

GOODLIFE

ELEGANT LIVING

MISSISSAUGA

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up close with
SIMU LIU
Marvel's next superhero



Shang-Chi: Legend of the Ten Rings star is Mississauga's

Simu Liu

from Kim's Convenience to the big screen

story **Laurie Wallace-Lynch** photography **Steve Uhraney**

You may know Simu Liu for playing the role of Jung Kim on CBC's *Kim's Convenience*, but soon the entire world will know his name when Simu plays the lead role in Marvel's *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*. Marvel recently made the announcement at the San Diego Comic-Con, saying that Simu will star in the upcoming movie, set in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, scheduled to be released in February 2021.

"It was a surreal moment," says Simu. "Absolutely nuts. I went from being a small-time TV guy to having dinner with Angelina Jolie." (Marvel announced a new batch of movies which included Angelina Jolie in *The Eternals*, Benedict Cumberbatch in a second *Dr. Strange*, and Tom Hiddleston in a *Loki* TV series spinoff.)

Not bad for a shy kid from Mississauga who grew up to become an accountant and took up acting in 2012 when he was laid off from his day job!

Simu is from the Erin Mills area of Mississauga and his parents still live in the same house. His parents emigrated from China to attend university, leaving their young son in China to be raised by his grandparents until he was five years old. "I was raised in Harbin, China. I remember meeting my father for the first time and it was really strange because my grandparents were always telling me that one day my parents were going to come and get me, but I had no concept of Canada or what it meant. My grandparents came to Canada for a year-long visit when I was six and then it was 12 years before they came here to live."

Marvel's next superhero credits watching hours of movies at
Erin Mills Town Centre for helping him discover his love of acting

Simu wears: Smith Denim Jacket by **Outland**, from **Harry Rosen**, Dusty Slim Fit Jeans by **Outland**, from **Harry Rosen**, Terry Cotton-Blend T-Shirt by **John Varvatos Collection** from **Harry Rosen**.



Suede Cafe Racer
Jacket Jacket by **John
Varvatos Collection**
Federal Slim Straight
Transcend Jeans by
Paige Denim,
Long-Sleeve Cotton-
Wool T-Shirt by **Patrick
Assaraf**, from **Harry
Rosen.**

“We lived in Erin Mills and there was absolutely nothing around us (1999), just barren land.”

Photo shoot credits:

Our special thanks goes out to the following people who helped make this photo shoot and interview possible:

Subject: Simu Liu, actor

Location: Allan Kliger Soup Studio

Agent: Norbert Abrams, Noble Caplan Abrams

Clothing: provided by Harry Rosen, harryrosen.com

Fashion Stylist: Corey Ng for P1M.ca,

Hair and Makeup: Sarah Smith MUA, sarahsmithmua.com,

Catering: Cousin's Market, Port Credit cousinsmarket.com

Transportation: King Limo, kinglimo.ca.

Simu's parents moved to Mississauga in 1999 when Simu was 10-years old.

“We lived in Erin Mills and there was absolutely nothing around us, just barren land,” recalls Simu. “My best memory of growing up in Mississauga is going to the movies at Erin Mills Town Centre. Growing up I thought all super heroes were pretty cool, from Tobey Maguire's Spider-Man to X-Men; actually, I have this very vivid memory—my parents used to work all the time, and they would drop me off at the movie theatre at 10 a.m. and pick me up around dinner time. And.....like nine hours later, I would watch three movies in a row. The weekend X2 came out; I loved it so much I just watched it three times.”

Admitting to being shy as a kid, this only child became fascinated by super heroes and mesmerized by actor Bruce Lee. “I was intrigued partly because I was a Chinese kid and I never really saw myself or my culture represented on screen.”



Simu wears: Leather Jacket by **Emporio Armani**, Dusty Slim Fit Jeans by **Outland**, fStretch Pima Cotton T-Shirt by **Patrik Assaraf** from **Harry Rosen**.

“The show is about a family running a convenience store, so their kids can pursue whatever they want to pursue, I feel that’s such a quintessential immigrant story.”

His parents were real life superheroes, ensuring Simu got a proper education. He attended *University of Toronto*; studied two years at *University of Western* and studied finance and accounting at the *Ivey Business School*.

“There is very little creativity involved with being an accountant and it was a very stifling environment for me,” recalls Simu. “However, when I found myself laid off, I was very ashamed, embarrassed, and I couldn’t believe I had hit this rock bottom. I began thinking that I should take some time to start to do things that I would like to do. I had always not necessarily wanted to be an actor, but to be on a set of a movie. I responded to an ad on Craig’s List that was looking for extras for a movie and it ended up being *Pacific Rim* and I showed up on set and I remember being so inspired by everything, and everyone was so charismatic. I became totally engaged and found this real pull.”

Searching Craig’s list for bit acting jobs became a daily routine which soon paid off.

“I somehow landed a Bell commercial which was my first major role. I had not told my parents I was doing this and when I heard it was airing nationally, I had to tell them. They definitely didn’t understand.”

Other roles followed including parts on TV and film including *Nikita*, *Orphan Black*, *Warehouse 13*, *Taken*, and of course his current role on *Kim’s Convenience*, playing the eldest son of a Toronto convenience store owner.

Working on *Kim’s Convenience* helped Simu gain greater appreciation for the sacrifices his parents made in order to provide him with a better life.

“Our relationship is a journey that has taken many twists and turns and now I am happy that we are each other’s greatest supporters and I truly want to make them proud,” he admits.

“It’s something that has really sunk in for me, especially during the past few years doing *Kim’s Convenience*. The show is about a family who is running a convenience store, so their kids can pursue whatever they want to pursue, and I feel that’s such a quintessential immigrant story.

It's no different than with my parents—they are electrical engineers, but are very humble and hard workers, and what they sacrificed coming over here; learning a new culture and a new language, and a new language, basically, to be able to give a higher standard of living and more opportunity for their kids, so of course I want to make them happy."

Although his home base is Toronto, Simu is now spending a lot of time in Los Angeles prepping for the movie *Shang-Chi* and the *Legend of the Ten Rings* which is being filmed in Sydney, Australia. Simu will play the leading role of Shang-Chi, the 70's comic book hero and master of martial arts. Although Simu is tight lipped about his training, it's obvious the buff actor knows his way around a gym.

"My background is more than martial arts. I dabbled in boxing and kick-boxing and was a self-taught tumbler, and thought this was a good way to talk to girls," he chuckles. "I want my training to be a bit of a surprise but I've always liked working out and I've always been a bit of a workaholic, so I am looking forward to it."

It's a groundbreaking role by any standards. Simu is not only a Canadian superhero; he is also Marvel Comics' first Asian superhero in the title role.

"There have been others before me but never in the lead role, so it is a very significant moment for our community," says Simu. "We deserve to be seen, to be represented and to feel like we belong here. That is something that is



Simu wears: Extra-Fine Merino Wool Sweater by **Patrik Assaraf** from **Harry Rosen**.

"When the Shang-Chi movie was announced, I Tweeted, 'OK @Marvel, are we gonna talk or what? #ShangChi.'"

to speak something into existence and to visualize it as vividly and as clearly as possible, you will set yourself up on the path to get there."

It worked for Simu. He had a specific goal and through words, action, hard work and talent, he was able to turn his dream of being a superhero into reality.

"Five years ago I Tweeted at Marvel, 'Hey, don't you think it's time for an Asian superhero?' and when the Shang-Chi movie was announced, I Tweeted, 'OK @Marvel, are we gonna talk or what? #ShangChi.' It went super viral and I think it's because people latched on to the narrative. After the news, I Tweeted, 'Hey, thanks for getting back to me!'

very difficult, not only for myself, but for many of us growing up. Often I felt like a guest, as if I didn't belong, and as a guest, we try to make ourselves as small as possible and not take up much space. If I could go back, I would tell myself to stand tall and don't let the world pass you by. That was a big revolution for me, and Kim's Convenience was definitely a big part of that."

Simu will be back in Toronto next year to film another season of Kim's Convenience. If there's one message this accountant-turned-superhero wants to share, it's this: "People are fascinated by superheroes, and as a kid, I was raised on movies and TV and deep down I always knew that is what I wanted to do, but, there are certain things that you don't give yourself permission to want because you tell yourself it's a stupid dream. But I think if you give yourself the permission