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On the Town: Lainey: Once a gossip, always a gossip

By Lia Grainger, National Post

Lounging on the patio of the Park Hyatt hotel's rooftop lounge, sipping a \$10 vodka soda, Lainey looks at home. The 35-year-old author of her own celebrity blog, Laineygossip.com, seems unruffled by the gown-clad crowd that murmurs about the candlelit party, and she's equally unfazed by the fact that in less than an hour she'll be on the TIFF red carpet with a mic in her hand as co-host of CTV's eTalk, interviewing some of Hollywood's biggest names. In Lainey's world, if anyone should be nervous, it's the celebs.

"I'm pretty judgy," Lainey says, laughing. She has no problem chatting amicably with celebs in front of the camera and then, should she deem them unworthy, tearing them to pieces on her blog. "I'm very opinionated, very bitchy." She pauses to consider how best to define herself. "I wouldn't say I'm the warm, fuzzy type."

Perhaps it's that sass that's landed her a seat at the top of the competitive celebrity blogging scene. "It was totally haphazard," says Lainey, whose real name is Elaine Lui, of her unlikely emergence in the entertainment industry. A native Torontonian and fundraiser by profession, Lainey had been living in Vancouver and working for a charity when she was called back to Toronto to be with her mother, who needed a kidney transplant.

"My work friends were like, 'How are you going to keep us updated - you're our pop culture connection!'" Her solution was an e-newsletter that quickly grew until her subscriber list was in the thousands. When it finally crashed her server, Lainey decided it was time to start a website, and within six months of launching, she was approached by eTalk to become a gossip reporter.

Though she now calls Vancouver home, Lainey makes the trip to TIFF each year, when celebrity saturation and fan hysteria is at its Canadian peak.

"I like to come here, especially during TIFF, because I'm responsible for getting good gossip and stories for the show and for my blog," says Lainey of the heavily guarded Park Hyatt lounge where she sits.

Last year, Kate Beckinsale and Harvey Weinstein wound down their evenings here, and the year before it was the watering hole of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. "Most of the titillating stuff happens at night," Lainey explains. "You can see the celebrities relax."

There is no doubt that this self-made "It girl" takes her job seriously - she has been up since 4:30 a.m. and writes about 3,500 words per day. But despite her schedule and appetite for the details of famous people's lives, she still keeps things in perspective.

"I'm not going to try to tell you that my blog is going to cure cancer - I write 10 times a week about the goddamned Twilight people, so let's be real here," Lainey says. "But at the same time, I think you can present a subject as frivolous as gossip in a way that is not so lowest-common-denominator."