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August 2002

Feature
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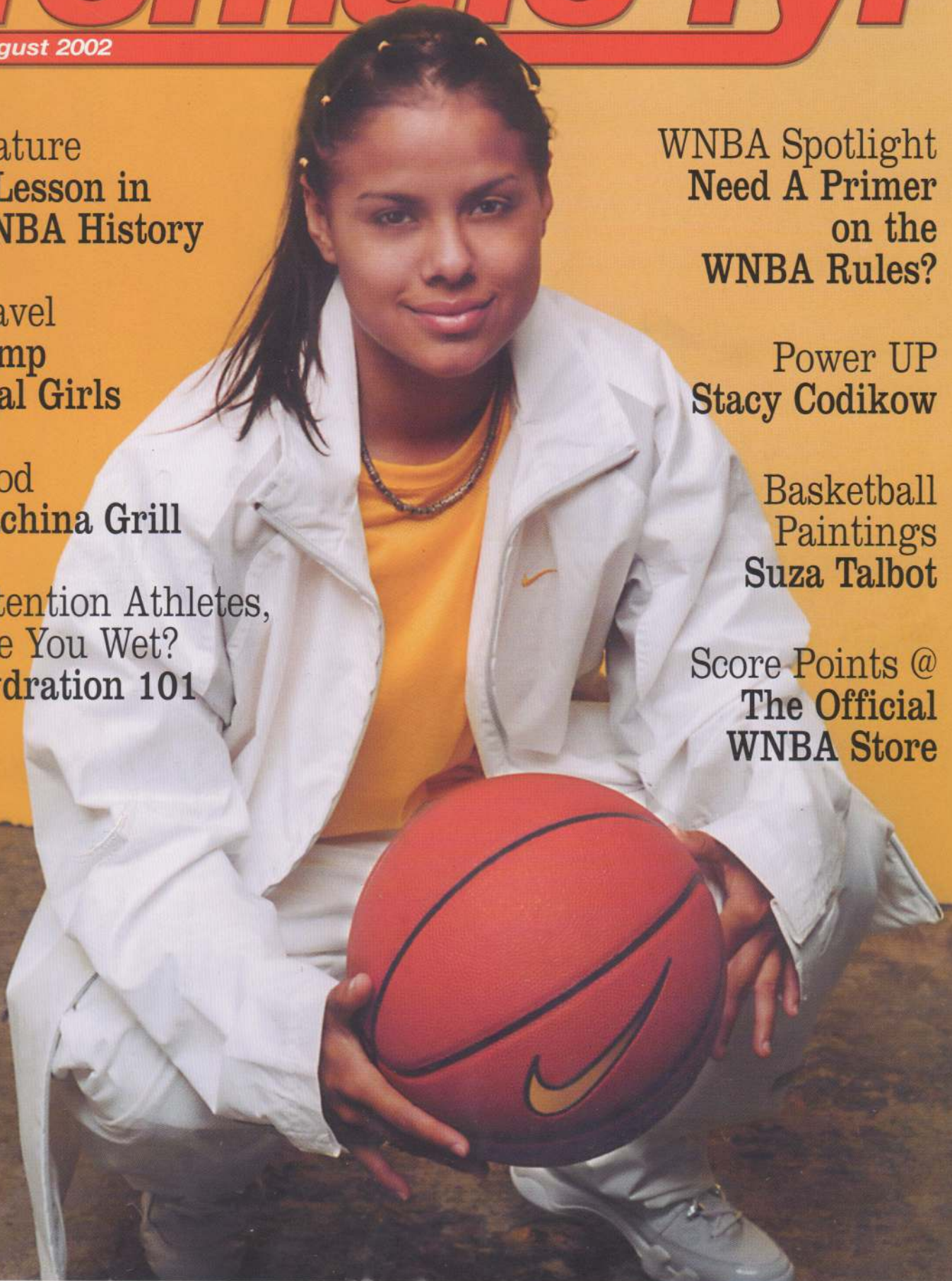
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Are You Wet?
Hydration 101

WNBA Spotlight
Need A Primer
on the
WNBA Rules?

Power UP
Stacy Codikow

Basketball
Paintings
Suza Talbot

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The Official
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PowerUP

By Candace Moore

Stacy Codikow Building a Community, One Member at a Time

WRITER, PRODUCER, AND NOW NON-PROFIT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, **STACY CODIKOW** is the powerhouse behind POWER UP. A successful producer of the feature films *Under the Hula Moon* and *Fatal Instinct*, and writer whose TV credits include *Profiler*, Codikow opened her Rolodex in 2000 along with co-founder Amy Shomer, and called together the first Hollywood girls club, a networking organization with the mission to promote, encourage, and support the visibility and integration of gay women in all forms of entertainment. Since, POWER UP (Professional Organization of Women in Entertainment Reaching Up) has grown into a full-fledged non-profit, offering growth-building opportunities, networking, industry mixers and film grants, as well as mentoring roles and internships and benefit events for those women who wish to give and belong to their community.

I chatted with Codikow at her elegant Hollywood home, where she lives with girlfriend Lisa (an attorney at FOX) and their three dogs. We sat on lounge chairs and sipped lemonade poolside.

C: I first interviewed you for *Girlfriends Magazine* when POWER UP first launched... Is there anything since we last talked in terms of POWER UP changing, members increasing, that you wanted to share?

S: Well, when you're launching an organization and you have a concept in mind, perhaps you don't work the whole thing out. With POWER UP I was thinking we need an organization for women to have a community -- sort of a community center in the sky. Since I'm in the entertainment business and so many people out here (in L.A.) are, I came up with the idea that we build a community of women in entertainment. When we first started we thought, a hundred members maybe. But by the time you and I last spoke I would say it was probably 250. Now we have over 700.

C: And another whole chapter in New York....

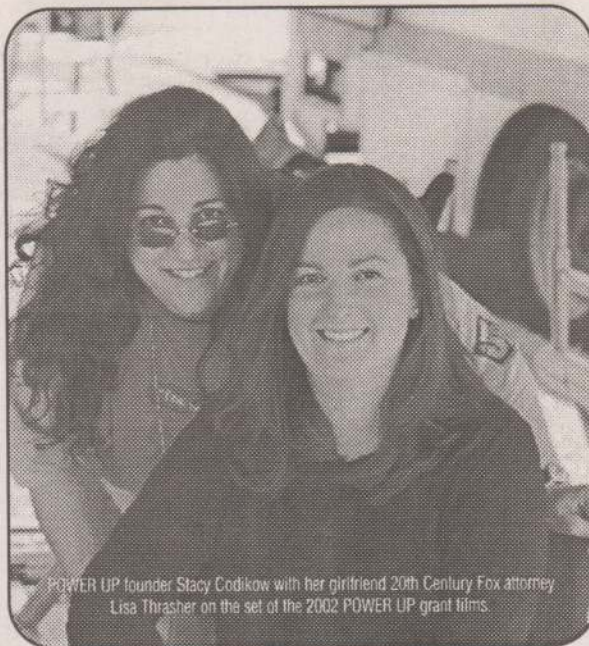
S: Yes, and we're about to launch in Chicago. It's built itself. I started the train rolling down the track and now it's multiplying and the speed's building. I thought we'd make it to the first stop and it's just going cross-country.

C: I noticed you have a staff now.

S: Things have really changed. I did a lot of the work of year one, from Xeroxing, to speaking, to trying to raise money. I feel like we've evolved, there's a momentum that's happening here -- people all over the country are excited, getting involved. Others are able to take some of the load and do some of the planning for events and programming.

C: I think it's awesome that POWER UP members have so many films in the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival already. It shows that you're actually supporting women who are making films.

S: Well there are 15 of our members who are in *OUTFEST*. Out of those we officially sponsored two films, but we've also helped our members with making some of their films. Others have already produced their films, but may come to us for publicity advice, or for who are good agents to send their work to or to invite to screenings. We have a little button on the website now -- 'come see all the members' films and where they're at'. It's up all the time and you can check 'em out. Those kinds of supportive gestures are



POWER UP founder Stacy Codikow with her girlfriend 20th Century Fox attorney Lisa Thrasher on the set of the 2002 POWER UP grant films.

going to help things continue in a positive way.

C: How's the shooting going of the 2002 POWER UP grant winners' shorts?

S: We just wrapped. This year went incredibly smoothly. It is truly exciting to see fifty people sitting together on a set, more than half of them women. Usually you see five women: makeup and hair. But here's a huge number of ladies working together, collaborating, doing what they do professionally together. Everybody works for free. It's a supportive atmosphere and people have the right attitude, like 'we're here to make a creative endeavor as a team.' In fact, making these last three films has been a better experience than any feature film I have ever worked on, whether it was a million dollar or a twenty million dollar project. I should mention that we'll be putting out a great DVD this year, an hour-and-a-half compilation of short films by our members as well as our grant-winning films, and the theme of

the DVD is "Celebrity-driven Lesbian Shorts." So every one of them has somebody you know in it, and all of the money made from that will go back into making more movies...

C: How has running POWER UP, being its fulltime spokeswoman and advocate, affected your own career in film, in terms of your production?

S: I said when I started this 'I'm going to take a year off from work,' cause I figured if I can make it through year one then it can run itself. Well, having never run a non-profit before, and it not being as much like a production as I thought it would be, I don't know... I'm still certainly on hiatus. I have a few projects still in the hopper and fate will control what happens with those. I'm working at least 60 hours a week on POWER UP. It's tough. Every penny we raise is a challenge to get. We've pretty much existed on membership dues. We have a little bit of corporate sponsorship, and the things that go with it, but that takes time, and it takes quite a bit of money to run a non-profit organization of this magnitude. We don't pay anybody, there's not a salary there. Of the approximately 300,000 dollars we raised last year, not a cent went to salaries.

C: Really? They're all volunteers?

S: Well they don't get paid from POWER UP's funds. My production company pays for the overhead of the office and I pay for a couple of employees. Having office space and help is necessary to be able to sponsor the events, make sure that everything is running as it should, and sponsor various members and their films.

C: You can obviously tell that POWER UP was necessary by the way that it has taken off...

S: I had no idea what I was getting into. That naiveté gave me the chance when people said 'Oh, you're not going to be able to get a bunch of women to do this or that' and I'm like, 'Why can't I?' And I did. I tried to apply the logic of life and of business... I started this because I thought 'Gosh, how can I be 37 years old and not know any of the gays and lesbians in film? Everybody I know is straight and I've been in the business fifteen years. That seems weird.' I started going to a lot of charity events and donating a lot of money to GLAAD and the Gay and Lesbian Center and all of these rewarding causes and noticed that at a lot of these black tie events it's eighty-five percent male. That's great -- but it'd be nice if it were fifty-fifty. I started inquiring and there really wasn't anything community-based for professional women, something that can actually help you grow as



On the set of "Breaking Up" (currently playing in 15 festivals) actress Karri Bowman, director Jen McGlone, exec producer Stacy Codikow, and actress Alexandra Paul working through a scene.

an individual, grow in your relationships, in your life...

C: Tell me a bit about your own personal history, how you started out? I know you grew up locally, in Los Angeles, and you went to USC. What was it like when you first set out to find work in Hollywood with your newly-minted degree?

S: I graduated USC and had to fight for my P.A. job driving my car till midnight delivering scripts...

C: It's grueling at first.

S: Of course it's grueling. It's like anything, if you work hard at something, once you prove yourself to be a master of whatever it is you're doing, you can only go from there. If you're fighting for a P.A. job and competing against boys bigger and stronger than you, who the producers think they can beat up more, you need to have something else to offer. I shot all the stills for the movies I worked on, which always helped. I also shot stills for Cagney and Lacey that they used on the shows and in behind-the-scenes stuff. I would say 'Okay, I'm a PA but I'll also throw in all of the photography for free.'

C: How did the first feature film you produced happen?

S: I was learning, and moving up, and decided 'I'm going to make my own film.' Again I thought, 'Oh, I can do this.' (I seem to have that problem.) I had worked as Associate Producer on a couple of other films... I started talking to a couple of the guys I had known who were producers and we got together and just did it.

C: So why, after having success producing movies for years, do you think you chose to change gears and start a non-profit which encourages others to step up to the plate?

S: I wanted to do something bigger than me. I want to know I've made a difference in some people's lives. After a year-and-a-half of running this organization, I feel there are a lot of women who have benefited from the friendship, support, creative outlets, career advice, film grants, and parties and social events -- things to make them proud of who they are. For that I feel grateful and like I've made my mark, done what I needed to do. Now it's just a matter of implementing it, continuing it, and bringing it into a wider world.

C: Well I think "community" is an interesting word that's been used a lot lately. Maybe thirty years ago or so, people seemed to have more of a sense of community then they do now, and charity, and care for other people. It's a very honorable thing in such a cynical age (and business) to run a non-profit for women who are reaching up.

S: POWER UP's that, and it's also for the professional women who want to be a part of something bigger than just them, who want to be giving something back. A large chunk of our members are very successful and make a lot of money. They often attend the high scale functions and come out when we ask them to speak. POWER UP is a mix: we have students, and we have professionals from editors to scriptwriters, from electric and cam-

era department to makeup and hair to I don't know accounting and attorneys... we even have a couple doctors.

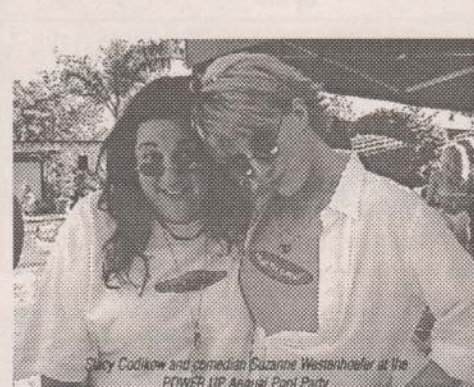
C: Do you ever have difficulties emphasizing the importance of volunteerism to your membership?

S: I feel since everything is run by us, it's up to us to support it. Do I think that the membership needs to get more involved? I think that the more a person gets involved the more they get out of it in anything they do in life. Everything in life worth having is worth working for. I firmly believe that. To continue, POWER UP is going to take a lot of work and more people who want to get involved. If you volunteer to help stuff gift bags, or are a part of an events planning process, or work on the crew of the POWER UP films, or just attend a couple of events...

C: People start to recognize you...

S: Exactly, you start a relationship or you learn something, or you pick something up or you hear about an opportunity... It's being at the right place at the right time. We had a girl volunteering at the office and a big producer called that day and was like 'I need an assistant.' If she hadn't of been there, no one might have thought of her, but she happened to be there so we hooked her up with the job. The idea is to support each other.

C: In what other ways does POWER UP facilitate support and networking?



Stacy Codikow and comedian Suzanne Westoholfer at the POWER UP Annual Pool Party

S: We host a high scale women's event (the Power Premiere), a swim party & BBQ event which includes a full day of outdoor pampering, including yoga and massage and with a lot of the movers and shakers that you want to be meeting in attendance and our special guests are the women filmmakers with movies at Outfest, plus we host a

number of industry mixers throughout the year. We also offer workshops for those who believe in getting involved hands-on and we're about to start a ten-week writing class with a professional writing teacher in mid August.

C: Did you want to talk about some POWER UP events and activities coming up?

S: Sure, we'll be having a benefit reception before comedian Kate Clinton's concert on September 21st. We're having complimentary cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. Then of course there's the Power Premiere this year where we show the grant winning films. We'll be honoring Melissa Etheridge and Jerry Offsay, the President of Showtime Networks, Inc.

C: What day is that?

S: November 3rd, Sunday.

C: Is there any break for you?

S: Nah, I think my break was today....

Candace Moore, a Contributing Editor of Girlfriends Magazine, writes a monthly film review column and freelances on features focusing on Los Angeles entertainment and culture. She received her MFA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University and currently lives in Silverlake. Moore is also a Professional Member of POWER UP, Professional Organization of Women in Entertainment Reaching Up, the only national organization of it's kind. POWER UP stands for unity, community, and empowerment. Feel the surge! www.power-up.net (310)271-4708.