

rB Celebrities Know Best | Rod Brace

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Each year from January through March award shows abound. During these few weeks, some unseen yet all knowing voters select the "best" of everything on our behalf. Occasionally a new face or two will emerge, but we see mostly the same run-of-the-mill celebs; all so seemingly elegant and wise.

Did I say "wise?" I did, because we ascribe to them the status of sage for the masses; these oft-divorced, serially bankrupt, conspicuously consuming "bling-bling-ers" of Hollywood, created by and for the selling of something -- anything. We study their "look," we worship their presence; we listen intently to their wisdom regarding what to buy and where to spend. We have fallen head first into a spiral of fawning consumerism the likes of which history has never seen.

Richard Corliss, of Time magazine labels celebrity as "possibly the most vital shaping force in society." He cautions that celebrities have become "the chief agents of moral change in the U.S." Celebrity behaviors such as sexual hyper-activity, consumption compulsions, illicit marital affairs, drug addiction, murder and moral bankruptcy have become the expected (and unwittingly accepted) standard of behavior in the U.S. -- courtesy of good old fashioned stardom.

We idolize and pattern the every move and whim of these "stars," wanting to live like and through them. We mimic their fashion, their politics and their "religion." They have become, in a sense, our gods.

Too harsh of a label? Toss a teenage heart throb on a shaky food court stage in a suburban mall, surrounded by teen and "tween" girls and see worship - live and in person. Drop a bus load of mid-western housewives at the door step of Oprah's Chicago studio and see awe up close and personal. March last year's Cy-Young winner down the corridor of a sales conference and see grown men swoon.

We are smitten with celebrity and all that it conveys. We look to these saints of screen, sports and sound for advice and direction on what to wear, how much to spend and who to trust. But our desires are misguided.

Celebrity is merely the creative sleight of hand dealt out by an army of make-up artists, stylists and publicists following a well honed marketing plan. The rise, stall and fall of any given celebrity is directly related to their ability to create a sale-able moment that transfers your money to their creators. Celebrity is the pack mule of commerce; a famous person that exists in an often lonely bubble for the profit of others. Yet, we all envy their celebrity status.

Which of us hasn't dreamed of being a star as we play our air guitar or sing before the mirror with hair brush in hand? But do we really know what we are asking? Is the world of a star really that desirable?

Listen closely to the vocabulary of celebrity-dom. "Exclusive vacation homes in remote settings" are really code words for "places we celebrities can hide so stalkers can't find us or worse." Honest celebs might say, "We live in constant fear that our children will be abducted. We can't go to the grocery store without creating a dangerous mob scene. Our children have never been to Disney World or to a party at Chuck-e-Cheese. Friends eventually sell us out to the gossip press and the pictures our prom date's mom took 20 years ago show up on E-bay. We have zero privacy and fear for our lives on good days. We are in a continual state of lock down, hidden behind the fortress-like walls of our palatial estates. We are indeed living the dream life -- but it's a very bad dream with no escape."

Still want to be a big star? There is a price to be paid. In reality, the hero-status is nothing more than idolatry. There is a better life waiting for you in the context of who you were meant to be. Be wary of people selling things that are contrary to a higher calling in life.

Products, advertising, models, and celebrities are not bad. It is the context in which we view these forces that determines whether or not we are unduly swayed by their influence. The power and success gospel that popular culture conveys is not a true gospel at all. Popular culture, in its current form, is designed to do one thing -- sell you something. And that's only good news to the seller.

This is an excerpt from *Simplify* by Rod Brace. Available at Amazon.com or other popular online booksellers.