

Gossip girl



R.M. VAUGHAN THE Q&A

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 rmvaughan@globeandmail.com

While Hollywood wrings its expensively moisturized hands in frustration with the continuing writers strike, one group of tinsel-dependent workers are gleefully clapping their paws to red, raw stumps: gossip columnists.

Stars with loads of money and access to the best vices are the bread and butter of scandal-mongers, but stars with all the above plus months of time off to misbehave? Bread, butter, jam and a baked ham on the side.

Canada's premiere gossipista, Vancouver-based Elaine (Lainey) Lui, must be working

night and day to keep her very popular (and deliciously vitriolic) celeb-watch blog, *lainey-gossip.com*, up to date. With more than a million monthly visits from Canadians alone, she is the source for everything you don't need to know about celebrities you're not certain you recognize.

In between fits of fevered, expletive-dappled typing, the glamorous Ms. Lui appears regularly on the breathless *eTalk* - CTV's nightly who's-wearing-Paris's-mukluks-to-traffic-court-with-Britney update - and finds time to wag her finger on *Canada AM*, local B.C. newscasts and radio chat shows from coast to coast. With all that muck to sift, imagine her Purell budget.

Where do you get your material?

Well, a lot of it is editorializing. I editorialize on stories I've read in magazines, or on photos I've seen on the paparazzi agencies.

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'There's an appetite out there – gossip is immortal'

So most of the material comes from where most people get their news.

I understand you have a vast network of spies.

A gossip column can't have exclusives every day. But I do have a stable of sources I go to who give me exclusive material.

Is this stable composed of the traditional sources – waiters, bellhops, hotel desk clerks?

Some, but those are more one-offs. The main sources are people who work in the industry, in Hollywood – you know, people working on film sets. And these are people who've come to me after reading my website. When I first started, I had nothing. I have no illusions that I was connected from the beginning.

Do you pay for dirt?

No, I've never paid – in cash. What I do is exchange information. I always say information is currency. So, if I'm working with a source who's going to give me something hot, it's understood that I'm going to feed that source back something that will be useful to them later on.

Have you ever been sued?

Knock on wood, not yet! My website is a separate legal entity from me personally. I've been threatened to be sued, by offended people. When I posted photos, scans from People magazine, of the first photos of Shiloh Jolie-Pitt – I mean, People had a terrible leak, be-



Lui: 'My readers know the difference between fun smut and sad smut. It's my own personal line.'

JOHN LEHMANN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

cause many gossip bloggers got those scans before the magazine hit the stands – I received a really nasty letter from Time Warner. And there have been several celebrities who've been very unhappy with me.

What won't you print?

Well, for instance, I'm not going to talk about Heath Ledger any more.

Hmmm – there was something on your blog the day he died...

Yeah, but it was under the title

"sad smut," and my readers know the difference between fun smut and sad smut. It's my own personal line. For me, he's dead now, so he's no longer fodder for my website. I did mention that there were warnings, and for people who cover entertainment, his death was not a surprise. And then, that's it, I'm not going to write about it any more. I did the same with Anna Nicole Smith. I lost a lot of traffic, I probably made no gains during the entire Anna Nicole fiasco because I refused to write about her, ev-er.

Michael Jackson is not fun to me, either.

One could argue that your covert reference to the nature of Ledger's passing constituted a kind of gloating – you claiming that you predicted it.

Right. I can't control how people interpret my words. I can live with my own standards.

What would you do if a friend or co-worker was suddenly gossip fodder?

If they became a celebrity?

Particulars

ROOTS

Lui grew up in North York. As a kid, she told an interviewer, she would look out for young star Corey Haim at a local restaurant. "This was at the time when he was just starting to break-out, and it was rumoured he went to a nearby high school. For my friends and I it was an absolute guilty pleasure."

SECRETLY SERIOUS

After getting a B.A. at the University of Western Ontario, Lui worked at Toronto's Covenant House (which provides shelter and services to homeless youth).

BIRTH OF A GOSSIP QUEEN

Lui got off to a humble start: The unemployed twentysomething started compiling a gossip report she would e-mail to friends. As her readership grew, she launched her current website just three years ago – and quickly got national and international attention. TV and radio stardom followed.

Well ... your co-worker Ben Mulroney's family has been in the news a lot lately.

No, I wouldn't report on that, because it's not Hollywood-based. My column is celebrities.

So you don't consider yourself or your TV co-hosts celebrities? Aren't you fair game?

I'm fair game. Not because I'm a celebrity, but because I have an opinion and I'm putting it out there. That automatically gives people carte blanche to come and attack me. I've put myself out there, so give 'er.

You appear to have more vitriol for female celebrities than male celebrities.

I don't know that that's true. I think that I've been pretty hard on Tom Cruise. Tom Cruise can equal five female celebrities with the amount I've posted on him! He's No. 1. As much as I hate on female celebrities, I also love on a lot of them. I really liked Katherine Heigl, up until a month ago, when she decided to piss all over the movie that made her a star.

Why do you care? Is it just for the money?

I don't make a lot of money, and it's not an accurate assessment to say I care. This is my business. There's an appetite out there – gossip is immortal. And you have to remember the obsession is not one-sided. Hollywood creates this; they invite the public into the stars' lives. Hollywood understands that the stars are the products, not the movies.