

Please [register or log in](#) | [Member services](#) Story search: Last 7 days Older than 7 days

[Weather / Traffic](#)

[Classified](#)

[Homes](#)

[Shopping center](#)

NEWSPAPER ADS

[Special sections](#)

[News / Home](#) ◀

Local

- [Chicago](#)
- [TribWest](#)
- [Lake](#)
- [Northwest](#)
- [McHenry](#)
- [Southwest](#)

Nation/World

Editorials & Opinion

- [Voice of the People](#)
- [Commentary](#)
- [Perspective](#)

Columnists

- [Steve Chapman](#)
- [John Kass](#)
- [Clarence Page](#)
- [Mary Schmich](#)
- [Dawn Turner Trice](#)
- [Don Wycliff](#)
- [Eric Zorn](#)

Special reports

Obituaries

Community info

Corrections

Archives

Business

Technology

Sports

Leisure

Travel

Registration

Today's newspaper

Customer service

Special reports

[Confronting the ghosts of a looted past](#)

[Disaster at No. 5 Mine](#)

[Still standing: A portrait of America one year](#)

Ex-staffers mourn their magazine glory days

By Allison Benedikt, Tribune staff reporter. Allison Benedikt is an editor for the Tribune's Friday section
Published October 31, 2002

- [E-mail this story](#)
- [Printer-friendly format](#)
- [Search archives](#)

NEW YORK -- With arms outstretched, Jesse Oxfeld broke out in song.

I had seen this type of spontaneous performance from Jesse before. When we were both working at Steven Brill's now defunct media magazine, Brill's Content -- he as a staff writer, me as an assistant editor -- many a night ended with Jesse, having read a few too many "McLaughlin Group" transcripts or having had a few too many after-work drinks, belting out the score from "Les Miz." But Monday night, as the "Magazines We Miss" cocktail party wound down, Jesse sang for me that old motivational Sinatra tune, with its inspirational pick-yourself-up-and-brush-yourself-off message, "That's Life."

Like most of the 200 guests at Monday night's party at Go, an ultrasleek, blindingly white, strikingly stark Manhattan bar (translation: hip), Oxfeld is a member of the "staffs of magazines that went under in the advertising downturn" club, as am I. These boom-and-bust magazines include, but are not limited to, Talk, Industry Standard, Yahoo! Internet Life, Lingua Franca, George, Inside.com and Brill's Content.

Though our stories are not all the same -- some were laid off, others got out when they sensed the beginning of the end; some received hefty severance packages, others got none at all; some are gainfully employed, others are still looking -- we all convened to reminisce, to see old co-workers, to network and, of course, to remind ourselves of how important we once were and to convince each other of how important we still are.

"What people do when confronted by failure is clearly a large question of the moment, especially for people of the boom," writes media columnist Michael Wolff, in his most recent column for New York magazine. "What media people do in the throes of failure may well be of even greater magnitude and entertainment value -- because it involves getting back on the horse in public," he continues. "It's a fight against obscurity."

Wolff happened to be writing about former Talk czarina Tina Brown and comparing her recent fall from grace with other defeats, namely his own and Steve Brill's.

A short-lived Talk

Brown, after reviving both Vanity Fair and the New Yorker, took a large risk and a large investment from Miramax to start Talk, a glossy general-interest magazine intended to run articles that would eventually grow into movie treatments. But less than three years after the initial buzz (nabbing a Hillary Clinton interview in which Clinton discussed the roots of her husband's infidelity) and its highly anticipated debut party (local 24-hour news station NY1 carried live the celebrity arrivals to the Liberty Island bash), Talk suspended publication

Advert



Click to follow

Sell

[later](#)

[A final accounting: The fall of Andersen](#)

[All special reports](#)

Top news headlines

Update: [Rap pioneer killed](#)

[Ch. 5 sportscaster loved his life](#)

[Political army wields clout, jobs](#)

New: [Tentative deal in Plainfield teachers strike](#)

New: [Quake Traps Italy Schoolchildren](#)

the Liberty Island basin), Talk suspended publication.

Brown, now writing a weekly media column for The Times of London, is still making news. Similarly, Talk's former publisher, Ronald A. Galotti (reportedly the inspiration for "Sex and the City" character Mr. Big) garnered a considerable amount of media attention when, after Talk died, he returned to his former employer, Conde Nast, to serve as vice president and publisher of GQ magazine.

Brill, for his part, has also managed to stay in the spotlight, writing a sporadic column for Newsweek about post-9/11 legal issues. And the list goes on: Michael Hirschorn and Kurt Andersen, founders of media industry Web site Inside.com, and Maer Roshan, former editorial director of Talk, continue to get mentioned in the pages of the New York Times and the Washington Post. In terms of work, Hirschorn's at VH; Anderson hosts a talk show on public radio; and Roshan is braving the rough waters and developing a new magazine to be called, for now, Radar.

It's tough to imagine Brown or any of these gentlemen actually having to put up the hard "fight against obscurity." Not so for a whole slew of entry and midlevel writers and editors.

"I went from being relatively nondescript to getting my name in print," says Jeremy Caplan who, after toiling in the lower ranks of Newsweek for a few years, opted to take a new gig and write his own column at Yahoo! Internet Life, the Ziff Davis/Yahoo Internet magazine aimed at a secular audience. "It was a strategic move . . . to be a bigger fish in a smaller pond." But in July, Caplan lost his column, "Touched by the Net: Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things On-Line," and his job.

Off the media map

Sitting on one of Go's overstuffed fake leather couches, Caplan, a Princeton grad, seems moderately dejected. At age 27, he has only been unemployed for a few months, but it's obvious that he already feels as if he has fallen behind, dropped off the media map.

My own triumph-over-adversity story (after leaving Brill's and New York for Chicago, I found myself earning a whopping \$7 an hour making soy lattes for artsy vegans at a Wicker Park cafe and dreaming of parlaying it all into a best-selling memoir, "Foam") cheered him up a bit, though expenses in Chicago aren't nearly what they are in New York.

Caplan recently moved into a new place with three other roommates and can "barely afford his rent," though from our little chat, I suspect he is less worried about his finances and more worried about his career at the moment. I assure him he'll land on his feet; his eyes tell me that he's not buying it.

"I don't know how I would have felt about tonight if I didn't have a job," says my singing pal, Oxfeld, who was unemployed for almost a year after Brill's Content folded in 2001. Now an associate editor at Book magazine and a host of the party, he can let down his guard.

"When people used to ask me what I was doing with my time, I'd say, [inserting air quotes] 'I'm freelancing.' But most of my checks came from the New York State Department of Labor." Most of Monday night's partygoers seem to be in some sort of recovery. While most of us have landed respectable jobs and are happy with our current lot in life, we still cling a bit to our past glory. A lovely group of women, all former Mademoiselle employees, including former editor Elizabeth Crow, speak glowingly of their time at the venerable women's magazine. While most of the magazines on the party roster had a 2- to 5-year life span, Mademoiselle soldiered on for 66 years.

Big turnout from Mille



Mille (as Mademoiselle was called on the inside) had one of the largest turnouts Monday night, though many of those attending had never worked together.

Their bond is more over the magazine as an institution than as a collaboration. Each woman talked as if, at one time in the publication's long history, she owned a part of it.

"The sad thing is," says Katherine Rosman, former Brill's Content senior writer and frequent New York Times Sunday Styles contributor, "as proud as I am of the time I put into Brill's and what Brill's tried to do, I don't think anyone gives a [expletive] that they --Talk, Brill's, Industry Standard -- don't exist today.

"For us," she continues, searching her purse for a lighter, "these magazines are where we grew our identities," but on the newsstand, the effect was negligible.

And so we drank a lot, as we always did, and name-dropped a lot, as we always will, and, upon seeing Salon.com founder and editor in chief David Talbot make a party appearance, we all placed our bets on who would be the next member in our growing club.

LIFE AND DEATH OF MAGAZINES

September 1995: George's first issue, with Cindy Crawford dressed as George Washington, hits newsstands.

February 1996: Yahoo! Internet Life's first issue, a joint venture between Ziff Davis and Yahoo, debuts.

August 1998: First issue of Brill's Content debuts, with a 30-page cover story, "Pressgate," about Ken Starr's relationship to the press in the President Clinton-Monica Lewinsky scandal.

July 1999: George's founder, John F. Kennedy Jr., is killed in a plane accident.

September 1999: Talk's first issue premieres, with a Hillary Clinton interview.

September 1999: George cuts back its publishing schedule, from 12 to 10 magazines a year.

October 1999: Hachette Filipacchi buys Kennedy family's share in George to own the magazine in full.

November 1999: David Kuhn, Tina Brown's longtime deputy, leaves Talk for Brill Media Ventures.

April 2000: George, under new editor in chief Frank Lalli, throws a huge celebrity bash in Washington, D.C., before the White House correspondents' dinner.

May 2000: Inside.com, a media industry Web site, founded by Michael Hirschorn and Kurt Andersen goes live.

January 2001: George announces suspension of publication.

January 2001: Standard Media, parent company of Industry Standard, announces first round of layoffs.

February 2001: Standard Media announces next round of layoffs, including 18 Industry Standard editorial staffers.

April 2001: Brill Media buys Powerful Media, the parent company of Inside.com and lays off editorial employees from both Inside.com and Brill's Content.

May 2001: Brill's Content cuts back its publishing schedule to quarterly and lays

off more staff.

August 2001: Industry Standard announces suspension of publication.
Management creates phone tree to contact staffers on mandatory vacation.
Standard Media files for Chapter 11.

October 2001: Mademoiselle, after 66 years, announces suspension of
publication; Brill's Content announces suspension of publication; Lingua Franca
announces suspension of publication.

January 2002: Talk announces suspension of publication.

July 2002: Yahoo! Internet Life announces suspension of publication.

Copyright © 2002, [Chicago Tribune](#)

[Home](#) | [Copyright and terms of service](#) | [Privacy policy](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Customer service](#) | [Archives](#) | [Advertise](#)

