

WikiLeaks

Presented to Quest Club

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His dating profile from a dating website over a decade ago under the pseudonym Harry Harrison labeled him as six feet two inches tall, and stated, “Warning: Want a regular, down to earth guy? Keep moving. I am not the droid you are looking for. Save us both while you still can. Passionate, and often pig headed activist intellectual seeks siren for love affair, children and occasional criminal conspiracy....I like women from countries that have sustained political turmoil. Western culture seems to forge women that are valueless and inane. OK. Not only women! Although I am pretty intellectually and physically pugnacious I am very protective of women and children...I am DANGER...” (15, p.32-33)

He is, of course, Julian Assange. Julian Assange is the founder of WikiLeaks. Julian Assange achieved international rock-star status back in 2010 when WikiLeaks published confidential and classified documents from the U.S. military. Julian Assange was a runner-up for the 2010 Time magazine Person of the Year. (7, p.90)

His dry sense of humor makes him attractive to women. Oh yes, and there is his intelligence. Some reports speculate that he may have an IQ in excess of 160. (6) He is reportedly a fantastic conversationalist and capable of long, well-informed discussions on a broad reach of topics for hours. He once shared with a journalist that, “when you are much brighter than the people you are hanging around with, which I was as a teenager, two things happen. First of all, you develop an enormous ego. Secondly, you start to think that everything can be solved with just a bit of thinking – but ideology is too simple to address how things work.” (12, p.39)

Some say that he is somewhere on the autistic spectrum. When asked, he simply responds by saying, “Aren’t all men?” (15, p.33)

His striking white hair, curious glance and audacity to stare down global superpowers make him a true bad boy. He inspired a James Bond villain. (12, p.39) He appeared in a cameo on an episode of the TV show, The Simpsons. He has enjoyed the company of A-list stars. (12, p.39) He would have been a character worthy of last year’s Quest paper presentation on the allure of the bad boy in history and life.

But if you would like to date Julian Assange, he cannot meet you at the station. You will have to find your own way. A journalist for the New Yorker magazine recommends the easiest route, which is to take the London Underground, through the Knightsbridge station, next to Harrods department store. Then, walk down the street to 3 Hans Crescent, to the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. (12, p.36) It is here, inside this Embassy, that Julian Assange has been calling home ever since he absconded, broke bail, and sought political asylum in June 2012. He showed up here at the Ecuadorian Embassy “disguised as a motorcycle courier” (12, p.36) to avoid extradition to Sweden for allegations of rape and molestation filed by two different women during a trip to Sweden in 2010. His trip to Sweden occurred during the height of WikiLeaks’ release of those confidential and classified U.S. military documents.

Shortly after the original European arrest warrants were issued, Julian Assange stated to a journalist that “I’m in my element...Battles with governments come easy. Battles with treacherous women are another matter.” (12, p.44)

As for women, Julian Assange appears particularly energized by Hillary Clinton. Friends of Assange report that during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the idea that the person who might become President of the United States was targeting him, “and at the same time he had material over her...He was exhilarated.” (12, p.48)

Regardless your opinion of Julian Assange’s dating profile, you should give more thought to WikiLeaks. It’s important how you view WikiLeaks and the movement it started. Is WikiLeaks a printer or a publisher, similar to a newspaper publisher that enjoys first amendment and freedom of speech protections? Is WikiLeaks a library, one that has created an on-line database of authentic, original-source content? Is WikiLeaks nothing more than a rogue terrorist hacking site that launders illegally-obtained confidential information?

Swedish prosecutors abandoned their attempt to extradite him in May 2017, but Julian Assange still remains at the embassy. Julian Assange believes the Swedish claims to be nothing more than a Pentagon “honeytrap”. (12, p.43) Even though Sweden abandoned their extradition claims, there is still the threat that he will be arrested by

British authorities for breaking his bail back in 2012. And, the looming threat of a secret grand jury to extradite him to the United States to face espionage charges keeps him at the embassy.

When you arrive to meet Julian Assange, don't be surprised if he appears somewhat paranoid. He was never actually charged with a crime in Sweden, rather he was merely wanted for questioning. He is paramount about secrecy and surveillance. Small electronic devices in the two rooms in which he occupies are often turned on to create white background noise. (12, p.36) And in a bit of irony in this modern age of digital hacking, Julian Assange's computer inside the Ecuadorian embassy contains two large monitors, each "with their built-in cameras taped over". (12, p.59) Julian Assange believes that "(t)he internet, our greatest tool of emancipation, has been transformed into the most dangerous facilitator of totalitarianism we have ever seen." (12, p.60)

Julian Assange understands a vagabond life. He was born in 1971 in Australia after his mother, who was working as an artist, "fell in love with a rebellious young man that she met at an anti-Vietnam war demonstration in 1970". (15, p.34) Their love affair did not last. So, Julian spent his youth living with his mother in the bohemian hippie population of Australia. As Julian Assange's mother Christine once recalled, "I lived in a bikini, going native, with my baby and other mums on the island." (15, p.35)

Julian Assange's childhood was filled with the itinerant saga in his mother's green Volkswagon Beetle, in the Age of Aquarius, moving from settlement to settlement. He attended thirty-seven different schools. (15, p.37) His classmates remember him as the quiet but sociable boy. (15, p.37)

At one point, when Julian Assange was a child, his mother rented an apartment across the street from an electronics store. It was here that Julian Assange became fascinated with a Commodore 64 and taught himself computer programming code. He attended a program for gifted students in Melbourne, Australian, and soon, he discovered hacking. (15, p.39)

As early as 1999, Julian Assange set out to develop a leaker's website and registered the domain name wikileaks.org, but otherwise didn't do much about it until the two thousands. (15, p.46)

Reading Hillary Clinton's e-mails are easy. Simply log onto the internet browser on your smartphone, type wikileaks.org, wait a few moments for the site to load, and you will have full access to WikiLeaks' complete library of thirty thousand e-mails sent to and from Secretary Hillary Clinton's private server. (25)

Julian Assange had this to say on a recent interview posted on YouTube. "We are a source protection organization with a perfect record. We also have a perfect record in authenticating what we publish." Assange reminds us that WikiLeaks has simply published Hillary Clinton's own words and allowed the American people to read them. (26)

The WikiLeaks website includes a WikiLeaks shop. For twenty dollars, you can purchase a classic-sized tee-shirt that sports a caricature of Julian Assange and states "Free Julian Assange – Publishing is Not a Crime". (25)

WikiLeaks states on its website that "WikiLeaks is a giant library of the world's most persecuted documents." WikiLeaks set out to become a place where whistleblowers could post documents without fear of being traced. Julian Assange states that "our primary interests are oppressive regimes...but we also expect to be of assistance to those in the west who wish to reveal unethical behavior in their own governments and corporations." (25) As one New Yorker magazine journalist stated, Julian Assange is a cultural icon, "helping to give the solitary act of whistle-blowing the contours of a movement." (12, p.39)

One internet scholar said that "The government has recognized that WikiLeaks is not an event – it is a capability – and anybody who can get material out of a classified system can now publish it worldwide in a way that can't be redacted or removed". (7, p.90-92) The genie is out of the bottle.

The large datasets of information on WikiLeaks are categorized into vaults. Each vault is represented with its own comically caricatured icon of the underlying information. The vault containing Secretary Hillary Clinton's e-mails are lampooned with an arm from the familiar WikiLeaks globe lifting a curtain, thus exposing a startled Secretary Clinton as she pecks away on her home computer. (25)

One of WikiLeaks' most recent vaults is labeled "Vault 7", which includes a series of vaults released in two thousand seventeen. "Vault 7" describes itself as the largest publication ever of confidential documents on the CIA, including CIA hacking tools. "Vault 7" includes one vault titled "ExpressLane" which, according to WikiLeaks, includes secret documents from the CIA's cyber operations that the CIA conducts against the National Security Agency, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. (25; 18)

Another "Vault 7" publication in August 2017 is titled "Angelfire", which, according to WikiLeaks, discloses documents on the CIA's Angelfire project, used to infect Microsoft Windows systems. (25; 18)

In 2010, WikiLeaks released to the public the largest trove of confidential and classified U.S. military documents ever released in the history of the United States. The trove of information contains over three hundred fifty thousand reports and documents from United States military actions during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the mid two thousands. The files are catalogued into three vaults. The volume of documents contained in these three vaults is so vast that WikiLeaks imbedded a search engine within the vaults to assist readers. Links within the search engine include headings such as "Friendly Fire", "Criminal Event", "Suspicious Incident", and "Counter Insurgency". (25) Most of the documents are written by U.S. military soldiers and personnel on the ground and read largely like police reports describing local situations. The reports describe everything from non-combat-related traffic accidents to the discoveries of enemy war supplies, and to general reports of individual military movements.

The treasure trove of these war documents were provided to WikiLeaks by U.S. Army private Chelsea Manning. Private Manning was serving in the Middle East and had clearance levels that provided her access to the classified information. Private Manning downloaded the information to compact discs, and made contact with the man that Private Manning described as the “crazy white-haired Aussie who can’t seem to stay in one country very long.” (15, p.31) Private Manning’s actions led to her court martial and a thirty-five year conviction of violating the Espionage Act. Private Manning’s sentence was commuted down to seven years served by President Obama, and Manning was released from the Joint Regional Correctional Facility at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in May 2017. (4)

WikiLeaks states on its website that these war documents are available as a helpful tool to reporters and researchers to learn more about the United States’ war in the Middle East. (25)

While WikiLeaks professes to open governments, it itself remains a relatively secret organization. Little data is available on its financial condition or the sources of its revenue. Reportedly, WikiLeaks’ annual budget runs into the millions of dollars and is supplied partly by donations “funneled through non-governmental organizations”. (12, p.41) When challenged about the idea of accountability in a recent New Yorker magazine article, Julian Assange falls into “angry fits”. (12, p.41) He notes the scourge of hidden surveillance, government scrutiny and relentless journalists. “WikiLeaks is probably the most held-to-account organization on earth!” he says. (12, p.42)

If you wish to support the WikiLeaks’ cause, you can select the red button on its website labeled “donate”. (25) Reportedly, WikiLeaks “has so much money in Bitcoin it’s ridiculous”. (12, p.41) Just a few weeks ago, Julian Assange gloated on his Twitter account by posting, “My deepest thanks to the U.S. government, Senator McCain, and Senator Lieberman for pushing Visa, MasterCard, Paypal, AmEx, Moneybookers, et al, into erecting an illegal banking blockade against @WikiLeaks starting in 2010. It caused us to invest in Bitcoin – with > 50,000% returns.” (20)

In the wake of 9/11, “increased surveillance capabilities” and secrecy “inverted the usual paradigm under which our personal lives were private and the work of the government is open.” (21, p.128) Increasingly, one author notes, “the workings of the government became secret, and our personal lives became public.” (21, p.128) Daniel Ellsberg, the renowned whistleblower from the Pentagon Papers era back in 1971 opined that, “the NSA, FBI and CIA have, with the new digital technology, surveillance powers over our own citizens that the Stasi – the secret police in the former ‘democratic republic’ of East Germany – could scarcely have dreamed of.” (3)

One New York Times opinion article states that “if Mr. Assange is extradited to the United States, the consequences will reverberate for years around the world. Mr. Assange is not an American citizen, and none of his actions have taken place on American soil. If the United States can prosecute a journalist in these circumstances, the governments of Russia and China could, by the same logic, demand that foreign reporters anywhere on earth be extradited for violating their laws. The setting of such a precedent should deeply concern everyone, admirers of WikiLeaks or not.” (17)

Use of the Espionage Act being applied to a publisher raises concern at the Justice Department. It’s what they call their “New York Times problem”. One justice official said, “How do you prosecute Julian Assange for publishing classified information and not the New York Times?” (12, p.44)

In the messages released in the trove of the WikiLeaks files, there is evidence suggesting that minimal harm resulted to on-going military operations. (10) One journalist observed that, “Isn’t it part of the balance sheet in this changing age that the digital world can provide us (a Julian) Assange and the N.S.A. at the same time?” (12, p.46) The rise of WikiLeaks creates a unique confluence of computer technology capabilities, national security interests, and freedom of speech.

Regarding freedom of speech, local attorney Jared Helge reminds us that the first amendment does not give us the right to say whatever we want. The first amendment is a restriction on the government and states that “Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech or of the press.” (9)

Indiana State Court of Appeals Judge Paul Mathias says that communication across a computer or the internet does not necessarily constitute free speech. The internet and social media are somewhat of an untested domain. Many websites are corporate-owned sites that are not editing content based on traditional journalistic filters, such as clarity and public decency. (16)

Speech made across the internet and social media lacks the normal self-regulation that free speech contains when it exists on the public town square or in the pages of a newspaper. In a public town square, those citizens who are accusing face the citizens who are being accused. Opinions and news articles published by local newspapers are self-regulated by the publishers, who remain accountable to their customers, their marketplace, and local community sentiments. Newspaper publishers apply self-restraint when stories or letters are edited for content or decency. (16)

Freedom of speech principles and an active local newspaper remain the arbiter and regulator of civic decency. After all, how many of us use the “front page test” to self-regulate our own personal and professional lives?

Regarding fair reporting, Julie Inskeep, publisher, and Sherry Skufca, editor, of our local Journal-Gazette, share editing standards. The Journal-Gazette requests that sources allow themselves to be identified within published stories. News stories are more credible, and sources are more credible, if sources are identified. Readers have to trust the source, and the more willing sources allow themselves to be identified, the more credible and trustworthy the news articles become. In cases where sources wish to remain fully anonymous, the Journal-Gazette has a practice of verifying the information from at least one other source, or at least two other sources if the information is particularly damaging. (11)

Also, regarding court cases that involve allegations of abuse, the Journal-Gazette does not publish the names of rape victims or of children involved. The Journal-Gazette does not publish names of the accused adults, where publication would cause easy identification of the children. (11)

Comparatively, no corresponding privacy policy or terms of use policy appear on WikiLeaks' website. Julian Assange appears more revolutionary. He stated to a journalist that he is willing to accept "blood on our hands". (7, p.94) When asked whether he "would publish the names and children of U.S. officials, Assange replied (that) harms to innocent people 'tend to affect isolated individuals' while the benefits of disclosure 'affect systems of policy, planning (and) governance and through them the lives of all'." (7, p.94)

Julian Assange appears indifferent to the possibility that foreign agencies could use WikiLeaks to launder confidential information. "If it's true information, we don't care where it comes from," he said. "Let people fight with the truth, and when the bodies are cleared there will be bullets of truth everywhere." (12, p.56-57)

But Julian Assange's star status may have waned over time. A recent New Yorker magazine article highlights Julian Assange as potentially a "fallen man". "He has detractors who believe that he is a criminal, or a maniac, or both. There have been calls for his assassination, and for him to be given a Nobel Peace Prize." (12, p.44) He has been called a "high-tech terrorist". (17)

Even President Donald Trump is singing a different song. President Trump proclaimed that he loved WikiLeaks during the 2016 presidential election. But, earlier this year, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions said that arresting Julian Assange is now a "priority" for the United States. (23)

The U.S. Justice Department's effort to bring Julian Assange to the United States under the Espionage Act is troubling. As one journalist stated, "even Americans who may have serious doubts and disagreements with WikiLeaks' conduct should be concerned about legal efforts directed against them. Never in the history of the United States has there been a prosecution of a publisher for publishing truthful information. A successful prosecution of WikiLeaks will be a precedent that is used to support a much broader crackdown against mainstream news organizations." (12, p.60)

This concern appears to be taking hold across a larger spectrum of U.S. journalists. Writers express increasing "reluctance to tackle certain subjects" (21, p.142) due to

evidence of U.S. governmental surveillance. In his book titled Freedom of Speech – Mightier Than the Sword, author David K. Shipler notes that journalists avoid “researching, writing, or speaking on particular topics”, especially “military affairs, the Middle East North Africa region, mass incarceration, drug policies, pornography, the Occupy movement, the study of certain languages, and criticism of the U.S. government.” (21, p.142)

Freedom of speech does not genuflect at the alter of censorship, political embarrassment, or government secrecy. And when it comes to freedom of speech, we all advocate for first amendment rights until we are the ones at whom the speech is aimed. But Julian Assange is not a U.S. citizen. WikiLeaks is not a U.S. corporation.

When discussing the United States, one journalist observes that Assange holds the view that “despite its humanitarian rhetoric, (the United States) acts primarily to increase its power in the world, using both economic and military coercion.” (12, p.50) In a paradox, the very U.S. government that WikiLeaks reveals in its publications is the one country that offers Julian Assange, potentially, the highest level of journalistic protections.

Several weeks ago, Julian Assange reportedly told one U.S. congressman that WikiLeaks wants a seat in the White House press room. (2)

It’s important to consider the words of our U.S. Supreme Court in its 1971 decision in New York Times vs. United States, which is the famous Pentagon Papers ruling. Justices Black and Douglas, writing in their concurrent opinion, state that, “the Executive Branch seems to have forgotten the essential purpose and history of the First Amendment...Both the history and language of the First Amendment support the view that the press must be left free to publish news, whatever the source, without censorship, injunctions, or prior restraints....The press was to serve the governed, not the governors. The Government’s power to censor the press was abolished so that the press would remain forever free to censure the Government. The press was protected so that it could bare the secrets of government and inform the people. Only a free and unrestrained press can effectively expose deception in government.” (18)

Back at the Ecuadorian Embassy, Julian Assange has not been in the sunlight for five years. He is now forty six years old. He is still at the embassy today. “(He) has a fractured tooth and a shoulder injury that requires an MRI.” (12, p.38) If he leaves the Embassy for medical treatment, Britain says that it will arrest him for breaking bail back in 2012. (12, p.38) And, it is uncertain if the United States has issued a secret arrest and extradition warrant in connection with WikiLeaks’ release of the Chelsea Manning files back in 2010. (4)

So how do you view WikiLeaks? Is it a printer or a publisher, like a newspaper publisher? Is WikiLeaks a library? An on-line data base? Or is it a hacking site that launders illegally-obtained information, and thus, nothing more than an off-shore terrorist organization?

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