



FASHION & STYLE

Caitlyn Jenner's Secret-Sharer

The Year in Style 2015

By JACOB BERNSTEIN DEC. 19, 2015

Sometime around the end of 2014, the publicist Alan Nierob received a call at his office at Rogers & Cowan in Los Angeles. The caller was a former client, Bruce Jenner, who explained that after years of gender dysphoria, he had begun the transition to become a woman and needed a representative.

As a publicist, Mr. Nierob may not seem like the obvious man for the job. His top tier of clients comprises the likes of Chris Pratt, Liam Neeson and Denzel Washington. He's a 58-year-old divorced father of two, entirely heterosexual, with peripheral experience working with L.G.B.T. issues.

He abhors the spotlight and hates being quoted, which is why you won't see him interviewed here (although he did allow a few friends to come to the phone for him). "Keeping Up With the Kardashians" is exactly the sort of program he doesn't watch.

And yet, over the last year, Mr. Nierob orchestrated one of the most successful coming-out stories in recent Hollywood memory, helping transform what could have been a terribly tawdry tabloid narrative into a historic moment in transgender politics, and embellishing his own P.R. credentials in the process. Just a few weeks ago, he was named co-president of Rogers & Cowan.

Mr. Nierob grew up in Los Angeles, where his father was a plumbing contractor and his mother was a housewife. He attended Beverly Hills High School, and his classmates included the actress Jamie Lee Curtis, the lobbyist and felon Jack Abramoff and the playwright Jon Robin Baitz.

From his early days, he wanted to be in the business. While studying at U.C.L.A., where he got his degree in communications, Mr. Nierob took an internship at Rogers & Cowan, and joined the firm after college.

One of his clients was Bruce Jenner, whom the tabloid press had begun to pursue rumors about, specifically that the former Olympian was cross-dressing privately. Over the next decade, associates say, it fell on Mr. Nierob to squelch those stories.

In the 1990s, Mr. Jenner left the orbit of Rogers & Cowan. He had married Kris Jenner, who largely took the driver's seat with regard to her husband's then-failing television career.

Mr. Nierob didn't take it personally. He had plenty on his plate, with a wife of his own, two young boys and a growing client stable that included Kim Basinger, Alec Baldwin and Richard Gere.

But crisis management, or something like it, proved to be Mr. Nierob's specialty.

He advised Rob Lowe in the aftermath of his 1988 sex-tape fiasco. For much of the next decade and a half, Mr. Nierob held the hand of Robert Downey Jr. as he struggled with a debilitating drug addiction.

And Mr. Nierob was Mel Gibson's adviser during both the good and the bad days of his career, including an evening in 2006 when Mr. Gibson was tape-recorded in the back of a police car, drunk as a skunk, blaming Jews for all the world's wars.

"What I remember," said Jeff Jensen, a reporter for Entertainment

Weekly assigned to write about Mr. Gibson's saga, "is that Alan respected our inquiry without participating. It was like: 'I know this is a story, I know you have a job to do, and I wish you well, but I can't help, and Mel won't comment.' It was incredibly gracious and professional. He did his job for his client while showing respect for mine."

Today, Mr. Gibson remains his client, as do Mr. Downey and Mr. Lowe.

In November or December of 2014, Mr. Nierob got the call from the person still known as Bruce Jenner. Newly single, he was being hounded by paparazzi because of an appearance that was changing practically by the hour. The question was what to do.

Mr. Nierob knew that the best thing his client, soon to be known as Caitlyn, could do was take control of the narrative and find a place where her story could be told in as forthcoming a way as possible.

"That was the main concern," said Paul Bloch, the chairman of Rogers & Cowan. "That she could tell it properly, and that the press would get an accurate description of what she's gone through."

At E!, where Ms. Jenner co-starred on "Keeping Up With the Kardashians," there was hope that this could be done through a program on the network, but Mr. Nierob thought this would look self-serving. Moreover, there were deep divisions in the family over Caitlyn's coming out, which made it unclear that E! would be loyal to Ms. Jenner.

Another option was to bring Ms. Jenner to the parent company, NBCUniversal, for an interview with its news team, but that would have looked too much like corporate synergy, a financially motivated way to craft the narrative.

They needed to find a reporter with no conflicts of interest, but who was likely to be sympathetic. Ms. Jenner had long respected Diane Sawyer of ABC

News, who had become an acquaintance over the years.

Mr. Nierob had a history with Ms. Sawyer, too. He even took Mr. Downey to her for an interview in 1996, after a string of drug-related arrests. A decade later, he took Mr. Gibson to her for his first interview following his D.U.I. (Ms. Sawyer didn't respond to requests for comment for this article.)

Still, the Jenner transition team didn't want to put all its eggs in one basket. There were numerous surgeries still on the horizon at that point, and family members were clearly going to need some time. So it seemed inadvisable to plot the full reveal of Caitlyn Jenner in a spring TV interview.

Vanity Fair was the logical place to go for the unveiling, highbrow enough to present a serious behind-the-scenes look at the transition and connected to top-tier photographers who would ensure that Ms. Jenner looked as glamorous as possible. ("It would've been easy to say no to me," said Buzz Bissinger, the author of "Friday Night Lights," who ultimately got the assignment. "It's harder to turn down Annie Leibovitz.")

In January, the magazine's features editor, Jane Sarkin, received an unsolicited call from Mr. Nierob. As it happened, she had been calling members of Ms. Jenner's old team for much of the fall and had gotten nowhere. When Mr. Nierob said, "I have a new client you might be interested in," Ms. Sarkin practically jumped out of her chair.

"I said, 'It's Bruce Jenner,'" Ms. Sarkin recalled in an interview. "He said, 'How'd you know?' I said, 'It just makes sense.'"

Soon, Mr. Bissinger was virtually camped out with Ms. Jenner, hanging out with her in intimate scenarios including right after her breast augmentation and facial feminization surgeries.

It was far more access than is typically granted to reporters covering celebrities these days, but Mr. Nierob was calm and got out of the way, Mr.

Bissinger said.

For one thing, Mr. Nierob had a history with Vanity Fair, having worked with the magazine on numerous cover articles over the years. For another, Mr. Nierob knew his client well enough to believe that most people would ultimately be won over by her, particularly journalists and transgender activists brought into her inner circle.

“Having watched that show,” Mr. Bissinger said, referring to “Keeping Up With the Kardashians,” “I thought they would be unapproachable and difficult, and they were not at all. Caitlyn was open. So was Kris. So was Kim. Which was surprising to me because there’s such an air of materialistic exclusivity around them.”

In November, Caitlyn Jenner appeared at the Glamour Women of the Year Awards, where she was among the honorees.

Her date for the evening was Mr. Nierob.

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