

THE CAMERA WARS

Kevin Mazur is the new breed of paparazzo, as popular with Bono and Barbra as he is with the magazines that make his WireImage the top entertainment-photo agency. But the stars can't relax yet. By stealth or by helicopter, Phil Ramey will get the shot they don't want taken

BY NANCY JO SALES



TWO APPROACHES

Left, a Kevin Mazur photo of Jennifer Aniston and Brad Pitt at a 1999 Sting concert; above, Meg Ryan and Russell Crowe, captured by Phil Ramey in 2000.

Jon Bon Jovi, a burnished beige all over and swathed in leather, jumped from a limousine to a red carpet and walked, smiling for the paparazzi. Hanging in there all these years, still smiling for the paparazzi, his smile seemed to say.

The photographers, about 100 of them corralled behind red velvet ropes like unruly schoolboys, flashed and clicked their cameras relentlessly, mashing against one another, trying to get a better angle, any angle. "Jon!" they pleaded.

One photographer, a stocky man who looked like he could be Tom Cruise's cousin from Long Island, zoomed right up next

to the star, exchanging jolly "Hey, man!"s with him to the irritation of some of the other photographers. "Jon!"

The photographer was Kevin Mazur, and, here tonight at the VH1 "Biggie" awards at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles, in December, he had access anywhere, to anyone. Plus, Mazur said, he and Bon Jovi were "tight."

"Kevin, you *know* what I need," Bon Jovi said, leveling a finger at him. "Some great pictures of Times Square"—a concert he'd done there—"something frameable for my house, and I *know* you got it."

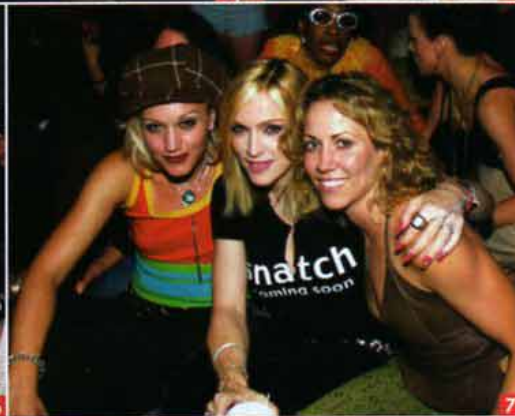
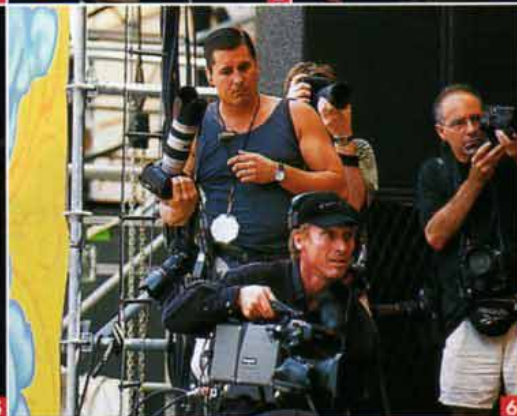
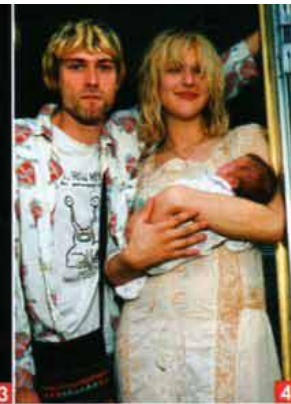
Bon Jovi rushed off to hug Sharon Osbourne.

"You want to talk to him, I can get him for you later," Mazur told me. He'd been arranging interviews for me with his friends. There were several people he wanted me to speak to that evening—Lisa Marie Presley, Carmen Electra, Kid Rock.

Square of body, he zipped through a crowd like a hammerhead, knocking into someone with his long, hard lenses. "Sometimes women give me a *look*," he said, "like 'Hey, what the hell was that?'—or 'Hey, come back here!'"

Over by a dressing-room trailer, Mazur took pictures of Kid Rock and Pamela

LEFT, BY KEVIN MAZUR; RIGHT, BY PHIL RAMEY



MAZUR IS "MORE LIKE A NEIGHBOR WITH A CAMERA THAN A PROWLING BEAST WITH A FLASHGUN," SAYS DAVID BOWIE.

Anderson; she flashed her white teeth and a large engagement ring—a shot available to no other photographer.

Mazur asked Kid Rock to say a few words about him.

"He's a nice guy!" said Kid Rock sincerely.

"Oh, this is a great interview," said Anderson.

"He's personable," said Kid Rock.

"I think he's got drugs—isn't he the drug dealer?" said Anderson.

"She's the interview," Kid Rock said pleasantly. "Kevin has some good pictures of my mom with Guy Ritchie that I gave to my mom, 'cause our real name's Ritchie, so I wrote on it 'The Real Mr. and Mrs. Ritchie.'" Kid Rock smiled. "I got tons of Kevin's photos in my studio."

Mazur was already hustling back to the press tent with more of his images.

In the press tent, dozens more photographers were sequestered, waiting for stars to appear and pose briefly before a VH1 backdrop. "This is bullshit," one of them said. "This is the Kevin Mazur show," said another. "This sucks."

Paparazzi had been in the news again; an article in *The New York Times* had said these were "glorious days for the paparazzi," due to a rivalry between *People* magazine and *Us Weekly* that was driving up photo prices. "Then what are we doing back here with the cheese Combos?" demanded one paparazzo.

Here in the field, photographers were talking about how this was the worst of times—and they blamed Kevin Mazur, and his company, WireImage, and its stable of 600 photographers, who were getting more, or exclusive, access at celebrity events around the world, every night.

Meanwhile, five WireImage employees

KEVIN'S CELEB SCRAPBOOK

(1) Elton John, Alicia Keys, and Sting, all smiles for Mazur. (2) Bono. (3) Sharon Osbourne and Jon Bon Jovi. (4) Kurt Cobain, Courtney Love, and Frances Bean Cobain, 1992. (5) Leonardo DiCaprio and Robert De Niro, 2001. (6) Mazur, standing, left, at Woodstock, 1994. (7) Gwen Stefani, Madonna, and Sheryl Crow. (8) Bruce Springsteen at a 9/11 tribute concert in New York. (9) Axl Rose and Mick Jagger, 1989. (10) David Bowie and Sean Combs.

with laptops were busily editing and sending Mazur's pictures to the WireImage Web site; there they would instantly become available to magazines and other media worldwide. The next morning, photo editors everywhere would get E-mails—and several more throughout the day—alerting them to the availability of not just one but four, six, or eight shots of Bon Jovi and Pierce Brosnan and Frankie Muniz doing the red-carpet strut—all flattering, with little variation.

Said Mazur, "We're doing it right."

As part of its mission statement, WireImage promises to observe the "marketing and publicity interests of our corporate assignment clients"—or not to produce, in the words of its C.E.O., Jason

Nevader, any pictures that aren't "nice."

This pledge has paid off. Started just two years ago by Mazur, four other photographers (Steve Granitz, Michael Caulfield, Jeff Vespa, and Lester Cohen), and several Wall Street deal-makers, WireImage has become the leading supplier of "entertainment photography" to magazines. In October 2002, the company provided 36.2 percent of celebrity photographs published in the major entertainment, fashion, and women's magazines.

WireImage also happens to be the first photo agency serving the media ever to define itself as a publicity firm rather than a journalistic enterprise. "Wire for Hire" is its creed. One-quarter of its revenue comes from corporate accounts like Disney, Victoria's Secret, and

news photographer in *La Dolce Vita* Paparazzo ("buzzing insect" in Italian), thereby coining a term for a new kind of unabashedly relentless eye. Fellini had become fascinated with the photographers he saw in Rome spinning around on Vespa motor scooters, shooting stars without regard for any notion of boundaries.

Into the 70s in this country, paparazzi were still seen as somewhat glamorous figures, part of the scene at any good party. At Studio 54, they documented a culture blithely in the midst of a meltdown: Bianca Jagger riding through the club on a white horse; Margaret Trudeau without her underwear.

But then two milestone events, 22 years apart, turned paparazzi from cool to scumbag. In 1975 a New York district court

vided into the invited—event photographers—and the uninvited—street photographers, who still get the type of stolen shot that has become the object of the *People* and *Us* bidding war: Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck for the first time caught kissing, which was bought by *People* last August for a reported \$100,000. (The bidding became all the more heated because the couple was reading *Us* in other shots in the same package. *People* did not publish these photos.)

But the bulk of celebrity photography sold is the more carefully managed kind—stars breezing through events looking their best, or cutting up in pre-arranged moments on movie sets. It's no surprise that at a time when publicists control access to celebrities more than ever, a company like WireImage has arrived and is doing so



THE PAPARAZZI STORY

(1) Paparazzi glamour, as shown by Federico Fellini in his 1960 film, *La Dolce Vita*. (2) Jacqueline Onassis outwalks Ron Galella in Manhattan in the 70s. (3) Graffiti near the site where Princess Diana died, Paris, 1997.

"WHO DO YOU THINK IS TAKING ALL THOSE PICTURES IN YOUR FAVORITE MAGAZINES ... THE ONES THAT MAKE YOU STOP AND STARE?"

VH1, which had hired Mazur to photograph the "Biggie" awards show that night.

"He has more access," said M. Janet Hill, the senior vice president for corporate communications at MTV Networks, "because he doesn't complain, he gets the shots placed, and we like him."

Now Mazur was scurrying to the back of the auditorium, where Lisa Marie Presley was waiting. Presley—big-haired, with charcoaled Elvis eyes—said, "I trust him. He's never done anything to betray me."

After Presley had gone, her manager checked shots with Mazur in the digital window of his Nikon.

"She doesn't want anything from the side," the manager said. "O.K.?"

Mazur nodded—"O.K."—and took out a pen to make a note of it.

In 1960, Federico Fellini named the

determined that Ron Galella—the self-described godfather of American paparazzi—had committed harassment in his pursuit of pictures of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Galella was ordered to stay 25 feet away from Onassis for the rest of her life (although he continued to photograph her until 1982, and his pictures of her looking casually chic on the streets of New York were among the best of her ever shot).

And then, in 1997, Princess Diana died in a car accident after being chased by a pack of paparazzi through the Pont de l'Alma tunnel in Paris; rightly or wrongly, the accident was blamed on overzealous photographers. Paparazzi had become murderers.

And so today we have *La Dolce MTV*, *La Dolce Miramax*. If photographers don't adhere to the mandates of publicists, the result is no access. Paparazzi now are di-

well, already beating out the former leading photo agencies Retna, Corbis, Getty, and ImageDirect. When it comes to photos of celebrities, the A.P. and Reuters don't come close.

But WireImage would have been just another struggling dot-com without Kevin Mazur on board. His partners say they knew they needed him. "Every artist loves him," says Larry Jenkins, head of publicity for Columbia Records. Mazur's the paparazzo stars like.

Barbra Streisand wrote in an E-mail: "He knows a good angle and is a very pleasant person—he's not intrusive—you don't know where he is till he shows you a really good picture right after the event."

David Bowie wrote: "He has impeccable manners ... more like a neighbor who

shows up with a camera than a prowling beast with a flashgun.”

Billy Joel said on the phone: “We give him *carte blanche* backstage. I’m camera-shy. I have no photographic angles. If you see a good picture of me, it’s probably because Kevin took it.”

Carson Daly said: “There’s no mischief or malice with him. He photographs everything we do.”

Sting wrote: “After all these years, Kevin is just like one of the family.”

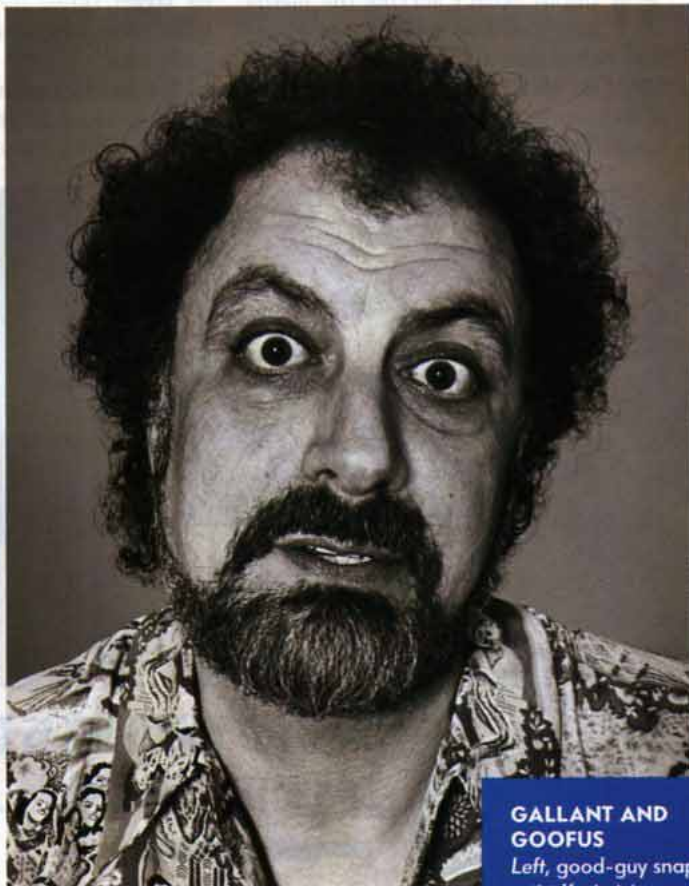
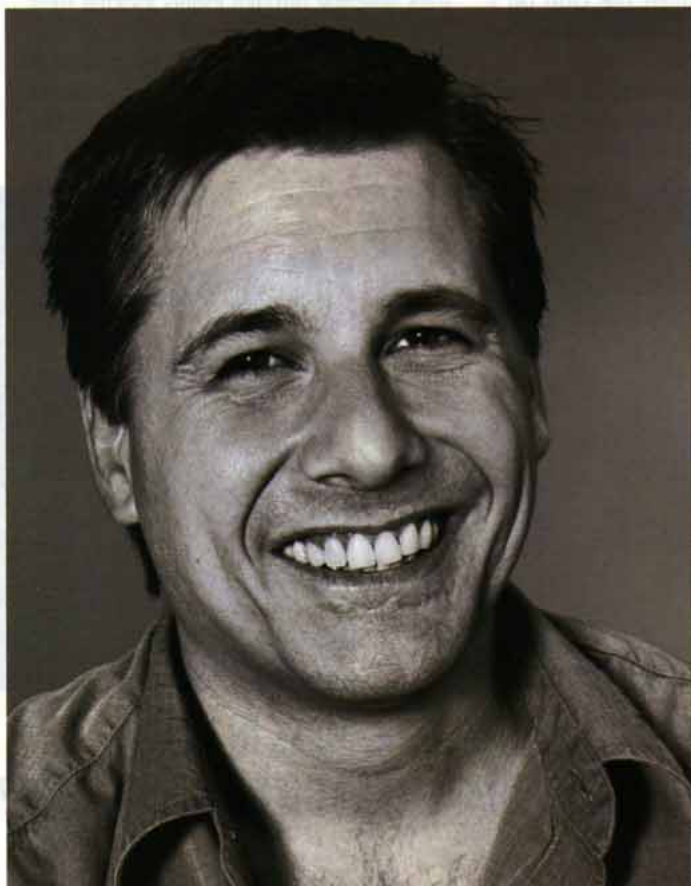
Sheryl Crow said on the phone: “Let’s face it, anyone in this industry has a huge

started hanging around with a guy from the neighborhood called Fat Vinnie.

Vincent “Fat Vinnie” Gonzales was a famed autograph hound and the guy Robert De Niro based his Rupert Pupkin character on in Martin Scorsese’s 1983 film *The King of Comedy*. It was on the set of *The King of Comedy*—where Fat Vinnie was hanging around because he’d become a consultant for De Niro, and Mazur was hanging around because Fat Vinnie could get him next to the stars so he could take their pictures—that Mazur had the defining moment of his career. De Niro screamed at him.

He got some good shots of Billy Joel at Madison Square Garden in 1984, and, feeling confident, he called photographer Annie Leibovitz and asked her what he should do with them. Leibovitz suggested he call Retna. Mazur did, and his first published photo, of Joel, wound up in *People*.

He supported himself for a few years as a medical photographer (autopsies, operations) while doing freelance photography for ASCAP, the music-publishing agency. He became a fixture in the office of Ken Sunshine, a publicist there (and now the publi-



GALLANT AND GOOFUS

Left, good-guy snapshot artist Kevin Mazur, 2002; above, aggressive old-school lensman Phil Ramey, 2002.

ego and likes to see flattering images of themselves out there, and he puts great shots of people out there.”

Mazur started out as a fan. “I was a true fan,” he says. He was a high-school kid in Lindenhurst, Long Island (“the American Venice,” he calls it), when he discovered he liked going to rock concerts and taking pictures of the bands. A small-time scalping ring he was involved in facilitated his proximity to the stage. He was into Led Zeppelin, Stevie Nicks (“like any guy back then,” he says), the Rolling Stones, the Who. He smuggled lenses in his socks and cameras in his pants. He put the pictures up in his room. He attended Farmingdale University, and then, feeling guilty for ignoring the wishes of his dad that he follow in his footsteps and become a fireman, he became a paparazzo. And he

“We’re on the set,” Mazur says, “and all of a sudden De Niro’s coming out of a trailer, and I’m like, I’m gonna take his picture. He’s in his costume, he’s got the bow tie on and everything, and I’m thinking, This is great, he’s looking right at me.

“But then he sees me, and he runs at me, pushes me up against the trailer, and starts screaming at me, wagging his finger in my face, spitting in my face, ‘Don’t you ever take a fucking picture without asking!’”

“I was petrified. I’m 22, and I mean, we idolized *The Godfather*. And he walks away from there, and that was what instilled it in my head that I always ask, and I’m always polite to everybody.”

That, Mazur says, and his own father telling him to “always be nice to people, because you never know when you’re gonna need somebody.”

cist for Leonardo DiCaprio and Justin Timberlake). Mazur says, “Ken explained the whole game to me. I don’t think like a photographer—I think like a publicist and a photographer combined.”

While shooting at the Live Aid concert in Philadelphia in 1985, Mazur got another lesson in the importance of being “nice.” “I’m shooting all these pictures of people backstage, Mick Jagger,” he says, “when this guy grabs me, and he’s screaming in my face, ‘No fucking pictures!’ He’s cursing at me and stuff, he’s leaning into me, so I cock back to punch him.

“And Ken grabs my arm and says, ‘You hit that guy and you’ll never work in the business again.’” The person he’d been about to hit was Bill Graham, the powerful concert promoter behind Janis Joplin, the

MAZUR’S GROOMING BY KATE BEST; RAMEY’S GROOMING BY CHRIS TURNER; FOR DETAILS, SEE CREDITS PAGE

Stones, and the Grateful Dead. "I'm glad I never hit that guy," says Mazur.

After that, Mazur began to perfect the mellow, easy approach that has proved so winning with not only celebrities and their managers but other gatekeepers like cops and security guards. On one of his first assignments for *Rolling Stone*—the "dream job" he landed in 1987—he impressed his editors by getting backstage access to the making of U2's *Rattle and Hum* concert film in Tempe, Arizona.

The press had been barred from the event. "But right away," Mazur says, "I'm hanging out with the roadies backstage, and I start talking with this guy, and he says, 'Oh yeah, I'm Phil Joanou—I'm directing the show.'" Joanou told U2's publicist to let Mazur shoot. "He says, 'He's cool.'"

"Before you know it, I get full access," Mazur says. "He introduced me to Bono and the band." Now Mazur counts Bono among his friends. At an event honoring Bono at the Simon Wiesenthal Center in November, where I went with Mazur, Bono posed for him with his medal in his eye like a monocle.

Mazur soon learned that what made him cool was his refusal to betray a trust, which often meant agreeing to photo ap-

shot that has since become iconographic, a rock 'n' roll *American Gothic*.

"MTV was having this big problem with Nirvana," Mazur says. "MTV wanted them to do 'Smells Like Teen Spirit,' their big hit, and Kurt wanted to do 'Rape Me.' So the MTV publicist, she comes up to me and says, 'Whatever you do, Kevin, do not go up to Kurt and Courtney and the baby, 'cause if they lose it they're gonna walk out.' So I'm like, 'O.K., fine.' You know me, I listen.

"Soon as she says that, who's walking toward me—Kurt Cobain and the baby, no bodyguards around. He's going toward the production people, walking away from the trailers. The guy sees me, I got my cameras dangling, and I see the panic in the poor guy's face."

But all Mazur did was walk on by. "I say, 'Kurt, congratulations on the baby,'" he says. "And I walk away."

And then, later, Mazur went looking for Cobain.

"So later," he says, "there's Kurt sitting on the steps of the trailer. I go over and introduce myself and we just start talking and I say, 'I feel bad for you—it's kinda messed up what was written about Courtney'" (in *Vanity Fair*, a story which report-

resemblance to the work of a paparazzo.

"Everybody's talking about the paparazzi now. I see them on TV interviews and they're like, 'Here I am in Central Park—I'm waiting to find some celebrities.' And I'm like, It's *wrong*," he said. He called paparazzi "scumbags" and "stalkers with cameras."

"The worst thing I see is celebrities will be with their kids, and they say, 'No, I have the kids,' and they don't even respect that. Or shooting over somebody's fence or into somebody's house. Poor Brad Pitt on vacation—he's on his balcony, him and Gwyneth!" He was talking now about how a paparazzo had shot the couple in the nude, in 1995.

"I thought after the whole Princess Diana incident some law would come up to prevent these paparazzi from being such animals," he said. "The thing that kills me the most is when somebody's sick, like Elizabeth Taylor, and some of these scummy photographers go and try and get a picture of them, ill."

He parked his car.

"I really like what I do," he said, "so I don't want to jeopardize anything over being greedy to sell a couple of pictures. I'm making a living I never ever expected in my life to make. These photographers are like, 'You're a millionaire,' and I'm like, 'Dude, I'm not a millionaire.'"

"Everybody's like, 'What'd you get for this picture?' You know what? It's none of your business. I'm doing all right."

It was actually Mazur who shot some of the first photos of Pitt and Jennifer Aniston together—his arms around her at a Radiohead concert in Washington in 1998—pictures that brought in more than \$100,000. "I didn't put my name on them," Mazur said, "'cause I didn't want to piss Brad off—he's a nice guy. But I'm there shooting the concert and I see this and, I mean, how you not gonna take a picture of that?"

Which brings us to Phil Ramey. If there's an anti-Kevin Mazur in the world, it's Phil Ramey, a man as notorious among celebrities as Mazur is loved and hired by them. Sean Penn once reportedly fired a gun in the air as Ramey dangled from a helicopter over Penn's wedding to Madonna in 1985.

Ramey is known for, among other outrageous acts of paparazzism: jumping onto a moving van to take pictures of Rock Hudson lying dead in a body bag; lying in wait outside the Betty Ford clinic to catch Elizabeth Taylor, Johnny Cash, and Peter Lawford during their dry-out sessions; shooting Taylor bald after her brain-tumor surgery;

"YOU PULL THE CAMERA OUT OF THE BAG ON THE FLY," RAMEY SAYS, "AND THAT'S THE PICTURE: SOMETHING TRUE THAT REVEALS SOMETHING."

proval, with which he has no problem. More often than not, when he tells a story about his work, it's about a picture he wouldn't publish rather than one he did. "I have so many photos that are buried and will go to the grave with me," he says, "because celebrities are like, 'I don't want that out there,' and I'm like, 'All right.'"

"I shot Guns n' Roses at Rock in Rio" in Brazil in 1991, he says. "Axl [Rose] let me and one other guy shoot. I did photo approval with him. We talked about everything from family to the business—a writer would have flipped out for what we talked about."

But later, Mazur says, when he got back to his hotel, Rose's bodyguard called to say the rocker had changed his mind and didn't want any of the photos from the session released. "And I was like, 'You know what?'" says Mazur. "'All right. Just tell Axl, remember me next time.'"

In Mazur's view, there's a bigger picture than the one he lost. He never insists. He got one of his most famous pictures this way, the one of Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love with their new baby, Frances Bean, sitting in the doorway of a trailer at the MTV Awards in Los Angeles in 1992—a

ed on Love's drug use). "Courtney pops her head out, she's got Frances in her arms, and she goes"—gravelly voice—"Who are you again?" And I go, 'My name's Kevin Mazur.' She was sitting right there listening to the whole thing, feeding Frances. And she goes"—gravelly voice—"Kurt, he seems *cool*. Will you take a picture of the three of us?" And I'm like, 'Fuck, yeah.' So I take pictures.

"I love to give everybody a little dig," Mazur says, "so I see the woman from MTV later, and I say, 'Guess what. I got pictures of Kurt and Courtney and the baby.' And she's going crazy, and I say, 'Slow down—they asked me to do it.'"

Mazur went on tour with Nirvana the next year.

"I'm no paparazzi," Mazur said one night, driving his S.U.V. to Madison Square Garden to photograph Shakira, the exotic pop princess, at her "Tour of the Mongoose" concert. Sony Music, her label, had hired him.

He seemed eager to dispel the notion that what he does now—photographing celebrities at events, shooting for corporate clients who hire WireImage—bears any

browbeating John McEnroe into letting Ramey take the first shots of his first baby with Tatum O'Neal in return for his agreeing to leave him alone after that.

Ramey pioneered shooting celebrity weddings from a helicopter, which actually led to legislation in California limiting the practice. More recently, if less dramatically, he got pictures of J.Lo flashing a ring and dancing in a bikini, shots that brought in well over \$100,000; ditto for the first pictures of Meg Ryan and Russell Crowe together, dancing and kissing on the streets of Venice, California.

Ramey, 55 and based in L.A., is a man who deals in tips from waiters and parking-lot attendants and in telescopes disguised as cigars. Only his mother knows his home number, he says. He's not easy to talk to, abrupt on the phone, with the voice of a tough guy with a bad cigarette habit (he doesn't smoke).

"I can make one phone call and find out if you're a slut," he said the first time I rang him. I imagined our relationship could only improve from there, so I went to L.A. to see him, although he made no promise to speak to me. He rarely does interviews and seldom goes on television.

I called him repeatedly from my hotel room, listening to his vitriolic jazz in the background as he ran his agency, Ramey Photo (he represents a handful of other photographers and takes half):

"Melanie Griffith's 45th birthday in Buenos Aires," he said to someone, "that's gotta be gross . . ."

"Everybody's all over them"—Affleck and J.Lo, he meant—"like a cheap suit in New York, so I'm only gonna care about her when she pops back in town . . ."

"Is Wacko Jacko back in court today, fucking miserable piece of . . ."

And then, on another line, sounding jocular, he said, "Do you get big bucks to be a photo editor and have these insights, motherfucker? Just 'cause you don't have the brains to quote the right price . . ."

Ramey's known as a tough negotiator—a "gouger," according to an editor at a celebrity magazine. He's the guy who came up with the idea of holding a photo hostage until it goes to the highest bidder, which for many paparazzi has become a *raison d'être*.

It happened like this: Ramey was a struggling freelancer for *The National Enquirer* in 1982 when Generoso Pope, the *Enquirer's* mythic founder, decided to settle a score with Johnny Carson, who had gone on *The Tonight Show* and denounced the tabloid, denying its claims that his marriage to his then wife, Joanna, was in trouble.

Ramey sat in his car watching Carson's

house for a month, trying to catch him with other women. But he got nothing, until one night he swung by just to see what was going on, and he noticed a strange car in the driveway.

An L.A.P.D. contact ran the plates and found the car to be registered to Sally Field. Ramey and Russell Turiak, another photographer sent by the *Enquirer*, got shots of Field and Carson on Carson's Malibu-beach deck, drinking champagne, and then coming out of a local restaurant together. They also tape-recorded them.

Ramey told me, "Mr. Pope used those shots to fry Johnny Carson's ass."

But because Ramey wasn't technically on assignment, the *Enquirer* didn't own his pictures, so he refused to give them up, convincing Turiak to hold the line with him. The *Enquirer* originally offered \$250 and went up to \$20,000.

Ramey says, "I just ballsed 'em out. I said, 'I don't care if you don't hire me

"SEE, A LOT OF THESE PAPARAZZI GO INTO IT BECAUSE THEY WANT RECOGNITION FROM THE STARS," RAMEY SAYS. "I NEVER CRAVED THAT!"

again, 'cause you don't hire me anyway.' What were they gonna do, deprive me of an income I didn't have?"

"Every time after that, they paid."

When Ramey finally agreed to meet with me, it was at a small, expensive sushi restaurant—Ginza Sushiko—where there are only eight seats at the bar and the sushi chef makes his own wasabi by scraping the root against sharkskin.

"What, Madonna and Gwyneth Paltrow were here and you didn't call me?" Ramey chastised a sushi chef.

He seemed intent on demonstrating that, as he said, "some paparazzi have taste." He'd brought two bottles of Dom Pérignon 1985—at around \$300 each—in a leather wine bag. "I'm much more famous in the wine world than the paparazzi world," he told me; he's a champagne collector.

Ramey is six feet three with a wild mane of salt-and-pepper hair and the kind of dark, wet eyes that are both sorrowful and malevolent. He wears jewelry, including a black pearl in his ear that he says he bought on one of his many trips to Tahiti in the 80s to snap the Marlon Brando clan, in the days of Christian's murder trial and Cheyenne's mental disintegration and eventual suicide.

The troubled young woman killed herself a year after appearing in *Paris Match* magazine. *Paris Match* had given her enough money to help her leave the San Francisco mental institution she was in and

return to Tahiti—money in exchange for her pictures, shot by Ramey, and her story.

"My concern," Ramey said, eating endless, delicate pieces of sushi, "is that we"—the paparazzi—"be taken seriously. Who do you think is taking all those pictures in your favorite magazines—not the ones you flip by of the stars looking elegant, but the ones that make you stop and stare?"

Ramey grew up working-poor in Boston, and attended Tufts and M.I.T. on scholarships. He landed in New York, where he stayed awhile after having fallen in love with an actress-waitress who had an interest in cats; he started out as a photographer of cat shows. He finally made it to L.A. on the goodwill of a star.

In those days, he rode motorcycles, and a stuntman he knew, Bud Ekins, hooked him up with the actor Steve McQueen, who was a motorcycle head himself and an antique-bike collector. Ra-

mey and McQueen became a "motorcycle-buddies kind of deal," says Ramey.

In the late 70s, McQueen offered Ramey some money to load 30 antique bikes on a tractor-trailer and haul them from New York to L.A. Ramey wound up living in one of McQueen's houses, in Malibu, where he stayed for a negligible rent, "because Steve McQueen was a nice guy and he liked me, and that's all there is to it," Ramey said.

But with no real profession or means of support, at 30 years old Ramey started hanging around celebrity events, trying to snap pictures of stars to sell to the tabloids. In those days, the *Enquirer*, *Star*, and *Globe* were separate entities (now they're all owned by American Media), and they were lucrative and powerful.

But Ramey was always a combative type and no good at dealing with the publicists who even in those days tried to control access to stars. His defining career moment turned out quite differently from Kevin Mazur's. At a party at the Beverly Hills Hotel not long after moving to Los Angeles, Ramey says he told Warren Cowan, the founder of Rogers and Cowan, one of the biggest publicity firms in Hollywood at the time, to "go fuck himself"; from then on, he says, he was blackballed from celebrity events. (Cowan says he doesn't know who Ramey is.)

"That's the thing that got me jump-started doing paparazzi," Ramey said. "That gave me the push to go out and get

true paparazzi pictures. It certainly was fun.... I know people with considerable more skill who can't do this sort of work. When I think about some of the things I've done, I think, Did I really do that?"

"There's always been photographers who've been invited in, and it's a different world. I don't see that as any more than button pushing," he said. "They're not doing anything particularly creative—anybody says it's journalism is just wacky, and it's certainly not Herb Ritts, is it?"

Later, at the Sky Bar of the Mondrian Hotel—which he first scoped out for stars—Ramey told me about how he used to go around L.A. in a Rolls-Royce with a guy from the *Enquirer*, Don Monte,

known as "the Godfather of Gossip," and find out what the celebrities were doing. He had an unlimited expense account. He used to peel off hundreds of dollars in a night, and he used to make the rounds seven nights a week, and he kind of became my mentor and sponsor."

Ramey told me about how he chased Elizabeth Taylor through four countries in Asia in 1984, finally finagling his way into being the only driver available to her in a remote part of China, where he won her over, and she asked him to take her picture in front of the Great Wall. "You could make a career of Liz Taylor on the stretcher," he said.

He told me how he got the shots of Meg Ryan and Russell Crowe, the first pictures of them together as a couple. "Somebody at a limo company tipped us off," he said. He and some other photographers from his agency staked out the hotel Crowe

and Ryan were meeting in for days until, finally, they went for a lovers' walk along the Venice boardwalk.

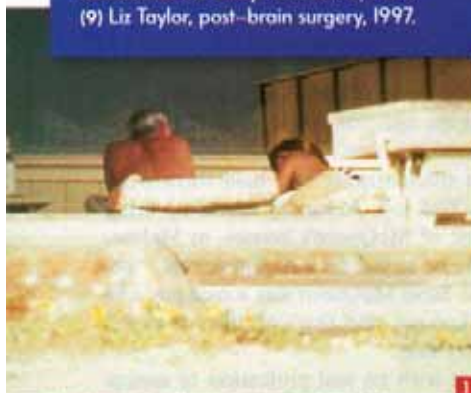
"From a window of a van I shot 20 minutes of video of them hugging and kissing in a Starbucks—she's acting like a schoolgirl on her first date. He's messing with her hair," Ramey said. "There was no hotter shot at the time. It was hotter than J.Lo right now. You pull the camera out of the black bag on the fly, and that's the picture: something true that reveals something."

The majority of the great pictures I've made," Ramey said, leaning back, drinking bitters, "I'm so far away from the subject, I'm so unknown to them, that I simply capture an artist in the way of being themselves. People want to see celebrities doing the same mundane things that they do—going to a store, doing the laun-

THE RAMEY FILE

- (1) Johnny Carson and Sally Field caught on film, Malibu, 1983. (2) Tatum O'Neal and John McEnroe at St. John's Hospital, Santa Monica, 1986. (3) Michael Jackson, 1995. (4) Marlon Brando, 1995. (5) Ramey, circa 1990. (6) Halle Berry and Eric Benét, 2000. (7) Sean Penn and Madonna, married in Malibu, 1985. (8) Peter Lawford at the Betty Ford Clinic, 1984. (9) Liz Taylor, post-brain surgery, 1997.

"YOU COULD MAKE A CAREER OF LIZ TAYLOR ON THE STRETCHER," SAYS RAMEY, WHO CHASED HER THROUGH ASIA.



PHOTOGRAPH NO. 5 BY STEVE CRISSE. ALL OTHERS BY PHIL RAMEY

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CELEBRITY

dry, playing baseball, whatever. Some of it, certainly, is salacious. Some of it by its nature is certainly intrusive, but celebrities are public figures.

"There have been a number of situations where I've been tipped off by the publicists who work for the celebrities," he said. "You'd be very surprised—a reasonable amount of stuff comes into us that way. I know a publicist controlled the situation where Tom Cruise and Penélope Cruz were coming out of a restaurant called Spago together. The publicist wanted a photographer there, and she controlled the distribution of the images.

"You know what I think the most intrusive photography is," Ramey said, seeming to feel, like so many paparazzi, that he had to defend himself, "is news photography. They're only there to do one thing: to exploit any given situation, and it's generally a tragedy, from car wrecks to people jumping off buildings to people dying in the streets. I'm not putting them down—that's the nature of what they do. But they don't suffer the chastisement for doing that as we do, and that level of duplicity is unconscionable as far as I'm concerned.

"When Princess Diana died, Walter Cronkite came out in defense of the photographers. It was just a celebrity involved in a car crash. Were they remiss in shooting the pictures of her laying in the car as opposed to aiding her? I don't know if any of them had the technical expertise to aid her—they probably would have done more damage than good. Were they there to shoot pictures? That's what they were there to do, and that's what they should do.

"I wouldn't say what I do is journalism, but it is journalistic," he said. "I photograph images that are real. See, a lot of these paparazzi go into it because they're fans—they want some recognition from the stars, some validation. I never craved that, although I have wanted to sleep with some of the women."

Backstage at the Shakira concert at Madison Square Garden, Kevin Mazur started telling me about the first time he went on tour with the Rolling Stones. "I can't tell you how much they trust me—they really trust me," he said.

It was the Stones' Steel Wheels tour, 1988. "I was literally married for six months," said Mazur, "and my wife goes, 'Don't even ask me.' I'm like, 'Hon, it's the Rolling Stones.' The first day I'm there, they introduce me to the rest of the band. It's Keith Richards, Bill Wyman, Ronnie Wood, and Arnold Dunn, the tour manager, shooting pool.

"And Arnold gets a call to go do something, and they say, 'Can you shoot pool?' They're playing this English game, snook-

er. And I say, 'I can shoot pool, but I don't know this game.' I was paired up with Bill Wyman. He says, 'It's easy, I'll show you.'

"Me and Bill, we killed Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood, and I'm like sitting there, I'm the new guy, and I'm shooting pool with them, and I see people looking at me like, 'Who's he?' So the next day, they're going to play pool again. They're choosing up sides, and Keith goes, 'I want Kevin!'

"I had to pinch myself. I'm hanging out with the Stones, they're letting me hang out with them, flying around in the private jet and stuff..." Mazur smiled. The music started. He ran off to take pictures of Shakira.

That night, performing, Shakira took a nasty spill—blond hair cascading over her face as her chin hit the stage, mouth clamping down on the harmonica she was playing, legs sprawling out from under her, sideways.

"Did you see that?" Mazur said excitedly, first thing when I hooked up with him after the show. "She took a fall, she came down hard, she's hurtin'! I had my elbow on the stage, I felt the thud!"

I asked him if he had taken pictures of it.

Mazur said, "I couldn't. I felt bad for her. I wanted to run up and help her."

Phil Ramey told me there was never a shot he wouldn't take, except for one. It was of Steve McQueen.

"Steve McQueen eventually got diagnosed with cancer," he said, "and *The National Enquirer* found out that I was a close friend of his, and when he went to Mexico to take the cure, they offered me lots of money, more than you could have imagined. They knew that I could go and see him and not raise lots of alarms. It was a tremendous amount of money, and, no, I didn't do it.

"And even in retrospect, considering all the other shit I've done, I'm still glad I didn't do it. And I'm not just saying that to make me look good, 'cause I don't give a fuck what I look like. But you know what it was with McQueen? Anybody can be nice to anybody if they're looking for an end point. In chess it's called an end-game, an end-point advantage. In all the years McQueen was friends with me, McQueen never looked for any advantage from me. We were just friends because we were biker buddies. I never did it, because I never did it.

"It's not a matter of morals or ethics, because in this kind of business those kind of things really don't exist. I don't care if the *Enquirer* offered me 10 times what they offered me, I wasn't gonna do it." □