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TV Week

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Wentworth Miller

EXCLUSIVE

STUDIO 4's FANNY KIEFER

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THAT GAVE HER A RENEWED
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Earlier this year, *Studio 4* host Fanny Kiefer was rushed to the hospital where she underwent emergency surgery for a potentially fatal brain aneurysm. But she lived to tell the tale, and four months later, the outspoken broadcaster shares what happened that fateful day.

BY JEFF KELLER

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The star of dramatic new series *Prison Break* talks about filming in a real prison, and the unexpected challenges of making a Mariah Carey video.

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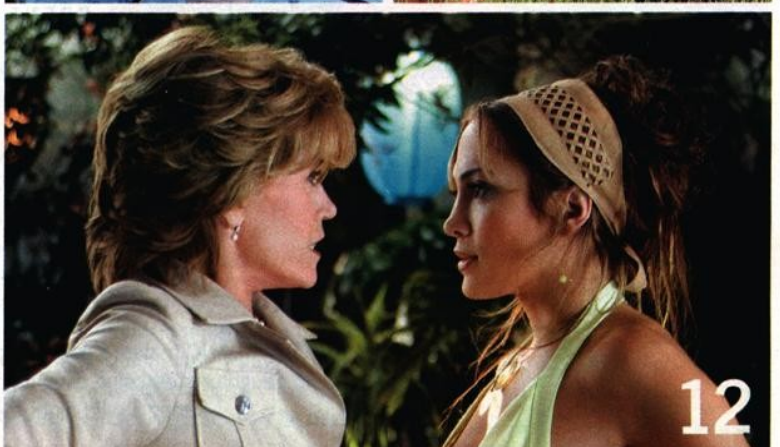
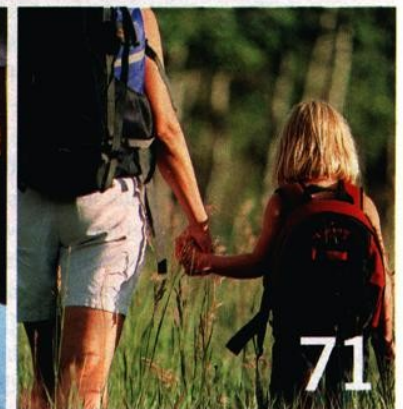
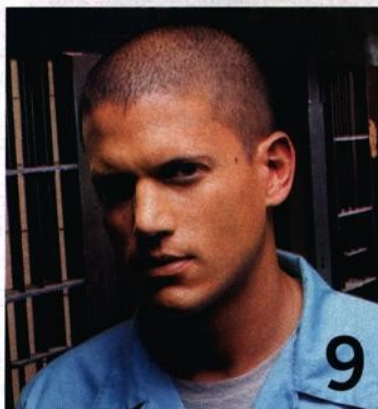
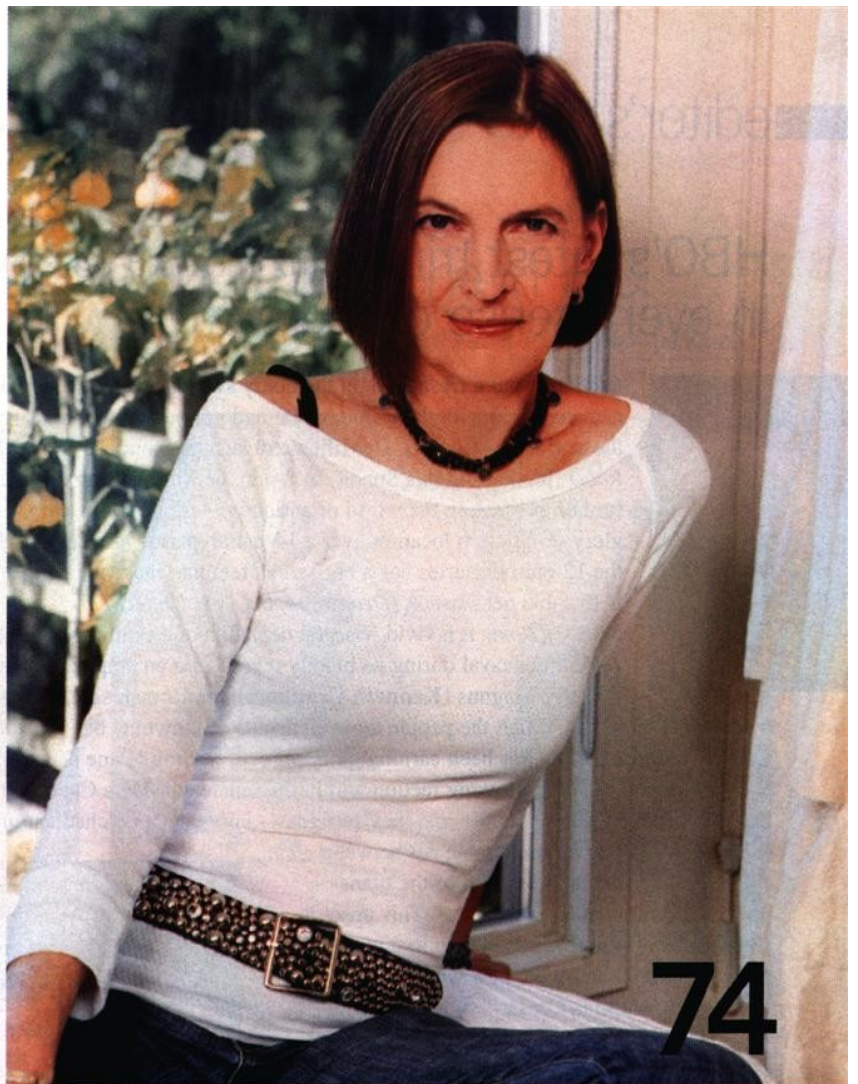
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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: GREGORY CROW, (MAKEUP) ANDREA YEW, (INSET) FOX

ENTER TO WIN

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Fanny's Fritz

Just months after suffering a life-threatening brain aneurysm, Shaw TV host **Fanny Kiefer** talks about how she's bouncing back

BY JEFF KELLER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREGORY CROW



IT WOULD SEEM DISRESPECTFUL, EVEN GHOULISH, TO REFER TO **Fanny Kiefer's** recent aneurysm as "Fanny's Fritz," had the words not come straight from her own mouth. "When I had my fritz . . ." she says. Or: "After my fritz . . ." Kiefer, the host of Shaw TV's *Studio 4* talk show, tells the story of her "fritz" with courage, grace and humour. In time the word aneurysm, with all its horrible connotations, fades into the background, leaving one with the mistaken notion that the "fritz" was the subplot of a soap opera, played out by a cast of intelligent, caring and terminally comedic actors.

The truth is, however, that she came very close to death. She had, in the frontal lobe of her brain, a cerebral aneurysm, a section of blood vessel in which the walls became weak and ballooned outward. When an aneurysm ruptures, it hemorrhages blood into the surrounding brain tissue, causing a variety of neurological symptoms, and, often, death. Aneurysms can vary in size. Kiefer's was classified as a *giant* aneurysm. It was roughly the size of a plum.

On April 18, 2005, the night before the drama began, Kiefer ate dinner at **Vicki Gabereau's** home with her usual coterie of friends. ("When Fanny gets together with her old crowd of over-55 broads," says the irreverent **Neil Macrae**, sportscaster at CKNW and Rock 101, "it's probably more fun than a roomful of 20-

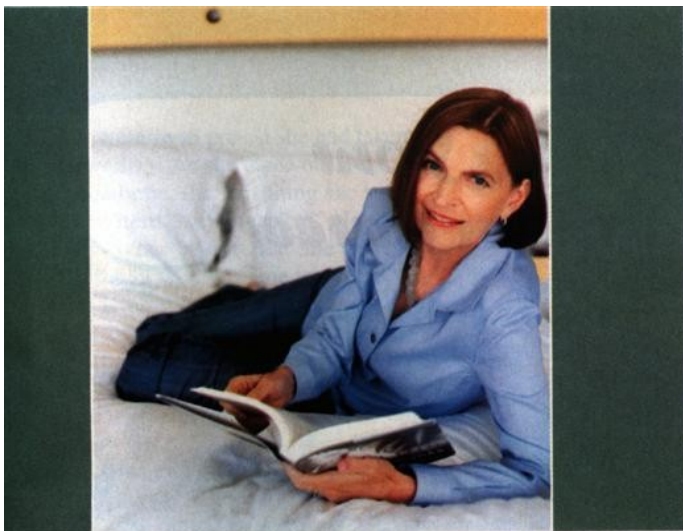
year-olds.") Spirits were high, and lamb was on the menu, giving rise to a post-fritz rumour that she'd really had a "lambeurysm."

When the party broke up, Kiefer drove back to her West Vancouver home, and after a good night's sleep she went to work. Perhaps more pertinent than the lamb, she admits, is the fact that one of her interviews on the morning of the 19th was the Greek film director **Constantin Costa-Gravas**. "He's drop-dead gorgeous," she says matter-of-factly. "My blood pressure went to the moon. Maybe that was it."

After work, Kiefer hit the gym. "I was doing a lat pull," she remembers, "and it was like a gun went off in my head. Suddenly everything seemed to recede." Her trainer made her sit down. She asked her if she'd had breakfast, and finally drove her to a clinic. The clinic doctor, seeing no other symptoms than headache, told Kiefer that if things were to get worse she should go to Emergency.

That evening, B.C. Supreme Court judge **Nancy Morrison** (who had also attended dinner at Gabereau's the night before) phoned Kiefer for the number of a mutual acquaintance. She was surprised to learn that Kiefer had a bad headache and was throwing up. "Chatty Cathy didn't want to talk," says Morrison. "Fanny never gets sick. It was very unusual."

Morrison phoned back the next morning at 6:40. "Fanny answered, and I almost couldn't recognize her voice. She thought



she had the flu, but I began to think she might have meningitis — you hear all those awful stories. As soon as I got off the phone I called a friend of mine who's a nurse and described Fanny's symptoms. There was an ominous silence, then she told me: 'Get her to the hospital.'

Getting Fanny Kiefer to a hospital, however, takes a bit of doing. "For her to call an ambulance and put people out," says Morrison. "Well, she'd never do that." Morrison phoned Kiefer back and told her to call an ambulance. Kiefer demurred. Morrison insisted. "I said if she wouldn't call an ambulance, I'd be in her driveway in five minutes. She said she'd throw up in my car, and I said I didn't care."

"Nancy saved my scrawny neck," says Kiefer, who finally agreed to be driven to the hospital by her daughter, **Molly**. At Lions Gate Hospital she underwent an MRI and an angiogram, and the seriousness of her condition was finally determined. She was moved to Vancouver General Hospital and scheduled for surgery the next day.

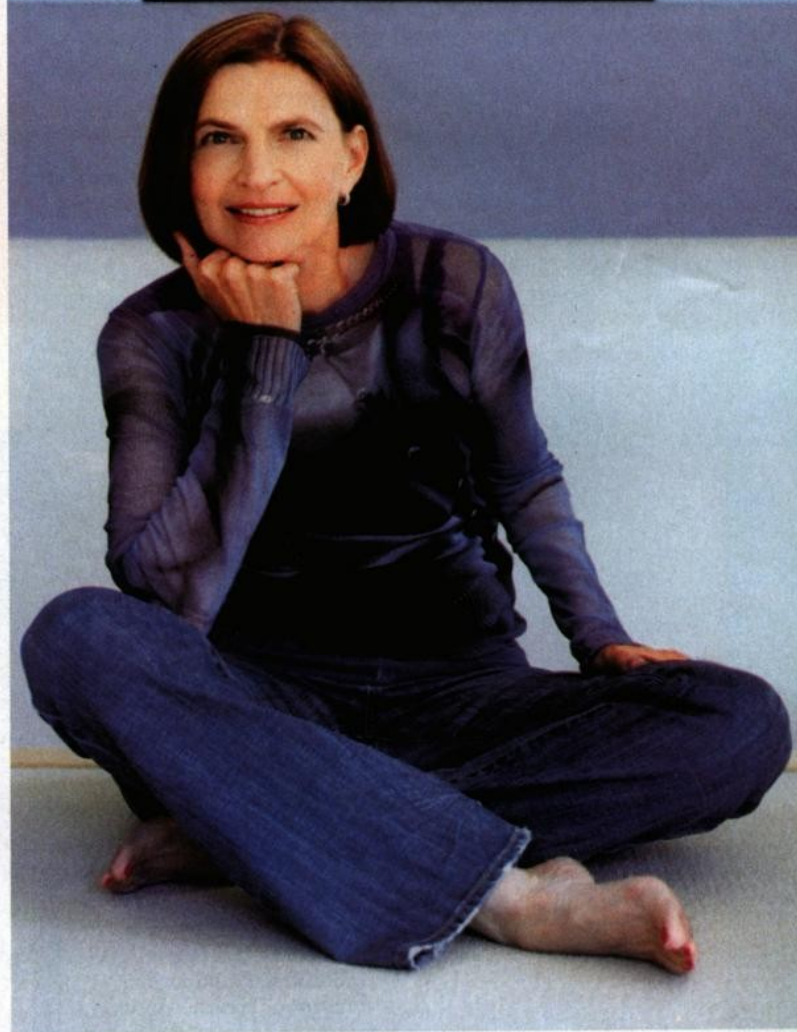
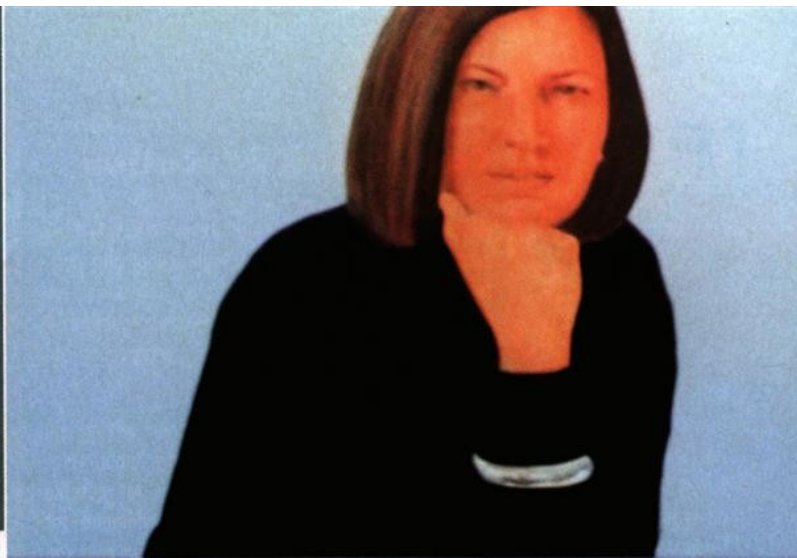
When Neil Macrae arrived at work on the morning of the 22nd, the station was buzzing with the news of Kiefer's aneurysm and imminent surgery. Macrae and Kiefer go back almost 30 years, to her early days as a producer and host at CJOR. As a couple, they were together for five years. ("It felt like seven," he jokes.) As friends their relationship has been close and strong — there had even been talk of Fanny serving as "best man" at Macrae's wedding.

"When I heard that Fanny was at death's door it was like I'd been given a major kick in the gut," recalls Macrae. "I wasn't able to get hold of anybody at five in the morning, and I had a lot of shows ahead of me. All I wanted to do was hurry up, get them over with and go see Fanny."

By the time he got to the hospital, Kiefer was in pre-op. "This wasn't the pre-op for people having hernia surgery," says Macrae. "This was the serious pre-op. There was no way anyone was getting in there except immediate family — so I said I was her son." He found himself gurney-side, with Kiefer's daughters Molly and **Jennifer**. Kiefer was sleeping, with an ice pack over her face. "I woke her up a bit," says Macrae. "I don't think she knew how serious it was. And I didn't know if I'd see her again."

While Kiefer was under the knife, her daughters and friends waited at one of her favourite restaurants. "On my orders they went to Il Giardino," recalls Kiefer. "That way, if I didn't make it, at least they'd have good wine."

Eight or nine hours of brain surgery later, it was done. The aneurysm was repaired. There were no complications. When



“ I dodged a bullet, but I didn't see a light, and I didn't go down a tunnel. ”

Kiefer went in to pre-op she had taken off her jewellery. As she came out from under the anesthetic, the first thing she said was: "Where's my bracelet?" Her girlfriends sighed with relief. She was okay.

"Everything just came together," shrugs Kiefer. "I was a lucky duck. It's not my usual parlour trick." The next seven days were spent in Intensive Care, being woken at regular intervals to answer the same boring questions: Who are you? Where are you? What's the date? "How would I know the date?" laughs Kiefer. "I wasn't at work."

Looking back, she realizes that she was lucky, but even against a background of personal spiritual beliefs, she's reluctant to extrapolate her experience into a larger cosmic picture. "I dodged the bullet," she quips, "but I didn't see a light, and I didn't go down a tunnel."

Nor was she elated to find herself alive. "When I came out I was flat," she relates. "Everyone assumes you'll be euphoric, but your body is so broken you can't find an emotion. You really realize for the first time that you come in alone, and you go out alone. Being in recovery is almost like going back to the womb. You're all by yourself, hooked up to tubes and machines. You have to give up all control and be okay with that."

Kiefer recovered more quickly than most aneurysm patients, but then, she had her friends, her "fake nurses," bringing her regular installments of the organic foods she thrives on. "All my friends were incredible," says Kiefer. "They took turns bringing me food. It was an extravagant demonstration of love."

"We were all worried sick," says Vicki Gabereau. "She has a million friends who love her very much. Fortunately, she keeps herself in better condition than the rest of us combined, and I think that really helped her. If you think that keeping yourself fit and being careful with your diet isn't important, look at Fanny."

Shaw TV also came through with some important stress relief. "At first I was worried about money," admits Kiefer. "I get paid by the show. But my producer came by the hospital and said, 'Don't worry. We'll take care of you.' That was very cool, a big corporation doing what they didn't have to do."

Asked if the experience has changed her, Kiefer answers with a question. "Are you squeamish?" With a gentle touch, one can feel the hard titanium plate beneath her skin that covers the hole where the surgeon cut through her skull. There are no visible scars. No memory lapses or motor control problems (and just four months after the surgery, she's now heading back to her hosting duties at *Studio 4*). Nor are there any changes in her



“Live it to the hilt, sister. This isn't a dress rehearsal.”

personality. Well, almost none.

"This will astound my friends," she says, "but I've lost my shopping gene."

Asked what she's learned from her fritz, Kiefer smiles wryly and sums it all up. "Live it to the hilt, sister. This isn't a dress rehearsal." ■

The new season of *STUDIO 4* premieres September 6 on Shaw TV. Check listings for times.