



Alex Cambert '90

PICK
OF THE

Glitter

Given the way

the entertainment industry is vilified by

politicians, dismissed by academics, and alternately coddled and blasted by the press, it's not difficult to see why Hollywood intrigues us.

Although we are wary of its influence on society, we can't suppress the giddiness we feel when we join friends to watch a favorite television show or finally see the great movie everyone's been talking about. In this way, Hollywood helps connect us; it creates common ground.

With writers on *Sports Night*, *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*, and *Frasier*, Carls can take credit for some of the smartest, funniest, and most incisive writing on the small screen. Carls also are cinematographers and TV hosts, filming and interviewing today's hottest stars. In short, they're helping create some of the entertainment worth watching.

On the following pages, the *Voice* profiles seven alumni who have made an impact on Hollywood, both in front of the camera and behind the scenes.

On the Air

Gwyneth Paltrow speaks perfect Spanish, and Ben Affleck and Robin Williams are respectably bilingual as well. Alex Cambert '90 should know, having spent the past three years interviewing Hollywood celebrities for a popular Spanish-language show called *Edición Especial*.

Though he never imagined doing Spanish-language TV, the job is a perfect fit for the Cuban American Miami native who has a disarming manner and an obvious love of performing. "I've always been a talker," he says during a recent phone interview, in one of the few sentences he spoke using his own voice. (Among his imitations during a 30-minute conversation: his Cuban grandfather, himself as a radio DJ, Paltrow's Castilian accent, and Jerry Seinfeld on safari.)

Cambert, who won't exactly claim he majored in political science but does admit to "often attending classes in that department," feels he actually specialized in improvisational comedy at Carleton, where he helped found an improv group, Cujokra. "I take a great measure of satisfaction in that, in having started something," he says, adding, "there were some really funny people at Carleton. They're probably all cracking jokes in operating rooms now."

After Carleton, which Cambert chose in part to have an experience as far away as possible from his Miami upbringing, the fledgling actor spent several years doing comedy, radio, TV, and voice-over work in Miami and New York before moving to Los Angeles several years ago.

The time he spent on radio and voice-over work (including a stint on *Letterman*) was terrific experience for a comedian, says Cambert. "I learned to be funny with just my voice. It expanded everything I knew about comedy."

Since moving to an apartment "just below the Hollywood sign," Cambert has divided his time between reporting and producing programs for Telemundo—one of two Spanish-language networks in the United States—and hosting *Amazing Tails* on the Discovery Channel's sister network, Animal Planet.

The latter gig is a bit of a surprise to Cambert, who confesses, "I'm not an animal person exactly." He decided to take a Jerry Seinfeld-meets-the-jungle approach, he says, lapsing into an imitation of the sitcom star encountering exotic animal droppings. ("Oooh, koala poop. What's up with that?") A lighthearted style was essential, Cambert believes, since "too often these animal shows are—let's face it—boring."

The ever-energetic entertainer, who recently won an Emmy for an hour-long *Telemundo* celebrity interview special he produced called *La Silla Caliente* (the hot seat), isn't satisfied with Spanish- and animal-channel stardom, however. Like most aspiring Hollywood actors, he hopes his star will someday rise as far as the movies and a network sitcom. In fact, he already has a premise in mind for a sitcom based on his family and his autobiographical one-stage show *One Flew over the Cuban's Nest*.

Cambert thinks the time is right for a Hispanic family in prime time. "There are so many people like me, who grew up bilingual, but our community isn't being served," he says. "Hollywood is just beginning to realize the importance of this market—I call it rice and beans meets the Brady Bunch."

—LL.

By Elaine Cunningham
and Lynette Lamb



Wendy West '94

PHIL CHANNING

From Banking to Babylon

As the youngest officer in the history of the Harris Trust & Savings Bank in Chicago and an M.B.A. candidate at the prestigious Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University, Jim Slocum '79 was on his way to a successful business career back in 1983. Then it happened. A professor asked Slocum if he was in a creative field. The question gave Slocum pause and pushed him to reevaluate his career decision.

An English major at Carleton, Slocum was involved in theater at college. In fact, he chaired the Musical and Experimental Theater Boards and wrote, produced, and directed a full-length musical comedy called *Prince David*. He wondered: Did his interests lie more in the arts than in commerce?

Slocum completed his M.B.A., but rather than continue in banking, he applied to and was accepted at the School of Cinema–Television at the University of Southern California.

While he was there, he won an award for a short animated film called *20th Century Christmas* that he wrote, produced, and directed. The USC faculty honored him with the Jack Nicholson Scholarship for Screenwriting. His thesis film, *A Modest Proposal*,

West's Law

Although a Manhattan-based cop show may seem a long way from a Northfield college campus, television writer Wendy West '94 claims that, in one sense, she hasn't really come that far.

"What's amazing to me is how much certain parts of my life are like they were at Carleton," says West, who writes for the hour-long dramatic series *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*, which airs Friday nights on NBC. At Carleton, the English and media studies major was heavily involved in theater, directing *Chess* and *Six Degrees of Separation* her senior year. "Every night in college we'd make a script better, rehearse, rewrite, cut . . . it's the same stuff I do now," she says.

It is a long way in terms of compensation and prestige, though West credits luck as much as talent in getting her where she is today. After Carleton, she earned an M.F.A. in film from the University of Southern California. Before graduating, she wrote some audition scripts, one of which secured her an agent. That agent was seeking writers for a WB channel sitcom called *Three*, which was on TV for "about a heartbeat," says West.

Her rapid entrance into TV writing is unusual, West acknowledges: "I was in the right place at the right time." From that first experience she moved to a job writing for a Fox channel Shaun Cassidy vehicle called *Hollyweird*, which never made it on the air. It was the head writer on *Hollyweird* who hired her for her current job.

Just five writers come up with 24 shows a year for *Law and Order: SVU*. Sitcom writers hang out together in a room trying out bits and lines on each other, but dramatic series writers tend to work alone, says West. And although she often puts in long days, she insists the process isn't nearly as grueling as that faced by the comedy writers on shows like *Friends*.

"Sitcoms are easier on actors, harder on writers, and dramas are the opposite," she says.

Each *SVU* writer is responsible for writing five shows a year, West explains, though they regularly seek feedback and suggestions from each other. And on this program, at least, the writers all get along. "It's a wonderful, smart, hip staff, and we really do work well together," West says.

Because it's shot in New York, *SVU* demands that its writers and actors negotiate the tricky business of a bicoastal lifestyle. West works relatively normal hours in Los Angeles—"unless something goes wrong"—but when one of the shows she has written is in production, she must fly to New York to be on the set. There she spends far more demanding workweeks consulting with the program's technical advisers—cops in the Brooklyn Police Department's Special Victims Unit—and helping with casting, costumes, props, and rewrites.

At first she was nervous about hanging around with cops, says West, who grew up in New Mexico, the daughter of two educators. But she began to feel more comfortable with them when she realized that police officers are actually a lot like teachers. "They're civil servants, they work hard for not much money, there's no glamour, and they don't walk away, no matter how hard it gets," she says.

During her first months on the show last summer, "I immersed myself in the *SVU* stuff," West says. Soon she got to the point where she was very glad she had chosen a different profession and that, unlike the cops, she could distance herself from the uglier parts of that world.

As for what sort of career she ultimately desires, West says she is very happy writing for TV. Although many of her colleagues hope to write films, West loves the speed and immediacy of TV.

"Every day you get another crack at the bat," she says, "and every once in a while something good happens."

—L.L.

based on the writing of Jonathan Swift, received numerous awards at film festivals around the world. Not bad for a banker.

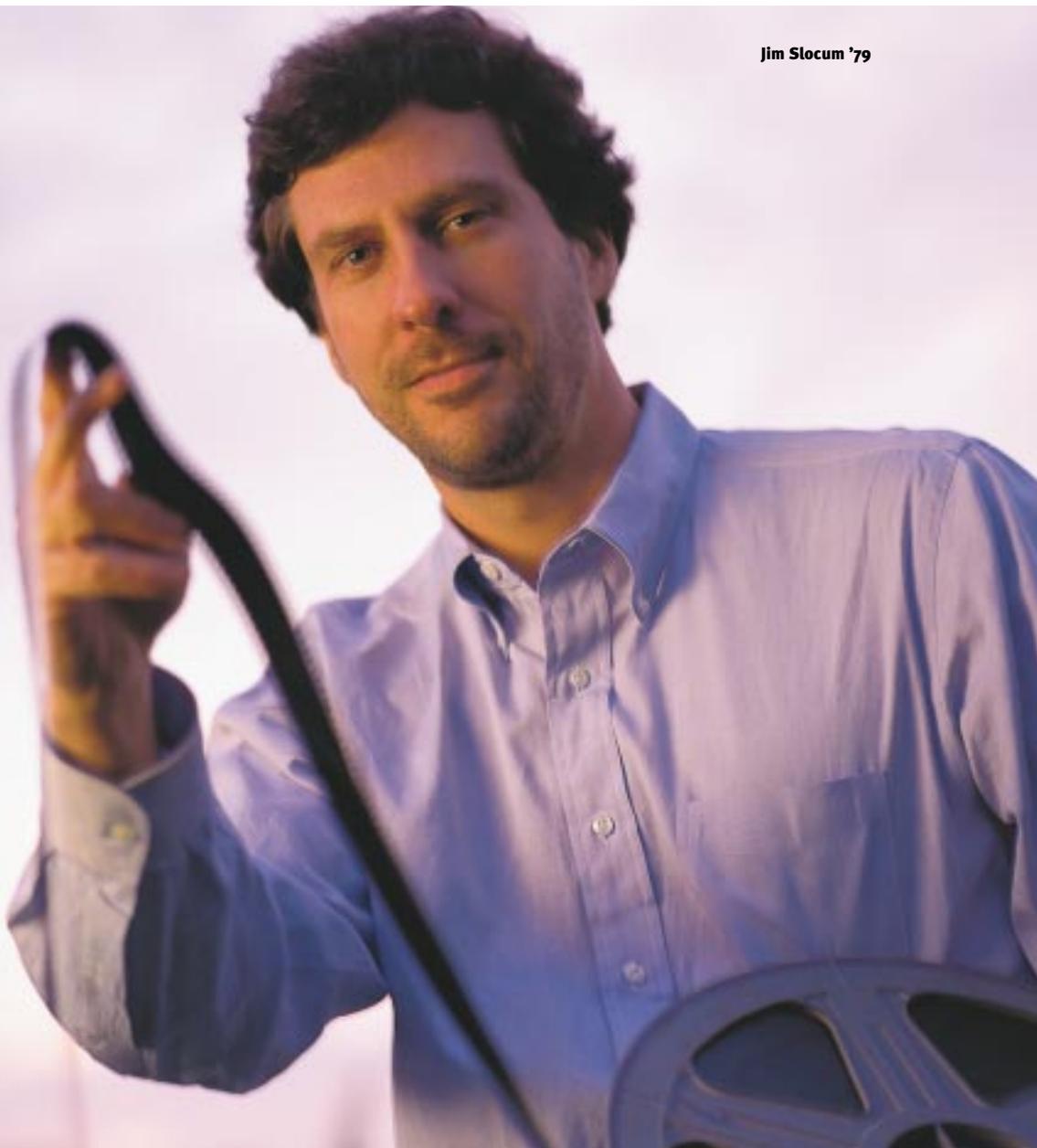
“The films I made in school went over extremely well,” Slocum says, “and I thought I’d found the right career.”

Following film school, Slocum worked in entry-level development jobs at independent film companies. He also put together the funding for his first feature film. In 1992 Castle Hill released *An American Summer*, starring Brian Austin Green (*Beverly Hills 90210*) and Joanna Kerns (*Growing Pains*), and written, produced and directed by Slocum.

“It did reasonably well for an independent film,” says Slocum modestly of the film that received critical acclaim and was later released on video by Columbia/Tri-Star, on cable by HBO, and still airs occasionally on syndicated television.

Slocum is currently in post-production on another feature called *The Last Place on Earth*, which he also wrote, produced, and directed. A romantic drama about a stressed-out young executive who meets a woman who changes his life, the film stars Tisha Campbell Martin (*Boomerang*), Dana Ashbrook (*Twin Peaks*), Billy Dee Williams (*The Empire Strikes Back*), and comedian Phyllis Diller.

PHIL CHANNING



Jim Slocum '79

Slocum finds great reward in writing, producing, and directing. “I enjoy doing all three,” he says, “and I find the most challenge in whatever one I happen to be doing.”

Working on independent films allows Slocum to combine his business acumen with his creative talents. As a producer, he brings the money together, arranges to get key talent, and negotiates contracts and distribution.

“At the independent level,” he explains, “you have a lot of freedom to do what you want. When you work with a studio and have a bigger budget, you have to worry about making your budget back. You tend to take fewer creative risks.”

Yet even at the independent level, new projects can be intimidating. “Every time you embark on a feature,” Slocum says, “you stare failure in the face.”

That’s when he falls back on his college experience. “USC gave me the nuts and bolts in terms of how to write and create for film,” he says, “but Carleton gave me a background in critical

thinking that transfers to any project. I can analyze how things work and how to make them better.”

Those skills also help Slocum survive in an industry that can be pretty unforgiving. In reality, Slocum says, the film industry isn’t much different from other businesses. “It’s extremely competitive,” he admits, “but every business is competitive. It involves working with people, and I don’t think people are that different across the map. There are some nasty ones out here, but I’ve encountered nasty people in every job.”

Since arriving in California, Slocum has written seven screenplays and two novels. His next project, he hopes, will be a movie based on one of his novels.

Slocum is originally from Minneapolis, and most of his family remain in the Twin Cities. “Some [of my family] thought I was nuts coming to California,” he says, “and to a certain extent so did I. But I’m glad I did. It’s worked out so far.”

—E.C.

Daily's Planet

Bob Daily '82 is nursing a sore jaw muscle. He pulled it at work the other day by laughing too hard. It's a common malady for Daily; he laughs a lot. After all, he says, "I work with 11 of the funniest people I've ever met."

Daily is in his first season as a writer for the highly rated NBC comedy *Frasier*. Despite 10- to 14-hour days, he readily admits he has a great job. He does something he loves—writing—with coworkers he respects, for a cast he repeatedly describes as "amazingly talented."

There have been a few ruts in Daily's path to a career in television writing. He spent three years in Los Angeles shopping around sample scripts in hopes of enticing an agent. (Daily says an agent is key to unlocking the door to the competitive world of television.) Shortly after his agent signed him, he had a job: first for a short-lived Andrew Dice Clay comedy, then for another short-lived show called *Costello*, and finally for a show that never saw airtime.

"Those shows were all at Paramount Studios, which is where *Frasier* is done," Daily says. "Some of the executives there liked me and when an opening came up for *Frasier*, they called me for an interview." Suddenly, he was writing for a top-rated show, attending Emmy parties, and celebrating "best show" awards.

An English major at Carleton, Daily planned to be a journalist. In his senior year, however, he decided to audition for a school play and got the lead. "Actually," he says, "I was one of only three men to audition." He was bitten by the performing bug and, after graduating, he decided to try stand-up comedy because it com-

bined writing and performing. Carleton theater professor Ruth Weiner referred him to Comedy Workshop, a comedy club in Houston owned by Paul Menzel '68.

"I literally threw my stuff in the car and headed for Texas," says Daily. He discovered quickly that being a stand-up comedian was not his thing. "I performed very badly," he admits. He did, however, enjoy writing sketches, and he met some funny and talented people.

Daily returned to Chicago, his hometown, to pursue journalism. He spent the next seven years as a contributing editor for *Chicago Magazine* and as a freelance writer for other magazines, including *Spy* and *Men's Journal*. He also got married and began settling into family life.

"Some of my friends from Houston were now in L.A. and writing for television," Daily says. "They kept encouraging me to come out and try it. Finally, I did."

The father of a 3-year-old girl and a baby boy, Daily is happy living and working in L.A., which he calls the "most bad-mouthed city in the country." After three years without a job, Daily appreciates the security he has found with *Frasier*. "It's the first show I've written for that hasn't been canceled midseason," he says.

Frasier employs 12 writers, which is a lot, according to Daily. For each script, the writers get together to brainstorm ideas and jokes. One person actually writes the script, then they come back together as a group for fine-tuning. The script goes to the actors, who make suggestions, and the group gathers again to rewrite.

"When a joke isn't working and you keep rewriting it for days and it still doesn't get a laugh, that's when you want to take a cyanide pill," says Daily of the stress inherent in writing comedy.

On the other hand, there is nothing more exhilarating than watching an actor nail a line with a simple look or a perfectly timed pause. "That's when you want to stop rehearsal and go over and kiss them," says Daily.

The group-writing process intimidated *Frasier*'s newest writer at first. "It's terrifying to suggest a joke and nobody laughs," Daily says. "That's when my comedy club experience comes in handy. I'm used to bombing on a regular basis."

—E.C.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NBC

Bob Daily '82, front right, and Gabrielle James '55, holding Eddie the dog.

The James Gang

Gabrielle James '55 has a résumé that reads like a history of successful television sitcoms. She worked behind the scenes for 8 seasons on *Laverne and Shirley*, beginning in 1974, and wrote for 11 seasons on *Cheers* and for three episodes of *Perfect Strangers*. She also has written for *Caroline in the City*, *Dear John*, *Wings*, *Happy Days*, and *Bosom Buddies*.

Today James is a script supervisor for *Frasier*, a job she has held since the show began in 1993. Simply put, she works with the director and the actors to make sure the action is continuous. For example, if *Frasier* is holding a wine glass in his left hand at the end of one scene, James makes sure the glass is in his left hand when taping resumes on the next scene.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD KOORIS

Richard Kooris '66

In addition, she logs each and every scene that is filmed so the director can pull it all together. She also acts as a liaison between the cast and the writers, working primarily with the head writer.

“Early on, cast members have a lot of opportunity to voice their opinions and make changes to the script,” she explains. “I’m responsible for keeping track of the changes and explaining them to the writers. We film in front of a live audience, so during taping the cast sticks to the script as written.”

James began her college career at Carleton (where she was known as Alice Middlekauff), but eventually graduated from Stanford University. She moved to Hollywood initially to become an actress. She did act for a while, but after getting divorced, she realized that a single mom of three needed a more regularly paying job. In the early ’70s, she took a position as secretary to Garry Marshall, the producer of such shows as *Happy Days* and *Laverne and Shirley*, and was soon working on the sets doing technical work.

“Garry Marshall is a very generous man,” says James, who still exchanges Christmas cards with the producer. “He’s boosted the careers of many people.”

During her long career in television, James also has worked on the sets of movies-of-the-week, television specials, and commercials. Nonetheless, she prefers working on a weekly series. The hours are more regular, which allows her to spend more time with her family, and she can get to know the cast and crew.

Her favorite shows are the early episodes of *Cheers* with Shelley Long, and the *Frasier* episodes that feature Eddie the dog. “I’m always trying to find the dog a good part,” she says. “I’m a dog advocate.”

At 65, James isn’t looking to advance her career. “I’ll stay with *Frasier* for its run and then maybe I’ll retire,” she says.

Unless, perhaps, Kelsey Grammer launches another series.

—E.C.

King Richard

A funny thing happened to Richard Kooris ’66 on his way to law school. He made a little monster movie with college friends, then made a big slasher movie called *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, and then founded the first and largest production studio in Austin, Texas. Needless to say, he never made it to law school.

Instead, he earned the first master’s degree in film production ever granted by the University of Texas and has made a name for himself as a director and cinematographer, working with the likes of Willie Nelson, Nolan Ryan, and Stevie Ray Vaughn, in features, commercials, and music videos.

In 1983 he and Nelson made the first country music video which went on to win an American Music Award. He shoots commercials for clients such as Budweiser, Coke, Coors, Wal-Mart, and Scotts lawn care products.

“I’m a good fixer,” says Kooris, attempting to explain how he went from being a government and international relations major at Carleton to being a filmmaker. “During my senior year, some friends asked if I wanted to help them make a film. I said sure. Trouble was we didn’t have equipment and no one knew how to run a camera. I helped fix that. We borrowed a camera and I ran it.” In editing the project, he says, they actually cut film and Scotch-taped it together.

The result was a “monster fantasy” featuring the people and places of Carleton. Students jammed into the Olin Hall auditorium to see the film and even paid admission. The following semester, they made a second film, which Kooris describes as a Bergmanesque film about date rape. “It was a more serious film,” he says, “and more seriously flawed, as well.”

By then, however, Kooris was enamored of filmmaking. “It combined everything I loved—music, history, art—everything.”

Instead of heading to Berkeley for law school, Kooris accepted an offer from the University of Texas, which included free tuition and a position as a teaching assistant, to be one of the first students in its new graduate film program.

Having never taken a film course, Kooris had a lot to learn at Texas. He thrived, eventually earning the school’s first master’s degree in film production. After graduation, he stayed at UT to teach, but freelanced as a cameraman on low-budget films and commercials. By 1974 he was ready to concentrate full time on filmmaking.

With his wife and a partner, Kooris started a production company. Relying on commercials to pay the bills, the company grew and began attracting filmmaking projects to Austin. During this time, director Tobe Hooper asked Kooris to work on a movie called *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.

“I had to turn it down,” says Kooris of the film that eventually grossed more than \$100 million, “because I was already booked on another project.” But he was available to shoot *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* a few years later.

Kooris and his wife, Laura De Bolt Kooris, bought out their partner, purchased some warehouses in downtown Austin, and expanded their company. Today Kooris is part owner of TPFV Group, a holding company for three subsidiaries: 501 Post, a production company; Gear Inc., an equipment firm; and XOPIX, the filmmaking arm that Kooris runs. He and Laura also own and operate Pegalo Properties, a real estate firm that oversees the warehouse complex that houses photography labs, studios, talent agencies, and graphic design firms.

When Kooris arrived in Austin in the late ’60s, the film industry was nearly nonexistent. Kooris’s production studio is the largest in Austin, which now rivals Dallas for filmmaking projects. Indeed, many people consider Austin the “third coast” because of its thriving film industry.

“I hit this town with \$200 in my pocket,” he says, “and literally built a successful business from scratch. The film industry has created jobs for hundreds of people. I am very proud of that and the effect it has had on people in this area.

“Austin’s the high-tech capital of this part of the country,” he adds, sounding more like the town’s mayor than a cinematographer. “There are no smokestack industries, so it’s very clean and with all the lakes and trees, it’s gorgeous. Plus, you have 300 days of sunshine each year.”

Although the Koorises have had several opportunities to move to Los Angeles, they have steadfastly declined. “Los Angeles is a good career place,” says Kooris, “but it’s not the best place to live and raise a family.”

Despite all of his business responsibilities, Kooris still enjoys working behind the camera. He is developing a project based on the children’s book series about Hank the Cowdog, which he envisions will combine animation and live actors, similar to *Roger Rabbit*.

“I figure if you have to get up and go to work for 40-plus years, it’d be nice if work was as much like playing as possible,” says Kooris. “For me, that’s taking pictures and telling stories. I love getting up and going to work every morning. And I’ve never regretted not going to law school.”

—E.C.

Szentgyorgyi Slays ‘Em

With “no plans, only anxiety,” Tom Szentgyorgyi (pronounced *St. George*) graduated from Carleton in 1982, armed with a double major in English literature and European history and a vague ambition to work in publishing.

He ended up “miserably unhappy” in New York City, working for Fodor’s travel guides. After a year, he changed directions and spent about 15 years in theater. He served as a literary manager for several years at New York’s Manhattan Theater Club, selecting original plays for the company to perform, and then did similar work on a larger scale as an associate artistic director for a theater company in Denver.

He also has written four plays. Three have been produced and the fourth will go into production in Chicago this summer. One of them, *A Family Man*, was named Chicago’s Best New Play of the Year in 1995.

So far, Szentgyorgyi’s is a familiar story of an artist trying to make it in the cold, hard world of show business. But things changed last spring when Carleton chum Bob Daily ’82 suggested Szentgyorgyi try writing for television. Szentgyorgyi wrote a script on spec for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, sent it to an agent whom Daily recommended, moved to Los Angeles, and was hired three months later as a writer for ABC’s critically acclaimed *Sports Night*.

“I’ve been told it was kind of quick,” says Szentgyorgyi of his success. “The best thing about television is that you get to see your work performed immediately. In theater, it may be years before you hear people speak the words you write. Instant gratification—it’s a playwright’s dream.”

Less gratifying, though, is the degree to which the writing gets filtered through other people’s sensibilities. In theater, Szentgyorgyi says, the playwright has the final word. Not true in TV. On *Sports Night*, seven writers discuss the script, one person writes it, all seven rewrite it, and then the show’s creator, Aaron Sorkin (who also created *West Wing*), gets a final edit. “You have trouble remembering what’s going on the air after so many revisions,” Szentgyorgyi says.

Szentgyorgyi plans to work in the medium for a while. “Okay,” he says, “let’s mention the money. No one wants to talk about it, but it’s awfully good. I’m paid well to do work I like to do. I’m really lucky and I know that.”

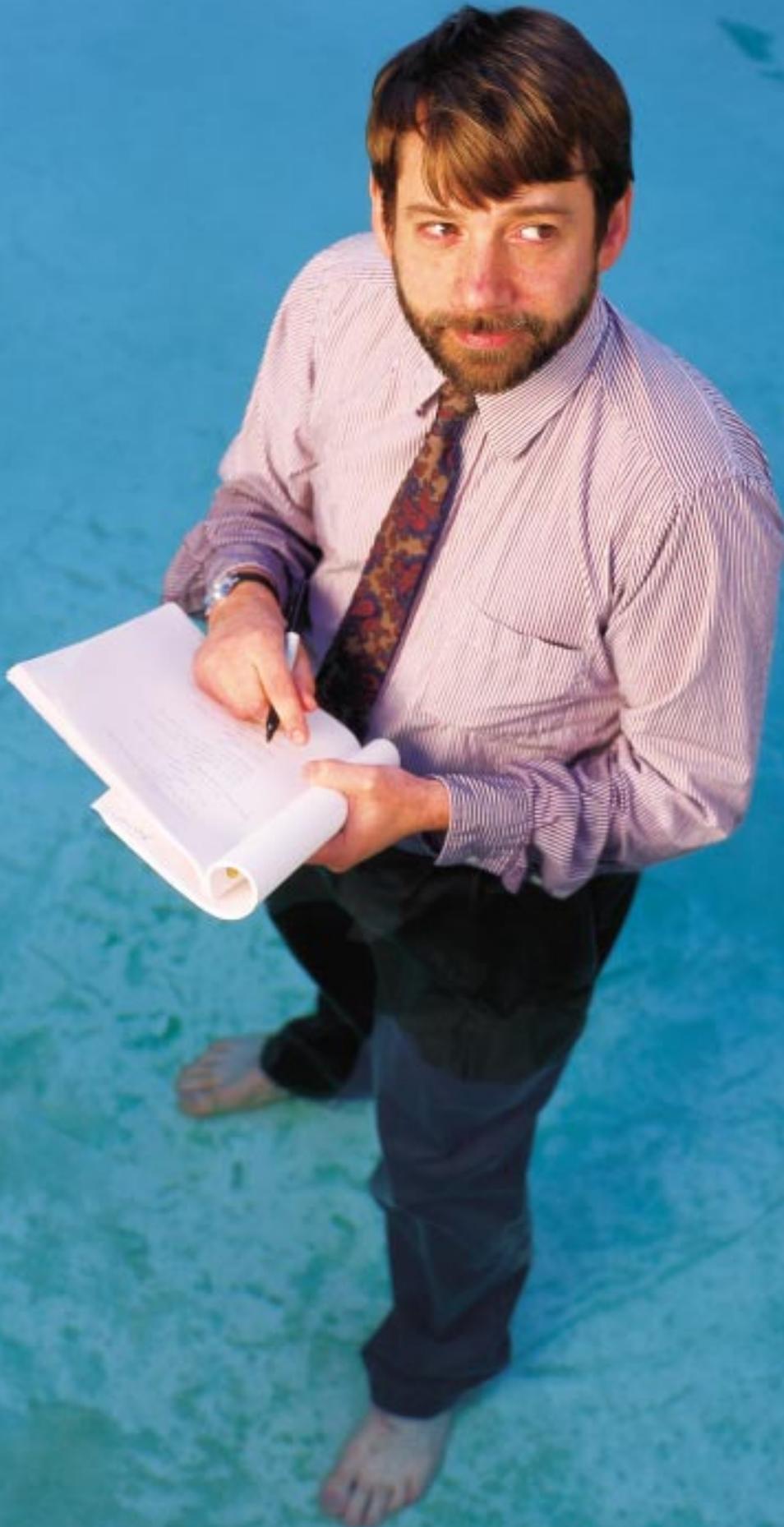
Plus, he says, television writing is fun, especially when he isn’t doing the writing, but only “spending the day talking with smart, funny people.”

As for living in L.A., “I can’t tell yet if I like it or not,” says Szentgyorgyi, who is getting married soon. “I’m still absorbing my surroundings.”

After living in New York (where he was born), Minnesota, and Denver, Szentgyorgyi claims he gets bored with sunny California. “It rained the other day and I was positively giddy,” he says.

—E.C.

Shortly before we went to press, ABC announced that it was dropping Sports Night from its lineup. The show’s future is uncertain, though ABC insists it has not been canceled.



Tom Szentgyorgyi '82