

THE ENTERTAINMENT *Journal* NEVER QUILTS

LUMINARY AWARD RECIPIENT GEORGE PENNACCHIO HAS HAD QUITE A CAREER, AND THERE'S MORE TO COME BY CLAUDIA OBERST

WHEN George Pennacchio covered the Academy Awards for the first time, he felt like pinching himself. The then-news producer and sometimes-entertainment-reporter for a local station in San Diego stood on the red carpet of the most important Hollywood event of the year.

"That was the night where I took the limits away from what I could achieve," he remembers.

Little did he know that he would one day have syndicated Oscar pre- and post-shows watched by millions of people around the world. In the roughly three decades following his Oscar debut, Pennacchio has become a household name in entertainment reporting. He has interviewed hundreds of actors, filmmakers and musicians. He is a three-time Emmy winner, and has received awards from the Broadcast Film Critics Association, the Pub-

licists Guild of America and the Hollywood Arts Council.

Tonight, the Los Angeles Press Club is honoring him with the Luminary Award for Career Achievement.

It is hard to believe that Pennacchio's reporting career almost did not happen. Fresh out of college, he sent about 100 letters to TV stations, trying to get a job.

"They told me I looked too young. One director told me to grow a moustache," says the Chicago-born Pennacchio, who spent part of his childhood in Southern California.

He decided to give it time and hone his writing skills. With no producing experience, he finally landed a job as a producer in Monterey, and from there he went to work in San Diego. He got his break as an entertainment reporter at KFMB in that city because he



Bookending young George in the middle are portraits from kindergarten on left, and first grade on right.



pitched the idea to his boss in a meeting.

“It is not easy to ask for things, but if you never ask, you will never get anything,” he says.

Soon after, ABC7 offered him a job in Los Angeles, and the rest is entertainment history. Pennacchio has been with ABC7 for 22 years. Viewers can’t imagine the Oscars without him. The same goes for shows such as “Dancing With the Stars,” the Country Music Awards, the Emmys and the American Music Awards. Not to mention his coverage of movie premieres and press junkets and his sit-down interviews with some of Hollywood’s greats.

Each time Pennacchio goes on the air, he is meticulously prepared and impeccably dressed, the latter thanks to his costume designer wife, Erin Pennacchio. She first came up with the idea for her husband’s signature vest style and has designed and tailored hundreds of suits for him during their 25-year marriage.



Covering entertainment events involves not only being up-to-date on what is trending but being outfitted in custom-designed suits by his wife, Erin, plus the the rehearsals that take place before the actual event.



Clockwise from above: Zootopia's animation of George; hanging with Oprah outside at the Academy Awards; interviewing Kirk Douglas for his 100th birthday; visiting Rose Marie; a young George with Faye Dunaway. Opposite page: George and Erin at home with their greyhounds.

From left: Steven Spielberg turns the mic on him; meeting Stan Lee who died last month.

There is another strong woman at Pennacchio's side: his producer Cheryl Diano. She has been working with him for 17 years. In addition to their Italian heritage, they share the same vision.

"We have come a long way and each step of our journey has been amazing," says Diano. "I love George to pieces, even when I want to

strangle him!" Pennacchio grew up loving entertainment. He recalls staying up until 11

p.m. as a 5-year-old to watch TV.

"In sixth grade, my friends and I would go to the movies pretty much every weekend. We would go to the matinees because they were cheap," he says.

His mother watched "General Hospital" and Pennacchio first started making his yearly cameo appearances on the show to make her happy. Today he does it to honor her memory.

Pennacchio is unabashed in his love for Old Hollywood. When asked about his favorite career moments, he talks about meeting his idol, the late actress Rose Marie of the "Dick Van Dyke Show," and interviewing Kirk Douglas for his 100th birthday. He has a standing invitation to Douglas' 105th birthday, which he plans to honor. He has also formed genuine friendships with some of his interviewees, among them Ruta Lee and Ilene Graff, and is proud of his bond with actress Nia Vardalos, whose one-woman play he reviewed before it became the smash hit movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*.

"Every once in a while, you create something unique," he says of his numerous encounters with Hollywood's elite.

Pennacchio realizes that the entertainment business is rapidly changing. Luring celebrities in front of your camera at red carpets has got-





ten harder with the ever-growing number of outlets covering an event, he admits. To keep in touch with his fan base and connect with a younger audience, he has built a social media presence by playfully branding himself as the “entertainment guru,” a nickname

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given to him by a former anchor. One of Pennacchio’s tweets about Korean boy band BTS once even had him trending on Twitter, as he proudly points out.

“I’m happy when my fans tell me what they like,” he says. “The truth is, I just love my job. It never gets boring and I work with great people.”

While he is grateful for everything he has achieved, he is looking ahead to see which path the entertainment industry takes over the next couple of years. He says he would not mind doing a syndicated show where entertainment is mixed with other concepts.

He is also dreaming of sitting down with Doris Day to talk about her life and career. So far, he has had no luck in convincing her to step in front of the camera, but that does not mean he is giving up.

There is no doubt that George Pennacchio still has a few career-defining moments ahead of him.

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Journalists aren’t just passive observers. We’re active storytellers who shape the way our communities see the world. The Los Angeles Press Club is where you can use those passions and talents to support our profession. It’s also where you can meet colleagues from diverse outlets, platforms and beats. The more we participate, the more we all get out of it. Here’s how you can stay involved.

JOIN: If you’re not already a member, signing up is simple at lapressclub.org. Most of us are full-time journalists, but there are other membership categories, too.

GIVE: As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, we depend on your support. A journalism career can be glamorous, but it can also be tough, so please give what you can. You can help in other ways, too, such as working on events, joining committees, leading panels, writing copy for our website, etc. All support is appreciated.

ENTER: We host two annual awards competition, both of which lead to a blow-out gala: the Southern California Journalism Awards in the summer, and the National Arts & Entertainment Journalism Awards in the winter. Both attract hundreds of entries and the winners represent some of the best journalism in the country. Enter your own work or, if you’re impressed by a colleague, encourage him or her to enter. The SCJAs are awarded for work during a calendar year, and the NAEJs cover a yearly period starting July 1.

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LEAD: Our board of directors has 14 members, half of whom are up for election each November. While board members must be working journalists, anybody can volunteer to join a committee and help out. Our priority areas include Events/Programming, Membership, Financial/Fundraising and Ethics. We’re also always looking for creative ideas.

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