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“Hollywood Hack” – A fascinating book by Robert Kerwin, / Pine Street Press

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By [Adrienne Papp](#)

There's no question that we're living in a celebrity-obsessed culture. Entertainment TV breathlessly chronicles every move of the days' top celebrities, of which there are endless supplies, including detailed information on their personal lives to an apparently insatiable audience.

In Hollywood's "golden age" in the 1930s and 1940s, gossip columnists were courted by the movie studios, so that the studios could use gossip columns as a powerful publicity tool. During this period, the major film studios had "stables" of contractually obligated actors, and the studios controlled nearly

all aspects of the lives of their movie stars. From the 1930s through the 1950s, the two best-known were competing Hollywood gossip columnists [Hedda Hopper](#) and [Louella Parsons](#).

The publicity machine was all very controlled in those days and much of the controversy was kept under wraps, as studios or managers tried to keep the careers of celebrities on the straight and narrow, running interference on any damaging speculative gossip, rumors, innuendo about romantic relationships, affairs, and purported personal problems.

Today it seems to be the opposite. Some stars intentionally create gossips in order to stay in the media and draw attention to themselves. It is also referred to as "Free Publicity" or "No Publicity is Bad Publicity." These are not the stars I personally highly regard, nor do I care for gossip. In fact, I feel that the celeb frenzy about prying into the lives of the "rich and famous" is degrading both to the media / reporter and to the celebrities as well making them into some public property.

The real successful and talented stars know better and ARE better. They do not have the need to be a sensation every day one way or another. Rather they seek a quiet retreat away from work. For them, being on the set at times from 6 am to 2 am is hard work and not celebrity extravaganza that the public perceives. It is interesting how this major gap between reality and imagination has surfaced in recent years.

Yet, the interesting part of our current culture is that television and endless publications, online or in print, make millions of dollars off of the private lives of celebrities! Probably more than the celebrity makes, which is yet another misconception, but kept under the radar? The illusion must stay!

The expression that I always felt was so elegant, exquisite, and righteously descriptive used to be "movie stars" like [Greta Garbo](#), [Elizabeth Taylor](#), or [Ingrid Bergman](#), somehow disappeared to a great degree and "celebrity" took over. It is very little known in America that the expression "celebrity" has a negative connotation to it in most other countries. Nevertheless the fascination is there: seeing a compromising photo of a celebrity, or following a public divorce, mostly based on gossip, is almost "comforting" to the rest of the world. Their beliefs that a celebrity's life is creams 'n peaches chips away little by little through media gossiping shooting through the roof, making everything a "scandal," which in return makes the reader feel that "even celebrities have issues." Oh, what a relief that is!

To me the fascination is not the "celebrity world" but rather the fact that almost none of those scandalous stories we read are true at all. Full features based on real one on one, recorded, interviews with the celebrity are, but none of those end up in gossip columns or "kiss and tell." I believe that no credible journalist would pry into famous people's lives, but rather respect their success and talent to make exceptional movies and be frontrunners for world events. The works involved in getting a movie made is so complex that it falls into the category of miracles from conception to execution. I respect these amazing talents who stand in front of the camera or behind it every day in order to contribute to the lives of us all. True stories made into movies and new discoveries shown on film, whether a documentary or not, is actually educational.

But we've always had this desire to know what these stars are really like, how they differ from their public image and that's why [Robert Kerwin's](#) book "Hollywood Hack" is such an engaging read. [Kerwin](#) got into the business of writing about Hollywood and its stars, and along the way gained unprecedented access to a wide range of personalities from [Mae West](#) to [Tom Cruise](#), including some of the most well-known stars in the world. He is a credible journalist and a fantastic writer who did not look to make a living by gossiping. Rather, he was sought out by studios to interview stars in a very professional capacity. That is why Kerwin's career was a long and respected one until he decided to leave it all behind when the "new

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entertainment culture” started to sneak in and true respect for anything or anyone slowly started to disappear.

Kerwin’s career writing celebrity profiles began, as he describes it, by “fluke.” While watching a PBS show called “Book Beat” hosted by Roger Cromie, Kerwin was inspired to send some of his writing samples to the host in hopes of creating interest in them. Though he eventually declined his submissions, Cromie saw enough promise in the work to forward them over to friends at the [Chicago Tribune](#), who offered some assignments to Kerwin.

Kerwin’s first idea was to get a behind-the-scenes story on the real [Willie Mays](#). After getting access to the San Francisco Giant centerfielder, Kerwin’s experience with Mays turned out to be a disappointment: Mays was unresponsive, virtually ignoring Kerwin. Stomping out of the clubhouse, Kerwin was convinced that the meeting had been a disaster, but typed the story up and sent it to the Times, fully expecting rejection. Instead, they ran the piece as written, loving the way it captured the catatonic Mays, and the irreverent tone that Kerwin had used.

Acareer was born.

The Chicago Tribune then wanted Kerwin to do a profile of [Gene Autry](#), which went much better, as Autry turned out to be a very rich old wrangler who was also a genuine down-to-earth good guy.

Delivering on those interviews launched a career documenting a wide range of entertainers over several decades, and, as it moves from anecdote to anecdote, Kerwin’s book gives us plenty of insider information and behind the scenes looks at people like [Dean Martin](#) (who never really liked interviews), [Diane Keaton](#), [Glen Campbell](#), [The Everly Brothers](#), [Raquel Welch](#) (beauty and brains), [Charles \(Chuck\) Heston](#), [John Wayne](#), the flatulent [William Holden](#), [Lucille Ball](#) and [Katherine Hepburn](#), for publications like [TV Guide](#) and [Modern Screen](#). In short, he covered anyone and everyone on entertainment’s A-list, fully enjoying his role and the inside access. It was a heady lifestyle, Kerwin dressed in designer Italian suits and dining at all the Hollywood hotspots, running interference for Anthony Quinn at Trader Vic’s, and also suffering the wrath of Shirley Temple Black by surreptitiously gaining access to her home.

His most impressive interview? That would probably be [Luciano Pavarotti](#), who loomed larger than life in Kerwin’s imagination but received him warmly and then arranged to sing “Ave Maria” for the Pope’s visit to Chicago in 2008 with Kerwin present. “That was pretty impressive,” he remembers.

“Hollywood Hack” is a great read, covering many of the personalities of a bona fide Hollywood golden era, told with a lot of personal commentary and insight, and also a lot of soul searching. In the end [Robert Kerwin](#) had to get out of the business to gain self-respect, getting tired of the superficiality and sometimes complete nonsense, tired of being, as he puts it, “Hollywooded” and being treated as service personnel, someone basically on the level of a gardener, such as the current culture tends to treat everyone in show business who is not a “celebrity.”

The book is a fascinating read as he also looks back on it fondly, moments spent with some of the world’s biggest stars brought back while watching one of their films. And there were many genuinely good people that he came to like during his Hollywood career: [Carol Burnett](#), [Shirley Jones](#), [Debbie Reynolds](#), [Clint Eastwood](#), [Lee Marvin](#), [Bill Cosby](#), [Jackie Gleason](#), [Tony Randall](#), [Henry Mancini](#), and [Candace Bergen](#) among a fairly large list that Kerwin mentions. These were stars who talked to him as if they didn’t believe they were superior beings, around whom the whole universe revolved. In my personal observation the real successful, intelligent stars became who they are precisely because of their humble approach toward the Industry and gratitude for the work they are offered. Although arrogance is not uncommon, but sadly expected in this business, those who stayed true to their upbringing and own values are very pleasant and a great fun to be around. They do not have the need to intimidate, which almost is a job all by itself for a celebrity these days outside the studio. As if intimidating everyone around them came with the job...somehow it gets overlooked that appreciation, gratitude, ambition, determination and honesty are still the key to success and a fulfilling life. Simplicity, trustworthy friends, shopping trips without the Paparazzi running them over, a walk on the beach, and experiencing the good, the bad and the ugly in life is still what’s real for all of us whether movie stars or not. Every star has moments of doubts, fear, and a whole spectrum of human feelings, but somehow the media can much better sell sensationalized misinterpretations or digging dirty as deep as possible.

“I’m glad I met the stars I liked,” Kerwin says. “And as I watch them perform I wish them the best of everything, not just for their sakes, but for my sake as well. Most important I wish them success for the sake of them having liked me in return.”

“Hollywood Hack” is one of those books that opens a door into the inner working of Hollywood, shining a light on some of its most famous stars. If you have any interest in Hollywood and its star-making machinery, then this book is your ticket to one very intriguing ride through Hollywood history.

About the Author of This Article: [LadyAdrienne Papp](#) is a recognized journalist, economist and feature writer who has written for many publications including Savoir, [Beverly Hills 90210](#), [Malibu Beach](#), [Santa Monica Sun](#), [The Beverly Hills Times](#), [Brentwood News](#), [Bel-Air View](#), [Celebrity Society](#), [Celeb Staff](#), [It Magazine](#), [Chic Today](#), [LA2DAY](#), [West Side Today](#) among many others. She is the President and CEO of Los Angeles / New York-based publicity company, [Atlantic Publicity](#) and publishing house, [Atlantic Publisher](#). Adrienne writes about world trends, [Quantum Physics](#), entertainment and interviews celebrities, world leaders, inventors, philanthropists and entrepreneurs. She also owns [Atlantic United Films](#) that produces and finances true stories made for theatrical release or the silver screen. [Spotlight News Magazine](#) is owned by [Atlantic United, Inc.](#) Dame Adrienne Papp is a member of the [International Press Academy](#).

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