

# INTRODUCING...

## douglas leopold

### born to it

Monday afternoon, 3 p.m.

The scene is a spacious loft in Old Montreal. Queen Street, no pun intended. Classical music, paintings individually lit, pottery, a hammock strung between beams, clothes in open cupboards. Two telephones side by side on a pillow. The telephones never stop ringing. The bathroom is wall to wall photos, some of famous people, almost all include the occupant: Douglas Leopold.

The scene continues...

Enter Roger Héroux of the City on Fire Héroux. Douglas introduces him as "the cutest of the Héroux brothers." Roger offers Douglas a handshake. Douglas complains, "Is that all I get?"

Later:

Douglas, "I just realized I have to be in Toronto, Montreal and Quebec City — all in three hours. I just keep saying Yes to everyone. I raised \$4000 myself this weekend by going on stage at Place Des Arts. Maybe I should raffle someone's jock strap from the Alouettes."

Douglas organizes publicity for feature films. In between he raises funds for Ballet Jazz. In between that he has about 200 other projects "happening."

"I'm a great cook," he explains as he offers a summer drink of Orzata (almond syrup), milk and soda water. He once worked in a "chic" French restaurant in order to earn money to travel.

"PR is a funny kind of career. You have to start very early. You're either born to it or forget it. I don't think it's the kind of thing that one can learn. You have to be very curious and get involved with any kind of project."

At McGill Douglas studied psychology, law and classical music.

"My first interest more than anything was culture. I felt that a law de-

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*Lois Siegel writes, photographs, teaches and makes experimental films in Montreal.*



Douglas on the phone

gree would be helpful and suffered through a few years of that. I went to a lot of cases in court and realized that there was no justice in this world after all, and psychology I realized was perfectly useless — so I went to Harvard for a year and discovered that the outside world way beyond Canada was really very exciting."

Douglas wanted to travel. Summers were spent in the N.Y. and Cape Cod area. He kept meeting people in theatre, film and the arts. Paris was his first stop abroad. He became a teacher of English Literature and Economic History at a lycée.

"That changed my philosophy in life. I became very European and very French. I think everybody should go and live in Europe for a year. It brings you out of your Canadian context. I think that's really important if you are in the film industry. It's wrong to

only see what we're doing here. It also gave me fluent French. I speak 6 languages.

"My first job back in Montreal was Assistant Manager of the Montreal Symphony. And I just did everything. I raised money, sold tickets, arranged press conferences. I like putting interesting things together, and I take no risks — I'm very careful. I'm truly Canadian that way.

"But I know what sells, and I know what's going to attract. I have a strong feeling for the street: I want to know what people are doing. I run to New York — anywhere where there's a "scene" going on. I think it's important to remain in contact with what people are doing who are half your age: I'm 34."

Where Douglas has done PR: National Arts Center, McGill Faculty of Music, Saidye Bronfman Center, Place Bonaventure, Bell Telephone.

photo: Lois Siegel



"I think what people really want to know is not what happened, but what's happening... and how they can change their lives. I've proved that because I teach a course to 165 students at Dawson College. It's called 'Culture Vulture,' and I take them to art auctions, exhibitions, museums, plays and rehearsals and to New York, Asia, England and France.

"There's a lot of divorced, separated, retired and young people who want a change in their life style and who want to meet other interesting people but don't know where to go - I tell them what to read - what magazines to subscribe to and where to travel.

"After doing all these things - it's funny - you become just a known quantity, and so you don't go looking for the next part of your career. I fell into film. I fell into Robert Lantos and did *In Praise of Older Women*. I also do financing, and casting, besides publicity.

"A good publicist needs contacts - it's very important to work everywhere - as you know the Margaret Trudeau film (*Kings and Desperate Men*) made 780 front pages across America.

"Canadian film should not only be known about in Canada. The biggest problem is that we just don't think our product is good enough. Also they save the pages of "Time Magazine" for a big \$10 million American film so even though you have Karen Black, it doesn't guarantee you much more than say "The Hollywood Reporter," "Variety" and a mention in "The New York Times. And often the big name stars do not want it known that they are doing a small Canadian film.

"They save the biggies for the biggies. You're just another small movie somewhere out there - if you had 10 big names at least a \$5 million budget and a fabulous film - you might have half a chance.

"But then you have the other side of the coin where you have Altman and Paul Newman. They don't even hire a publicity person. Everybody knows in the industry - and just waits for it. They don't need publicity - they just release a few photos and the photos go around the world and onto the wire - and that's the end of it.

"Or you get a Super Star like Margaret Trudeau and then you can just have 50 journalists drop everything, and you call a press conference in three hours, and they're all there - like we had 200 journalists at a press conference - outrageous - really outrageous."

Future:

"I don't want to be an actor, and I don't want to be a producer. I don't want to get up at 5 a.m. and stand out in the cold.

"I'm for having better culture. I want to be known for turning more Canadians on to culture because I think there is really nothing that is superb and international except for The Ontario Art Gallery, The Montreal Opéra du Québec when we had it, and The Chinese Collection of The Royal Ontario Museum. There's very little else except for a dozen plays a year spread out across the country. We don't have any orchestra that comes near The Chicago or The London Symphony. We don't have any opera that comes near Salzburg or Vienna or La Scalla or Paris. We don't have any ballet that comes near The New York City Ballet or The American Ballet Theatre. So let's not kid ourselves.

"The same in film - I think we've only had half a dozen great films out of this country. Duddy Kravitz was a great film. I really honestly can't remember too many other great films, but I should say half a dozen or otherwise I'll get axed."

About the "Stars"....

"Canadians are so themselves that they don't get overwhelmed by working with big people, and the wonderful thing is they're very friendly and very 1st name basis - so you get these big stars coming to Canada - they're in your hands because without you they don't know where to go or what to do - you've got to get them their fur coats wholesale - you've got to take them to restaurants - you've got to make sure they're happy -

"Marilyn Keach wanted to go for 2nd hand clothes - Marissa Pavan wanted a fur coat - Karen Black wanted 20 pillows for her baby. Jean-Pierre Aumont wanted interesting evenings."

About people:

"Patrick McGoohan: an impossible man - he's got private problems.

Karen Black: unpredictable, very direct, like sexy direct, very Hollywood.

Stephen Lack: one of the strangest characters in this country.

"There are Hollywood type conversations between directors and producers that I find are very strange and not very Canadian - they're constantly promoting themselves in their own minds. So they better get very good

PR people who can do the job properly. There are only two people in film in this country who are good at PR. Prudence Emery and myself."

About PR:

"One of the strangest things I've ever done was to put 5 drag queens from "French Dressing" with Terry Evanshen from the Alouettes in a calèche in the Gray Cup Parade for Hai-Karate Cologne.

"Every client has a different problem *Kings and Desperate Men* had a Super Star - all I did was answer the phone - 300 times a day. They came to you and pleaded.

"Whereas with *Two Solitudes* everybody was down on the film because the PR had started very slowly, and people didn't think that the number was going to get off the ground - there had been a lot of personality conflicts - so I had to change the whole image of the film.

"With *In Praise of Older Women* Karen Black didn't want to give any interviews until after the movie was over, and then she only chose "The Globe and Mail" and "The Star". That was it - only two interviews in Canada, and you had a very aggressive Hungarian team that wanted to be in the papers every day."

Friends:

"I fit my friends in with my work. My friends help me on films - they stuff envelopes and type press releases. I bring them along to the press conferences and openings and drag them to the theatre every night. It could be worse. I think it's important to be amused as well as amusing."

A Typical Day in the Life of Douglas Leopold:

8:30: Phone starts ringing.

8:45: Listen to Thomas Schumacher Program (my partner) then talk to him on the phone. Do telephone calls.

11-4: Appointments

4-5: Swimming

5-7: Press conferences, openings or clients.

8: Performances every night: parties, ballet, Centaur, Symphony, Chinese Opera or movies.

11: Receptions or friends

1 a.m.: Dancing for 1/2 hour

2-8:30 a.m.: Sleep

"On and on and on for 15 years. If it gets any wilder, I'm going to get very old."

Lois Siegel