

Author Jennifer Buhl Talks About Her Time Spent 'Shooting Stars'



Interview and written by [Whitney Johnson](#). Transcription by Louisa Gonzales.

Jennifer Buhl spent three years in Los Angeles working as a paparazza (the word for a female singular paparazzi), and as a top-earning photographer, she was one of only five women in an industry dominated by men. Her work was published in *People* magazine, TMZ, and E! News, to name a few. Having since escaped the California lifestyle to move to Boulder, Colorado, and run a family photography business, she took the opportunity to reflect on her time in the field and wrote her new book, *Shooting Stars: My Unexpected Life Photographing Hollywood's Most Famous*. Read on for our exclusive interview with the author and find out more about her experiences with the rich and famous!

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You write about how paparazzi are often portrayed as being the villain, but in reality, they aren't the bad guy. Has this perspective affected the way your friends and family viewed your career?

I think everybody outside of Los Angeles kind of thought I had this cool new profession, but people in LA sort of have an attitude about *their* celebrities – like, “How dare you?” The people who are most offended by my profession are the people who follow celebrities the most...because they feel like they're

friends with them. And, of course, it's kind of ironic because they know all about them because of the photographs that paparazzi take.

It's important for people to understand that, a lot of the time, celebrities actually *want* to be photographed. It's also good to note that paparazzi are just the photographers; we're not the buyers (magazines, blogs, etc.) or the consumers. Honestly, I don't really care that much about celebrities; I was just doing my job!

You mentioned that your favorite experience as a paparazzi was one with David Beckham. Can you elaborate?

David is one of those celebrities that I put in a different category – like this mammoth, mammoth star. He's like Tom Cruise or Brangelina. They operate in their own world, and they always have a ton of security around them. They've really changed their lifestyle because of their fame, so it's hard to get a good shot of them. You rarely see pictures of David just out and about because he knows how to avoid us (which isn't hard to do). So to have an encounter with him is a really special thing.

One day, I followed him to soccer practice knowing that I probably wouldn't get a photograph because it'd be on his terms. He had two security guards with him; he saw me following him and kind of waved at the car I was in. Then, he pulls up to a drive-thru Starbucks window – and I'm like, "Did he do that for me?!" We were both in line and had our windows down, so we started chatting.

He knew I was a paparazzi and I was following him, but I didn't pull my camera out because there was no shot. All he had to do was put his hand over his face, and his security would've come running. We just talked for a while, and at the end of the conversation, he let me have a picture. It wasn't an amazing photo – he was just grabbing his drink from the

window – but for me, it was a really special moment.

Were there any celebrity couples that you enjoyed shooting?

I photographed the Beckham's on the soccer field or out as a family. But interestingly, the paparazzi rarely follow a man by himself. Unless he's with his partner or kids or has a big bouquet of flowers in his hand, we typically focus on women. It's women who mostly read magazines, and we really want to see what other women look like – what they're wearing, how they've done their hair, who they're dating.

As an example, I was sitting on Jennifer Garner and Ben Affleck's house one day – that's a paparazzi term for "staking out" – along with several other paparazzi. Ben pulls out in his car, and nobody moves. We were all waiting for Jen.

Related Link: [Lessons from Jennifer Garner and Ben Affleck](#)

To shift gears a bit, we wanted to ask your thoughts about the recent petition from couples like Kristen Bell and Dax Shepard who are trying to stop photographs of their kids from being published.

Well, I think they are barking up the wrong tree when they are talking to paparazzi. But I actually think Kristen and Dax are going about it the right way; they're trying to target the people who print the pictures. Those are the deciders and consumers of what the paparazzi do. So if they want those pictures to stop printing, they need to talk to those people, and I think some of the media has agreed to it.

I don't think the paparazzi really care that much because, frankly, the publications and blogs are going to use our photos no matter what. Whether you buy the ones with Kristen and Dax's kid or you buy one with somebody else, it doesn't matter.

And how has the resurgence of social media affected the

paparazzi's careers?

Social media has given celebrities a lot of power. Our biggest competitors today are celebrities themselves. And that's because they're tweeting and Instagramming their own photos that the magazines and blogs can use for free. Publishers don't really care where the photos come from as long as they're good pictures, and the celebrities love it because they're able to drive their own media and their own look.

On a personal note, as a working mother, do you have any tips for our readers who are trying to balance parenthood with their careers?

I guess my biggest piece of advice is to look into attachment parenting – it really works for me. I would also say that, if possible, it's really important to have a flexible work schedule. It totally changed my life and just allows me to be a mother. If you read the book, then you know that motherhood is the most important thing in my life. So for me, it comes first. I still need to work, and I still love to work, so I put myself in a situation where I am able to be a working mother.

For more information about Jennifer, check out jenniferbuhlphotography.com. You can order Shooting Stars from Amazon!