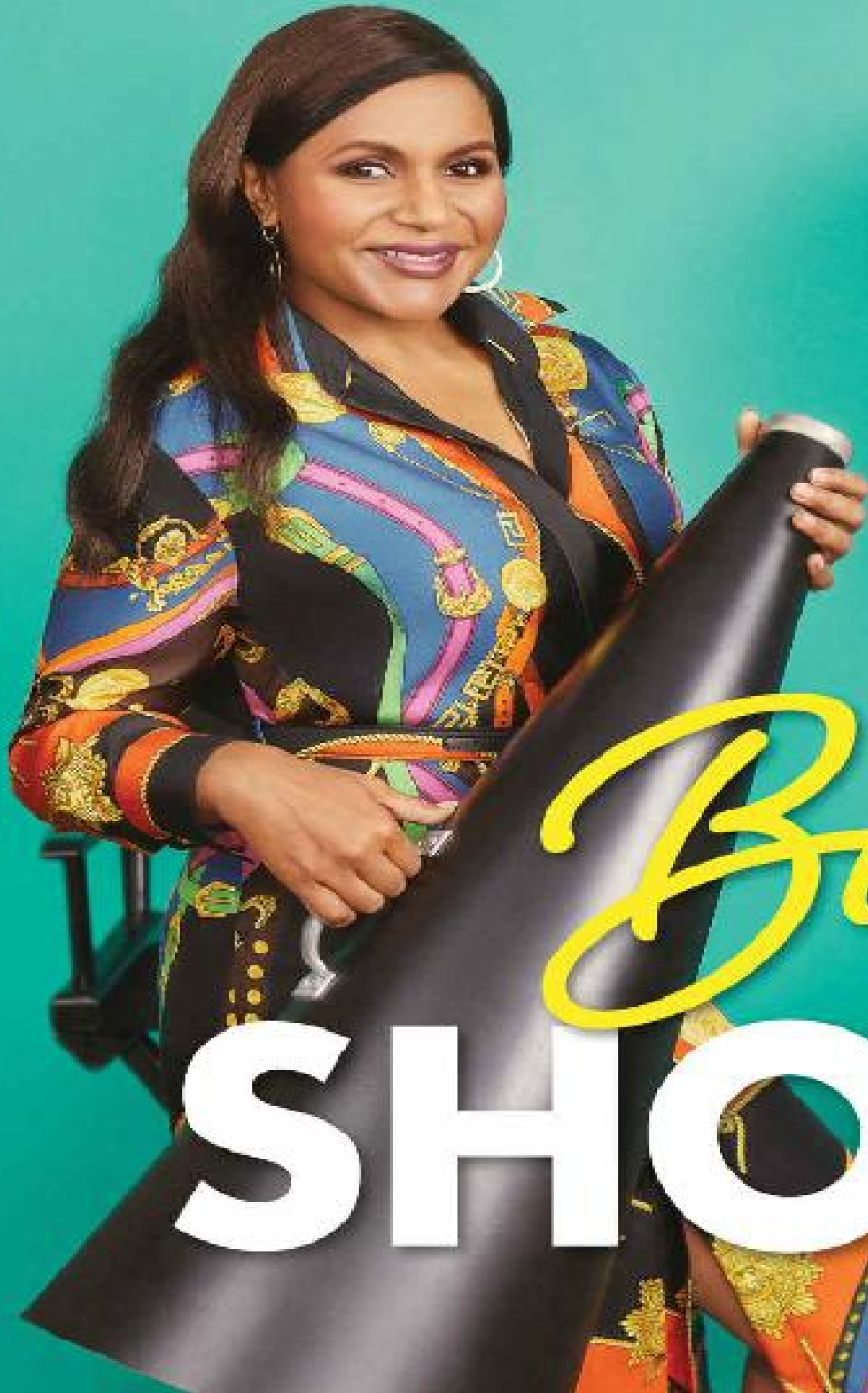


AMAZON ORIGINAL STORIES

MINDY KALING



Big
SHOT

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Big
SHOT

**NOTHING LIKE
I IMAGINED**

(Except for Sometimes)

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The workday at *The Office* writers' room started at 10:00. I would arrive around 10:15, sometimes later, at which point the showrunner would give me a dark look that told me he was very aware of my lateness and that we would be talking about it later. Honestly, it was a shame to be late, because from 10:00 to around 10:45, we mostly told personal stories. It was too early to hit the ground running with work right away, and we needed to ease into the day with stories of Hollywood gossip and bad dates, or YouTube videos of Kelsey Grammer walking off a stage, while we made ourselves coffee and instant oatmeal. So it was its own punishment showing up late, really, because I would roll into the room and have to get to work immediately while everyone else had an hour to ease into the day. What I'm saying is that I showed up late every day because I was the hardest worker in the room. No time for chitchat; let's buckle down and get going!

One morning while we were writing season two, I arrived on time (miraculous) to hear B.J. telling a story. In it, he explained how he had gone to dinner with some friends the night before at a medium-fancy restaurant in West Hollywood called Farmer's Daughter, which is now closed. Soon after B.J. had sat down with his friends, one of the executives at NBC, Jeff Ingold, entered the restaurant with a group of his own friends. Jeff was known to the writers as a very good-looking executive we saw once or twice a year at NBC corporate events. He was warm and supportive of the show, but we didn't interact with him very much. He was a handsome mystery. That night, however, Jeff waved at B.J. and walked over to give him a warm hello, then chatted with him for a few minutes before leaving to join his group. Jeff and his table finished dinner and left first. When B.J. was ready to pay, the server told him that his bill had already been taken care of by Mr. Ingold.

Everyone loved this story, but nobody loved it as much as I did. It's unusual for me to be such a big fan of a story with no sex, violence, or celebrity gossip, and yet there I was, wishing it were *my* story, envious that this had happened to B.J. and not me. Of *course* I was jealous; no

handsome executive had ever deemed me important enough to stealthily pay for *my* meal at a restaurant! But more than that, I was dazzled by Jeff Ingold himself. I didn't know people just casually paid for other people's meals. When I went to a restaurant, I only ever thought about my own table and how to divide up a check to make sure that the people who had drinks and apps paid more. I have no idea how successful Jeff was at that time, but by quietly treating B.J. and his friends to dinner, he instantly became Tony Soprano to me. He was a big shot. And that's when I knew that I wanted to be a big shot too.

So, for years after that, whenever I saw a person I liked or wanted to impress at a restaurant, I picked up their tab. I couldn't always afford it, really, but it was such a thrill to surprise a person I knew professionally only medium-well by paying for their meal. I would pull aside a server, quietly tell them my wishes, and then have the delightful and voyeuristic experience of sitting and watching my intended victim's reaction. I would watch them finish their meal, the server would come over, and then . . . the look of surprise followed by the searching glances around the restaurant, finally landing on me (I had powdered my face and reapplied my lipstick, of course). They would come over to thank me, totally blown away by my class and generosity. The amount of pleasure that I got from this ritual was almost perverted.

I think one of the reasons I loved it is that my image of a big spender is usually an older white male. All the best stereotypes for people showing unexpected generosity are usually reserved for white men: Santa Claus, Bill Gates, God. And I thought, *Wouldn't it be nice to shake this up and see a twentysomething Indian woman treating up a storm?* Let's be honest—Asian women get a bad rap. We are known for scoring high on the SATs, but also for driving poorly and tipping badly. And I don't drive so great, so I needed to make sure to overcompensate in the other department.

After I had done it a few times to people I knew, like neighbors and other comedy writers, I branched out to strangers I admired. Once I was having Sunday brunch with B.J. and Lena Dunham on the patio at Barney Greengrass in Beverly Hills. While we were there, Hugh Jackman walked in with his two kids. The whole place went silent. People don't usually get starstruck in LA because there are celebrities crawling around every corner. You go to the DMV and you see Anne Hathaway getting her car registration renewed. You go to Target and you see Bradley Cooper buying diapers. (Okay, both of them are too rich to be doing those things, but you get the point.) But Hugh Jackman was different. Hugh Jackman is so big, he's a major sighting in *any* city. I think it's because he's Wolverine, but he can sing and dance too. He's a true quadruple threat: acting, singing, dancing, and impaling people with his claws.

Hugh was seated across the restaurant with his two kids, and I decided I wanted to send over some cookies. B.J. and Lena thought he was talented but were pretty Hugh-neutral. I flagged down our server and had them send over a dozen cookies. A few minutes later, we saw them being delivered. The subsequent five minutes were some of the most pleasurable of my life. Upon hearing the news that the cookies had been gifted to him, Hugh looked incredulous. "For me?" I saw him react, surprised and honored, as though we had dedicated a Broadway theater to him. The waiter pointed to our table, and his eyes fell on us. He stood and headed over.

And that's when I froze. It was simply too much to be confronted by him and his long legs and perfect torso and symmetrical face. "Did you send over cookies?" he purred (okay, asked) in his Australian accent. I just stared into my omelet. Finally, to fill the awkward silence, Lena jumped in, saying how much we were fans of his work and hoped he had a great Sunday with his family. They made some small talk, and he thanked us again and walked back to his table.

B.J. and Lena looked at me. "What happened to you?" B.J. asked. The only thing I can

compare it to is how Halloween felt when I was a kid. I was so excited to go trick-or-treating, I even counted down the days from the first of October. But when the day arrived and it was time to actually ring a doorbell—fully costumed—and say “Trick or treat!” I just couldn’t do it. I was rendered silent by nerves, anxiety, the whole bundle. My parents had to nudge me until I choked out a tiny “*Trickertreat*,” grabbed a piece of candy, and spirited away. I was such a fan of Halloween, but when confronted with it, it was just too much for me. As it turns out, Hugh Jackman is the “trick or treat” of people.

I was determined that this would never happen again. I would own my inner Tony Soprano. And soon I had an opportunity to prove it. It was Christmas 2016, and I was in Honolulu with my father and stepmother. Hawaii is where everyone in Los Angeles goes for vacation, because it’s relatively close to us, and the only way to improve on the casual sunniness of LA is with grass skirts and coconut drinks. On Christmas night, we had a reservation at Duke’s, a famous restaurant on the beach in Waikiki. Duke’s is one of those places that’s kind of expensive, but you can also wear Hawaiian shirts and flip-flops to dinner. It was heaven. While we were eating our *huli-huli* chicken, our server came over with a knowing grin. “You’re not the only celebrity here,” he said, explaining that a *very* famous A-list actor was also there. My father, stepmother, and I were thrilled. Celebrities are usually the people most titillated by other celebrities. I don’t know why that is, but in my experience it has generally been the case. I was the lead of my own TV show for six years, but I once saw Naomi Watts with her yoga mat on Astor Place in New York City and I walked into a bike rack.

This particular celebrity was an actor whom all three of us loved, and whom I will call Max Davis. (Why did I name Hugh Jackman earlier but am choosing to not name Max Davis here, you ask? Be patient and all will be revealed.) Max is a middle-aged, hugely popular A-list actor who is usually snubbed at awards shows but has amassed an enormous fortune churning out movies that literally every American pretends to hate but secretly loves. I loved that about him. Loving Max Davis meant that I wasn’t a snob. Of course, I love my actor’s actors, but it’s not like our Hawaii Christmas dinner was going to get lit up by a Paul Giamatti sighting. (Though, really, he is magnificent, and I would love to pay for his dinner sometime.)

I looked over at my dad and stepmom. Their presence, especially, made me want to be a big shot. I wanted to show them that I’d made it, that I was so successful I could handle this no problem. And so I told the waiter that I wanted to pay for Max Davis’s Christmas dinner. The server looked concerned and said, “He’s with his family. It’s a *very* large group.”

I was offended, and I could feel my dad and stepmother watching me to see what I would say next. “Oh, I don’t care how big the group is,” I said, with as much breezy rich-lady attitude as I could muster. “I want to treat them all.” Honestly, I was worried when I handed him my credit card. But it was all worth it when my dad gave my stepmom a proud look like, “Wow, isn’t my daughter wealthy and generous?” A few minutes later, the server came back with the receipt—the card had worked (thanks, City National Bank!)—and it had come out to \$1,800.

You probably think, because of my low-key Jay Gatsby old-money energy, that \$1,800 isn’t a big deal. But honestly, it was a lot of money to me, especially since I had also been planning on paying for my own family’s Christmas dinner. Still, it would be worth it, because when Max Davis got wind that I had paid for his entire family’s hideously expensive Christmas dinner, he would be so charmed and impressed that he would come over to thank us and decide that such generosity should be rewarded by making me the leading lady in his next film, thus starting a deep friendship that would last a lifetime. And, really, with that sort of Hollywood paycheck, the meal would pay for itself. I was investing!

So my family finished dinner with mounting excitement. At any moment Max could come over! I began to wish I'd dressed fancier for this dinner—and blotted my face with a napkin. My stepmom adjusted my dad's collar. But Max didn't appear. We ordered dessert and ate it slowly. No sign of him. I ordered a cup of coffee, which I don't drink, truly just vamping now. Still nothing. After we'd been there almost two and a half hours, I had a terrible sinking feeling. What was going on here? I got up, feigning having to go to the bathroom, and walked around to look at Max Davis's table. It was empty, and, lest I believe that his entire family had gotten food poisoning and had run to the bathroom all at the same time, it was also being bussed. His large party had finished their Christmas dinner—my treat—and he hadn't come by to thank us.

I was so humiliated. As I went back to my table, I made the decision to not tell my dad and stepmom that I had searched for Max. I just paid for our dinner and we left. I tried to play it off like I hadn't really been expecting Max to come over, but clearly my dad and stepmom thought it was strange. My stepmom suggested, kindly, that maybe he hadn't wanted to bother our Christmas dinner. I agreed—sure that was it. But I thought it sounded dubious. I'm not even Christian, and my vibe is *far* from uptight. I mean, I was wearing cargo pants at dinner. Also, this wasn't some intimidating room. It was a restaurant with drinks served out of coconuts, for crying out loud.

We walked back to our hotel, which was just down the beach. Christmas spirit was in the air (*Mele Kalikimaka!*), but my mood had turned. When we got to our rooms, I immediately emailed my agents and manager, ostensibly to say Merry Christmas, but really to ask, "Oh and hey, has Max Davis randomly reached out for my email or phone number?" They emailed back to say Merry Christmas, and no, Max Davis had not tried to reach them. Why was I asking, haha? I didn't respond.

The next day I checked my phone. No messages. I started having paranoid thoughts that I'm not proud of. What if the server had used my card to pay for Max's dinner and then claimed it was *he* who had treated them, taking credit for *my* Christmastime generosity? I considered going back to Duke's to confront him. Moments later I realized how insane that was. So I just waited impatiently for an email, a text, an unexpected arrangement of flowers at our hotel. Nothing. My stepmom and dad kept checking in too. It kind of ruined the rest of the trip.

We returned to Los Angeles. And by mid-January, I was still thinking about it. I went down a spiral of self-doubt. Had my overture actually been *rude*? Was paying for Christmas dinner something that Max loved doing? Was it tied to his feelings of masculinity and providing for his family? Had I robbed him of that by treating them all? I asked other writers from our show. They thought that was ridiculous. My friend Tracey Wigfield said, "Women always take bad behavior by men and twist it to make it so it's somehow our fault, not theirs. It makes more sense to us that we're somehow wrong than the possibility that a man is being rude." My male writers agreed. *Everyone loves a free meal. Who would be mad at that?*

So I forgot about it. Meaning, I stopped thinking about it every day, but when I would see a billboard for Max's newest movie, I'd get mad again. I would deface the billboard in my mind with a thousand penises.

A year went by.

It was Christmastime again, and I was invited to Conan O'Brien's Christmas party, which was held in his beautiful home on the west side of town. I was an intern at *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* when I was nineteen years old, so it's always so glamorous and fun to go to his house as a guest now. There's a part of me that still can't believe the lazy writer's intern who continually broke the photocopier gets to socialize with Conan and his family.

When I stepped into the party, it was immediately intimidating. Their house is huge and gorgeous, and it was packed with A-list celebrities. Jennifer Garner at the bar, Elizabeth Banks by the Christmas tree, Michael Keaton by the crudités. I had not brought a plus-one, which was pretty stupid, because now I felt out of place and didn't have someone to fake-laugh at my jokes so that Michael Keaton would look up from his hummus. So I did what any vulnerable person in a sparkly dress with social anxiety would do: I decided to get lit.

After downing three Moscow mules in quick succession, I found Rashida Jones and Ezra Koenig, the lead singer for Vampire Weekend. We were catching up when, suddenly, I heard his voice across the vast room: Max Davis. I felt a shiver through my body. He'd become so much more famous to me since the Christmas dinner slight. My relative drunkenness made me loose-lipped, and I couldn't resist spilling the story to Rashida and Ezra. They couldn't believe it. (I didn't know they were dating at the time; I like to think it was my amazing story that solidified their relationship.) Then Conan came by to say hello to our group. I tried to change the subject, but it was too late. He got pulled into the story, too, but I promise I never meant for Conan to hear it. It was just supposed to be fun and gossipy for Rashida and Ezra, who I knew better.

To make matters worse, Conan's whole demeanor changed. He didn't think it was a funny story—it was mildly alarming to him. “That *really* doesn't seem like him,” he said, serious. I know that most of you who are reading this probably don't know Conan personally, but if you've ever seen him on his show, you have some idea of his personality, which is charming and light. And so you can imagine how unnerving it would be to see him dead serious, staring at you in horror because of something you'd said. It became clear that Max was his close friend. Conan couldn't believe he would do something so rude, and he didn't want false gossip to be spread about him.

I was terrified. “Please don't tell him I said anything!”

Conan shook his head. “This is a misunderstanding. I'm gonna talk to him.” The conversation had gone from my “fun party gossip” to a full-blown social nightmare in about forty seconds.

I said goodbye to Rashida and Ezra, grabbed my purse, and headed to the door. I felt upset and guilty—but why did I feel guilty? Wasn't it my story to tell? It was 100 percent true with no embellishments. On the way out, out of the corner of my eye, I saw Conan in a quiet, kind of serious-looking conversation with Max. It was clearly about my anecdote. I saw the look of recognition cross over Max's face. I scurried out, mortified, before I could see more.

The next morning, Rashida emailed me. She said Max wanted to reach out—was it okay to give him my email? Clearly, they had all talked about me after I'd left. I wanted to die. I said sure. He then wrote me.

Hey Mindy. I always wanted to thank you for that meal and for some dumb reason I never got to it. Truly sorry for that. Thought it was awesome of you and at the time I was really blown away that you did that. Anyways, sorry that you thought I was a dick. It would appear that way but it was just a case of having stuff

going on a lot and being forgetful. Hope I can thank you in person next time I see you and again thank u for being so nice to me and my family.

Super nice and likable. Now I felt like the asshole.

I wrote back instantly and, of course, lied my face off. I said that I never thought he was a dick, I didn't even really care, how I shouldn't have said anything, how great he was to even write at all because of how busy he clearly is, and how much I had loved watching him growing up. I played it off like it barely mattered to me when, in truth, I had been obsessed by it.

What is wrong with me? Here are my guesses.

I don't actually understand the meaning of generosity. It means giving to people and expecting nothing in return. It doesn't mean giving to someone with the expectation, or even hope, that they will regale you with praise for being such a generous person. I realized that I'm fine with giving, but I'm bad at generosity. I don't understand how Bill Gates does it. I mean, he's not there waiting by his mailbox for African children to write to him to say thank you for their malaria nets. Being a big shot means giving and *not caring* if anyone acknowledges you. The very expectation of appreciation disqualifies you from being a big shot.

What else is wrong with me? I really care what famous people think of me, and that is a huge waste of time. This is the biggest takeaway from this whole incident. You know who doesn't notice when their \$1,800 dinner is paid for by a mysterious benefactor? Someone really, really fucking rich. The real reason Max didn't say thank you is that he is so loaded that \$1,800 is inconsequential to him. It's probably what he pays for his goldendoodles to get groomed every month.

So I learned that I have to spend my money on people who can appreciate it. I had tried to buy an interaction with a celebrity, and when the celebrity didn't live up to their end of the bargain, I was mad. I wasn't a big shot at all. I was just a cheesy rich person whose self-worth was defined by famous people acknowledging them.

That year, to celebrate my birthday, I decided to do something different. I announced on social media that I wanted to give \$1,000 to different charities, one for each of my thirty-eight years on earth. I wanted suggestions, and, boy, did I get them. I had so much fun learning about dozens of organizations I had never heard of. The Trevor Project, the Lustgarten Foundation, the Blue Ridge Conservancy—I have never spent so much money so quickly and loved doing it. It was such an addictive high. And the result? Every organization I donated to was thrilled beyond measure. Instantly. They sent me emails, sweatshirts, ecstatic tweets. The Down Syndrome Association of Wisconsin sent me a photo of some of the members holding up a sign that read "Thank you Mindy, We Love You!" and I cried.

Their heartfelt appreciation made me feel so much more complete and joyful than sending a million cookies to Hugh Jackman ever could. It was a high, one that made me feel an actual connection to people. I established relationships that I keep to this day.

I finally felt like a big shot.



FROM THE DESK OF

Mindy Kaling

Dear Readers,

Since you made it here, to the end of my final essay, you must be the kind of person who stays after the movie credits to see if there's an extra scene or a blooper reel. Also, you are clearly obsessed with me. To reward this smart behavior, here is an extra up-close-and-personal look at my daily life, bloopers and all.

Xo
Mindy



What I Do All Day

When I stopped acting in *The Mindy Project*, and decided to focus on producing film and television, I had a certain vision of my workday. I saw myself sleeping in, spending my waking hours with my legs up by the pool, sipping a nutritious and disgusting green drink my private chef had made for me, all while reading a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about one New England family that spans many generations. Novels are the luxury of the unemployed, I thought, and I would read 'em all when my show ended. Then I would take my daughter to school, handing her a lunch, a gorgeously plated bento box filled with delicious and creative food items I had made from scratch that, if I posted on my Instagram, would depress and shame all other moms. In my cursory understanding of what producers do, they had easy, vague job descriptions, where they mostly skimmed scripts and sent texts that said “Great work!” while taking three-day weekends year-round. I was thrilled to start.

None of that happened, obviously. Being a producer is not what I imagined. From my Instagram, you might think my life is all about wearing fashionable outfits and going to panels on women’s empowerment. It turns out, being a producer is exactly like writing for my show, but with less credit, less control, and a thousand more meetings. It can sometimes also be really fun.

Developing scripts with writers I love and launching shows is really exciting, filled with dramatic ups and downs. In the last show I produced, we couldn’t find the perfect actress to cast as the lead: a teenage Indian girl. But then we did a worldwide casting search through my social media, received more than fifteen thousand applications, and discovered a seventeen-year-old Tamil Canadian girl, Maitreyi Ramakrishnan, who is now the star of our Netflix show, *Never Have I Ever*. It was gratifying to not have to cast a twenty-seven-year-old Bollywood beauty to

play a normal American teenage girl, as the show is in some ways a reflection of my own childhood. So that was a highlight. But then other times, I would have a great pitch meeting with the head of a studio who loved a new show idea I had, and then the next day find out he had been implicated in a #MeToo scandal and would be fired before the end of the week. I would furiously scan through the photos on my phone, making sure I didn't have any of us looking chummy together. You win some, you lose some. To help describe what my day is like, I thought I would show you in some *exclusive, never-before-seen* photos!



I wanted this to be real, so I had my wonderful assistant Elena track me for an entire day. So yes, this means she came to my home before the sun rose and took a photo of me waking up. Please don't feel bad for Elena; she gets paid handsomely. Not in money, but in anecdotes about *The Office*. The point is, she's fine.

My days often begin when my daughter wakes up between 6:30 and 7:00 a.m. From the moment she wakes up, she has a plan. There's no indecision about how she starts her morning. She knows exactly what she wants and how she wants it. And what she wants, in this particular order, is: a bottle of warm milk, diaper change, playing Little Baby Bum music on Alexa (a truly mind-numbing station of unending nursery rhymes), and then me reading her ten to fifteen books.



When I read to Kit, I can't be distracted for a moment, or talk to anyone else who might be there, or she will loudly yell "NO TALKING!" and glare at me. My assignment is not to read the book, but to perform it as a charismatic professional voice actor, doing multiple characters and voices and, of course, sound effects. While I'm expected to be 1990s Jim Carrey at 7:02 in the morning, a lot of the time she doesn't even give me good material. Sometimes Kit will simply grab a restaurant takeout menu and plop in my lap and say, "Read it!" And then I must read the menu in an entertaining way. *Tom Kah Soup! Pad Thai with Chicken or Shrimp! Pad See Ew! Papaya Salad!* This is how I start each morning, which oddly prepares me for a day of being light on my feet, reading scripts, attending production meetings, and waiting around on set.



After my voice work for Kit in the morning, I head to my garage, which I have converted into a little gym. When I tell people I work out four to five times a week, I can tell they're thinking, *But how can that be? You're not in good shape.* And that is true! But this is the paradox of my life. I love running because it puts me in an instant good mood, and I think I read on the back of a box of Cheerios that it's good for my heart. But I also love alcohol, fast-food hamburgers, and eating gluten. So it's a perilous teeter-totter that I am trying to get away with until my doctors tell me I'm in trouble. I'm not sitting here recommending this diet, but it makes me happy.



Then it's time for work. I pack my car with my huge bag of scripts and drive over to my offices at Warner Brothers. Every once in a while, someone will park in my parking spot at the studio outside my office. I know it's not personal, but I treat it as if I have been wronged like the Count of Monte Cristo. I haven't actually done it, but I have often fantasized about keying a car in this instance. And then, when the teenage delivery kid inevitably returns and sees me standing there sheepishly, I of course become a different person. I smile and chirp: "Oh, it's no big deal!" imagining them telling their friends later, "Wow, I ran into Mindy Kaling—she was so chill about me parking in her space." As it turns out, I care more about people liking me than about justice.

I often spend my mornings reading script submissions. I am old and cannot read scripts on my iPad. My iPad is a coaster for my lunch and for young people to see when they walk into my office so they think I'm cool. There is something about turning pages that makes me feel like I accomplished something, so I make my assistant Elena print out scripts so I can read them on my sofa. I read up to twelve scripts a week, so it's important I find a comfortable position on the couch. Sometimes if the script is boring, I will fall asleep, and then Elena has to come in and poke me awake.



The way we work is that we will pull up a script on a computer in our writers' room, and one of us will guide the rewrite until we can't take it anymore. Then we will watch YouTube videos of interspecies friendships (like, say, a horse and a duck) or troll the Instagram pages of our enemies, until we feel panicked with guilt and start working again.



My wonderful tailor, Beth, comes to my office to do fittings with me about twice a month. Sometimes it's for something fun and glamorous, like a new Dolce & Gabbana dress for a Golden Globes party. Other times it's just her hemming my jeans and letting out a dress that used to fit me before I had my baby and now just won't pull over my hips.



Production meetings often come next. These are glorious two-hour events where all the department heads on a show meet at a conference table, and we go through a script chronologically, and the show creators answer any questions or concerns people have. “What kind of lunch would you like the characters to be eating?” a props-master might ask. “When the script says ‘evening,’ do you mean the sun is setting or it’s pitch black?” the cinematographer might ask. When I keep piping in with hilarious observational remarks as we get through the meeting, my co-creator, Lang Fisher, might whisper to me, “Stop trying to make little jokes—they are wasting time.” I love production meetings because I get to see all the department heads in one place, and I’m very chatty.



Peter Roth is my boss and the longtime head of Warner Brothers television studio. He is very powerful. Peter was the boss of Aaron Sorkin, Chuck Lorre, and the people who created *Friends*, and though he is very warm, I am a little scared of him. I would say we are friends, but I'm not sure he would corroborate that, so instead I will say with certainty that we are *friendly*. I'm trying to get into the friend zone, though, so I hug him every time I see him. Occasionally, he will ask me to meet him for breakfast or lunch, and of course I instantly think, *Today is the day I'm being fired*. But then I meet him for lunch and realize he doesn't want to fire me. He wants to check in with me, which is probably his way of making sure I'm actually working. Which is scary in another way, but hey, not fired.



When I'm not lunching with studio heads, I'm often snacking at craft services on set. Being on set means sitting in high chairs by a little computer monitor watching the same scene thirty times and somehow not getting bored. It's a silent area (because there is shooting happening mere feet away), so when we are monitoring the set, it's about thinking quickly and whispering solutions. It's really exciting when someone's phone accidentally goes off so I can look around judgmentally like "Whose phone is that? We are trying to make *art* here, how dare you!" When it does happen, however, it's usually mine.



When the camera crew is doing lighting, we have a break on set, and Lang and I play on our phones in our trailer. Oh, like you've never done it.



A really fun part of my job as a producer is that a couple of times a week, my work will be interrupted to get in hair and makeup and do something in front of the camera like an interview or network promo. It's good for my ego to have glitzy things to look forward to, and also a nice break from the same pair of sweatpants or jeans I wear every single day. Also, sometimes my makeup artist puts fake lashes on me; then, if I'm careful about not washing my eyes, I can look like an Indian Betty Boop for the rest of the week, which is good for flirting my way out of situations. Just kidding, I've never successfully flirted my way out of any situation.



Being a producer also means channeling the confidence of Kanye West to get people excited about things that I haven't even started working on. Nobody wants to hear, "Yeah, I'm kicking around some ideas. In a couple months I should have something concrete to show you." They want to hear, "This show is going to blow your fucking minds. It will make you laugh, cry, win every award, and I promise a big movie star will play the lead." Here, I'm talking about a new show I'm creating for HBO Max about college girls, which will, of course, be everything I promised above.



Like a true influencer, I almost always have a camera pointed in my direction. Here I am recording some really important content for my social media, like “How to wear florals this spring” or “Hey y’all it’s #EarthDay. Big ups to Mother Erff!” I love making content for social media. I think it’s really fun to connect with my fans and share my interests with them. I try to not do things that I don’t actually love doing or would not recommend to others. Unless it’s a corporation who wants to pay me a lot of money, like Visa or something—and then I’m like, “*Visa, it’s everywhere you want to be.*”



I always make time to embrace my fans! Just kidding, this is my daughter, Kit. She isn't a big cuddler, so this photo is very special. I had a ten-minute break between conference calls, and she ran into the room and hugged me. I think it was mostly because she wanted me to agree to let her watch three hours of *Peppa Pig*, but without context it just looks like she's obsessed with me.



About half the time, I am able to make dinner for me and Kit. Here's the deal with my culinary skills: I am not a good cook, and I am not a bad cook. The truth is I never learned how to cook in an everyday, easy way. I only know how to cook for a big event, and the experience exhausts me so much that I need two months to recover before doing it again. You know those cookbooks called "Thirty-Minute Meals"? Those are made for very lazy people, and yet that is still too long for me. So I have mastered the "Ten-Minute Meal." Guess what? They're not that good. Like the brown-sugar-soy-sauce-ginger salmon I make my daughter that takes about six minutes. It's not fancy, but she loves it. She is also two years old and has no choice.



If you wonder when I have time to write essays, like the very one you're reading, it's now! This pocket of time after my baby is in bed and I've sent emails about work, and been on Pottery Barn longingly looking at woven baskets I don't need (my favorite pastime), I switch over to writing. Writing dialogue for a script and writing an essay are more similar than you'd think. A script is many scenes of people talking to each other. But writing essays is just me getting to do all the talking, which is my dream.



Occasionally my writing is accompanied by a glass of rosé or two. On the rosé nights I tend to get a little free with my opinions and can write something completely unusable, like “PEOPLE IN HOLLYWOOD WHO ARE OVERRATED.”

In an interview once, I was asked what I would be doing if I weren’t an actor or writer, and without hesitation I said that I would apply to work at Paper Source as a gift wrapper.

At the very end of my day, around midnight or so, I’ve found that my favorite way to unwind is to wrap a present. Tonight I am wrapping a gift for my friend Ellie Kemper’s newborn son, James.

Wrapping gifts has always relaxed me. I’m not sure why. I’m kind of a high-strung person, and I think it just takes the edge off my day, plus it gives me a chance to use a little bit of visual creativity with almost no stakes. No one has ever gotten mad about a poorly wrapped gift.



So that's my day. It's not as glamorous as I would have thought, but that's because I'm just a producer, not the head of a studio. Maybe that's my next job. I would still love to sip that green drink by a pool.

About The Author



Photo 2020 by Mike Rosenthal

Mindy Kaling is an actor, writer, producer, director, and the author of two *New York Times* bestselling memoirs. She is the creator and executive producer of the Netflix original series *Never Have I Ever*, which is based partly on her teen years. She also created and starred in *The Mindy Project* and the Amazon Original film *Late Night*. Previously, she was a writer, producer, director, and costar of the Emmy Award–winning sitcom *The Office*.