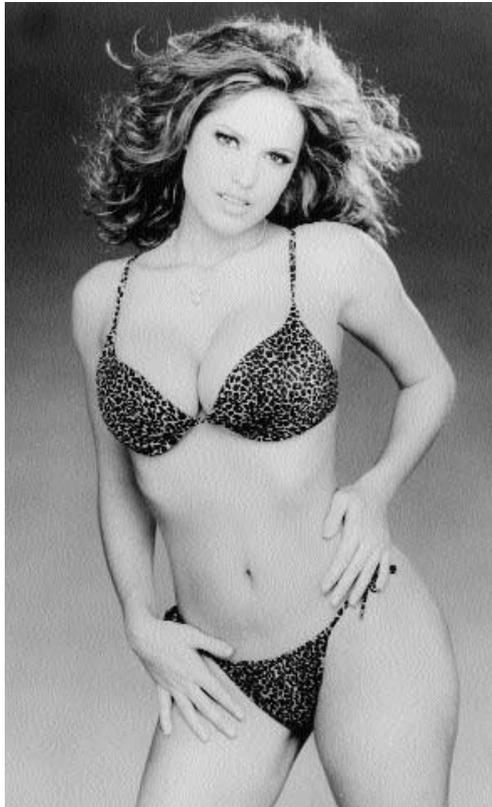
Posing nude in *Playboy*, however, was not Vuolo's idea. It had never even entered her mind. She had been working two jobs as a cocktail waitress to pay for school when one day a fellow co-worker and friend suggested she send in her photos. "I told her she was crazy and I started to laugh," Vuolo recalls. "I didn't think I was *Playboy* material." But her persistent girlfriend urged her on. Vuolo, whose whole modeling career consisted of posing for a local swimsuit calendar, finally consented, but with reluctance. "I told my girlfriend that if she wanted to send in photos of me she could, but I didn't want to know unless they called me." Then one suspicious day, Lindsey Vuolo's phone rang. She had not

only been accepted by *Playboy*, but they wanted to fly her down to Los Angeles for a test photo shoot offering her a shot at being Playmate of the Month.

Without telling her parents, Vuolo was on the next plane to L.A., where she was ushered off to America's most exciting estate, Hugh Hefner's Playboy mansion. There she shared a bedroom with one of Hefner's seven girlfriends, Christi Shake, who is Miss May 2002. Despite the famous parties and tales of the Grotto, Vuolo describes the mansion as "very homey." She also added that Hugh Hefner is one of the nicest people she's ever met.

Vuolo says that Playmates couldn't ask for better accommodations. First thing in the morning Vuolo was off to the mansion's gym where often other hopping, bouncing, kickboxing bunnies begin the day. Next she was off to the showers and sauna to join the other bathing beauties. The Playmates are pampered and their every need is catered to in the self-sufficient paradise. Later in the day, Vuolo was taken by a company driver to the Santa Monica studios where her magical transformation began.

"They create a look for you weeks before you even get there," Vuolo relates. "The girls have little input into what they end up wearing [or not wearing]." Vuolo, who is already a natural beauty, spent three hours in hair and makeup, where she was transformed from a simple college girl into a goddess of male fantasy. "I couldn't believe how beautiful I looked," Lindsay says, "but then I realized makeup was finished, hair was finished, and now I actually had to remove my clothing in front of the makeup artist, the wardrobe person, two lighting men and a photographer." Vuolo says that the photographer was very impressed with her ease and gracefulness in contrast with some other girls who get so nervous they faint. The good word even got back to Hugh Hefner himself who thanked his young bunny for doing such a great job. For the curious, that great job can be seen in the softness, naturalness, and innocence that exude from the pages of her *Playboy* pictorial.



Photos courtesy of Playboy Enterprises

treated the way you deserve to be." He kissed her on the forehead and bid his daughter good luck. "Most kids are going to do what they want anyhow and it's much safer for everyone if parents are open-minded," Vuolo says. "I think sometimes the greatest thing a parent can do is give their children the freedom to make their own mistakes."

But Vuolo herself does not feel that she has made a mistake. Although many would deem her actions sacrilegious, Vuolo is nonetheless proud of her religion and openly talked about her Jewish identity in her *Playboy* interview. She described her 1999 two-week student exchange program in Israel as one of the most wonderful and emotional experiences of her life. Vuolo was so enamored with the Holy Land that she didn't want to go to sleep at night afraid she might miss out on something. She

hadn't anticipated that she would be so moved, but when she got to the Western Wall, she and her girlfriend broke down and started to sob. "Everything I had learned about Israel in Hebrew school and about our people and history was here before my eyes. I regretted all the times I had complained about going to Hebrew school."

But if Vuolo was ready to reconcile her Jewish beliefs with posing in *Playboy*, there was one rabbi who did not let her off the hook so easily. His name is Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, author of the best seller *Kosher Sex*. In a live debate with Vuolo in New York City in December of 2001, Boteach challenged Vuolo with the vehemence of a prosecutor, reducing the 20-year-old woman to tears. Boteach argued that *Playboy* and pornography in general degrades and dehumanizes women and could even lead to things like rape or wife beating. He paralleled pornography with the Nazis process of dehumanization of the Jews, which ultimately led to mass murder. He attempted to prove to Vuolo that *Playboy* used her, saying that she will always and only be

Once Vuolo got back home, she decided to tell her mother what she had really been up to while her mother believed her to be at school at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, where she is studying communications and business. Vuolo told her mother that she had done a test shoot for *Playboy* and that Hugh Hefner had invited her back to the mansion for his 75th birthday party in April. Her mother, whose parents were Hungarian and German Jews, responded quite calmly, "You should do it if it's something you really want to do, but just make sure you're home for Passover."

The harder challenge would be breaking the news to her father. Vuolo remembers sitting in the bleachers at her brother's hockey game in April and telling her father that she wanted to pose for the magazine. "Very funny," he said. "April Fools Day was last week." But when her father realized it was no joke, he became dead silent. The next day, before Vuolo returned to campus, her father had come around. He said, "My only fear is that these people will take advantage of you and you will never be

Miss November, not Miss December, or Miss January or any other month to come.

Vuolo does not regard *Playboy* as pornography, and as she pays her tuition with Hef's money, she is hardly feeling used. In addition, her appearance in *Playboy* has earned her a lot of publicity, interviews and job offers. She receives an enormous amount of fan mail and marriage proposals from none other than Jewish doctors and lawyers. And Vuolo, whose Italian father converted to Judaism, said that she would never marry someone unless they were Jewish.

"I'm terrified that once my maternal grandfather passes away, no one will know how to recite the Passover Haggadah," Vuolo says. "It's very important for me to marry someone who can do that, and that my children know how too." Miss November feels that the older she gets the more she wants religion in her life.

Rabbi Bradley Hirschfield, Vice President of the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, has a rather different view of Vuolo than that of Rabbi Boteach. In an interview with a Beliefnet.com reporter, the rabbi said he admired Vuolo for being proud of her Jewish identity and her determination to marry a Jewish man, things the Jewish community spends tons of money to encourage. He was disappointed that all people were seeing was the negative. The open-minded modern rabbi provocatively added, "[So now] you'll have Jewish men who will go home and [pleasure themselves] to a Jewish girl for a change."

Vuolo's own rabbi, Elliot Stromm, a Reform Rabbi of Shir



Photo by Steve Fern

Lindsey with author and *Lifestyles'* Associate Editor Aliza Davidovitch.

Ami Congregation in Newton, Pennsylvania, refused to comment on her *Playboy* pictorial. He did say that Vuolo is a wonderful young woman whom he likes very much. Rabbi Stromm is the one person that Vuolo hopes did not see the magazine. Somehow it doesn't bother Vuolo that her father saw it, although it did take him some time before he could open it up. She doubts that her two younger brothers aged 13 and 14 saw the photos. But she does know that all her brother's friends did see them and as a result they always want to sleep over when Lindsey is home from school.

No, Vuolo is not the typical Jewish woman. But as an Orthodox man once

told author Dennis Prager, a perfect Jewish woman is a *Playboy* bunny who studies the Talmud. In that case, Vuolo is halfway there. Although she hasn't taken up studying the Talmud quite yet, she did say that she found herself praying a little bit harder on Yom Kippur for God to forgive her if He thinks what she did was wrong. She says that she also prayed for God to give her the strength to face the challenges that lie ahead.

The only negative repercussion for Vuolo has been that people assume her to be something that she's not.

"People stereotype me and think that I'm sexually promiscuous, when in fact I'm quite shy and conservative," Vuolo says. "I'm sure that my boyfriend would like me to be much more like the girl portrayed in the magazine."

In fact, Vuolo says that most people have high expectations of her. "I always feel like I should be wearing makeup and looking a certain way. It's a lot of pressure." Oddly, the *Playmate* admits that she has become much more critical of herself since frequenting Hefner's mansion because she feels the girls there are prettier or skinnier than she is. Standing 5'8", with hourglass measurements of 34-24-35, the 120 pound Vuolo may want to recalculate her self-perception. But

Vuolo also measures herself by other standards. The biggest compliment to the November bunny is when people tell her she is nothing like they expected: she's not a bimbo; she's not a snob; she doesn't drink; she doesn't smoke, and her breasts are real! Still, for many people she will always and only be "Miss November." To those who know better, however, Lindsey Vuolo is an exceptional woman all twelve months of the year. lifestyles



Photos courtesy of Lindsey Vuolo

Lindsey and her parents, Bat Mitzvah, 1994.