

from Leila Basen

memo to the producer



Producer Robert Lantos and Assistant producer Leila Basen

The following are a series of memos to Robert Lantos from his assistant, Leila Basen, during the shooting of **Agency**, an RSL Films Production directed by George Kaczender from December 1, 1979 to February 5, 1979. The names haven't been changed. Basen was the only innocent...

"Executive assistant to the producer, what does that mean?"

"I don't know but it sounds impressive."

"Nobody leaves Toronto to go to Montreal."

"Yeah, the traffic should be good once I'm past Oshawa."

After the standard CTV lunch in a medium-priced downtown restaurant; after the presentation of the regulation goodbye gift, a pewter mug with name and date engraved, a tribute to many early mornings and many uninteresting interviews from a producer who thought I was making a big mistake; I got into my car and drove to Montreal, to work in feature films for people I had met only once, on a film that I knew nothing about.

On Canada AM, I learned there was a good answer to every question; except for the question, "what will you do in Montreal?". What will I do? Nobody knows what I do. They still don't.

Dear Mr. Lantos,

In regards to your 8:00 a.m. squash game with Lee Majors; stop trying to get out of it, the exercise is good for you, 8:00 a.m. is better than 7:00 a.m. and I am unable to assist you in this area.

In addition to not playing squash, I also cannot take dictation, I don't touch-type or operate a telex machine and I have no idea how to organize the filing system.

Regards,

Leila (the girl from Toronto)

Yes, I can drive a standard shift. No, I will not pick up your jeep at the garage.

Dear Robert,

A xerox-copy of the interview with Lee Majors from this morning's Gazette is on your desk. (Yes, I know how to use a xerox machine.) I have underlined the part where Lee is quoted as saying, "I don't consider myself a great actor."

Before reading the article, keep in mind that old adage – I don't care what they say, as long as they spell my name right.

They spelled his name right.

*Leila Basen received a BFA in film from York in 1976 and worked as editor and sound recordist on **Anguilla**, a documentary about the West Indies. In 1977 she sold a script to **King of Kensington**. She has also worked as production assistant at **CFTO Nightbeat** and then at **Canada AM** where she was promoted to story editor and then to writer. In December 1979 she became executive assistant to producer Robert Lantos at **RSL** in Montreal.*

Regards,

Leila

The keys to your jeep are in your desk. I parked it on the street.

Dear Robert,

Last night, during an episode of Mary Tyler Moore, I noticed that Mary Richards brings Lou Grant coffee and makes his phone calls and she is the associate producer and he is the producer. Maybe all producers have problems dialing the phone. I was hoping you might have missed that episode.

Regards,

Leila

The girls in the office called in sick. They've been throwing up all morning. Possible flu or pregnancy epidemic. An occupational hazard.

Dear Robert,

Received a frantic call from Murray Hill Limousines – wanted to cancel our account. The reason given was ridiculous. Check out this story. . . Lee Majors hijacked the Rolls Royce assigned to pick up Robert Mitchum at the airport. Majors alleviated the chauffeur of his duties and drove Mitchum to a hotel in one of the seedier areas of town

Not a bad story, it has all the elements. Maybe we could use it in our next film.

Regards,

Leila

There were no phone calls and no mail, but everybody around here still likes you.

Dear Robert,

Nothing special today.

– Bad snowstorm in Senneville – totalled a car on the way to the location – let's move to L.A. and avoid this aggravation

– Valerie Perrine's boyfriend arrived on set – looks like a surfer from Central Casting

– Lee went to Schwartz' for dinner last night – didn't like the service, the smoked meat or the fact that nobody recognized him

– one of the actors spent three hours at the airport waiting for someone to pick him up – guess they don't teach them how to take taxis at the National Theater School.

Regards,

Leila

Rushes at Sonolab at 8:30. They still haven't fixed the projector and Lee is bringing the beer.

Dear Robert,

Re: conventions and practices for television

Called all the national networks and came up with the following:

– you can use “damn” three times during the film but not “god damn,” “oh my god,” “Jesus,” “Christ” or “Jesus Christ.” (somebody should have told that to Cecil B. DeMille)

– “shit” and “bullshit” are definitely out

– “bull” is okay in some contexts (if you are making a western)

– “frigging” cannot replace “fucking” (hey baby, you want to frig?)

– “hell” is okay (if you are Billy Graham) but “crap” is questionable

I just spent an hour on the phone saying obscene things to bureaucrats at NBC, CBS, CBC and CTV. A way of combining business with pleasure for a girl who spent three years in television.

Regards,

Leila

Sonolab is on strike. That could be funny if it was happening to somebody else.

Dear Robert,

Saw a nice shirt at Holt’s today. Could replace the one you lost playing poker with Lee last night.

Regards,

Leila

Having lunch at the Ritz with an American journalist. If you need me I’ll be in 915. (Nobody believes that it’s only lunch)

Dear Robert,

Some lunch. The phone in the room never stopped ringing. I felt like Faye Dunaway in Network. I must have impressed the pants off of the journalist. (figuratively speaking)

Called Noel about the re-write. He’s skiing in Vermont and his room doesn’t have a phone. (He has the right idea.) Called me back from a phone booth. Didn’t have a pen so he carved the scene changes in a snowbank. (Let’s hope it doesn’t snow.) Will call in with the new material. Wanted to know where I’d be in the morning. Said that the phone number I gave him sounds suspiciously like the number at the Ritz. (I told him it was just a coincidence.)

Regards,

Leila

Valerie swears that the syringes she wanted are for her B-12 shots.

Dear Robert,

Called Lenny baby in L.A. (Sales department, Avco Embassy, on leave from the mailroom) Gave me a 20 minute pitch on the good job he is doing with “In Praise”

in the States. “Cut the crap,” I told him, “just give me the figures.” Says he loves the way I do business, wants to know what sign I am and is looking forward to meeting me. (No airplane ticket to L.A. was forthcoming.) Lined up a screening for Tom Berenger. Spoke to the guy from Avco in New York. (another mailroom graduate) Says that “In Praise” opens in New York this weekend. Thinks you should fly me down. Told him, don’t hold your breath. Said he’ll see what he can do. (No airplane ticket was forthcoming.)

For a girl who doesn’t know what she’s missing, I seem to be missing a lot.

Do L.A. and New York really exist or are they just area codes on a long distance phone call?

Regards,

Leila

Lee refuses to leave his dressing room until the reporter from the National Enquirer leaves the set. (I think it’s an excuse to finish watching the football game.) Anyway, it’s in his contract.

Dear Robert,

Your mother called. Wanted to know how you were and if the crew likes the cheese buns from her baker. In this case, nepotism is forgivable.

Wendy is on her way with the per diem cheques. They have to be signed and on set by 3:00. She told me to get touch with you. I said it would be a pleasure.

Saw your guest list for the New Year’s Eve Party. I didn’t



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know it was an all girls party. Are you planning to attend?

Wexler called – definitely will have his script to you by tonight. (That line – “will have script by tonight” – somehow I’ve heard that one before – better call the company analyst –reoccurring dreams can be significant.)

Regards,
Leila

(on loan from the real world)

Dear Robert,

This is the stuff that dreams are made of:

Moses Middlemarch called from New York, New York – says you know him (doesn’t everybody) – says he’s a big movie producer (isn’t everybody) – wants you to call him.

Moses has a hot property – about religious cults – very big now but will it pass the koolaid acid test in a year from now – dying to do this film with you – two publishers are willing to kill for the rights to the novel from the screenplay – and, as if that wasn’t enough, he’s got a completion bond for half the money (whatever that means) – sending up the script – can’t wait to hear from you.

Tommy Schnurmacher called – says he saw me last night at dance. (Didn’t bother to tell him I stayed home last night, illusions are hard to find.) Wants me to tell him everything. I told him nothing.

Says that you tell him everything eventually. He knew more than me. I need a briefing session. He’s got persuasion down to a fine art and I’m a complete pushover.

Regards,
your faithless assistant

Why does the gossip columnist from the Gazette know more than I do about the company that I work for? It’s enough to make a girl very insecure.

Dear Robert,

Clare Walker has an actress she says you’re going to love. (I told her that might come later.) The actress will be in town tomorrow and I have arranged a meeting. Her C.V. was on your desk yesterday, but has since left for that nether world known as our filing system, where things go, never to be heard from again.

Regards,
Leila

Lee says he loves my haircut. He ought to know. He’s married to the most expensive haircut in America. Can’t wait to tell my hairdresser.

Dear Robert,

Valerie partied all night and was sick all morning. Sent flowers to her dressing room on your behalf. The card read – “The Show Must Go On” Subtle. . .eh?

your accomplice,
Leila

TELEX TO TAHITI

RE: Problems in Paradise

A.V. called. Says T.L.J. wants too much money. Suggest going with your second choice. Needs your O.K. to proceed. Please telex immediately. (How do you say Telex in Tahitian)

Can I hand deliver the next message?

Dear Robert,

AGENCY promo reel in the can, SUZANNE posters ready, all ads in place and yacht in Cannes confirmed. Very glamorous business, this business. . . and lots of work.

Some of us get the glamour and some of us do the work. With envy,

Leila

Don’t forget to take lots of pictures.

I’ll be living vicariously until you return.

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