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Vince Vaughn in Love

Yes, there is his paparazzi-hounded Friend. But here he talks to us about growing up in Lake Forest, buying a home in the city, and why he insisted that 'The Break-Up' be shot in Chicago

Ask anyone who knows Vince Vaughn, and you'll hear the same thing: the kid who left Lake Forest with a suitcase full of dreams and found success in Hollywood is a guy's guy, a Midwestern sort of guy, a guy more comfortable in the bleachers than the luxury boxes. Recently, Vaughn re-established his Chicago bona fides by buying a home in the city he never really left.

In the decade since his breakthrough performance in "Swingers," Vaughn has become one of Hollywood's most bankable young stars. Such recent triumphs as "DodgeBall: A True Underdog Story," "Old School," "Mr. & Mrs. Smith," and "Wedding Crashers" have allowed him to produce and star in "The Break-Up," which he insisted be filmed in Chicago.

For those unaccustomed to gazing at the headlines of the tabloid magazines at their local supermarket, it was during this shoot that Vaughn hooked up with his costar, the newly dumped and divorced Jennifer Aniston. Their continued friendship has encouraged those who care desperately about such things to speculate on the possibility of an impending wedding, maybe hosted by no less a fellow celebrity than Oprah Winfrey.

We caught up with the personable actor/writer/producer in his office suite on the Universal Studios lot in Los Angeles.

Q: OK, Vince, let's get this burning question out of the way: Cubs or Sox?

A: [Laughs] I grew up north of the city, so I was a Cubs fan . . . but, I like the Sox. I'm not the kind of fan who isn't entirely satisfied unless the Cubs win and the Sox lose—or the other way around. I want both teams to do well.

Q: That's diplomatic. You're in the minority there, I'm afraid.

A: I know I am. I rooted for the Sox [in 2005] and was very happy to see them win. A couple of the Sox players came to see our show ["Vince Vaughn's Wild West Comedy Show," performance at the Vic]. But I grew up loving the Cubs.

Q: On that other matter, in every gossip item I've read about your relationship with Jennifer, your name seems to pop up somewhere in the third sentence . . . almost as an afterthought.

A: I wish it would be even further down, in the fifth or sixth sentence. I find it to be ridiculous, but I don't take it personally. They're just doing it to sell papers and magazines.

Q: You've managed to keep a pretty low profile up until now. All this attention to your personal life must have come as something of a shock.

A: I never considered myself a tabloid person, and, until recently, the tabloids felt the same about me.

Q: Still, being on the receiving end of all this attention must be unnerving.

A: The incentive for digging up gossip has become so great that people will break the law for the opportunity to take that picture. Then it crosses the line into invasion of privacy. The thing that's really bad about it, though, is that the tabloids don't tell the truth.

Q: For example?

A: There is no wedding planned, let alone one that costs \$10 million. [As of now,] I've never met Oprah Winfrey. And if I were to get married, I'd never spend that much on a wedding. It would be the greatest waste of money in the history of mankind.

Q: Have you been followed by paparazzi . . . in Los Angeles or Chicago?

A: In L.A. I've had them try to follow me, yes. It's extremely dangerous, even if you choose not to drive crazy to avoid them. They'll run a red light and make a left turn into traffic, just to keep up with you. And they'll come very close to hitting oncoming cars. They don't care. Too much money is at stake.

If an ordinary person parks outside another ordinary person's house for a week, it's considered stalking. If, however, that person is considered newsworthy, it's perfectly legal for paparazzi to do the same thing.

Q: Chicago is protective of its own, isn't it?

A: Chicago runs counter to that culture. The focus is not on perception or image. The Midwest is built on hard work and values. Out here, in Los Angeles, there are people who would kill to have the paparazzi follow them. From an outside place—and I'm from an outside place—it all seems ridiculous, and not a real problem. But when you're in the middle of the situation, and feeling the pressure these people put on you—especially if you're a woman, by yourself—it's uncomfortable.

Q: I take it, though, that when you're by yourself you don't require bodyguards to accompany you to museums and ballgames.

A: I enjoy going out by myself . . . always have, always will. I don't have security guards, and, for the most part, I enjoy meeting new people. I see myself as a regular guy, who likes playing video games with his nieces and nephews, and poker with his family. I don't have an art collection or take exotic vacations. I enjoy being at home.

Q: And when you're with Jennifer?

A: People like Jennifer have become such icons, in a way . . . not by choice . . . but her personal life has become something about which people are curious. So for everyone involved, there are safety issues. Sometimes, when you're going some place special, it's better to give people a heads-up [so they can prepare for the crowds and the paparazzi]. There's no single answer, unfortunately.

Q: Are you part of the Chicago diaspora out here?

A: No. In Chicago, there were all these cliques, none of which I was a part of. I had my few close friends, and that was it. The same is true here, in California. My closest friends when I moved out here are my closest friends now. One is Peter Billingsley, who I met when we worked together on an after-school special and is an executive producer on "The Break-Up." My other friend is a stand-up comedian, Ahmed Ahmed, who was in the "Wild West Comedy Show" Jon Favreau and I were partners for a long time. . . . We met on "Rudy," worked together on "Swingers" and "Made," and he's great as a South Side tavern owner in "The Break-Up." But it's not as if we're going to start a production company or are in some kind of clique.

Q: Your name doesn't come up often when people talk about expatriates from Chicago's theatre scene.

A: Back in Chicago, I was from the suburbs, and that made me an outsider. Even when I was studying with the ImprovOlympic [now I.O. Theater]—not at the same time as Jon—people would go out a lot afterward, but I was never into that kind of thing. Here, people would go out after acting classes for drinks or dinner, and I wasn't up for that, either.

Q: And yet, you don't fit the mold of a brooding loner.

A: The way I got into this business, I cut class [at Lake Forest High School] one day to go into the city with a friend who was auditioning for an industrial film, and I wanted to see what it was like. The casting director asked if I wanted to read some lines and try out for the part. I did, and that's how I got my first job and an agent. I started taking improv classes, including a six-week summer program with Del Close. I was with ImprovOlympic, but only for three months. Once I graduated from high school, I was fortunate to book several very good jobs, including a national Chevy commercial, an industrial film for Sears, Roebuck on exercise machines. Very quickly, I moved out to California.

Q: Were you active in the theatre in school?

A: I had acted when I was younger. Both of my parents worked—we moved from Buffalo Grove to Lake Forest when I was eight—so, during the summer, I participated in several different programs. The first acting I did was at the Gorton Community Center, in Lake Forest. You had to be 13 years old or younger to be in a play. We'd memorize songs, but improvise our lines, because there were kids seven or eight years old there. When I got to junior high school, I did a couple of plays and hosted a variety show, which I really enjoyed. Then I stopped. I played sports and hung out with the guys. I didn't do anything else until my junior year. A friend of mine was trying out for a play,

and, as a lark, he asked me to come along. I got cast for the play, and cohosted the talent shows during my junior and senior years with my friend Paul Boese, who now produces television shows. We'd share the emcee duties, do sketches, introduce the acts, and have lots of fun.

Q: At six-five, I'd think the coaches would be beating a path to your locker.

A: I didn't shoot up until the summer between my sophomore and junior years. I wrestled fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. I played football my freshman and sophomore years, and freshman baseball, but I wasn't any great shakes. When I got to high school, the focus on winning became much greater. I wasn't so much in love with sports that I wanted to have coaches yelling at me and have to run around all the time.

Q: That needy-looking photo on the cover of last December's GQ only bore a passing resemblance to the man sitting in front of me right now. I'm told you favor jeans and T-shirts.

A: When I first started out, I did a lot of magazines. Since then, not so often. I don't enjoy the interview process—for the most part, anyway—and definitely don't like going to the photo shoots. I'm not comfortable, and I don't find it to be truthful. When I'm acting, I have a point of view and an imagination. . . . I build a character, who I play. When I'm posing for a picture, I don't know what I'm doing, or who I'm supposed to be. And, a lot of times, you'll get to a photo shoot and be told, "This is a great designer." Typically, they're clothes you would never wear. I'm not here to play a character for this designer. I'm supposed to be presented as myself.

Q: Why did you decide to make a Chicago movie?

A: I've always wanted to go back and make a movie in Chicago. That's where I got my first professional work and great training.

One of the writers of "The Break-Up" is from Chicago [Jay Lavender; see "Show Business," Chicago, May 2006], and I told him that it was really important to me that this movie be set there, and that it represents the city and the Midwest. I worked on the screenplay with the writers before we took it to the studios. Part of any deal with a studio would have to be that we shoot it in Chicago. The Chicago Film Office has been great, Mayor Daley has been great—everyone there helped make the shoot very easy. I plan to shoot more films in Chicago.

Q: Some of the gossip items imply that your decision to move back to Chicago might not suit Jennifer's lifestyle, as they imagine it to be, at least. If you were to get married—with or without Oprah's assistance—I really can't see you two in a Bridgeport bungalow.

A: When I moved back to Chicago, I bought a townhouse. I'm in the process of negotiating for a new place, because I plan to spend a lot of downtime in the city and it's become difficult to live in the townhouse. I've gotten to a place where I'm able to live where I want to live, and that's where I want to live.

The thing about Chicago is that it really isn't like any other place. The architecture and the layout of the city are the best. I'm from the Midwest, and consider myself a

Midwesterner. I feel most at home there. I love California. I have great friends in California. I just have always considered Illinois to be home.