

Journalism's jack of all trades

Magazine writer, editor and broadcaster Alan Edmonds dies at age 71

BY ANN MEREDITH BROWN

Standing over six feet tall, weighing 200 pounds with size 13½ feet, a beard and a British accent, Alan Edmonds was hard to miss. It didn't help that he was also a klutz. He could be irascible and politically incorrect, but also generous and big hearted. Above all, he was a storyteller. "He just loved to tell stories," says his daughter Sarah Edmonds, an economics editor for Reuters in Washington. "It was innate with him."

This love came early in life. Edmonds began his journalism career as a junior reporter for the *Upminster News* in Essex, England at age 16. He eventually landed on Fleet Street, working for the *London Daily Express*, which at the time was owned by Lord Beaverbrook. For a time he worked at its Manchester bureau and later was sent to Europe as a Paris correspondent.

After visiting Canada with his mother and sister, Edmonds moved to Toronto in 1960. He was part of an influx of British journalists immigrating to Canada where, at the time, there were higher wages and less competition. Edmonds landed a job with *The Toronto Star*. He went on to work for various newspapers and magazines including *The Toronto Sun*, *Maclean's* and *The Canadian* magazine, a national weekly newspaper supplement that published from 1965 to 1980.

"Alan was a full-fledged professional magazine writer," says Don Obe, former editor of *The Canadian*. He remembers discussing story ideas with Edmonds over lunch one day. "There was a mythical character who was always brought up in those conversations and she was called the little old lady in Moose Jaw. The line was always, 'Will the little old lady in Moose Jaw get that or is that over her head?'" After a few drinks they decided to send Edmonds to find this little old lady, and he did. Seventy-nine-year-old Lula Beatrice Wilken appeared on the July 12, 1975 cover of *The Canadian* with the headline, "She's the most influential person in Canada."

A high point in Edmonds's magazine career was a May 1970 *Maclean's* cover story on the ocean liner *Oronsay*, which had moored in Vancouver that January with an outbreak of typhoid. Edmonds snuck aboard the quarantined ship to investigate the saga and produced a



Alan Edmonds (1932-2004) was an inveterate raconteur in his professional and personal life

28,000-word piece, the longest magazine article in North America at the time. Edmonds began working on a fictionalized novel of that event at the beginning of this year. He completed the finishing touches on it before slipping into a coma on Sept. 10, two days before he died. Edmonds suffered from acute diabetes and died of complications due to liver failure. He passed away on Sept. 12, 11 days before his 72nd birthday.

Edmonds authored several books including *The Ion Effect: How Air Electricity Rules Your Life and Health* with Fred Soyka (Bantam, 1977).

He was well known for his work as a producer, writer and host of CTV's infotainment show *Live It Up!*, which he launched with Jack McGaw in 1978. The program ran until 1990. Alluding to the rivalry between print and broadcast, he used to refer to himself as a print journalist gone bad, says former co-host Liz Grogan. His immense size, gruff exterior and English accent made him an unusual candidate for television. With Canadian nationalism on the rise British journalists fell out of favour, especially on radio and television, which made it difficult for Edmonds to find work after the show ended.

"[Alan] mattered as a member of a very distinct generation of magazine journalists," Obe recalls. That group included David Cobb, Doug Marshall, Nick Steed, Jon Ruddy, Sandy Ross and Peter Gzowski, to name a few. "They were a lively bunch and they brought to magazine journalism a skepticism and a love of the language and a love of writing that I don't see anymore."

Globe and Mail columnist Margaret Wente, a former girlfriend of Edmonds in the mid-'70s, agrees that many of them were central to the industry when she was first entering the Canadian journalism scene. "[They] really made journalism so vibrant. To me they were the most exciting people in the country."

In August 1994, Edmonds gave *Masthead* his take on how magazines have changed since then: "When I started, the magazine writer was the best journalist in the country because he could make more money there than anywhere else. You got the cream of the crop. Now, magazines seem to be largely produced by young women with precious little journalistic experience whose main qualifications are that they will work for less money than union reporters on newspapers. If you pay peanuts, you get monkeys." **M**

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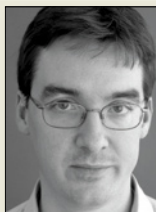
TRANSITIONS

with files from *MastheadOnline.com*

After playing front man for a clutch of shadowy Bay Street investors who purchased muck-raking biweekly *Frank* last year, **Fabrice Taylor** resigned as publisher and acting editor this fall. "By and large I am entirely out,"

he says. Burnout was a factor, although Taylor maintains he always planned to leave by year's end. Former *Canadian Business* editor and *This Magazine* media columnist **Arthur Johnson** has been retained as an "editorial consultant." With Taylor gone, the magazine is now without a spokesperson.

CA magazine associate publisher **Lou D'Souza** has left the magazine at the end of



Fabrice Taylor



Kisha Ferguson



Niel Hiscox

August after eight years in the slot following a "difference of

opinion" with publisher **Cairine Wilson**. "I'm looking to take one

more terrific kick at the can," he says of his career plan.

Niel Hiscox, formerly a group president with Annex Publishing and Printing, has jumped over to CLB Media as vice-president, media publishing. "The appetite for growth is very real here," he says. He succeeds **David Ritter**, who was released in May.

Former *Outpost* editor **Kisha Ferguson** succeeds *Where*