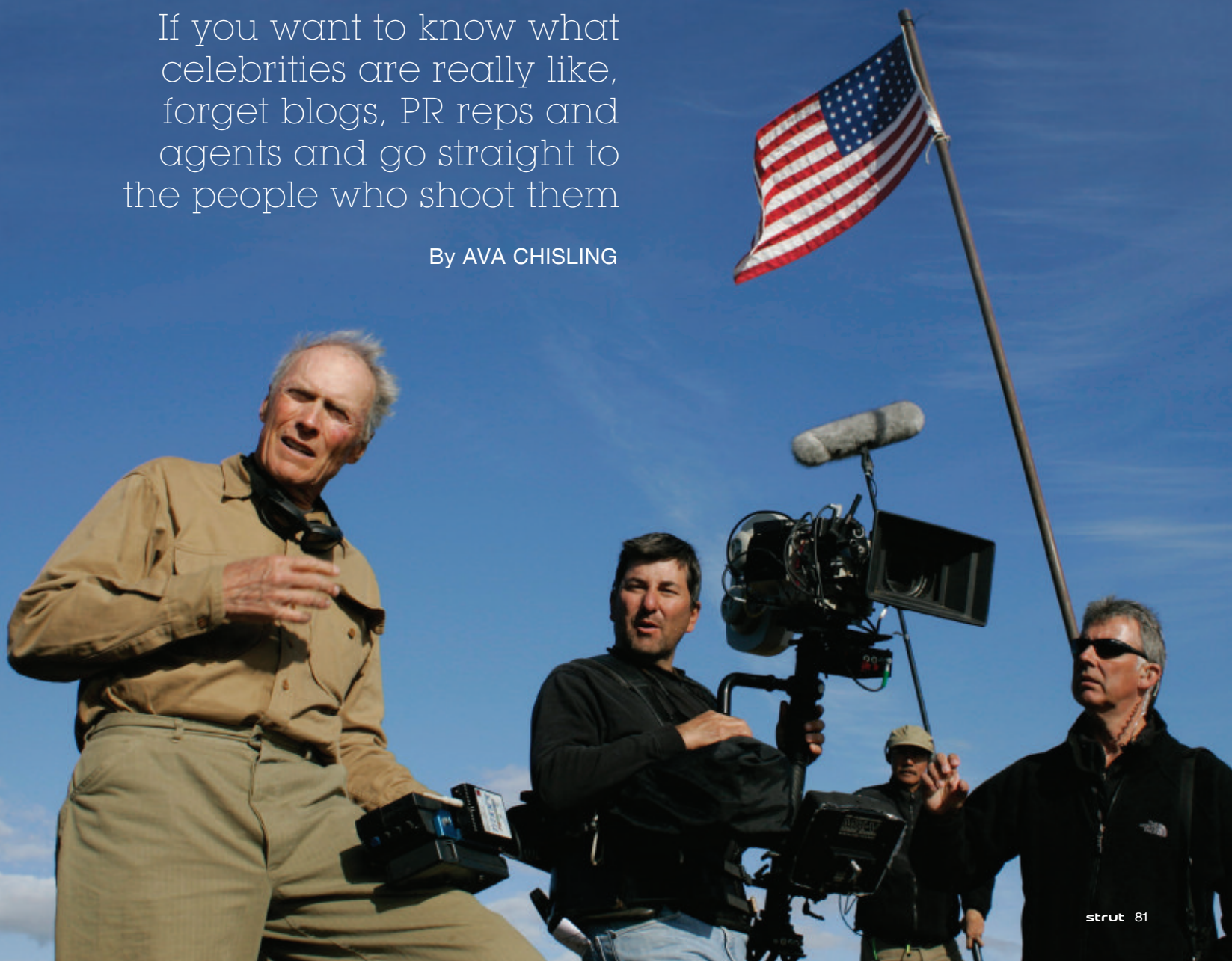


# ME AND CAMPANELLI

If you want to know what celebrities are really like, forget blogs, PR reps and agents and go straight to the people who shoot them

By AVA CHISLING





"Tom Cruise is a high-energy, passionate, nice guy. I am not surprised he jumped on Oprah's couch"



Behind the scenes of every Clint Eastwood film since *Bridges of Madison County* – and once thanked personally by the famed director at the Oscar podium – Montreal native Stephen Campanelli has worked with Angelina Jolie, Meryl Streep, Tom Cruise, Keanu Reeves, John Travolta and hundreds of others. A camera operator worth knowing, he has filmed *Get Smart*, *Vanilla Sky*, *Million Dollar Baby*, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* and *Romeo Must Die*, to name a few. Here's his take on those in the spotlight.

Just in case we win a Pulitzer Prize for this interview or we are asked to appear on *Oprah*, we should tell our readers that we have a few friends in common.

We do. We know Steven Goldmann [multiple award-winning video director] and Joe Sisto [soon to be award-winning movie producer].

But enough about them. Is it true your parents mortgaged their house to buy you a camera?

No. When I was 27, they loaned me \$25,000 to help me buy my first Steadicam. There were only two in Canada at the time and none on the East Coast.

Is that the weird camera you wrap around your body?

Yes. You can run with it, walk up stairs, whatever you like. It won't shake. It weighs about 100 pounds, and I fell in love with it.

You have shot some beautiful films [*Letters from Iwo Jima*, *Flags of Our Fathers*, *Mystic River*] and some beautiful people, too. What is the nicest thing you have ever seen through your lens?

That is a good question. I just shot a film with Angelina Jolie [*Changeling*]. She was dressed in a 1928 period costume with her hair pulled back. Her lips were bright red... she was just stunning and was one of the nicest things I have shot. But most striking, and the one that sticks with me still, is Hilary Swank in *Million Dollar Baby*. She has such charisma, she lights up my screen. She is the most memorable.

What's the worst thing you have ever shot?

I was shooting a scene in *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* and Jennifer Carpenter was in the barn being "exorcised" by the priest. She was on her knees, bent forward so I couldn't see her face. The goal was for her to raise her head, film her, and then make her scary afterwards with special effects. But when she lifted her head, her eyes rolled to the back of her head. They had these little slits in them. She was scary and demonic. I called "Cut!" and thought, "There is something wrong with that girl!" I had to leave the set for a few minutes.

Do you believe in those film set superstitions? You know, like *The Exorcist* where everyone working on the film either died or was visited by some kind of demon?

No. Well, kind of. Okay, I was a little nervous about the *Emily Rose* shoot. I am a half-believer, if there is such a thing.

Are there films you turned down that you wished you had shot?

Yes. The second *Pirates of the Caribbean* film and the second *Hannah Montana* movie, because I would have been a hero to my daughter. I just couldn't fit them into my schedule.

What about films that weren't offered to you? Which of those would you have liked to be a part of?

*Chicago* – I liked the visual aspect of it, and with a Steadicam you can go crazy with the dance scenes.

You have worked with Sean Penn and Meryl Streep, and you dream of shooting Renée Zellweger, shimmering in her little dresses? That is not the answer I expected!

Okay, I take it back. I choose *The Godfather*!

Too late! Tell me your best disaster story, the one where big stars are involved and you messed up big time.

I recently shot the remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* in Vancouver, and although it was supposed to be summer, it started to snow. Like, all day. That was a disaster.

Yes, but I want a story where it was your fault. You didn't make it snow, did you?

No. There was one time when I was working on a Clint film and I forgot to turn the camera on. We "shot" an entire scene, and when he asked me to verify it, I looked down and saw that the counter had not moved. The camera was off the whole time.

What did you do? I would have blamed someone else.

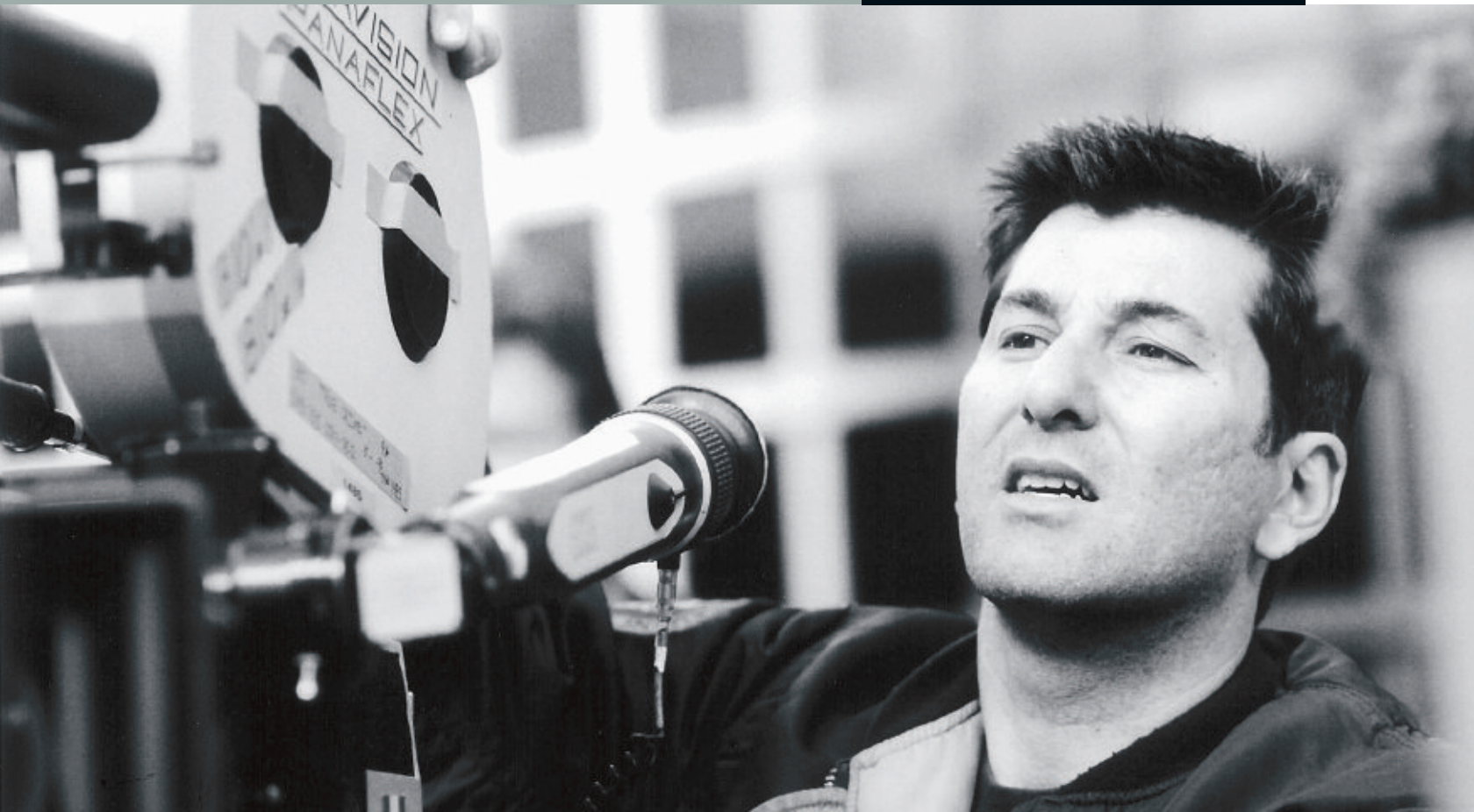
For anyone other than Clint, I would have lied and said the camera jammed or something. But for him, I told the truth. I said we screwed up.

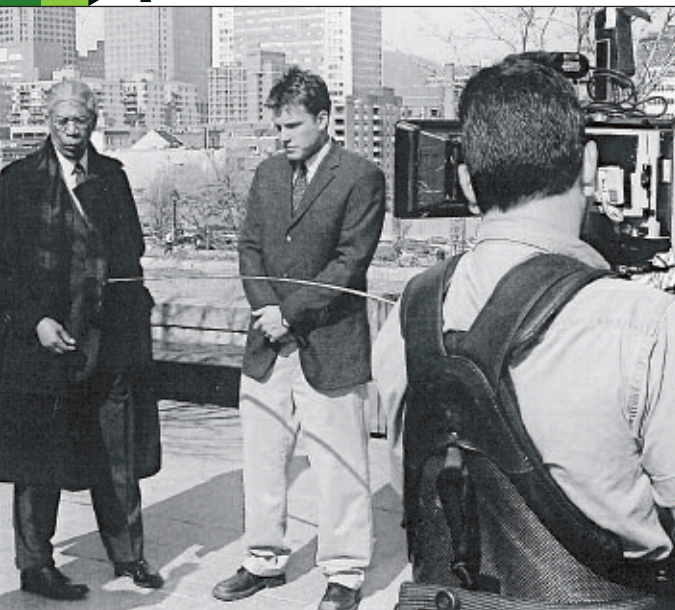
What is the toughest shoot you have experienced?

*Twister*. It was during a time when CGI was good but not great. Most of what you saw onscreen was real. I was pelted by huge chunks of ice, fake rocks and picket fences. 737 jet airline engines were blowing at us.

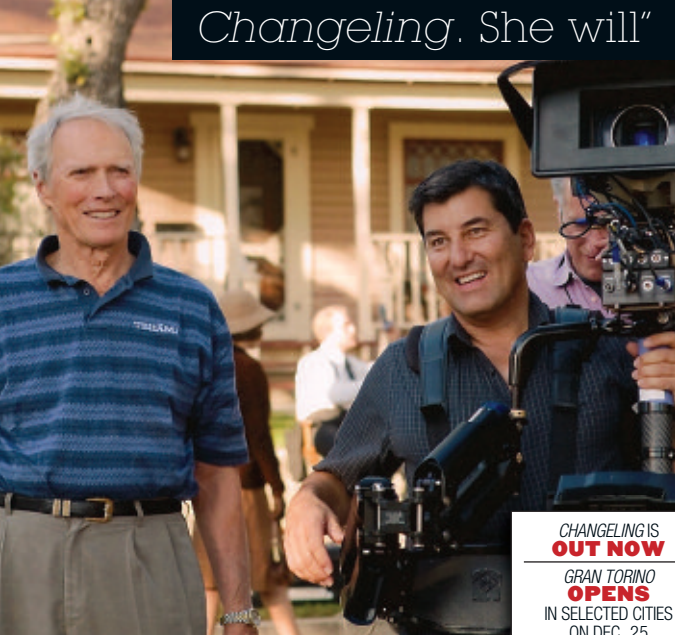


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"I told Hilary Swank she would win an Oscar for *Million Dollar Baby* and she did. I just told Angelina Jolie she would win one for *Changeling*. She will"



CHANGELING IS  
OUT NOW  
GRAN TORINO  
OPENS  
IN SELECTED CITIES  
ON DEC. 25

It sounds like a scene from the original *Star Trek*.

It was tough. There was one scene where the characters are in a red pickup truck and huge red farm combines come crashing down. Those were real! A helicopter dropped them from above. The pilot had to be told when to release them as he could not see us on the ground. One second more or less and we would be dead.

My guess is that to film your own death would have been scarier than the exorcist woman. How about I give you one or two words and you tell me what you think? Let's start with Tom Cruise.

High-energy, passionate, nice guy. I am not surprised he jumped on Oprah's couch. We did some really cool shots on *Vanilla Sky* and he was really excited about them. It's the way he is.

**John Travolta.**

I have worked with him three times. In 1992, he brought pizza to the set and was totally easygoing. Then he was a little distant in *Be Cool*, but a few weeks ago we worked on *Old Dogs* and he was back to his old self.

**Paparazzi.**

Don't get me started! They are creating the problem, and the news is airing it. Britney shaved her head. Big deal! Leave her alone and the behaviour will stop.

**Keanu Reeves.**

Great person, introverted. In *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, he did a good job of portraying a complicated character. He plays an alien. You will see that he never blinks and had a particularly rhythmic walk. That sounds easy but it is not. He had to do it all the time. Keanu struggles to get his performance. It doesn't come easy to him.

**Sean Penn.**

Very intense, professional, quiet, did not get to know many people on the crew [of *Mystic River*], not mean. There is a big difference performance-wise between him and Keanu, even though they both started out as surfer dudes.

**Angelina Jolie.**

Professional, prepared. At first, in *Changeling*, she was concerned about Clint's quick way of filming [little rehearsal] but got into it quickly. Brad came onto the set a few times. They are a nice family. You just can't believe the tabloids.

**Meryl Streep.**

Top of the list. Sweet, natural, incredible. Acting is so easy for her. She also had trouble initially getting used to Clint's style. She was used to five or six takes before getting into character, not one or two. But at the end of *The Bridges of Madison County*, she cried because she enjoyed the shoot so much.

**Hilary Swank.**

I told her she would win an Oscar for *Million Dollar Baby* and she did. I just told Jolie she would win one for *Changeling*. She will.

**What's next?**

I am off to spend a few months in Detroit to shoot *Gran Torino* [Eastwood], and then probably off to Vancouver for *Tooth Fairy*, a comedy with Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. I worked with him in *Get Smart* and *Be Cool*. He plays a hockey player who knocks out people's teeth. He is genuinely grateful for his success.

Oh, by the way, does the camera really add 10 pounds?

Maybe on TV. But not with me. ☺