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## Rise & Fall...A Journalist's Roller-coaster Ride

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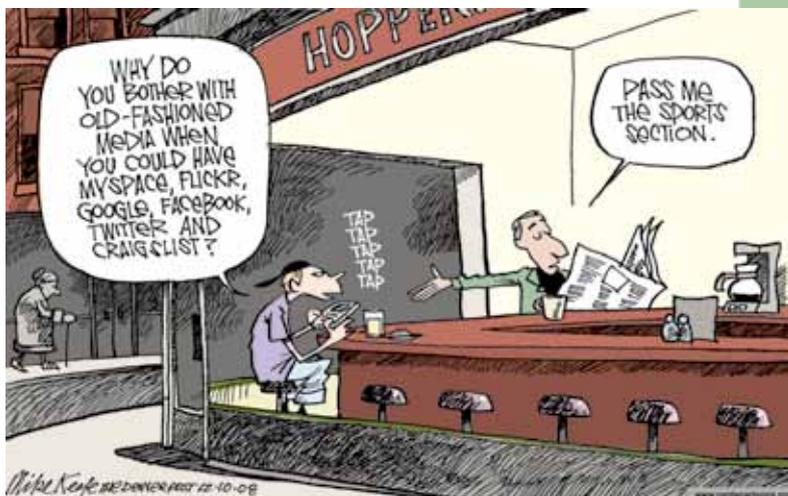
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even Gawker — bear an uncanny resemblance to the newspapers and magazines that they were thought to be the destroyers of,” says Holt, pointing out that these outlets follow the old-media rules about accuracy and transparency.

Beyond accuracy, others worry that new media emphasize the popular over the important. Newspaper and magazine publishers never really knew how many people were reading a given print article. But in the digital space, news outlets can track, in real time, audience size on individual articles.

Writing in *The New York Times Magazine* in March, *Times* editor Bill Keller lamented the emphasis on Web traffic. “Some once-serious news outlets give pride of place not to stories they think important but to stories that are ‘trending’ on Twitter — the ‘American Idol’ization of news,” he wrote. But what the best sites do is use audience data to inform but not dictate decision-making. So a story about Charlie Sheen’s latest antics might be the most popular



story on the page, but that doesn’t mean it will be elevated over the nuclear crisis in Japan or the unfolding battle in Libya. Journalism has always been a mix of news and entertainment. It’s finding the right mix that’s key.

That’s my hope for the future of news: that professional journalists will always be around to blend the best tools of old media (accuracy, fairness, sound news judgment) with the best of new media (interactive features, reader participation, and whatever’s next on the horizon). For all the angst about the future, I sure don’t miss that hot wax machine in *The Paladin* office. |F|

*The author, a 1992 graduate, is a senior editor at MSN.com and former managing editor of Newsweek.com. He works in New York City. All images from www.politicalcartoons.com.*

# RISE & FALL

## ... A JOURNALIST’S ROLLER-COASTER RIDE

**DURING MY YEARS** on *The Paladin* staff in the late 1990s, things were changing.

And by “things,” I mean everything.

We went from pasting up pages with that wax machine and X-Acto knives to designing everything on a computer and delivering each edition’s files to the printer on a Zip disk (remember those?). We went from developing rolls of film in a darkroom to handling all our photos digitally.

We even changed the location of *The Paladin* office four times during my four years at Furman. We were bounced around all over the student center during its renovation, and we spent one hot, weirdly damp semester in a tiny, windowless fallout shelter deep in the bowels of Plyler Hall.

All that upheaval may have turned out to be good preparation for my career in newspapers, which began just in time for a brief taste of the good ol’ days followed by a long, white-knuckled ride on a roller coaster that lately seems to be all dip and no crests.

When I graduated from Furman in 1999, the Internet was alive and well and — the most telling measure of all — being used by my parents. But most of us were using the World Wide Web primarily for personal communication, via e-mail or maybe chat rooms, or for research. Newspapers and television networks had Web presences, of course, but if you wanted to know what was going on in the world, you still bought a newspaper or turned on your television.

In those heady days of steady readership and dependable advertising revenue, newspapers were hiring. And they were so desperate for people that they were even hiring me, fresh out of college. Before I had my diploma in hand, I had three — three! — job offers from respectable daily newspapers.

Twelve years later . . . well, things have changed.

In 2007 — after the invention of Facebook, YouTube and Craigslist — I'd climbed my way to the *News & Observer* in Raleigh, N.C., and was deliriously happy to have a job at a pretty big paper in a pretty big city where I was being challenged and growing professionally by leaps and bounds. After changing jobs every three years or so early in my career, I felt as though I'd found my professional home.

"Congratulations," my boss-to-be had said upon offering me the job. "I'd like to offer you one of the last jobs in newspapers."

He was kidding, but his words turned out to be all too true.

Not even a year after I started working in Raleigh, the layoffs started coming. And coming. And coming.

Despite the parent company's last-hired-first-fired approach, I managed to hang on for more than two years. Several times I was saved by last-minute miracles when colleagues decided to end their ceaseless worrying by volunteering for a buyout that could fund an early retirement or a transition to a more stable line of work.

But eventually, being the perpetual new kid caught up with me, and the same boss who'd offered me "one of the last jobs in newspapers" was handing me a fat yellow envelope containing termination paperwork.

So that's it, I thought. The career I'd fallen in love with during my *Paladin* years and that had taken me from Anderson, S.C., to Tokyo was over. My husband, who'd moved from town to town with me without complaint every time I changed jobs, was settled in a career of his own. We had a house and a dog, and it's not like newspapers in other towns were hiring, anyway.

Plus, I was eight months pregnant, which is not exactly a great time to go on job interviews.

So that's it, indeed.

But it turned out that wasn't it for me, exactly.

Several months after my layoff, I was offered some part-time work with the paper. (I know — feeding the hand that bit me.) I've also scraped up some freelance writing and editing work that helps pay the bills.

I miss being in a newsroom, but the newsroom as I knew it may soon exist only in memory. In my newsroom and in others across the country, the empty desks are starting to outnumber the people, and those who are left are worn down. They're exhausted from a workload once spread among five people, and they're worried about the future of the industry as well as their own future ability to feed their families.

They got into this line of work to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, as the saying goes. But now there's no time for comfort, and the financial and manpower cost of the legwork required for afflicting just isn't in the budget.

I don't pretend to know how to save newspapers. If I had that kind of business savvy, I probably wouldn't have become a journalist in the first place. But I do know that the kind of in-depth journalism that newspapers offer is still important, whether it's presented on dead trees or a touch screen.

The day I graduated from Furman, I didn't know my journalism career would be such a roller coaster. But I've enjoyed the ride, and I'm trying my best to hold on tight so I can be a part of what's around the next turn.

— STACY SCHORR CHANDLER

Read the author's blog at <http://newsgirl.typepad.com>.

Photo by Geoffrey Chandler.

