

I Just Have **1** Question

Are You Ready for Your Close-up?



by Doug Carpenter

Have you ever looked closely at celebrities? I mean *really* close — like you-could-probably-guess-what-they-had-for-lunch close? [There was a *reason* our parents nagged us about “brushing after every meal,” you know.]

I ask because — at the risk of being impolitely honest here, have you noticed that a *lot* of them aren't *really* all that *good looking*? [Let's just say that ultra-high definition video and megapixel cameras aren't *everyone's* friend.]

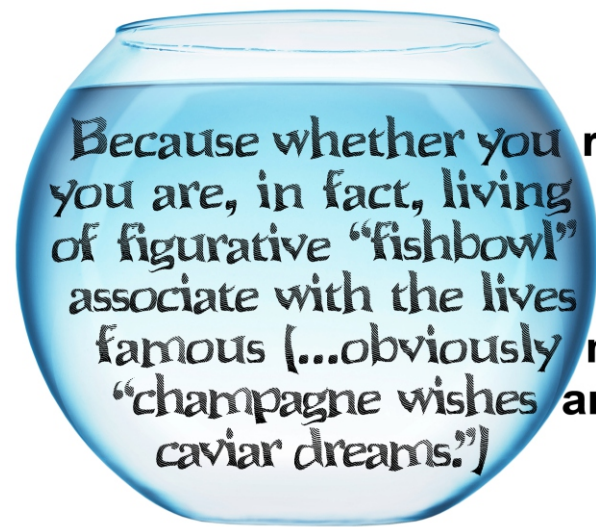
That, however, doesn't stop the world from elevating them to membership in the exalted pantheon of “beautiful people.” To that special place of social grace

“up there” — where the air is rare, the spotlights glare, and your worth is determined by your audience share.

In short, show biz — which *used* to be where you traditionally found your biggest gaggle of the gorgeous and famous. If you haven't noticed, though, *fame* ain't what it *used* to be.

For better or worse, it has become much more, even as — ironically — it's become *much less*. So much less, in fact, that if a regular, everyday, ordinary person like *you*, for example, wants to be famous, you *can* be. All you have to do is *ask* — assuming you even have to do *that*.

The pathways to public popularity — which previously ran primarily through glitzy glory factories like the movie, TV or music industries — now carry the unlikeliest cast of common folk to pinnacles of prominence you once



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had to hire a fast-talking agent [...preferably not the kind with a moniker like “Swifty”...] and a personal trainer [...probably named something Nordic like “Bjørn”...] to reach.

Today, even *without* the benefit of those basics, all you apparently need to ascend to self-made legendary status is a cell phone and a total lack of humility — with emphasis on the *latter* for reasons that will become painfully obvious.

With digital “apps” like YouTube, Instagram and TikTok, you have in hand — and I mean literally *in your hand* — the power to put yourself out there on line performing, doing something either as impressive as you're capable of or as embarrassing as you're prepared to endure.

And faster than you can say “I'm ready for my close-up, Mr. DeMille,” you could be an Internet

star. A “viral” sensation. A bona fide “influencer” in the bold, new world of an electronic economy in which “*followers*” are the power currency and “*impressions*” are the coin of the realm.

But at *what cost* to you? Because you *know* that *everything* costs *something*. The only *question* is whether it's a price you're willing to *pay* or a deal you're better off passing up.

Unfortunately, as much as I *wish* I could simply wish you luck making the right choice, I'm afraid that choice has already largely been made *for* you. [If only they could be that helpful where we actually *wanted* help.]

Because in today's world, where the only commodity even more valuable than *fame* is *your personal data*, your ownership of “you,” I'm sorry to say, is basically up for

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grabs. And it's hard to say *which* grabber has the tightest grip on it.

But even if you've never hungered for — let alone ever actively *sought out* — notoriety, that doesn't mean you're *not* under intense scrutiny every day. [And to think they made fun of you that time you felt like you were being watched.]

Because whether you realize it or not, you *are*, in fact, living in the same kind of figurative “fishbowl” we traditionally associate with the lives of the rich and famous [...obviously minus the “champagne wishes and caviar dreams.”]

Now, I can imagine you thinking to yourself “Who would be interested in *my* life?” But frankly, it's a question that even a superficial count of TV's current roster of reality shows — take the *Real Housewives of...* franchise alone! — should render moot. If only the full and far more disquieting answer were that benign.

As we've seen all too frequently, TV can make almost anyone instantly famous, even if the “fame” they're anointed with is simply for, well, *being* famous and nothing more. [What would be *really* nice is if the pseudo-famous would have the decency to sit down and be quiet when their supposedly-allotted “15 minutes” of it were up.]

Sadly, even fame's disreputable doppelganger infamy unfortunately delivers its own form of marketable star power. If the ancient philosopher Socrates' infamous 399 BC trial for spurning the Greeks' Gods, corrupting their youth and promoting new

religions hadn't predated the debut of Court TV by nearly two and a half millennia, he might've been able to skip the hemlock for a nice glass of iced tea.

Yet even as he was being judicially dissected — his very life hanging in the balance, he imparted a thoughtful and still-relevant insight, observing that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” One can only wonder how he'd like being “examined” 21st century style.

Cell phones with technology built in that tracks your movements and location. Cameras monitoring buildings and public thoroughfares along with the people using them, augmented with facial recognition software capable of identifying exactly who those people are.

Computer algorithms that can follow our on-line activity, documenting what we look at and buy, or even just *linger* over a little bit longer than we do *other* things — actions we may not even be aware we're *doing*.

It's the kind of diligently-collected digital data that, when assembled, can produce a remarkably detailed picture of who we *are*, what *interests* us and what we *might* or *might not* subsequently do — when we shop, or vote, or simply contemplate our lives in the privacy of our thoughts.

That privacy, we've come to realize, is no easy thing to preserve. Especially in a world that has *voluntarily* placed itself “under the microscope,” as well as behind the airport x-ray scanner and into countless automated data systems. [And on *hold* trying to talk to them. A lot.]

And we do all this in exchange for the perks of pleasure and popularity, a transaction whose nature those “celebrities” who covet and chase public acclaim understand all too well. These, remember, are *not* shy, retiring people.

Even as they complain — often bitterly and usually publically — about the invasion of their personal lives, they actually *want* you to have trouble taking your eyes off them. It's money in their pockets.

[Well, probably not *their* pockets. They undoubtedly have “people” to carry their money *for* them. I mean, those designer purses. How tiny are *they*? And *wallet bulges* on the *red carpet*? *Definitely* a fashion fiasco.]

In the end, the person best qualified to actively “examine” your life is, obviously, *you*. Still, if you find the task too intimidating to take on, I totally understand. After all, self-appraisal undeniably raises some difficult-to-answer questions.

Like are you ready to *see* what you're likely to *see*? Or to *hear* what you're likely to [...but proba-

bly don't *really* want to...] *hear*? Because you know perfectly well that *both* of those things *are* going to happen, which is probably the single biggest reason so many people so fiercely resist doing *either*.

But if you still can't muster the courage to look inward, find your real self, and bring it out for all the world to see, don't worry. Somebody else *will* — assuming they haven't *already*.

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Throughout *After 50's* first 16 years, veteran WNY writer and columnist Doug Carpenter regularly shared his wry generational observations with readers as *Everyboomer*. He has now returned to write a uniquely-named new monthly humor/opinion column called *I Just Have 1 Question* — which he says he'll ask and then bravely try to answer... without, he fervently hopes, looking excessively foolish in the process. [We wish him luck.]

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