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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2011

## Media, Darling: Sarah Kelsey

Sarah Kelsey isn't quite sure how she got her gig as a Style Editor at AOL/The Huffington Post Canada, but she ain't complaining. Each day her "dream job" affords her the opportunity to interview Canadian talent about fashion, beauty, entertaining and home. She's also a freelance writer for various North American publications and she's been featured in the *Globe and Mail*, *ELLE*, *Fashion Magazine*, *Canadian Living*, *National Post*, *Sweetspot.ca* and *SheKnows.com*. She previously worked as a producer, assignment editor and videographer for CTV. She blogs about 'La Belle Vie' at [sarahkelsey.posterous.com](http://sarahkelsey.posterous.com) and is a writer for hire at [www.sarahkelsey.ca](http://www.sarahkelsey.ca).


[@sarahkelsey](#)

### Did you always want to be in the media? If not, what other careers were on the horizon?

I didn't! For years I wanted to be a doctor -- I even started off in university studying human biology (my goal was to be a Doctor Without Borders). After taking a first-year political science course, I switched my major and was accepted into this specialized program at the University of Toronto in international relations and peace and conflict studies. The program's aim was to groom students for careers at the U.N. or in international law. I loved the program, but realized while interviewing people for my thesis, that I really loved the craft of journalism. I completed my degree and then went on to study journalism at Ryerson University. The rest, as they say, is history.

### Where would you like to be five years from now?

Interesting question... I don't know. This past year has been a year of change and growth for me, personally and professionally, so I'd really love to feel settled. I'd still love to be working at *The Huffington Post Canada*, having helped build their living sections. Ideally, my freelance writing career will have flourished as well. I'd also like to complete my novel, which has been in the works for about a year.

Personally, I have a goal of traveling to as many countries on each continent as possible. I have

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Australia and Africa to go (though I could stand to do more travel to Asia, like Japan and India). I'd also love to own my own home and to have run one marathon.

#### Any advice for people getting started in your industry?

Ask lots of questions! We (anyone who is working at a media outlet or PR firm) have all been in the same place as you are, just starting out. We know it can feel overwhelming. And, for the most part, we can sympathize with the position you're in: eager to learn, do, excel. So don't be afraid to speak up. You'll likely be surprised with how willing people are to help you find the right internship or a contact to set-up an interest interview with. Work hard. Meet your deadlines. And do your research on the outlets you want to work for/with.

That being said, when you are helped, pay it forward. Help those people around you who may be having a harder time getting their footing than you are. Be nice. Be thankful. Be courteous. And never, for one second, think you're entitled to anything that's given to you -- internships (and jobs) cometh and very easily goeth.

#### What are your favourite media outlets, not including your own?

I absolutely adore blogs. I couldn't live without the MobileRSS app on my iPhone -- it's linked to my Google Reader account. It's loaded with lifestyle feeds from around the world -- Oh Happy Day!, Ah Bon, Style Me Pretty, A Cup Of Joe, Coquette, Elephantine, Not Martha, Orangette... There are too many to list here.

I'm also addicted to *NPR* (This American Life, Radio Lab, All Things Considered) and CBC Radio. Every day I read a wide array of news sites, too: Salon, Slate, Scientific America, BBC, *Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The Guardian*, *The Onion*.

#### Best interview you've ever had? Worst?

I really enjoy interviewing anyone who has an interesting story to tell. That's not to say I haven't enjoyed chatting with celebs. Santa Claus was a pretty memorable interview. There are just so many people doing great things in their day-to-day lives. Like [Adam Garone](#), the CEO of Movember. Or Arlene Dickinson of *Dragon's Den*. Or Stephen Lewis of The Stephen Lewis Foundation.

I think the best interviews are those where I come out learning something new, and am inspired to do more and do better (personally, professionally and for my community). When I was a videographer for CTV I did have some difficult interviews -- like trying to get an evasive politician to answer one of my questions or chatting with families who had lost a loved one to violence or crime; I'm not going to lie, I'm glad those days are behind me... at least for now.

#### Best advice you've ever been given?

Never give up and stay positive. Failing is part of the process we all go through to achieve greatness; it's essential. It's in those moments when you're the lowest that you learn the most about yourself and the world around you. No one is perfect and that's okay. We're all working toward the same goal of happiness and feeling successful in our own lives, so it's also important to be nice to anyone and everyone you meet (or to make amends to anyone you may have harmed).

#### What rule(s) do you live your life by?

I really just try to live one day at a time and to learn as much from all of the situations/scenarios I experience. To quote a line from Ferris Bueller, "*Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.*" It's totally true. I try not to take anything for granted. It's been a hard year for me. I've learned a lot. And, right now, I'm exceptionally grateful.

#### What's the most important tip you can give PR pros?

Only one!?! I'd have to say know who you are pitching to and tailor your pitch to suit the specific outlet you're pitching. As journalists, we receive hundreds of emails every day. Pitches stand out when they have a unique tie-in to a larger story, even current events. It's also incredibly important to include all of the details about a product/event in your pitch, including FTP site links and passwords, product pricing, availability, location, hours, etc. It also helps when you get a little personal -- introduce yourself to a new journalist, ask how someone is doing, mention a recent article of theirs you read, never be rude -- little things go a long way.

#### Best experience you've had with a PR pro? We love to hear about #wins.

There are too many to count (that makes me sound like a kiss ass, but it's true). Toronto is home to so many fantastic PR people. I experience a #win courtesy of someone in the industry at least once a day -- whether it's grabbing me a one-off interview for TIFF or images that no one else will have access to. It's about going above and beyond of "what's expected." I feel really lucky to work with the PR folks in this city -- for the most part, everyone is super friendly, helpful. There's a great camaraderie between us.

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**I hate?**

Cauliflower. It's disgusting. I shriek a little when I see or smell it.

**I love?**

Too many things! Travel. Running. My cottage (in the summer and winter). Red wine. Scotch. Cigars. My dad's pizza. My mom's Caesar salad. Sunsets. Yoga (aka: trying to bend). [Kawartha Dairy Mint Chocolate Chip Ice Cream](#). Baking. Cooking. Reading. Blogging. Rosebud Salve. My iPhone. Writing. Journaling. Adding magazine tears to my "inspiration" binder. Fresh flowers. Painting my fingernails. Dyeing my hair. Learning more about my industry (fashion, beauty, entertaining, home decor). Decorating my home. Filling my closet with new clothes -- and developing my own personal style.

**Reading?**

I'm reading too many books. *Rebel Buddha* by Dzogchen Ponlop; *The Gifts Of Imperfection* by Brene Brown; *The Value of Nothing* by Raj Patel; *Bossypants* by Tina Fey. I'm also constantly flipping through my favourites -- *Autumn of the Patriarch* by Gabriel García Márquez and *A Tale Of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens.

**Best place on earth?**

Toronto. I absolutely love living in this city. There are so many things to do and see. If we're talking internationally, I adore Peru (the people and culture are incredible), Cambodia (it's the richest, most impoverished place on earth) and Paris (the history, architecture, fashion and food overwhelm me).

**Dinner guest?**

Katherine Hepburn. She was bold, feisty, intelligent, fashionable and not afraid to challenge the conventions of her time -- I think I could learn a thing or two from her.

**Hero?**

Superhero!? Batman! But if we're talking about "normal" people, I'd have to say my parents and my brother. Professionally, there are three people (two former bosses and one businesswoman) I hold as role models, but they're a secret. ;)

**Favourite app (or whatever you are downloading these days)?**

ShakelPhoto -- it turns iPhone pics into digital Polaroids.

**Pool or ocean?**

Lake.

**Voicemail or email?**

Email. One of the best bosses I ever had coached me to respond to all emails (whether I could use them for a story or not) within 24 hours. It's something I still abide by to this day. For some reason I neglect voicemail... I think I just forget it exists.

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