

WheatBread Closes Its Doors:

Media Mogul Mack Makes Many Mad, Most Moody Anyway

• An exclusive interview with and by Randy Mack •

WheatBread: Hello, I—

Randy Mack: Wait. You're not going to ask me a bunch of stupid cutesy journalist questions, are you? I'm sick of that Barbara Walters "If you could be a tree, what kind of tree would you be?"-shit.

WB: Ok, let me cut to the chase: why did you decide to close WheatBread at this point, after only six issues?

RM: Well, frankly, it felt like the time was right. Everything ebbs and wanes, and *WheatBread's* time had come.

WB: Some people think that WB had reached a kind of pinnacle in its career. Why close down a magazine at the peak of its popularity?

RM: Well, by some measurements, it was the peak of its popularity. The last issue [issue #5, the infamous "Your Ass Here" issue] was surely a landmark in that many ways. I mean, several personal goals were achieved in that issue. We did another detailed investigative piece, we did some well-researched news pieces that I think showed the campus how the Administration works and what they do. We united most of the articles according to a common theme, and I think we did all this without compromising too much of our sense of humor or lo-fi tendencies.

On the other hand, people's reaction was noticeably lackluster. *WheatBread* may have excited people when it was new and daring, but it's just another thing now. People

expect it, they expect things from it. It's not as exciting as when it was new.

Not to mention I've been doing it alone.

WB: I've heard about that. Is it true that you've done most of WB yourself?

RM: Well, last semester, I had some help. Sundrop Carter was invaluable for the debut issue, and Rob Mohns likewise for the others. We also had a regular copy-editor and a staff photographer, two jobs that consume a ridiculous amount of time.

But by the end of last semester, Sundrop was gone and Rob was fading. The first issue of this semester was produced almost entirely by me. I laid out everything, copy edited all the articles, scanned all the graphics, designed everything, et cetera. If it wasn't for Rachel Eisner and Nathan Kleinberger typing in generous amounts of material, the issue probably couldn't have been done. This issue was done with more help on the production side, but finding contributors has become very hard.

What I think people don't realize is that producing publications is amazingly laborious. I mean, the complexity of a traditional newspaper came about because it was so unbelievably difficult to keep communication going. Every staff member needs to know what at least 3 other people are doing at any given time. *WheatBread*, by being non-traditional, was doomed to constant crises of

communication. Not to mention it was impossible to maintain staff.

WB: Wouldn't people want to work for a magazine that seemed so much fun?

RM: Well, the magazine was fun to read, but putting it out is only fun for two reasons: you're either fulfilled post-factum by publishing, or you enjoy the company. And that company could get pretty stressed-out as deadlines approached. [Laughs] I guess I'm talking about myself here. I've paid a lot of dry cleaning bills in my day.

What I'm trying to say is, WB takes a lot of work. As much if not more than the *Scarlet*, though less often. And I think people were expecting something more intrinsically entertaining. An analogy here would be

“What is not important is not taken care of. Or, 'Be careful what you wish for.'”

producing a Tv show. A sit-com may be more fun than a documentary, but once you're past the jokes, it's an identical process. You have to worry about lights, makeup, unions, money, time, etc. It's still work, even if you're working toward laughs and enjoyment.

WB: Perhaps if you gave it more time, you would eventually pick up people who know the realities of publishing.

RM: That's always possible. But what are the alternatives here? I can do that, and not publish, or publish and do it all myself again. And I'm not going to do that. And frankly, I'm in my last semester as a senior, and it gets harder and harder to care. I'm still making up class work from last semester. The community decides what lives and dies in it, and by lack of participation, this community has decided that *WheatBread* dies. Should I question this? Be angry? Upset? It's life. I had a lot of fun, and now I have a lot of free time to have more fun with.

WB: Why do you think the community, in your terms, made this decision to kill its only alternative publication?

RM: Well, one theory of mine is that it's a publication. Print media is dying, according to a lot of people. Newspapers can barely keep up. People are still reading, as evidenced by the Internet, and the [World Wide] Web, to some extent, but nobody takes the time to just sit and read each day. Only when they're captive, somehow, does reading seem to be a viable option. [Laughs] That's why I always told people to keep a copy of WB by the toilet.

WB: What role did the *Scarlet* play in your decision?

RM: Hmm... not much, undoubtedly. But perhaps there were issues with them to think about. First, they've been improving steadily over the semester, believe it or not. My opinion of their news coverage is no secret, but it really has been getting better. Even more important, they've been avoiding large, stupid mistakes. Unlike last semester, they don't have columnists driving people crazy with asinine opinions on random topics of little profound interest. They also have avoided embarrassing front page mistakes, problem with "Emmy" being an Academy Award notwithstanding.

The *Scarlet's* excuse for everything, from the fact they aren't financially self-supportive, to their awful news coverage, to their horrible internal organization, is that they're understaffed. My contention is that this is the effect, not the cause. But there is some truth to the fact that people don't want to work for them. One interesting effect of closing *WheatBread* will be to see whether the students, when stuck with *only* the *Scarlet*, will start taking their student publications seriously. If some people honestly decided that the newspaper was important to the school, after all, then maybe we would see the kind of organizational and journalistic changes the *Scarlet* needs.

The *Scarlet* was excellent once, and it can be again.

WB: Do you see a need for an alternative publication here?

RM: Well, I'm a big fan of good-natured competition, but sometimes people need to sit back and take stock and appreciate what's there for them, instead of horseracing everything. This should be a good opportunity for Clark University to decide what's important to them and what isn't, once and for all.

WB: So what's the moral of the story?

RM: Great. Nice typical cutesy journalist question. You want something glib, cute, and quotable. Probably for a shallow pull-quote to pull your stupid readers in. How about: "Your behavior reflects your priorities"? What is not important is not taken care of. Or perhaps "Be careful what you wish for"? •

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