

JANE

PREMIERE ISSUE

Ten Steps
to a Beautiful
Life, by

drew

**Sex to
Write
Home
About**

**“I Want
Her Hair!”**
Get It Inside

**Style
Goddess**
For Under \$50

Brendan Fraser
Our Token Sex Symbol

US \$1.95 Canada \$2.95



**No Women
Allowed**
Inside the New
Men's Movement

IT HAPPENED TO ME

Lauren Spencer testified in a sexual harassment case. She had no idea just who would wind up on trial.

United States District Court, New York City: It's the longest walk of my life, and all I can think is that I'm going to trip and fall. To my left sits a female judge, to my right a jury of five men and four women. I've been made aware by the plaintiff's lawyer that these jurors are extra-responsive to the words *sex*, *blow job*, *sleeping with* and *fuck*, which makes sense, because this trial is about sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace.

Specifically, it is a case brought against Bob Guccione Jr., editor and publisher of the music magazine *Spin* and son of the publisher of *Penthouse*. The plaintiff is Staci Bonner, *Spin*'s former research editor. She's here to address why she never advanced to a creative position while those who dated or slept with her boss did. She's also here to charge that during the three and a half years she worked at *Spin*, she was professionally and emotionally scarred by the magazine's fraternity-like atmosphere.

"Ms. Spencer, did you ever discuss your sex life in the *Spin* offices?" asks Betsy Plevin, Bob's lawyer. I brace myself. I've been expecting this question since Hillary Richard, Staci's attorney, first called two years ago. At that point she asked me about my time as a *Spin* senior editor, about abusive behavior by male editors and whether I went along with it.

I inhale and say no, lying. The truth? Yes, I talked about my sex life, because I wanted to be part of the boys' club, a club where I got to hang out with people from Nirvana and Pearl

The sound of silence among the females in the office was deafening.

Jam. My friendships with them validated the dreams that had lured me to the rock & roll industry. But it was a world run by different standards. The kind where just five years ago, an executive of a major record company could stick his penis in his secretary's ear and go on to prosper in a high-level job (true story).

I paid my dues. I thought I had to ignore my female sense of right and wrong. I wore a T-shirt that said, "I'm In a Band, Fuck Me." I answered Bob in meetings when he asked if I'd gotten lucky with some guy. I heard writer Legs McNeil scream out to females, "Get in here and give me a blow job." I discussed the instruction from *Spin*'s managing editor not to hire "attractive blonde" interns, since they were a distraction to Bob. I laughed at slogans like "A beer in each hand and an intern on each knee." I'd convinced myself these activities were harmless.

"Ms. Spencer, I'm going to ask you again, did you ever discuss your sex life in the office—yes or no?"

I answer, "Yes."

"Ms. Spencer, when were you employed at *Spin* magazine?"

"Eight years ago." At that time there were memos about vacation and retirement plans—but nothing indicating my job would include being called a "stupid cunt." That I'd hear "girls can't write" and that, in a column featuring male and female writers, "all girls have to go on the bottom" of the page. When Legs snapped my bra in a crowded office, he wasn't even reprimanded—the magazine's general manager testified that she was uncomfortable bringing up harassment issues with Bob for fear of not being taken seriously. The sound of silence among the females in the

office was deafening.

"Did you know of Mr. Guccione's interactions with interns?"

"Absolutely." One says Bob called her at 1:30 a.m. and asked her to his apartment to get naked in bed, eat pasta, drink wine and edit her writing. She declined, telling him that she'd send over \$40 so he could hire "a real prostitute." Then there was the one with well-placed piercings and apparently a fondness for narcotics. Bob thought she was a genius, despite her nodding off one day at the *Spin* reception desk. They became involved. Over the course of a year, she ascended from intern to editorial assistant to freelance writer. No one seemed terribly surprised.

"Did you work with Jill Swid?"

"Yes," I answer. Jill, a fashion editor at *Spin* and daughter of one of the magazine's owners, was considered a hostile witness for the plaintiff, only to see her life shredded by Bob's attorneys. The purpose was that Bob could then twist everything he said and did to her—suggesting she join him in a ménage à trois or saying how funny it would be to fondle her under her parents' dinner table—into something she "encouraged."

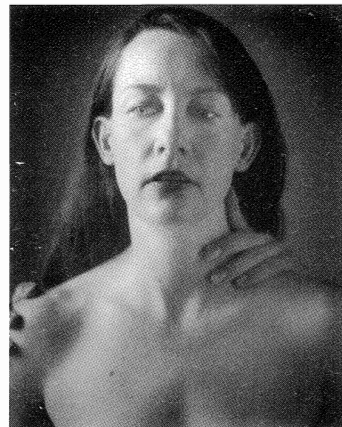
Two writers, Julia Chaplin and Celia Farber, had their skills

pulled apart by Staci's attorney to show their promotions resulted from their relationship with Bob. The general manager testified that editors told her Julia had "no credible background" to be working there. A former managing editor testified that Celia was "a sloppy writer," her reporting skills "not very good." Holly Holliday, a former art director in the promotions department, was asked whether she got her job from dating Bob. She said no, but she seemed to doubt her words. No one who walked up to that stand stepped away unscathed. "I feel like I'm the one on trial," Celia said.

"The jury finds Bob Guccione Jr. and *Spin* magazine guilty of violating New York State's Human Rights law, in creating a hostile work environment. Judgment: \$90,000. The jury also finds the defendant guilty of willful violation of the Federal Equal Pay Act. Judgment: \$10,000, with another \$10,000 awarded in estimated back pay. The jury finds the defendant not guilty of engaging in *quid pro quo* sexual harassment or intentionally inflicting emotional distress on the plaintiff." This is said to be the most a publication has ever been charged in a case like this. The defense will also be responsible for more than a half-million dollars of Staci's legal fees. (*Spin* recently was sold.) But it's hard to say whether Staci's reward outweighs the emotional costs here.

"Ms. Spencer, what is your current occupation?"

"Freelance writer," I answer. It's ironic that the place where I found my voice as a writer is where I lost it as a woman. ■



231

SEND YOUR PERSONAL STORIES to: *Jane*, 7 W. 34th St., New York, NY, 10001.