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NBC News Associates Program Taps IWU Graduate for Los Angeles Post

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. He's staked out Monica Lewinsky's Los Angeles apartment for eight to 12 hours at a stretch, schmoozing with neighbors and doormen, hoping to get precious nuggets of information about the former White House intern at the center of President Bill Clinton's impeachment woes.

The day a sex scandal broke around U.S. Rep. Bob Livingston (R-La.), the news desk tracked him down after work at the dry cleaner's, dispatching him to pornographer Larry Flynt's Hollywood Hills home to get the scoop on an upcoming Hustler magazine article outing the almost-Speaker of the House and other Capitol Hill notables.

When loner Russell E. Weston Jr., killed two U.S. Capitol police officers and wounded a tourist in a Washington, D.C., shooting spree last summer, he hopped a plane to Montana to dig into the assailant's background, visiting his cabin and kibitzing with locals to answer the question: "Who is Weston?"

And, while this one-time English and theatre arts major at Illinois Wesleyan University hasn't appeared on the silver screen, his beat is Hollywood, where he has met or interviewed the likes of Tom Hanks, Helen Hunt, Kelsey Grammer, Gwyneth Paltrow, Robin Williams, Sharon Stone, John Travolta, Jodie Foster, and Steven Spielbergan impressive collection of Academy and Emmy-award winners.

NBC News Associates Program

Tariq A. Khan, a 1993 IWU graduate from Benton, Ill., works as an assistant producer in NBC's News Associates Program, launched five years ago to bring more diversity to the network's news coverage. About 10-12 men and women are recruited annually for 10-month long positions they hope will turn into permanent slots with the peacock network.

Khan began his stint with the associates program in June and it will wrap up in April.

"I've always been fascinated by world events," Khan said, explaining the lure of journalism as a career. "Working in news you get a front-row seat to the world's events. It's being part of history."

Khan linked up with NBC News after completing a graduate program in broadcast journalism at Boston University and working as a reporter-anchor for Neighborhood Network News, a Boston cable TV operation.

Tom Brokaw Hero

The lure of NBC News was particularly attractive to Khan since his hero is NBC anchor Tom Brokaw, who he met at a broadcast awards dinner in Boston in 1995.

"People trust Tom Brokaw," Khan says. "With Tom Brokaw you get the feeling that what you see is what you get."

Brokaw told Khan about the associates program, then in its inaugural year. The program puts a premium on an advanced degree in journalism, professional experience, and a strong commitment to a career in journalism. A former professor of Khan's at BU encouraged him to apply.

Role as an Assistant Producer

As an assistant producer, Khan is based in the network's Los Angeles bureau, located in Burbank. He typically files for the NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw and The Today Show with Katie Couric and Matt Lauer. His work also has appeared on MSNBC, the cable TV joint venture between NBC and Microsoft.

"I work on elements of a story," Khan explains. "I may go out in the field with a crew and do an interview, or I might do the interview myself. Other times, I work in-house, taking feeds and looking at tape and interviews to determine what goes into the final story. I do research for stories and I pitch story ideas."

Assignments

The third day on the job, Khan was assigned an interview with Chinese dissident Harry Wu for a piece on President Clinton's trip to the People's Republic of China being produced out of NBC's Washington bureau.

"I picked up Wu at CNN," Khan explained, "where he appeared on 'Larry King Live.' I took him to a hotel for a 30-minute interview. The next day, I was on a press junket for the film, 'Saving Private Ryan.' I met Tom Hanks and Matt Damon and sat in on interviews."

Last November, Khan worked with NBC News anchor Maria Shriver on a West Coast election night special, focusing on gubernatorial races.

"The whole night," Khan recalls, "I was sitting right behind her in the camera's view."

Khan works with former O.J. Simpson prosecutor Marcia Clark on Fridays, when she sits in for Geraldo Rivera on CNBC's Rivera Live.

He also covered Jodi Applegate of NBC News, when she appeared on celebrity Jeopardy, interviewing the losing contestants: figure skater Scott Hamilton and Greg Germann of the Fox Network series Ally McBeal.

He also has covered the Golden Globe awards and is slated to cover the upcoming Academy Awards.

However, not all of Khan's assignments have gone smoothly. One day he was sent to Dodger Stadium, where the Chicago Cubs were playing the Los Angeles Dodgers. His initial reaction: "What sport is that?"

The story's target was Chicago Cubs' home run slugger Sammy Sosa and one of Sosa's former coaches, Manny Mota, now with the Dodgers.

"I was on the field," Khan said, "and it meant nothing to me. I told the crew that I didn't know anything about baseball. I was faking it, when a cameraman told Mota I didn't know anything about baseball. The coach laughed and did the interview. He took me over to meet the players and I didn't know any of them. I met Tommy Lasorda, but just remembered him from his Slim Fast television commercials. I didn't know he was the Dodgers' former manager."

Lessons Learned

Khan has learned some valuable journalistic lessons from his experience at NBC News.

"I've learned to keep focused on the goal at hand," he says. "That's getting news material interviews, pictures, or lining up people for stories. In other words, what is it we need to put a story on the air? I focus on my element of the story a sound bite, finding the person needed, or making sure the crew gets the right picture."

Khan also has become adept and comfortable living under constant deadline pressure. He copes with deadlines by making a serious commitment to planning ahead.

"I make sure," he explains, "that I don't do an interview later than 1 p.m. to make sure there is time to do the editing and script writing. I stay focused, determined. Sometimes you just have to pester people and keep calling them."

Khan has worked with a galaxy of NBC News correspondents, including David Bloom, Andrea Mitchell, Lisa Myers, Mike Jensen, and John Palmer. He's also worked with Chicago-based correspondents Jim Avila and Ann Thompson.

"In a perfect world," Khan said, referring to life after the associates program, "I'd like to stay working in TV news as a producer or correspondent."

Philosophy of Journalism

Khan sees news as an extension of formal education. "News presents new information to people," he says. "It's just like a classroom lesson."

However, his enthusiasm for TV news also is tempered by some disturbing industry trends.

"Some people worry," he says, "that we're not giving viewers enough substantial news, pointing to coverage of Monica Lewinsky and the O.J. Simpson trial. They think news directors, producers, and executives only give people what they want to see, but there is a conscious effort to give people the important news of the world. There is balance."

Khan urges viewers to be discriminating consumers of news.

"Viewers should ask themselves," he says, "why should I know about this? And, how does it affect me?"

"It's too easy," Khan adds, "for news and entertainment to merge. Look for facts, look for research, look for authorities in stories offering information in different fields. It's easy to do a two-minute story without telling people anything. Good stories have substantial information, real interest, and important authorities in their fields presenting new information."

Remembering IWU

Reminiscing about his college days at IWU, Khan said he came to the Bloomington campus because "I wanted to go to a small university. I didn't want to be a number at a big university. IWU was the best small college in the area. I was interested in studying theatre and IWU has a very good theatre department."

Early on, Khan had aspirations of acting in a television soap opera. His favorite soap opera as a college student was *Days of Our Lives*, which, ironically, is filmed at NBC. "I see them in the cafeteria and at the ATM machine," Khan said, referring to "Days" cast and crew.

Khan believes his IWU double-major in English and theatre arts has contributed to his journalistic development. "English and theatre," Khan explained, "taught me how to control and evaluate language. English gave me writing practice and that helps me on writing scripts, doing interviews, and getting the right sound bites."

Khan stays in touch with his alma mater. In fact, on a visit this month to IWU, he confessed: "I called Jim Ruoti [IWU's dean of admissions] from outside Monica Lewinsky's apartment to tell him I was coming to town."

About IWU

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,000 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a

\$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, and a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts.

--30

| Top of Page |
