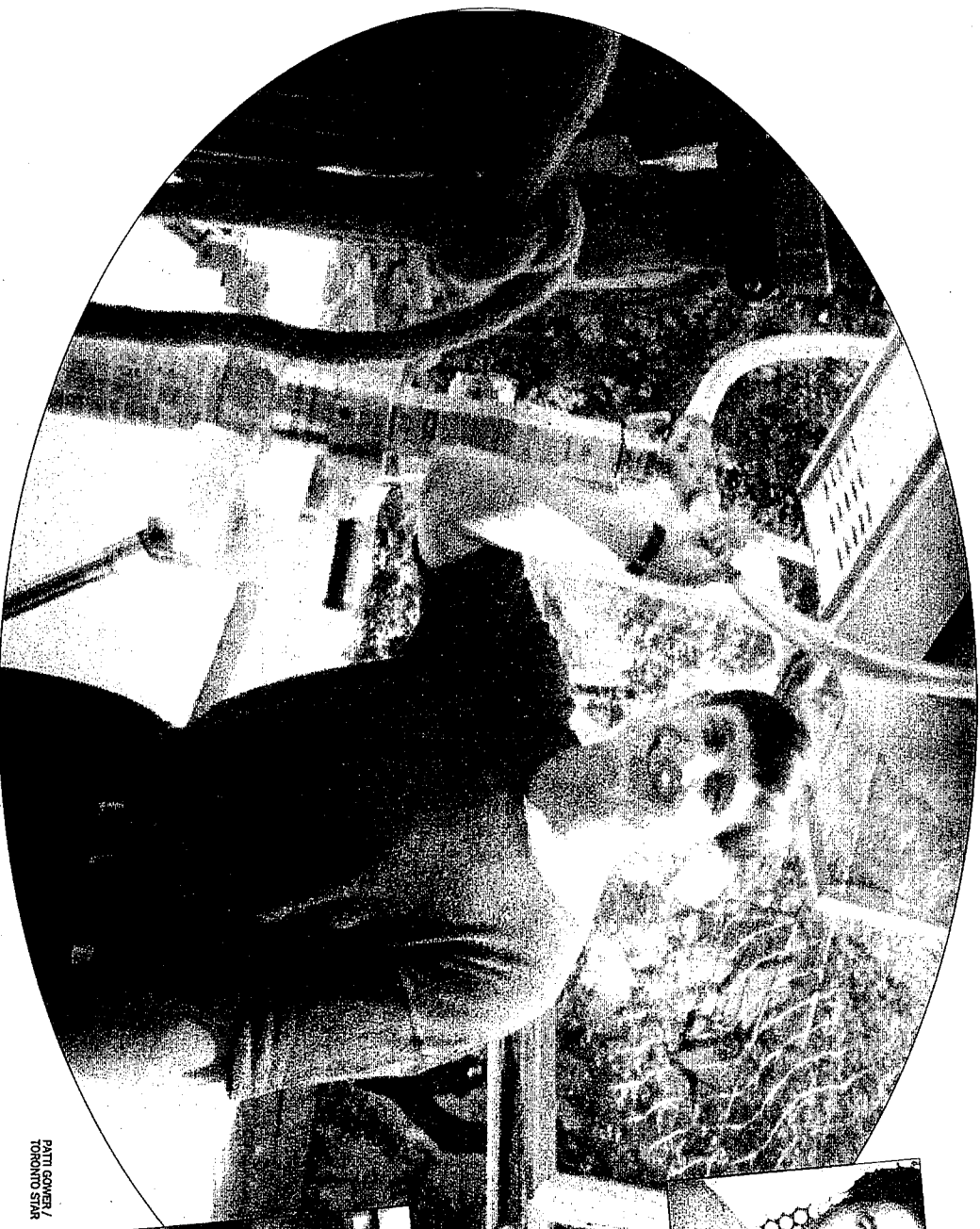


THE TORONTO STAR

Bronfman

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PATTI GOWER / TORONTO STAR



PAUL BRONFMAN: His Comweb Corp. has served such series and films as, top to bottom, *X-Files*, *Little Women* and *Legends Of The Fall*.

The other film Bronfman

Long before cousin Edgar Jr. bought MCA, Paul was a mini-mogul

By Sid Adulman
ENTERTAINMENT COLUMNIST

Paul Bronfman used to be considered the black sheep of his extended family, the first Bronfman to go into show business full-time, not into the real estate or liquor business.

That was until last April, when his second cousin, Edgar Jr., through Seagram's, spent \$5.7 billion to buy 80 per cent of MCA, the movie and record gi-

ant that also owns theme parks and 49 per cent of Cineplex Odeon theatres.

In Canada, Paul now 38 and president of Toronto's Comweb Corp., which he founded in 1988, is definitely a mini-mogul. His turf:

■ Many film equipment trucks lining the streets of Toronto and those across the country belong to William F. White Ltd. The name explains why its 35 vehicles are painted white. Comweb is majority owner, with Bill White, in the company, Canada's largest lighting and grip rental company and second-largest camera rental firm. Negotiations are under way to make Comweb an equal partner in the rival Panavision, Canada's largest camera rental outfit. ■ Actors and crews on many

movies, TV programs and commercials filmed in Canada get weekly pay cheques processed by Bulloch Entertainment Services, the country's largest movie and TV industry computer scheduling, payroll and accounting company. Comweb owns half of Bulloch.

■ TV series such as *The X-Files*, *The Cornish* and *The Marshal* and loads of commercials film at Vancouver's 14-acre North Shore Studios (six sound stages). Comweb owns North Shore Studios jointly with America's Stephen Cannell Productions.

■ *Pocahontas: The Legend*, the recent Canadian movie that went to home video after just one week in theatres, and the last two *Spenser: For Hire* TV-movies were produced by Protocol Entertainment. Comweb

owns Protocol with Steve Levitan.

Protocol now has landed what's expected to be its first TV blockbuster: a weekly live-action series based on R.L. Stine's *Goosebumps* children's books that have sold 61 million copies worldwide. Thirteen half-hours and a one-hour pilot are to film in Toronto starting this month for Fox Network. "The publisher, Scholastic, came to us; it was not a question of us outbidding anyone," says Bronfman.

Pocahontas was a deal from an American company. "We're in profit with it (because of distribution advances)," he says. "We wouldn't shoot anything if we knew we're going to lose money." Protocol recently filmed Ma-

na's *Boy*, a TV drama with Jackie Burroughs and Graham Greene for CanWestGlobal, and plans a movie remake of *The Hatchback Of Notre Dame*.

Comweb, also the co-owner of a film equipment company and studios in Quebec and Wilmington, N.C., racked up revenues of \$50 million last year.

But, since April, Bronfman has had to tell anyone who doesn't know — many don't — that he's not "close" to his second cousin and not to try for an MCA deal through him.

Paul's father, Edward, and his uncle Peter (real estate magnates) and Paul, too, are big shareholders of Canadian show-business conglomerate Astral Inc. Edgar senior and Charles (the Seagram brothers) are their cousins.

Edgar Jr., Paul says, "is part of the family that moved to the States in the 1950s. We really don't know each other well at all. They're all American citizens. The family got sort of split up. I don't think the cousins worked hard enough to keep the family together."

Paul was besieged at a TV market in Cannes, France, when Seagram's purchase of MCA became public. "I should have had a T-shirt printed that said 'I am just a cousin.' I haven't been in touch with him yet, but I will!" Paul, married with three children, started his career at age 18, "as a roadie" with a (rock) band, then worked at Astral.

"I wanted to make my own life, my own career, my own money, didn't want to take

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Comweb revenues hit \$50 million

☞ Continued from B1

handouts from my parents. Even as a teenager, I knew I didn't want to work in my father's business and he accepted that.

"It was hard at the beginning because people have a preconception of who you are. The name opens doors, but that's all."

And, he admits, "I lived for years with a chip on my shoulder, an attitude that said, 'I don't need my family.' Now I'm a little relaxed about it. You get a

bit older, more confident about yourself. It's not such a big deal anymore."

But he adds with a laugh, "I'm glad Comweb was in the marketplace before Seagram's bought MCA."

Despite his golden name, the banks refused Comweb a loan and he had to mortgage his house to get cash for his company "in those dark days of the recession, 1990-'91. In February, 1991, there was only one production set to film (in Canada). That year, (filming in) Canada

was down by nearly half."

Last year, there was so much filming in Canada, Comweb had to import cameras from New York. "We were maxed out," servicing productions that included *Little Women*, *Legends Of The Fall*, *Road To Avonlea*, *Lonesome Dove: The Series*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Dolores Claiborne* and *Trapped In Paradise*.

This year, he predicts, "Toronto will be about the same, but Vancouver will be down slightly; the business is so cyclical."

"We have in excess of \$30 million worth of equipment, we regularly reinvest in new equipment and research and development and, company-wide, we have profit sharing."

Comweb began in production, helping to finance the movies *Prom Night III: The Last Kiss* and *The Quarell* and the TV series *Neon Rider* and *Golden Fiddles*.

But as he said several years ago and still maintains, "I'm not a big gambler. I don't have the stomach to roll the dice."