

## The Other Bronfman...

**P**aul Bronfman, son of Allan, nephew of Sam and cousin of Edgar, no longer lives in Montreal, although he grew up there like all the other Bronfman.

But contrary to his cousins, he was neither rich nor particularly proud to be a Bronfman. "To tell you the truth, the name Bronfman caused me more problems than anything else, he says, sitting in a makeshift office adjacent to the Cité-Ciné Studios, the Mega Movie Complex in Saint-Hubert, on the South-Shore of Montreal, of which he is the President.

While attending high school in Westmount, Paul Bronfman did not mingle with kids from reputable families but rather with a tall black gentleman named Bonga, who occasionally acted as Paul's bodyguard. The memories of his childhood in Montreal can be summed up by a handful of images: the snowstorms, skating in Murray Park, the hockey games at the Forum where he insisted on wearing a Maple Leafs' t-shirt, out of loyalty for a team that had won the Stanley Cup four times, but mostly, the Cherry Coke

from Wilensky and the steamed hot dogs from Lafleur, the best in the world according to him. He also remembers the year of his Barmitzvah. It was in 1970. And he still remembers the soldier from the Canadian Armed Forces pointing his gun towards him as he was riding his bike in Westmount. Despite this isolated event, the October Crisis never worried him. "On the contrary, I found it rather exciting to live in a city under siege."

Paul Bronfman left his hometown when he was 19. And even though he made his fortune in Toronto and in Vancouver where he founded one of the biggest Canadian studios, he always dreamed of going back to Quebec to do business. That opportunity finally came to him two years ago in Saint-Hubert. Today, Paul Bronfman has a new address in Quebec which allows him to come back to his hometown every month. Without fail, as he gets off the plane, he rushes to Wilensky or Lafleur.

**Mega Movie  
Complex: The War  
Is On!**

**T**he first thing you notice when you meet Paul Bronfman, President of the Mega Movie Complex in Saint-Hubert, is his youthful look. He looks barely 30 when in fact, he is 40 years old and a bit.

The second thing that will strike you is his laid-back look. With his jeans and leather jacket, Paul Bronfman could easily pass as a horse breeder or a ski instructor. He could also be taken for the roadie of a rock group, which is exactly what he did when he was young and foolish, with the group April Wine under Donald K. Donald Productions.

Married to an American since the age of 19, father of three children, fervent admirer of Kubrick and Coppola, backed by a fortune evaluated at several millions of dollars thanks to Conweb, his private company, Bronfman does not fit the profile of the successful businessman that he is, cousin of one of the most wealthy families in the Country.

But by his own admission, Paul Bronfman is somewhat the black sheep of the family. When he lands in Montreal, he does not rush to the Ritz but rather

to Lafleur or Wilensky. And when the word referendum is brought up in his presence, he does not get speechless.

"As long as the process remains democratic and that no one gets shot, I have no problem with referendums. As for sovereignists, some of my best friends are, so..."

First Bronfman to launch out into the movie business rather than in real estate or in the distilling business, he distanced himself from the Bronfman clan at a very early stage.

The process was relatively easy.

"The family was not making any effort to bring the cousins closer together, the majority of which had already left to go live in the States anyway", he says.

In fact, Paul Bronfman has met his powerful cousin and owner of the multinational entertainment business MCA, Edgar Bronfman Jr., only twice.

"We spoke a few times over the phone. But the truth is, I was doing business with Universal well before he got in the picture. Today, I rely more on results than on my

cousin to open doors for me in Hollywood", he says.

Of course, Paul Bronfman soon felt the need to run his own show, alone, far away from the overwhelming power of his family and from the real estate dealings of his father, who was then associated with Irving Grundman.

At the age of 19, he cut the cord and moved to Toronto.

"One of the joys of finding myself in a city other than Montreal was to finally be able to live without being scrutinized for every little aspect of my life. In Toronto, people couldn't care less about the name Bronfman. It was such a relief for me."

Orphan and in exile in Toronto, Bronfman soon found himself an adoptive father. His name was Harold Greenberg, President of Astral. Bronfman turned up at Astral during the hazy period of the tax shelters, a governmental measure which led to the longest series of fiascos in the history of Canadian movies.

"I learned so much from the tax shelters, he says. The movies were terrible. During the screenings, we also had to

put up with the comments from the dentists, doctors and lawyers who had invested in the movies, who knew nothing about the business and who thought they were experts. A real joke."

The joke turned out good since it gave Harold Greenberg's pupil the opportunity to learn and climb up the company's ladder. In the space of a few years, he went from promotion to promotion to finally find himself at the head of the pay TV channel First Choice where he reduced the number of employees from 140 to 35 while tripling the number of subscribers.

In 1988, Paul Bronfman left the Astral school to run his own show and created Conweb. With his partner, Mike Dubelko, a wealthy Los Angeles studio owner, he found a vacant lot in Vancouver. That is where he built North Shore Studios, of which he eventually became majority shareholder with the king of equipment rental, William F. White, from Toronto.

Thanks to the weakness of the Canadian dollar, hordes of American movie producers were landing in Vancouver, and the adventure, risky at first,

turned out to be a tremendous success. In the space of a few years, the money generated by the movies filmed in Vancouver increased from 125 millions to 1 billion dollars. Bronfman was all the more proud that everyone had predicted that he would fail with his studios lost in the middle of nowhere.

"At the time, the local movie industry thought we were crazy. They were saying that the location was too far, too isolated, and that it would never work. In short, everything that is said about the Saint-Hubert location I have heard before and I'm not worried. It took me five years to build the reputation of the North Shore Studios. In Saint-Hubert, I'm convinced that it will only take me three years."

Two years ago, Bronfman sold the North Shore Complex to Lions Gates. The transaction broke his heart, he says. But at the same time, it was an offer he could not refuse.

As soon as the deal was signed, Bronfman started looking for a new "baby". With his friend and partner Emmanuel Lépine from Moliflex White, a Quebec-based equipment

rental company associated with the Toronto giant William F. White, he scoured the town in search of an abandoned land or warehouse but to no avail.

An unexpected meeting with Martin Fontaine, brother of the comedian Chantal Fontaine and Notary, changed everything. Fontaine was carrying with him a series of market studies which would prove without a doubt that Montreal was in dying need of studios. Fontaine also had in mind the old warehouses at the Saint-Hubert Airport.

At the time, Mel Oppenheim's movie Mega Town did not exist, not even on paper.

Faced with this golden opportunity, Bronfman and his two Quebec friends agreed to create a Mega Movie Complex in Saint-Hubert, which would be a facility where all the services would be offered, including a landing ground and parking for the private jet. The three men were so convinced and so convincing that the SGF granted them a 5 million dollar loan and the SODEC, a 4 million dollar loan.

The development work was completed a few weeks ago. Bronfman swears that

his three high tech studios will revolutionize the industry. There is only one problem: the order book is empty. Why?

"For two reasons. Firstly, because the paint is not dry yet and we have not yet started promoting the studios. Secondly, because there is, in the Montreal movie business, a monopoly set out to fail. Montreal is the only Canadian city in which you are forced to rent your equipment from the person who rents the studios. This is the only closed market in the Country. To give you an example, when I was managing the North Shore Studios, people could rent my studio and rent their equipment elsewhere. In Toronto, it is the same thing. Here, it is impossible."

Bronfman is referring here to his competitor, Mel Oppenheim, who, for the last 30 years, has ruled over the Montreal production industry. He can force all of his customers to rent their equipment from Location Michel Trudel, a company in which he has an interest, and if ever Trudel does not have a particular piece of equipment that a customer needs, too bad, the customer will have to do without it.

"The situation must change, otherwise it will be war, promises Bronfman. And if we have to go to war, we will. We too can refuse equipment from our competitor on our site. This is all the more a deplorable game that in all other Canadian cities, we have excellent rapports with our competitors. Unfortunately, here, it is a free for all. You must fight to survive."

Despite his calm and cooperative nature, Paul Bronfman is not the kind of man that will let people step all over him. The Mega Movie Complex in Saint-Hubert is his new baby for the next millennium. He invested far too much time, money and energy into it to let it sink. Considering his track record, we can easily predict that he will not throw in the towel until he wins.

#### **Underneath the photo:**

Paul Bronfman, President of the Mega Movie Complex in Saint-Hubert. A Bronfman who stands out from the rest of the family.

#### **Excerpt from the text:**

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Translated from an article published in La Presse on Monday, November 22, 1999.

**Nathalie Petrowski meets  
PAUL BRONFMAN**