

## HOLLYWOOD: THE REVENGE OF THE PUBLICISTS

Pat Kingsley is the grande dame of one of America's scariest cabals

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Who is the queen of Hollywood? You might be tempted to say Julia Roberts, Oscar-winning beauty and the world's most highly-paid actress. But in terms of sheer clout, Julia must cede the title to Pat Kingsley, a 67-year-old publicist whom some would like to see cast as one of the three witches in *Macbeth*.

Kingsley is the force behind PMK, the biggest public relations company in the movie world. Its clients include Tom Cruise, Courtney Love, Michelle Pfeiffer, Tom Hanks, and Hugh Grant. 'Not since the heyday of MGM,' declared *Vanity Fair* in its recent Legends of Hollywood issue, 'have three little letters wielded so much power.'

PMK grew out of Pickwick Public Relations, a company which Kingsley founded 30 years ago before merging with one of her rivals. In *Vanity Fair*'s portrait of Kingsley and her two co-managing directors (entitled 'The Gatekeepers'), Kingsley sits in the middle, bearing a remarkable resemblance to the cat that has got the cream, decked out in a white Armani jacket and Harry Winston jewellery – a definite upgrade from the utilitarian trouser suits that are her trademark.

*Vanity Fair* has every reason to present her in a flattering light. Without her goodwill, it would be unable to get anywhere near the stars on her books. Hollywood publicists demand – and usually get – approval of everything from the questions a magazine asks to its choice of make-up artist; and it is largely thanks to Kingsley that they can do so.

‘Twenty-five years ago,’ says a British film PR, ‘personal publicists didn’t really exist: they just booked plane tickets and restaurants. Pat Kingsley was one of the first people to wield power on behalf of her clients. She has the reputation of being very, very tough and on the ball, but also pretty fair. She’s not one of the bitches of Hollywood.’ (This PR nevertheless prefers to remain anonymous: Kingsley, she says, ‘could make sure that I never work again’.)

The world’s growing obsession with celebrities means that Kingsley and her colleagues can negotiate from a position of ever greater strength. Journalists who write hostile profiles can expect to be blacklisted, and as a result the average star interview is an avalanche of blandness.

‘I don’t like interesting stories,’ Kingsley is quoted as saying in Jeannette Walls’s book about gossip, *diSh*. ‘Boring is good. Good writing and good reporting is usually controversial. I don’t need that.’

Born in North Carolina, the daughter of an army quartermaster, Kingsley has been in the business for over 40 years. After dropping out of college, she worked briefly for NBC before joining Rogers & Cowan – the first of the big movie PR companies – as a secretary in 1959. Before long she found herself dealing with such clients as Marilyn Monroe (whose cat’s kittens she helped to deliver) and Doris Day, and in 1971 struck out on her own. Since then her operation has grown to encompass more than film stars: PMK was employed by Dodi Fayed to raise his profile, and by Mohamed Fayed after Dodi’s death to keep his son’s image as clean as possible.

A tall woman with a strong jaw, a blonde bob and a southern drawl, Kingsley is not noted for her civility – but then, few Hollywood publicists are. (They have a particular dislike of British journalists, whom they consider insufficiently deferential to the stars, and untrustworthy to boot

– though they themselves think nothing of stringing a magazine along before giving a coveted interview to its deadliest rival).

A couple of years ago, on a visit to Los Angeles, I arranged to meet one of PMK's rivals, Kelly Bush, for breakfast at the Chateau Marmont. I had spoken to her several times on the phone, and thought that I had a good relationship with her – but she didn't turn up, or ring to offer an explanation. Her embarrassed assistant rescheduled our meeting for the following evening; the same thing happened. Kelly, if you're reading this, I'm still waiting for an apology.

The odd thing about Pat Kingsley is that she tends to give even potential clients a rough ride. The actress Lisette Anthony remembers meeting her shortly after arriving in Los Angeles:

'I had three films coming out, and I'd decided to do a spread with *Playboy*, so I thought I should hire a top PR, because it was a risky thing to do. Pat Kingsley deigned to see me, but I soon began to wonder who was interviewing who. I decided against her in the end because she was too terrifying.'

Nor, in Lisette Anthony's view, do publicists give value for money. 'You're paying these people \$10,000 a month or more,' she complains, 'and you find that they're turning down interviews left, right and centre.'

This approach to PR – concentrating on favourable coverage in a few big publications, and leaving the rest of the press hungry – was pioneered by Kingsley. She was also the first to demand that, if a star was featured in a magazine, he or she must be put on the cover. Editors who refused to co-operate risked losing future interviews not only with the star in question, but with any of PMK's clients.

Jeannette Walls identifies the release of *Far and Away* in 1992 as the moment when Kingsley 'turned mainstream media into a public relations machine for the stars'. Journalists interviewing Tom Cruise were asked

to sign contracts stipulating where and when they might use any quotes that he gave. Most protested – and most signed.

From her cluttered desk in West Hollywood (a decommissioned blackjack table covered in green baize), Kingsley continued to turn the screws. When *Eyes Wide Shut* came out, major television shows had to agree that Cruise would not be presented ‘in a negative or derogatory manner’ and that any unused footage would be destroyed on request. (A major headache for PMK at present is Cruise’s divorce from Nicole Kidman – who is also one its books.) Shortly afterwards, Kingsley publicly castigated a presenter whom she claimed had made, and broken, an agreement not to ask Jodie Foster about her personal life.

Some believe that she is beginning to lose her grip. Pretenders to her throne were much excited by a recent interview in *Talk* in which Uma Thurman – one of PMK’s clients – confessed to having body-dysmorphic disorder and seeing herself as fat. It didn’t matter that the quotation was accurate, or that *Talk*’s article was highly complimentary: the mere mention of the word ‘fat’ was seen as lese-majeste in the first degree, for which PMK must take the rap.

‘There used to be a bunch of older publicists like her who were very established in the business,’ says one of Kingsley’s critics, ‘but they’re not really the best any more. Her main challengers are younger people such as Kelly Bush, who takes people like Willem Dafoe and manages to give them a hip edge.’

Should she ever wish to retire, Kingsley could certainly afford to do so. Though personal publicists do not earn huge salaries by Hollywood standards (\$130,000 a year at the most), she has done exceptionally well for herself: PMK was bought two years ago by McCann-Erikson, and Kingsley is also believed to have made a killing from property in Santa Monica, where she lives.

The press might not miss her, but the stars would. She is generally agreed to have worked miracles for the once untouchable Courtney Love, and Arnold Schwarzenegger, formerly with PMK, probably rues the day he left them (he has just been savagely profiled in *Premier* as a shameless womaniser).

‘I wouldn’t be putting up with the shit that she puts up with at 67,’ remarks the British PR Dennis Davidson. ‘The pressure is extraordinary.’ But Juliet Hohnen, who deals regularly with PMK as the Hollywood representative of British magazines such as *Esquire*, believes that Pat Kingsley will be around for quite some time yet. ‘I don’t think she’s losing her grip,’ she says. ‘She still has Tom Cruise – and whoever has Tom Cruise holds the cards, because he’s just the biggest in the world.’