

INTERVIEW

Legendary Louganis

More than a year after Breaking the Surface, the peerless diver is still making waves

by Daniel Vaillancourt

It was more than a year ago—on Friday, Feb. 24, 1995—that four-time Olympic-gold-medal diving champion Greg Louganis announced to the world via a televised interview with Barbara Walters on ABC's *20/20* that he is a gay man living with AIDS. In the ensuing months, his heartbreaking memoir, *Breaking the Surface* (co-written with Eric Marcus), became a No. 1 *New York Times* bestseller. Louganis the author came face to face with thousands of readers during an extensive North American lecture and book-signing tour of bookstores and colleges. And Louganis the actor performed to rave reviews before thousands of fans during his seven-week run in the off-Broadway hit *The Only Thing Worse You Could Have Told Me...* (written and originally performed by openly gay actor Dan Butler, "Bulldog" on NBC's comedy *Frasier*).

"I've been very busy," says Louganis with a laugh during a telephone interview from his Malibu home, as his beloved Harlequin Great Danes clamor for their master's attention in the background.

Asked what impact the last year has had on his health, Louganis admits the stress has taken its toll. "T-cells are so sensitive," he says. "But not everything rests on T-cells.... Now that I've had a little bit of down time, T-cells are climbing, so that's good."

About to depart on yet another whirlwind tour—this time to publicize the paperback edition of *Breaking the Surface*, out from Plume last March—the legendary Louganis, who turned 36 on Jan. 29, shared some of his thoughts about the past 12 months, and what lies ahead.

Vaillancourt: What was the high point of the last year?

Louganis: It's kind of a toss-up between the speaking engagements I've been doing at colleges and universities, and the performance off-Broadway. I never would have imagined that I'd be doing a one-man show. And I got great reviews, so that was very satisfying.

The low point?

I had to put one of my dogs down, and that was really hard because I realized that I hadn't spent the last year with her, that I missed out on that.

How have the events of the last year changed you?

I'm generally shy. I am, and I always will be. But I've been a little surprised, especially in the question-and-answer sessions after the speaking [engagements]. People ask me a question, I answer it. There's not a whole lot of editing going on. I grew so accustomed to it, I guess. It's a lot more freeing.... It's been funny, some of the things that have come out of my mouth [when I'm



Greg Louganis signing autographs in Portland in 1994 on a promotional tour for his line of women's swimwear

not thinking]. I just kind of shake my head in disbelief.

Are you looking forward to another major tour? Did you have a great experience the first time around?

It was exhausting, but it was a great experience. It's been such a crazy year. I'd like to spend more time at home. I'm personally more of a homebody. I guess it's kind of a mixed bag. I see that it's making a difference, but at the same time I miss being home.

What does your current health maintenance regimen consist of?

The main thing is that I have to make sure that I eat to be able to take my medications. And from the medications, I mean, you're not always hungry because they upset your stomach.... I go more on how I feel than like, "at such and such a time I have to have a meal, and such and such a time I have to take my medicine." I'm not so regimented

that way. I do go more on how I feel.

What about alternative AIDS therapies such as acupuncture, massage, herbs?

The one thing I did while I was on book tour—and it was the best—was that I had them schedule massages for me. [Laughs] I also make sure that in the day's events there is down time for me. Just so that I'm not going from interview to signing. To just try to keep my energy level up.... I know that I should do [massage therapy] more often, because I find a lot of benefit from it.... I haven't tried any of the other alternative things. I know that homeopathy—a lot of people are doing very well on that. A more holistic approach. Ultimately, you have to do what works for you, and what you believe in. I think attitude is everything.

How will you be involved in the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta?

Actually, I think what they're doing is kind of like a parade of champions for the opening cer-

emonies. I'm probably going to be doing that. And then, I'm going to be doing Chalk Talks, which is talking to NBC sponsors and their families, educating them about diving, telling them what happened the day before, what they may be seeing that day, that sort of thing. You know, on-camera work. But this will be an easier way to enjoy [the Olympics]. Less stress.

What's the status of the USA Network's cable version of *Breaking the Surface*?

We're trying to get that together to air prior to the 1996 Olympic Games. They're really pushing it. They want this to be their prestige project, and they're really putting a lot of time and energy into it. Steven Stern is directing; Alan Hines is writing the script.

What about casting?

I really want Keanu Reeves to play me. But I know he's not doing TV.

You never know. Margarethe Cammermeyer's *Serving in Silence* brought Barbra Streisand and Glenn Close to television. Has anyone spoken to Reeves, or are you not quite at that stage yet?

Not quite at that stage, but I think we're really very close. I want to body double [in the diving scenes]. The other name that's been kind of bandied about is Dean Cain.

How do you envision the future?

You know, I don't know. I want to do more acting. I want to do more TV and film. I'd like to. As any actor will tell you, it's a tough nut to crack.

Do you think that all of the media exposure you've received helps you or works against you?

I think many times it works against me.... A lot of times casting directors won't give me credit for having studied. You know, I have my degree in drama, and I've done quite a bit of theater, and they only see me one way. I think that's what was so great and freeing about doing Dan Butler's play. It's 14 different characters, and they're all very different.

How's your love life?

[Laughs] Oh! This is a bad day to ask me. [Laughs] There's somebody I've been seeing, a wonderful, wonderful man. Dating's weird. It's hard.... I don't think I've ever felt as emotionally close to someone. But it's difficult. He's HIV negative and I'm positive. It's an issue, no matter how well-adjusted we are. [Laughs] It is an issue.

Then there's dating "Greg Louganis."

I mean, he's got his success in his own right. He's even said, "I'm used to being the star." [Laughs] The roles are a little reversed.

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