

LIFESTYLE, ECONOMY, AND COVERAGE: A COMPARISON  
BETWEEN FOUR DAILY NEWSPAPERS BEFORE, DURING AND  
AFTER THE ECONOMIC COLLAPSE

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LIFESTYLE, ECONOMY, AND COVERAGE: A COMPARISON  
BETWEEN FOUR DAILY NEWSPAPERS BEFORE, DURING AND  
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And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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# LIFESTYLE, ECONOMY, AND COVERAGE: A COMPARISON BETWEEN FOUR DAILY NEWSPAPERS BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE ECONOMIC COLLAPSE

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## ABSTRACT

In September of 2008, the U.S. financial system teetered on the brink of collapse. The aftermath brought steady waves of layoffs and bankruptcies. As the impact of the economic collapse crept into every area of life, did it also bleed into lifestyle sections of newspapers? This study looked at how and why economic coverage edged into lifestyle sections of four daily newspapers during and after the economic collapse. In-depth interviews with eight lifestyle reporters and editors revealed both differences and similarities among the newspapers. A cursory examination of two constructed weeks of lifestyle sections from each newspaper provided additional guidance. The findings show that economic coverage often crept into the lifestyle section in the form of consumer reporting, news stories about the impact of the economy on the arts, trend stories that sought to explore uncovered aspects of the economic climate and features that humanized concepts such as bankruptcy. Many editors and reporters thought it was important to document how the economy was changing real peoples' lives, and also felt it was crucial to provide information that would help readers, such as consumer reports.

## INTRODUCTION

During a cursory view of news Web sites in February 2009, CNN.com's 'Living' section's top story was "How to quit fighting over money with spouse." Below the top story was an essay by the personal finance guru Suze Orman. On the same day, the *Columbia Daily Tribune*'s online Lifestyle section had two recession-related stories in its roster — one about economic buzzwords denoting a greater trend, another about finding low-cost footwear. On the *Chicago Tribune*'s Web site, the 'Living' page recently had several economy stories in different places — four out of five of the stories in the 'House & Homes' subsection related to mortgages, credit and loans. The 'Play' subsection featured a story about museums offering free admission, and the 'Food' subsection had a story about celebrating Valentine's Day on a budget.

These examples are a small illustration of how the economic collapse and its aftermath have crept into lifestyle sections of news outlets. While there have been many studies on the media and the economy, they usually focus on financial journalism or the media's impact on the stock market. What about the economy's impact on beats outside the realm of economics, such as lifestyle? When a massive change in economic condition occurs, does it play out among the lifestyle pages of newspapers as well as within the business and finance sections?

This study addresses the following research question: "How and why did economic coverage edge into lifestyle sections of newspapers during and after the economic collapse?"

The research question is answered by qualitative research methods, specifically in-depth interviews with lifestyle reporters and editors.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

**How and why did economic coverage edge into lifestyle sections of newspapers during and after the economic collapse?**

Other relevant research questions include: What did lifestyle editors and reporters have to learn in order to adequately cover the impact of the economic collapse on their beat? In what major ways did they see their content change? In what ways did it stay the same? Did covering the economic collapse alter their approach to their beat? If so, how? What did they learn? Will they continue to implement said changes when the economy is no longer depressed but stable or even thriving? Did their ideas of what topics or types of stories their readers would want to see change over the course of 2007 and 2008? If so, how?

The economy impacts every facet of society, and the economic collapse has demonstrated this. In fact, it has arguably changed the way people live. Will this be reflected in the lifestyle sections of newspapers?

These research questions are important to the study of journalism. Although this is the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, society and media have diverged drastically from the state they were in 80 years ago. Many journalists in lifestyle beats found themselves in uncharted territory. For example, a lifestyle reporter may have never covered stories so interconnected with our current economic state before.

These research questions are relevant to journalists working in the field as well. Journalists covering lifestyle would benefit from learning what their peers did to

accurately cover their beat in the face of an economic downturn. In addition, business editors and reporters may benefit as well and learn some ‘outside-the-box’ methods of coverage from a different beat.

## **EXPLICATION OF CONCEPTS**

According to Chaffee, “Concepts establish the linkage between communication perceptions, which everyone has, and theories, which communication scientists build and test.”<sup>1</sup> The most pertinent concepts related to the research question are the economic collapse, coverage and lifestyle.

**Economic collapse** — The phrase ‘economic collapse’ refers to a series of events that unfolded throughout 2007 and 2008 and resulted in the worst economic downturn the United States and the global economy have seen since the Great Depression.<sup>2</sup> The major events of the economic collapse occurred in the fall of 2008 and resulted in the nationalization of several major U.S. banks, the dissolving or conversion of all independent investment banks, and the stock market losing roughly 40 percent of its value.<sup>3</sup> The shift in media coverage as a result of the collapse’s aftermath is the central focus of research.

**Coverage-** The term ‘coverage’ is defined as the combination of articles and topics that compose a newspaper’s lifestyle section. Coverage can be expanded to include location of articles, prominence of a topic over a period of time, and introduction or ‘phasing out’ of a given topic, i.e. the economic collapse or high fashion.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen H. Chaffee, *Explication* (London: Sage, 1991): 1.

<sup>2</sup> Nouriel Roubini, “A Global Breakdown Of The Recession In 2009,” *Forbes*, January 15, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Levinson, “The Economic Collapse,” *Dissent*, Winter 2009, 61.



**Lifestyle-** Dictionary.com defines ‘lifestyle’ as “the habits, attitudes, tastes, moral standards, economic level, etc, that together constitute the mode of living of an individual or group.”<sup>4</sup> Thus the lifestyle section or beat of a newspaper or magazine will typically center on the presumed habits, attitudes, tastes, social trends and economic level of the publication’s readers. While different publications will have varying standards and methods for selecting content, most lifestyle sections feature some combination of the aforementioned elements. For example, the top stories of a recent Web edition of the *Chicago Tribune’s* Living section were concerning the last operating days of the Circuit City retailer, the habits of Bill and Melinda Gates, what one should know before selling one’s jewelry, and sleeveless shirts. Note that two of these stories are economy-related.

The central foci of research were the ways lifestyle editors and reporters saw economic coverage creep into their beat, and how they reacted to the shift in content. Lifestyle was chosen over other beats or sections because as a beat it is usually less affected by stories concerning the economy; however the economic collapse was so pervasive that it crept into every other area of life, even lifestyle. Editors and reporters on the lifestyle beat might not have had previous business reporting experience and might have had to learn about the economy or approach their beat differently.

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<sup>4</sup> Dictionary.com: definition of word ‘lifestyle.’  
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/lifestyle?qsrc=2888>

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review profiles studies done on the link between media and economics as well as the evolution of lifestyle sections in American newspapers.

Studies on the link between media and economics have predominantly focused on the influence media has on the stock market, the way market crashes are framed and media influence on a presidential race based on financial coverage.

“Information in the Marketplace: Media Explanations of the ‘87 Crash” is a study that used qualitative analysis to examine the various ways in which the crash was framed by the news media.<sup>5</sup> The study employed three different newspapers: the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. It divided explanations of market downturn into three ‘schools:’ the technical school, the fundamentalist school and embedded conceptions.

The fundamentalist school is considered a standard approach to finance and relies on the theory that value determines price. The technical school is slightly more abstract and holds that market trends of the past will predict those of the future. Finally, ‘embedded conceptions’ is a perspective that “suggests that price, as with any other so-called economic phenomenon, is embedded in the usual psychological, cultural, and social structural forces ordering human affairs.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, the embedded view examines sentiments, behavior and social organization of the market when considering

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<sup>5</sup> Harvey Molotch and Kee Warner, “Information in the Marketplace: Media Explanations of the ‘87 Crash,” *Social Problems* 40, no. 2, May 1993.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 171.

causes of market change.

The study found that the media often discussed the market crash in terms of causes; and in the three publications examined, the ‘embedded conceptions’ framework was most often used. The technical school — the idea that past market activity would predict that of the future — was rarely invoked; the fundamentalist school, more traditional to finance, was not used often and when used was also tied to social factors. For example, “the causes and effects of interest rate changes were, for example, dependent not only on the country’s “mood” but also on Greenspan’s leadership of the Fed, Phelan’s leadership of the New York Stock Exchange, and Reagan’s leadership of the United States.”<sup>7</sup>

Another prominent study in this field, “Media Coverage of the Economy and Aggregate Economic Evaluations: Uncovering Evidence of Indirect Media Effects,” asked the questions: “How closely does media coverage of the economy reflect real changes in economic conditions?” And “To what extent does economic coverage of the economy exert an independent effect on economic evaluations?”<sup>8</sup>

The study, based on Republicans’ claims that the media were framing the U.S. economy in a negative light in the early 1990s during George H.W. Bush’s re-election campaign, asked if these claims were true and if the media played a role in Bush’s failure to gain re-election.

Focusing on front-page covers of the *New York Times* from 1981 through 1992,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>8</sup> Robert K. Goidel and Ronald E. Langley, “Media Coverage of the Economy and Aggregate Economic Evaluations: Uncovering Evidence of Indirect Media Effects,” *Political Research Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (Jun. 1995), 313-328.

the study employed content analysis; researchers coded front page financial stories as positive, negative or neutral. Results indicated that the media disproportionately report negative financial news, particularly as it relates to unemployment and changes in the inflation rate. Researchers also determined that the media are free to report on the aspects on finance which they choose; these choices can significantly affect both public evaluation of the economy and political outcomes.<sup>9</sup>

While not a formal study, “What We Learned In the Meltdown” is an introspective look at financial journalism and media coverage of the economic collapse of 2008.<sup>10</sup>

The author makes an important note regarding coverage of the economy and news frames: “[T]here are certainly lessons to be learned about how to change some structural and cultural biases that might have gotten in our way — including the segregated silos we sometimes fall into in our beats, and a bias against speculative ‘this trend could be dangerous’ stories.”<sup>11</sup>

“The Media and the Market” is an exploration of the relationship between the mass media and the stock market.<sup>12</sup> The study examines both “general news” and “news about the market.”<sup>13</sup> The authors investigated both the widely accepted notion that important news events affect the market as well as the prevalent news coverage of the market’s activities.

The study was done by content analysis and counted positive, negative and

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>10</sup> Martha M. Hamilton, “What We Learned In the Meltdown,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, Jan/Feb 2009, 36-39.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Parker and David A. Snow, “The Media and the Market,” in *The Social Dynamics of Financial Markets*, Eds. Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler (Greenwich, Conn.: Jai Press, Inc, 1984): 153-172.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 153.

neutral news coverage preceding and following both market upturns and downturns. The 1982 study was compared to a similar study conducted by different researchers following news flow from 1966 through 1972.<sup>14</sup> After finding that their results were both similar and divergent from the previous study, Parker and Snow concluded that market activity tends to shift with the *flow* of news rather than in reaction to a single event, but at times operates in an entirely dissimilar fashion to news flow.

Parker and Snow additionally addressed the way that the market is often framed by the general news media: “we have argued that by exaggerating the relevance of the market to the average American, by overgeneralizing its effects, and by focusing primarily on daily market activity to the exclusion of historical considerations, the media present a distorted picture of the market that functions to perpetuate and sustain certain beliefs and practices that are critical to the market’s functioning.”<sup>15</sup>

While studies examining the link between media and economics are important to consider, also crucial are those that focus on newspaper lifestyle sections.

Brown asked the research question: “Who do lifestyle section editors think their readers are and what kinds of information do they think their readers need and/or want?”<sup>16</sup> Via a questionnaire, she tried to determine editors’ perception of their audience, how they decided who their audience was, how they perceived the interests of their readers, and what they thought of journalism research.

From a results standpoint, Brown was primarily interested in lifestyle editors’

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<sup>14</sup> F. Klein and J.A. Prestbo, *News and the Market* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1974) quoted in “The Media and the Market,” Robert Parker and David A. Snow.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>16</sup> Julia C. Brown, “Editorial Attitudes and Philosophies of Lifestyle Section Editors,” (Master’s thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1983).

attitudes about and usage of journalism research. She found that editors who had completed or attended graduate school were the most likely to read research reports than other editors, followed by college graduates, then high school graduates, 50 percent of whom had never read or used journalism research.<sup>17</sup> Brown's hypothesis that journalism college majors would be more likely to read and use research reports than non-journalism majors was unfounded — in fact, non-journalism majors were slightly more likely to read research reports.

Kang studied change in patterns of content in women's and lifestyle sections during the 1970s, a decade of great social upheaval, when the women's movement greatly accelerated.<sup>18</sup> Kang investigated whether content in women's pages and lifestyle sections was updated to reflect changing social conditions. She used content analysis to track lifestyle sections in four newspapers over five-year intervals from 1970 through 1980.<sup>19</sup>

Kang used 13 categories in tracking the frequency of certain types of articles: social event, food, furnishings/housing, fashion, entertainment/arts, social issues/problems, lifestyle, women's issues/problems, consumer information, human interest, hobbies/crafts, advice and other.<sup>20</sup> She found that articles on entertainment/arts were the most common in lifestyle sections in all of the papers in the study except the *New York Times*, which had more articles on housing and furnishings than anything else. The number of articles directed only at a women audience decreased in all four

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>18</sup> Healan Kang, "The Evolution of Women's/Lifestyle Sections: A Content Analysis," (Master's thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 72-73.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 74-76.

newspapers over the decade, as did the number of total articles in the sections, save for the *New York Times*, which increased both pages devoted to the section as well as articles included.<sup>21</sup>

While Kang studied the evolution of women's/lifestyle sections over time, the impact of a single event on the lifestyle section has not been studied.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 90-97.

## METHODOLOGY

The research question's main concepts of economic collapse, coverage and lifestyle were best explored through grounded theory and through qualitative research, specifically in-depth interviews with lifestyle reporters and editors. In addition, samples of two constructed weeks of content were examined to aid in formulating interview questions. During examination of lifestyle section samples, the frequency and type of economy-related stories, or lack of such stories, was noted. This helped in determining interview questions.

Grounded theory was developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. It was created to give researchers greater freedom in exploring data.<sup>22</sup> Rather than frame research around a given theory, Glaser and Strauss stressed the need for a theory that could emerge *during* and *after* research; this way, the study would not be colored by the preconceived notion of an assigned theory. In the words of Martin, who used grounded theory in a media study, it was “[d]eveloped to build theory from data rather than utilizing existing theory as a starting point.”<sup>23</sup>

However, for the purposes of this study, rather than using grounded theory to develop a theory, it will be used to track emerging patterns of content change in lifestyle sections of newspapers.

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<sup>22</sup> Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, “The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis,” from *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Aldine Publishing Company, 1967: 101-115.

<sup>23</sup> Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, “Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria,” *Qualitative Sociology* 13, no. 1, 1990: 3-21.



Grounded theory was derived from pragmatism and symbolic interactionism.<sup>24</sup>

The two major principles it borrows from these theories involve change and view of determinism.<sup>25</sup> Change is one of the main components of grounded theory; researchers using the theory must recognize that their perceptions of research findings are in a perpetual state of flux. Additionally, when it comes to determinism, both notions of strict determinism and nondeterminism should be rejected or at least not used by researchers for grounded theory studies. Instead, it should be recognized that participants in the study have free will, though they might not always use it, and the ability to make decisions based on options provided them in a study.<sup>26</sup> In this case, the researcher was aware that editors and reporters might have adapted their approach to the lifestyle beat in reaction to a changing economic climate.

Glaser and Strauss deemed grounded theory the “constant comparative method” and described the four stages of its implementation in a study: “(1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting the theory, and (4) writing the theory.”<sup>27</sup> However, it is stressed that in most cases the four stages are often fluid; earlier stages will remain in use concurrently with later stages.<sup>28</sup>

In the first stage, the data is examined and grouped into categories. In this case, data will be reviewed with the intent of using emergent categories to formulate questions for in-depth interviews. Typically two types of categories will be developed: those

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>27</sup> Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, “The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis,” 105.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 105.

created by the researcher and those developed due to recurring language or conditions in the data. Typically, researcher-created categories will become explanatory labels for classifying the data while data-originating categories will become the processes or phenomena that must be explained.<sup>29</sup>

In the second stage, the various categories are consolidated and the theory begins to emerge. “...as the coding continues, the constant comparative units change from comparison of incident with properties of the category that resulted from initial comparisons of incidents.”<sup>30</sup>

‘Delimiting’ is what happens in the third stage of research. This is a way of whittling down the many themes and categories that have developed into a universal, meaningful theory. As the data is compared against the previously established categories, fewer modifications are made and a robust theory emerges. The categories themselves are also delimited; this process is referred to as ‘reduction.’ “By reduction we mean that the analyst may discover underlying uniformities in the original set of categories or their properties, and can then formulate the theory with a smaller set of higher level concepts,” Glaser and Strauss wrote.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, the memos and notes about the data and corresponding categories are fleshed out in support of the emergent theory. This is the fourth stage; also known as the writing stage.<sup>32</sup>

While some of the literature on grounded theory establishes guidelines for coding,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 113.

in this case coding was not part of research.<sup>33</sup> Instead, grounded theory was used as guidance for analyzing content of lifestyle sections prior to in-depth interviews.

Grounded theory has recently been used in a media study charting news consumption. Martin proposed the theory of “purposive attending” after data analysis and interviews with news consumers, many of whom had written letters to newspaper editors.<sup>34</sup> Martin describes purposive attending as a “feedback loop in which awareness increases relevance, which can increase attending, which can then reset awareness.”<sup>35</sup>

One of Martin’s key interests in studying news attending was how consumers negotiated ambivalence; how they attended to news they didn’t feel was relevant or news they felt was biased. Martin concluded that ambivalence towards news occurs for many reasons, but can most often be traced back to the fact that viewers feel that news is too sensational. They find the news biased or they feel the news does not speak to their demographic.<sup>36</sup> In these cases, viewers often sought multiple perspectives, for instance, by subscribing to multiple newspapers, and took their news with a grain of salt.

On grounded theory, Martin notes: “Grounded theory in its purest form involves the identification of a Core concept — in this case *attending* — through which the other categories and related properties are integrated.”<sup>37</sup> This relates back to Glaser and Strauss’s outlined steps of grounded theory — in the ‘delimiting’ phase of analysis, Martin boiled down categories and notations to attending — a universal concept that

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<sup>33</sup> Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, “Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria,” 12.

<sup>34</sup> Vivian B. Martin, “Attending the news: A grounded theory about a daily regimen,” *Journalism* 9, no. 1, 2008: 76-94.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 76-77.

serves as a framework for the theory of purposive attending.<sup>38</sup> Martin's news consumption study relates to this research in that it is an example of how another news study successfully used grounded theory.

In addition to grounded theory and the concepts of economic collapse; coverage; and lifestyle, the principles of news values, altruistic democracy and responsible capitalism provide additional supportive framework to this study.<sup>39</sup> As outlined by Gans in a study of nightly news broadcasts, 'news values' are defined as the social values given preference or greater coverage in news broadcasts due to journalists' tacit acceptance of them.<sup>40</sup> "Journalists try hard to be objective, but neither they nor anyone else can in the end proceed without values. Furthermore, reality judgments are never altogether divorced from values," Gans notes.<sup>41</sup> Gans defines the 'enduring' news values of the 1960s and 1970s as ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, moderatism, social order and national leadership.<sup>42</sup> Among those, altruistic democracy and responsible capitalism are most relevant to this study.

The news, Gans argues, endorses the value of 'altruistic democracy' and is often filtered through the viewpoint that government should be free from corruption and conflict. In the weeks and months following the economic collapse, details of government bailouts of private financial institutions dominated the news, and the concern over whether the government was acting with the interests of the public in mind was palpable.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>39</sup> Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*, New York: Vintage Books, 1980.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 42.

On the other hand, the news also promotes ‘responsible capitalism.’ Gans wrote:

The underlying posture of the news towards the economy resembles that taken toward the polity: an optimistic faith that in the good society, businessmen and women will compete with each other in order to create increased prosperity for all, but that they will refrain from unreasonable profits and gross exploitation of workers or customers.<sup>43</sup>

Gans purveys the value of responsible capitalism as it stood in the ‘60s and ‘70s; were he to reevaluate it today, he might write something entirely different. Starting with Enron and Arthur Anderson in 2001, this decade has seen greater scrutiny into and skepticism of business accounting practices by news organizations and society as a whole. The economic collapse saw a second wave of sorts; the news widely reported that businesses by and large failed to refrain from “unreasonable profits.”

During this research, attention was paid to news values in the lifestyle section, in particular the edging in or inclusion of altruistic democracy and responsible capitalism.

A sample size of four newspapers was used. The papers were analyzed prior to interviewing; for comparison, newspapers of different sizes and in both economically prosperous and struggling cities (determined by housing value stability) were picked. The newspapers in well-off cities include the *Kansas City Star* and the *Chicago Tribune*. The newspaper in an economically struggling city is the *Detroit Free Press*. The fourth newspaper is the *Baltimore Sun*.

Though Baltimore is an economically strong city, its relatively large population of impoverished residents, according to one of the *Sun*’s editors, means that the economic collapse will affect the city differently than it would Chicago or Kansas City.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 46.

The cities were chosen in large part for their housing markets. Housing market health can be a reliable indicator of economic stability in light of the recent subprime mortgage crisis. Michigan has been one of the hardest-hit states by the subprime mortgage crisis, while housing prices in Illinois and Missouri have remained relatively stable.<sup>44</sup> Incidentally, however, the sample also includes two large newspapers, as well as two mid-sized papers, which makes it well rounded. One editor and one reporter from each of the four publications were interviewed.

In addition, two constructed weeks of lifestyle sections from each newspaper were examined. Samples for one week were pulled from editions between April and September of 2008; samples for the second week were pulled from editions between October 2008 and April 2009.

Constructed week sampling is more effective and representative than simple random and consecutive day sampling.<sup>45</sup> The logic of constructed week sampling rests on the notion that news content varies by day of week; for example, Sunday newspapers have disproportionately more content and a greater number of articles than other days of the week, due to increased advertising and consumers' perceived greater leisure time.<sup>46</sup>

When examining the constructed weeks, how stories related to the economy and whether or not economy-related stories increase in the second constructed week were considered. An economy-related story is defined as one which mentions saving money,

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<sup>44</sup> "Home prices by metro area," *MSN Money*, Feb. 24, 2009

<http://articles.moneycentral.msn.com/Banking/HomebuyingGuide/HomePricesByCity.aspx>

<sup>45</sup> Daniel Riffe, Charles F. Aust and Stephen R. Lacy, "The Effectiveness of Random, Consecutive Day and Constructed Week Sampling in Newspaper Content Analysis," *Journalism Quarterly* 70, No. 1 (Spring 1993), 133-139.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

prices of items, the current economic condition or altered lifestyle habits related to a recessed economy in the title, subhead or first paragraph of the story.

Examining two weeks of constructed-week samples with a grounded theory framework in mind was instrumental for identifying emerging themes, categories and topics to discuss during interviews. One lifestyle editor and one lifestyle reporter were interviewed from each of the four selected newspapers. The editors and reporters were asked specific questions about the content of their newspapers as well as more general questions about the economic collapse, lifestyle coverage and media.

Editors and reporters were also asked about reader commentary, including letters to the editor and comments on stories published online. This was done for two reasons: because it was thought that struggling newspapers might pay more attention to reader feedback, and that the feedback might even drive content change, and because of a curiosity about how much attention journalists pay to reader comments.

Finally, in addition to discussing the economic downturn and the lifestyle beat at the newspaper, editors and reporters were also asked about the declining state of newspapers' impact on coverage. It is estimated that 8,484 newspaper jobs were lost between January and late April of 2009 and that the industry lost 15,970 jobs in 2008.<sup>47 48</sup> All of the newspapers in this study suffered layoffs and buyouts in the past few years, and this surely affects content in all areas of a newspaper.<sup>49</sup>

In-depth interviewing was the best qualitative method for this research because many of the questions were open-ended and best answered face-to-face rather than by

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<sup>47</sup> "Layoffs and buyouts at U.S. newspapers in 2009," *paper cuts*, <http://graphicdesignr.net/papercuts/>.

<sup>48</sup> "Layoffs and buyouts at U.S. newspapers in 2008," *paper cuts*, [http://graphicdesignr.net/papercuts/?page\\_id=1088](http://graphicdesignr.net/papercuts/?page_id=1088)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

survey or questionnaire. Only with in-depth interviews can one properly understand the individual decisions of the editors and reporters vis-à-vis the unique situations at that newspaper; each paper's different approach to covering lifestyle, etc. In-depth interviewing allows for unique follow-up questions to go with unique answers; as situations vary from newspaper to newspaper.

Interviewees at the four aforementioned newspapers were asked to assess the change in coverage, or lack thereof, from April of 2008 until April of 2009.

Newspapers were chosen for the study because their content is developed for a general demographic and while most papers have lifestyle sections, each approaches coverage differently. The sample included newspapers in Detroit, Kansas City, Chicago and Baltimore; these cities were selected with geographical and economic diversity in mind. Because the crux of the economic collapse occurred in September of 2008, the study's time frame is from April 2008 to April 2009.

Limitations to in-depth interviewing and this research design include wider generalization, possible interviewer bias and data analysis.<sup>50</sup> It is difficult to generalize the fate of lifestyle sections at newspapers nationwide based on changes made at a handful of newspapers. Additionally, during interviews, researchers must take care not to let their opinions color the interview. However, some degree of bias is inevitable. Finally, data analysis is a limitation because different researchers will likely make divergent interpretations of the same pool of data.

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<sup>50</sup> Joseph R. Dominick and Roger D. Wimmer, *Mass Media Research: An Introduction*, 136.



On the other hand, this approach provides a solid basis for answering the research question, “How and why did economic coverage edge into lifestyle sections of newspapers during and after the economic collapse?” The design is also works well for answering the related research questions: What did lifestyle editors and reporters have to learn in order to adequately cover the impact of the economic collapse on their beat? In what major ways did they see their content change? In what ways did it stay the same? Did covering the economic collapse alter their approach to their beat? If so, how? What did they learn? Will they continue to implement said changes when the economy is no longer depressed but stable or even thriving? Did their ideas of what topics or types of stories their readers would want to see change over the course of 2007 and 2008? If so, how?

## RESULTS: HOW AND WHY ECONOMIC COVERAGE EDGED INTO LIFESTYLE SECTIONS OF NEWSPAPERS DURING AND AFTER THE ECONOMIC COLLAPSE

Cursory examination of two constructed weeks of lifestyle sections at each newspaper revealed shifts in coverage for all during the research period, which spanned from April of 2008 to April of 2009. However, coverage did not always become more economy-focused in lifestyle sections.

Using grounded theory, information gathered from the beginning of data collection was used to inform subsequent information-gathering. For example, as the *Detroit News* was the first newspaper examined, themes and trends noted in the constructed weeks selected were searched for when looking over other publications. In turn, as the *Chicago Tribune* was the second newspaper researched, new themes and trends that cropped up while exploring its lifestyle content were considered while examining the third newspaper, the *Kansas City Star*, and so on.

In the *Detroit News*, there was a significant spike in economy-themed stories in the second half of the year. The lifestyle sections of the first constructed week contained three economy-related stories; the contents of the second week had six economy-related stories. The most noteworthy article was an editorial run before Christmas titled, “This holiday, give the gift of a little less,” which was about scaling back Christmas festivities due to the economy.<sup>51</sup> Despite its mention of bankruptcies and foreclosures, the article’s tone was decidedly middle-class, and brought the question to mind — when running

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<sup>51</sup> Marney Rich Keenan, “This holiday, give the gift of a little less,” *Detroit News*, December 17, 2008, Features section.

economy-related articles in the lifestyle section, who is the paper trying to reach? Does it strive to provide content for all classes, or content that appeals to all classes?

The *Chicago Tribune*'s economy-themed articles actually decreased within the constructed week samples. In the first week, there were 11 economy-related articles; in the second week, only five. However, restructuring within the lifestyle sections of the newspaper with the economy in mind was evident. The Q section on Sundays, previously a quality of life section, was replaced with the Smart section. The Smart section's tagline is "Faster, cheaper, better" — there was a new emphasis on economy and simple living; Q's focus was on zeitgeist and general trends. This was a telling sign that the lifestyle section had been altered to reflect readers' changing lives and leaner times.

At the *Kansas City Star*, economy-themed articles also increased, though not as substantially as they did in Detroit. In the first constructed week, six economy-related articles were counted; the second week had eight articles.

Restructuring was also evident — the *Star*'s home section shrank during the time period, the travel section disappeared and the lifestyle section beyond homes became increasingly entertainment-based.

The *Baltimore Sun* didn't appear to have significant changes in content or structure, though interviews with an editor and reporter there suggested otherwise. There were four economy-related articles in the first week and five economy-related articles in the second week.

While an increase in economy-related articles within the lifestyle section is arguably its own theme, additional themes were revealed within those specific articles.

Some of the emerging themes in said economy-related articles were service versus news, entertainment versus cheap entertainment and class differences.

During examination of the *Detroit News*, it was noted that economy-related articles tended to carry one of two themes: service — as in, “How you can save money on X,” or news — as in, “How the economy is affecting X.” These themes were noted and then discussed with the editor and reporter there. They were found to be relevant themes at all of the other newspapers as well.

Each paper had a different distribution of these types of articles; for example, the *Detroit News* had a fairly even distribution of service and economy news stories. Economy news stories were commonly about layoffs at arts and media institutions, such as those at a local television station.<sup>52</sup> Service stories focused more on assisting readers with home projects, for instance, ways to cheaply renovate a basement.<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand, the *Baltimore Sun* had far more service stories within the lifestyle category than it did economy news stories. For example, two stories about planning for the holidays on a budget ran in December; an airfare guide ran in April 2008.<sup>54 55 56</sup> This begged the question — did editors keep this in mind when assigning content? Did they decide which article theme was more helpful to the reader or more relevant? If they struck a balance, was there a conscious effort to do that?

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<sup>52</sup> Kimberly Hayes Taylor, “Channel 56 lays off 11 employees,” *Detroit News*, January 22, 2009, features section.

<sup>53</sup> Jeanine Matlow, “Basement renovation need not be costly,” *Detroit News*, September 27, 2008, Homestyle section.

<sup>54</sup> San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News, “Flying Europe on the cheap,” *Baltimore Sun*, April 6, 2008, Travel section.

<sup>55</sup> Rob Kasper, “Beers, wines that won't break your gift budget — in my glass,” *Baltimore Sun*, December 17, 2008, Taste section.

<sup>56</sup> Jill Rosen, “A bargain roast — inexpensive chuck can keep your holiday table festive on a budget,” *Baltimore Sun*, December 17, 2008, Taste section.

Entertainment and cheap entertainment were themes in sections of some, but not all, papers. The *Kansas City Star* increased its entertainment coverage during the time period and even added a new entertainment blog. A column that ran in November 2008 discussed the rising trend of entertaining at home instead of going out in order to save money.<sup>57</sup> Entertainment coverage increased in the *Chicago Tribune* as well, though it was later discerned through an interview with an editor that that had more to do with restructuring and staff changes than it did with a conscious effort to change content. On the flip side, an increase in providing readers with options and information about more affordable, or even free, entertainment was evident and increased in all papers.

Class difference — or lack of recognition of such — was noted as a theme during examination of the *Detroit News*. Though it was noted that the newspaper did not appear to write stories that covered all classes, and the editor agreed, class difference remained a theme. This brought the question of who the paper was aiming to serve — who was the target audience — and whether editors and reporters struggled to cater to readers of different classes and address the varying economic concerns of different classes. Therefore, articles that addressed different classes were searched for and discussed with reporters and editors at other newspapers, most of whom agreed with the stance of the *Detroit News*, with the exception being the *Baltimore Sun*.

During interviews, grounded theory was used much in the same way that it was during content examination. Themes that stuck out or had prominence during earlier interviews became questions for later interviews.

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<sup>57</sup> Jeneé Osterheldt, “Night life comes home to roost,” *Kansas City Star*, November 18, 2008, FYI section.

In addition, many themes that emerged during examination of content were expanded upon during interviews as editors and reporters were asked about service versus news and other themes and allowed the chance to discuss their decisions. It became very clear during interviews that other themes also impacted newspaper lifestyle coverage. Layoffs, budget cuts and advertising decreases at all newspapers resulted in shrunken newsholes for all in question and the restructuring of sections and resources for most.

It is also interesting to note that in the time leading up to and during the collapse, fashion editors or reporters disappeared from three of the four newspapers studied, and that the decision was often economy-related. The *Kansas City Star* lost their fashion reporter to staff reductions. The fashion reporter at the *Baltimore Sun* left the newspaper, but editors decided that it was unfeasible to replace her. At the *Detroit News*, the fashion editor also left, and Rita Holt, deputy features editor, decided not to fill the position, as she didn't feel a need to cover high fashion while the economy was tanking.

"This is maybe me," Holt said, "But I'm the one that chooses these stories so — I'm just not that interested in couture now and I don't think our readers are."

Discussion of the disappearance of the fashion reporter first occurred at the *Detroit News* and was followed up with at other newspapers, editors at which shared similar stories. The absence of a fashion reporter can signal another theme — that of fading conspicuous consumption.

Themes heavily discussed during interviews were the impacts of layoffs, shrunken newsholes, altering newspaper structures and employee malaise on lifestyle coverage. In every case, either these themes were brought up by the editor or reporter, or they were discussed at length when prompted. In some cases, discussions in early interviews

prompted certain questions to be asked during later interviews. For example, Long (*Detroit News*) first mentioned that newspaper publishers tend to cut lifestyle and feature sections first, and then editors and reporters at the other newspapers were asked this question.

## RESPONSES TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Participants' answers to core research questions varied widely from paper to paper. All editors and reporters interviewed acknowledged that economic coverage had crept into the lifestyle section in one way or another; central themes that emerged in responses were similar to those noted after examining constructed weeks of the papers. Many noted increased consumer reporting — i.e., service stories — and greater general awareness of how the economy was affecting their city.

Holt of the *Detroit News* discussed consumer content and service reporting from the stance of helping people affected by the recession:

I think that there's certainly a recognition now that we need to pay more attention to what's going on in the economy and to help people cope as much as we can ... because that's a big part of people's lives with what's happening in the auto industry, with people losing their jobs, we are trying to be aware of that and offer stories that will help people.

Linda Bergstrom, features editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, also thought consumer content was important in terms of assisting her audience, but that it was equally important not to succumb entirely to service journalism:

I think it's true across all of the newspaper — we're definitely budget-minded and consumer-focused and doing some performance reviews, that's one of our company's goals is customer focus and relevance and utility. So in the lifestyle areas we've tried to really take that utility to heart and give people guidance on dealing with, you know, having less money, less finances, but still able to make smarter decisions. We try to give them information to try to make smarter decisions.

So I would say yes, it has crept into — but I would think that we were doing that before and its just probably a little more emphasis now. We are rethinking that, but also trying to mix in some other things cause people don't always want to be hit over the head with cheaper, cheaper, cheaper — you have no money, no money, no money. We're trying to think of ways to break out of that a little bit.

Besides consumer reporting and economic news stories, a third theme — the way people live during an economic downturn — also surfaced.

Mary Lou Nolan, assistant managing editor, features, of the *Kansas City Star*, noted that though lifestyle departments typically aim to tell the stories of people's lives, including their financial lives, they try not to bombard readers with bad news or sad stories:

We are always looking for ways to get beyond that, to either give advice, to tell interesting stories to have fun with some things. We've done everything this year from an A1 that a feature reporter did on following someone for 30 days who was looking for a job, a tech guy that had been laid off from somewhere, and what that was like, it was really moving, moving package, to things like this which is just kind of a fun sidebar. The \$700 billion economic stimulus what you could get — house and home is our Sunday section about homes this was — how to party on a shoestring. Different things. We also did probably my favorite story, very high concept, for Halloween, we took a bunch of pumpkins and then wrote on them things like, economic collapse, and just all these things that had to do with — gas prices going up, whatever — and then a reporter took them and destroyed them in various ways. We dropped one off a building, couple of our folks took guns out to someone's farm and actually shot a couple of them up, we had an elephant at the renaissance festival smash several of them. Smashing pumpkins was going to be in town before too long, which was sort of where it all started, but it was really fun and it's a great video. So we do serious and not so serious.

Dave Rosenthal, head entertainment editor of the *Baltimore Sun*, had similar sentiments:

So here I think with the economic downturn — the paper as a whole and certainly within features — we've been thinking, so what does it mean to you as a person. How do you react emotionally to losing a job, what does it mean to your family what does it mean to kids when that happens, and then sort of practicality in food or in dining or in travel — how do you change how you live your life, because of



the economics, so it's less, kind of, a corporate view and more kind of a person, how do they react to it.

## **BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL NEWS**

When asked if they began to pay more attention to business and financial news during the time period in question, some editors and reporters did, but many said they didn't. Bergstrom said being at the *Chicago Tribune*, a bigger newspaper, she didn't have to, as the more relevant business stories were covered by the business department. Long (*Detroit News*) and Mary McCauley, arts reporter at the *Baltimore Sun*, acknowledged that the economy came up a lot more in the stories they covered, but that they didn't feel they had to follow the business beat more carefully. Interestingly, Gutierrez (*Kansas City Star*) said she didn't follow business news more closely because as a features reporter she was covering the news from a different angle:

I think I was probably watching the same thing that everybody else was — CNN, and anything that I could see online. But no, I wouldn't say that we all of a sudden became business reporters, again that's because I think we think a little bit differently. We're more people oriented so again, going back to what was happening in our own lives, I think we often use that as a starting point for a lot of our stories and, if we're paying more at the gas pump, and we're seeing that milk is \$4 a gallon, it's happening to everybody and we're seeing it but no, I wouldn't say that I necessarily started studying up on [business].

On the flip side, both Nolan and Rosenthal felt that a solid understanding of the business beat was crucial to covering features during a downturn. Nolan said:

You have to understand it or you wouldn't know. We had a reporter out who was tracking — was looking for a street where he could tell a story about foreclosures and unless you really understand what's going on, how the process works and know how to track records so you can determine the escalating values of the homes over time and then the crash, you can't tell that story. And that's what a lot of people were going through.

Rosenthal, as a former business reporter, had an interesting perspective. While he had always followed business news, he noticed his colleagues paying more attention, and that doing so helped them write lifestyle stories that related to the current economic climate:

For example the Cash for Clunkers program, which was big government program, we did a story just looking at, and I think it was one of the first ones I saw — Chicago did it after we did it and I think a lot of other papers did it after we did it but that's always nice to see — we did a story not on the program itself but on what does this mean for junkyards, what are they doing with all these cars, do they like it, do they hate it.<sup>58</sup> And that was an interesting piece from a features perspective. But it also got into a little business so even for a feature/lifestyle reporter who would do a light piece on that, they had to pay attention to what the program meant and what was the economics behind it and what was the government trying to achieve. So even those sorts of stories show how economic problems kind of trickle into a lot of the stories that you're going to write.

## CONTENT CHANGE

Overall content change was another topic that yielded different responses, some from employees of the same newspaper. On the other hand, common themes emerged here as well — two reporters discussed articles generally becoming shorter, while three editors said features were generally more economy-focused than before.

“Stories are shorter,” McCauley (*Baltimore Sun*) said. “There’s a lot less criticism. We are going into Washington much less than we did, even 12 to 18 months ago. This wasn’t in the past year, but book review coverage has virtually disappeared.”

At the same newspaper, Rosenthal discussed an increasing emphasis on economy and the various ways the downturn affected people, including job losses and health insurance issues:

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<sup>58</sup> Timothy B. Wheeler, “Clunk junk — salvage firms are divided on whether the federal car initiative will provide their businesses anything more than a headache,” *Baltimore Sun*, Thursday, August 6, 2009, Local section.

We started to focus a lot on the response to the economic downturn [in the Sunday paper]. We did stories about people out of work and looking for new work — some very practical, how do you find a job, some more kind of touchy-feely about what people were going through. And then when we came over [to features and entertainment] we did the same sort of thing. Our parenting reporter did a story about how — the family dynamics of a parent losing a job — so now dad lost his job and he's home a lot more. What does that mean to the way the family routine works, what does it mean to the kids, are they afraid — he found that some kids actually like it cause dad can come to school now and be the room parent and go on field trips and that sort of thing, so we focused a lot on different types of stories related to the economic downturn.

Long (*Detroit News*) said he didn't think content changed much as his city,

Detroit, had been in recession for longer than the rest of the country:

The economy became a wreck across the nation in 2008. The economy's been a wreck here since 2000 ... The car companies have been slowly dive-bombing for years now so we — and plus this is Detroit — it's one of the most impoverished areas in the world, you know — well, not the world, but certainly the United States — so these sort of economically-driven lifestyle stories you're talking about that have probably been popping up elsewhere have been a steady part of the diet here for years.

Bergstrom (*Chicago Tribune*) — in line with those who mentioned shorter articles

— said that the recession brought the introduction of 'content sharing' to Tribune

Company, via pre-designed, pre-written modules that included artwork:

We've started something that we call content sharing. So we create modules — for lack of a better term. And what we do is we make these shapes of stories that go into either our newspaper or our sister papers. Our sister papers are Orlando, Fort Lauderdale, Baltimore, and lifestyle has definitely been a huge part of that. So we're either getting these from other sources such as the LA Times, which is one of our newspapers, or TMS which is Tribune Media Services, which is our media service or wires, and so where you would find at one point every newspaper or us would be creating content for every single hole in the newspaper now we aren't. We are creating it one time to be either used by us and then to be used by other people so — it's kind of an efficiency so that's been a big, big change as far as writing, editing content.

Bergstrom says the result is that Tribune Company papers, including the *Chicago Tribune*, are now less local, as they share content that must be made applicable to papers in all corners of the country.

## **APPROACH TO BEAT**

Every editor interviewed said or implied that awareness of the economic collapse and its impact changed their approach to their beat in some way. Holt (*Detroit News*) and Bergstrom (*Chicago Tribune*) said they were acutely aware of their readers' changing financial situations and that they skewed away from featuring particularly expensive items in shopping features and made a conscious effort to commission more budget-friendly articles. For instance, Bergstrom said that when a shopping module came from the *Los Angeles Times* featuring a \$2000 chaise longue, she opted not to use it, as "no one's going to be buying that right now." Similarly, Holt said that her fashion editor left and that she didn't replace her as she didn't feel like high fashion was a major priority in Detroiters' lives at that point. In addition, Holt discussed the types of articles she introduced — the recession influenced her to run more articles about vegetable gardening as well as a series of articles about Michelle Obama's White House garden, as vegetable gardening was an economical activity that those hit by the recession could participate in.

On the other side, Nolan (*Kansas City Star*) and Rosenthal (*Baltimore Sun*) changed their approach. They wanted to show how a larger-than-life economic collapse impacted people's lives, and how economic woes often crept into areas of life they hadn't previously. Nolan said:

In general, if you're telling the story of peoples' lives, and people are suffering in the economy, you're going to look for an economic angle to many of the traditional things you would do. And you're also gonna have your eye out for

what's new and different. That you haven't seen happening before. I think we had a reporter, did a little piece for A1, just a kind of little scene-setter, early on, we started hearing tales that people were going to pawn shops and were getting rid of more valuables to try to free up some cash.<sup>59</sup> And we just went out and did a piece, talked to some people who were coming and going from pawn shops. You wouldn't know to go there unless you were paying attention or were really really good at guessing what people would do.

Among reporters, Bill Hageman, reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*, and Long, movie critic for the *Detroit News*, said they didn't change their approach to their beat, but for very different reasons. Hageman said he felt many stories were altered to 'fit' an economic angle, which he disagreed with:

It went against my grain to approach everything as a story about the economic collapse. I think too often the stories that we would do, we would kind of twist a good story to make it fit that mold — the mold of telling people how to do things — to the point, sometimes you can give readers really good advice, sometimes you can just tell them really stupid stuff that any 6-year-old on the street knows. And putting that into a newspaper story like you're breaking news for the readers, I just think that kind of stuff makes us look silly. I tried to steer clear of pitching anything that seemed to me to be too obvious — stuff that the readers could find in any number of places. But that's just me.

Long, a movie critic, said that covering cinema attendance, changing technology and how the economy affects theater attendance were already integral parts of his beat, so what he covered and the way he covered it didn't change:

The money and the affordability and the reason for there even being movies anymore ... that has been the ongoing story that I've been covering, so the economic plight or the economics of the situation are part of the ongoing story, and so it really hasn't changed in terms of 'Wow, now it's really important,' no, it's been pretty important for the whole time.

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<sup>59</sup> Eric Adler, "Hard times bring big business for pawn shops," *Kansas City Star*, Friday, October 17, 2008, Front section.

## READERSHIP INTERESTS

In line with approach to beat, answers varied vastly on whether editors and reporters felt that the type of story their audience wanted to read changed. Holt (*Detroit News*) felt readers were looking for service stories that would help them save money. Though Bergstrom (*Chicago Tribune*) changed her approach to her beat, she said her idea of what her readers were looking for didn't necessarily change. Both Nolan (*Kansas City Star*) and Lisa Gutierrez, lifestyle reporter for the *Kansas City Star*, felt readers wanted to see coverage of how the recession was affecting real people and the different aspects of their lives, though Gutierrez also said there was a noticeable spike in recession-heavy content that eventually calmed down:

Even not just looking at the stories we were writing, but what everybody else was writing, there I think — September, October, November, I was starting to see, and not just in features, those sort of 'What am I going to do with my future, my 401(k) is gone,' there was almost a certain level of panic I think, a tone of panic in some of the stories, you know, and I think that that has, toward the end of the year, especially after the first of the year, people started calming down and settling down. And I don't know, honest to god, why that happened, whether there was a reflection of a new administration coming in, or all of a sudden everybody was just tired of talking about the bailouts, and all this — I don't know what happened, but I would definitely say that there has been a difference in just the tone of the stories. Like I said, at the very beginning it seemed like everybody was just really panicked and in this, oh my god, what's going to happen to us, almost fearful, frightened tone. And now ... It almost seems like the economy is maybe starting to get a little bit better, so people aren't as panicked and we're starting to kind of move away from brainstorming those ideas. Like oh my gosh, how should people live, in a bad economy and how are they faring in a bad economy. I think the tone really has changed and maybe it's for the better, maybe we're being a little bit more optimistic now, but I definitely noticed a difference.

Hageman, Long and McCauley said their ideas of what readers wanted didn't change, though Hageman said the climate at the *Chicago Tribune* might have led him to write more recession-related stories than usual:

I continued with the same approach. But in the *Tribune's* quest to become more, shall we say, reader friendly — to react to the economic crisis — the editors may have had more ideas for stories along those lines that they would ask me if I would want to do. So maybe I did more stories about that, I don't know. It could be looked at that way — but if I did, it was probably generally stuff that was pitched to me that they said, 'Can you do this?' and I said, 'Yeah, sure.'

## CLASS DIFFERENCES

Although the economic collapse essentially affected all demographics, it is worth considering whether newspapers reconsidered the demographics they market to and cover — and which they were catering to in the first place.

Holt and Long of the *Detroit News*, a conservative newspaper according to Long, in a two-paper city that also publishes a liberal paper, said that effort was not made to reach out to readers from different class backgrounds. Long said this was in part due to the paper's conservative base and in part due to the fact that perhaps readers enjoy reading about lifestyles beyond their reach as fantasy:

I couldn't believe how many stories were about places that I could never afford to go to in my life or things you know, trips, over the years, just all these things and going, 'Who is going and doing this? Who?' But I think that has its basis in two things. One is that there was a lot of wealth here and there still is, to an extent, and it's Republican and conservative and so we would be their paper and the other is I just think there's sort of a long lasting fascination, fantasy-type sublimation thing readers do. Like, 'I can't do that, but isn't it groovy somebody can' or 'Don't I wish I could do that, don't I wish I had that life.'

Long said that he expected working class and the poor would be covered more in Detroit's liberal paper, the *Detroit Free Press*. At the *Chicago Tribune*, editor Bergstrom said that every section of the paper has a readership in mind and that research identifies people by lifestyle and economics — examples would be urban childless couples, working families with small children, and so on. She said the *Tribune* had been making increased efforts to understand and cater to its audience. *Tribune* reporter Hageman had a

slightly different perspective. He felt that the *Tribune* failed to adequately cover Chicago's poorer neighborhoods:

Not because of the economy — I've always taken the approach that the *Tribune* ignored certain segments of the population and it wasn't a racial thing so much as an economic thing. We always used to joke that the *Tribune* didn't know Chicago extended beyond Roosevelt Road or West of Damen. So especially when I was with the Q section for example, I would make an effort to find things that normally were a little bit outside of the *Tribune*'s sphere — profiling some guy in Englewood who takes kids who are headed on the wrong path and teaches them martial arts, but before he would take them to their classes he would make them bring in their report cards every week. He would have study time with them and turn them into students first before he'd turn them into little martial arts enthusiasts. Things like that. That's the kind of story on the news side I don't think they — but the Q section loved it. Things like that. So people talk about diversity, 'We gotta be diverse,' I don't know if we always did that, we always have done that — we're better than we were, much better, but I always tried to look at — 'This is not a *Tribune* story, this story wouldn't be in your parents' *Tribune*' — 'Okay, good, then I'm interested in doing it.' It would just — this stuff is so much fun to write, it's interesting. I always tried to make an effort to expand the *Tribune*'s horizons.

At the *Kansas City Star*, Nolan and Gutierrez both felt that the paper strived to reach a "middle" demographic in order to tell stories that would have the most broad appeal.

Rosenthal of the *Baltimore Sun* said that the paper made a serious effort to cover all classes, especially in lifestyle. He discussed Baltimore's unique demographics, and his take on class coverage was very different than any of the other editors or reporters. He felt that the poor were over covered in government reporting, because the focus is often on programs for the poor, but under covered in lifestyle:

I think sometimes we err more on covering the very poor and leave out the people in the middle. Again I think it's because we've written so much about government and government programs to help the poor and that sort of thing. I was traveling in another city and I read the coverage that day — and every column was either about government or about the poor. It was funny and it made me think about why that is and I think it's kind of a newspaper's default sometimes to write about



government programs and they tend to be focused more on the people that are poorest. So I think it's important that we keep in mind that if we write about everybody, we write about — like healthcare reform, it's not really designed for the poorest people, it's designed for people in the middle class, struggling to keep insurance, so our stories should always reflect all across class lines. And in a city like Baltimore where you have some desperately poor parts of the city and some really incredibly wealthy areas too, it's not hard to forget that ... But I do think it's important that we do write all the way across class lines. And in a city where you also have to pay attention to racial diversity in a city — a predominantly black city, but not a majority black region that we serve, so you have to kind of make sure that you have people represented on your pages and photos and stories and that sort of thing. So you try and cover everybody.

As an example, Rosenthal talked about a lifestyle story his paper did about inadequate access to grocery stores in poor neighborhoods and how an illegal cab system developed out of residents' need to buy groceries, and the stores' and police's recognition that the system should be allowed to operate so residents could buy healthier and cheaper food.<sup>60</sup>

## READER FEEDBACK

Letters to the editor are an institution at almost every newspaper. In addition, with the advent of newspaper Web sites, readers can now more easily comment on stories, sometimes anonymously. When newspapers are struggling, is more attention paid to these letters and comments, in order to satisfy their audience and keep readers' loyalty? And when people are struggling, does the nature of their letters change?

For most editors and reporters interviewed, the answers were no and no. While Bergstrom (*Chicago Tribune*) said she was interested in hearing what readers had to say,

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<sup>60</sup> Laura Vozzella, "Hail at own risk — Hack cabs: Inner-city residents rely on them. Grocery stores give them Ids. But these illicit taxis can be perilous, police say," *Baltimore Sun*, September 15, 2009, Local section.

she didn't think readers' comments ever drove content change. Holt (*Detroit News*) said she didn't pay particular attention to reader feedback.

Hageman (*Chicago Tribune*), on the other hand, said that he felt he received less letters and feedback than before, in part because he used to write more whimsical, slice-of-life stories, which he thought drew greater response than service stories or recession-related stories.

Long (*Detroit News*) said things hadn't changed, but that he'd always taken what readers wanted into account:

Many of the things I write about readers really don't give a damn, you know, most of the trend stuff — it'll run on the front page with giant headlines and I'll get almost no reaction. I review transformers and I'll get a hundred letters so — I can't let that shape — I do let it to an extent, I realize the main job I should do is to review movies cause that's what people seem to like to read, you know, when I go off into more, esoteric sociological things they're just not as interested, you know, but it's still important to do the sociological things and all.

McCauley said things didn't change following the economic collapse or the papers' struggles, but that the *Baltimore Sun* had always held a keen interest in reader feedback: "I really do think it's something we've always been concerned about. We've always been in the public eye — and it's great that people have always felt very passionately about certain things that we do."

Rosenthal agreed, and said that sometimes reader letters did drive content change at the *Sun*:

Sometimes they'll come to us with good ideas. And sometimes they'll just say — look, the way you covered this topic maybe wasn't fair. I can think — recently there was — the Eastern part of our area is kind of blue collar town. It used to be a steel and other manufacturing in the area so it's — doesn't have the best reputation of areas in the Baltimore region. And I remember one woman called in to me because one of our bloggers had written about going to a bar there and talked about it. And she thought he was making fun of the area where she lived.

And she was an elderly woman, proud of where she lived, a newspaper reader which is great, and it ran on the blog; it also ran in the paper, so she was responding to the paper. But she just thought the tone was wrong. So I listened to her and I tried to tell her the tone — we don't try to make fun of different areas — and the blogger said he had a great time there, people were very friendly, but it was a little bit of the tone she was reading into it. And I had her speak to the blogger too — you know, you should probably speak to the blogger directly. So he — if he is trying to write again about this area he keeps your thoughts in mind and doesn't slip up. So when they call in we always try to talk to them personally and see what they have to say.

## INDUSTRY STRUGGLE

Every participant was eager to discuss and had much to say about the specific struggle of the newspaper industry during the economic collapse — both in general, at their place of work specifically, and the impact changes and struggles had on the lifestyle section of their paper. Some common themes were that as advertising revenue dropped and the newspaper reduced pages, stories by default became shorter. With a shrunken newshole, editors generally found that they had to more carefully consider which stories to assign and run.

In addition, a shrunken newshole also meant that traditional feature stories were more frequently running in the front section or tweaked to run in the business or metro section, due to space constraints in features sections. Another big change at all papers was restructuring and reorganization of sections. The notion that a struggling newspaper will cut features and lifestyle sections first was discussed with all the editors and reporters. At two of the newspapers, the *Detroit News* and the *Chicago Tribune*, interviewees felt that this was true — in general and at their paper specifically. At the *Kansas City Star* and the *Baltimore Sun*, interviewees disagreed and said that they felt

that the publishers of their paper understood the value of features and had been reluctant to cut them out of the paper.

Finally, several editors and reporters also spoke at length about layoffs and newsroom morale and the impact that these two things had on coverage. Some felt that diminished morale impacted coverage to the effect that journalists in the thick of financial insecurity themselves were more likely to pitch and write economy-themed stories.

## **SHORT STORIES**

Consequences of a shrunken newshole included shorter stories, less of them and the migration of features to other sections of the newspaper. While most thought that shorter stories and the absence, or at least reduction, of depth in the paper were casualties of the economic collapse, Hageman saw the positive side of a reduced word count:

I'm finding, stuff that I'm writing, I'm having to write much shorter. And that's better. Shorter's always better. And they'll tell me they need something at 700 words and invariably it'll be 850 and then I'll whack it down to 800 and hope we can negotiate the rest ... cause it forces you to kind of boil down all the information, and get it. Not to the point where you're leaving crucial stuff out. If there was a situation where they said, gimme 500, and the story could not be told in less than 700, I would tell them. And speaking for myself, the editors are always very understanding on something like that. They say, 'Well if you need 700, do what you need.'

On the other side, Long thought that shorter stories meant a loss of depth and meaning:

That's the great frustration of — depth has almost disappeared, you know, you're much better off tackling a story that's really almost a piece of garbage or that's really superficial and doesn't have that much to it or isn't opening that many — like right now I'm working on an essay thing that's going to be impossible to get into 25 inches but it — I would've had 50 inches easily to work with, now I'll be lucky if I get the 25. That's just a fact of life, that's happened with news stories as well, but it's happened with ... features used to be where you got to go long, it's

where you used to go hit the long ball, that's why a lot of people who were in features got into features because you could go in depth ... Now, it's pretty rare, its pretty rare. And I'm not just talking ... like a profile, a really good profile, you used to be able to go 60 inches on a great profile. Now nobody even does profiles as a result cause you know you can have 20 inches, you can't get a guy's life into 20 inches.

Bergstrom also acknowledged that stories were shorter, in particular in content-sharing modules. Nolan said that a decision was made to shorten stories on some days in order to print longer ones on other days. Gutierrez echoed Nolan's sentiments, but said there were advantages to shorter stories — they are often snappier than longer stories, and more emphasis is placed on conveying information in the paper visually.

## **SECTION CHANGES**

The notion that news publishers by and large consider features and lifestyle coverage to be the most expendable parts of a newspaper was a theme throughout interviews, first expressed by Long at the *Detroit News*:

It ends up lifestyle is the first place they turn to to gut. Because most guys who run newspapers are hard news oriented people, simple as that. It's the very very rare newspaper that's gonna have the lifestyle editor who became the editor and publisher. They're almost all guys who worked their way up through the city desk ... So there's the hard news bias that we've got to cover the water board, you know type bias and that's more important than celebrity news or features or any of that so whenever ... and then, next comes the fact that everybody knows that sports makes more money for the paper than anyplace else so that's the last place they're going to cut. Business around here at this paper is a very high priority, we have a very good business section, and it has been traditionally that this is a conservative newspaper ... which means it tends towards the business community so business isn't gonna get gutted. So who are you gutting? Features.

Bergstrom's sentiments almost eerily echoed Long's:

I would have to say that the temptation is for publishers and editors to cut lifestyle first. I don't agree with it, because that's what people come to newspapers for is relaxation, and they can get their news elsewhere, but I think it's a little misguided. So I think you'll find lifestyle and entertainment coming back, cause it's kind of a unique thing that newspapers can provide, so I think they'll find the

errors of their ways and it'll come back. Most editors and publishers don't consider lifestyle to be news. They consider it to be softer news, soft stuff, so you know, it's just what your definition of news is and, it's also, they also try to think 'Well, is it content they can get elsewhere,' well maybe, but you can get other news content elsewhere too. So I think that, I think that's the kind of thing that you'll see grow again when things get a little bit better, well I want — 'There's nothing in the newspaper to read,' is kind of what you hear a lot, and I think that's a reaction to not having different kinds of stories that are not necessarily news oriented. And I think people want fun in the newspaper. You go for fun as much as you do news.

Conversely, both the *Kansas City Star* and the *Baltimore Sun* felt that their higher-ups placed a premium on feature and lifestyle content. This is particularly interesting considering that the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Chicago Tribune*, where Bergstrom said lifestyle was not viewed a priority, are both Tribune Company newspapers.

Nolan felt both that the *Star* was committed to features, but also that at other papers, perhaps features get hit harder as they make up more of the paper to begin with:

At one point here, I don't know how many sections we were putting out. Half the Sunday paper was coming out of the features department. When you start taking space out proportionally is it going to look like features gets hit more? I think that could happen — just cause we have so much more to begin with than some of our other sections. But at the same time I'll say, when we reorganized in the spring, we have three freestanding sections every day, and all our news went into one section, and sports and features. So there was a real commitment to the idea that a features section is something that's important to readers as an independent thing in the mix, not just something that you can continue to cut away at.

At the *Baltimore Sun*, Rosenthal explained why his paper's editor was committed to quality lifestyle coverage as well as why he felt it was a big mistake for other papers to cut it:

I think that's a really big danger, that lifestyle — you don't want lifestyle to seem frivolous and say 'Oh, we can do without that.' And I think papers who do that make a big mistake because then your paper just becomes government reporting and cops reporting and I don't think that's a formula to keep readers really. You have to write about what's going on in people's lives. And if that means — it doesn't have to be all frivolous but it should be relevant to their lives — if it's,

you know there's a huge green movement now — 'How do I buy locally produced vegetables, how can I do that, how can I create my own garden, what can I cook?' ... But there are all sorts of things again about how you live your life that if newspapers are getting rid of that sort of coverage, they're going to be troubled down the road, cause I don't think people just want to read about crime and government ... And when we restructured our staff in the spring, our editor Monty Cook made a very conscious effort not to get rid of these things but to place them kind of on the equal footing with the traditional government reporting and crime reporting and schools reporting. To make sure that we did have a healthy balance with what's happening with people in their lives.

## **NEWSROOM MORALE**

Newsroom morale's affect on coverage was also widely discussed. Due to the dire financial straits of newspapers and the often numerous cycles of layoffs many newsrooms underwent during and following the economic collapse, it was suspected that employee malaise could affect coverage. Perhaps employees would be more inclined to cover stories about things that were happening to them, such as job loss and trouble paying bills.

However, no one overtly agreed that this was the case. Gutierrez (*Kansas City Star*) said that although the cycles of layoffs were unbelievably distracting, for the most part, business continued as usual:

I don't think morale affected the types of stories, but — and I wouldn't even say that morale affected the quality of our work because — this sounds stupid, but we're all pretty professional around here. We know how to do the job regardless of what we're feeling. You compartmentalize after a while, you feel like crap because of everything that's going on around you but you still gotta put out a paper, so you learn how to — okay, I'll think about that later, but right now I gotta get this done. So I don't think if you were a reader of the *Kansas City Star*, you would've been able to tell — 'Wow, those people are really feeling like crap, because everybody's getting laid off' — I don't think that would've been reflected in it. But certainly it made our jobs more difficult. When all you want to do is sit around and tear your hair out and go, 'Oh my gosh, what's happening?'

Long (*Detroit News*) said that while the contracting newsroom's impact on morale didn't necessarily affect coverage, it definitely changed what was accomplishable, sometimes negatively:

I'm gonna say what affects coverage is knowing what you can get done and what you can't. It's that 25-inch versus 60-inch thing. In other words, you will not go out and find a really cool story, or if you find a really cool story, you may be actually wary of doing something on it because you know you're gonna butcher it down to some meaningless piece of shit, basically, you know, and so I think that — those of us who try to do that have gotten it stomped on enough, which is virtually everyone at some point. You just go — it's not that you're demoralized but you just go, okay, we're not hitting homers here anymore — we're going for a nice double if we can get one. You know that that will be as good as we can get. Of course the bosses would all faint to hear that but on the other hand, it's true.

Conversely, Long also explained the *News*' "Today's News" feature, which is an in-depth story that runs daily in the paper. Though stories by and large have been shortened, the *Detroit News* reserves space for one longer story each day, which is selected from material among all departments.

Camaraderie, said Hageman, was an unexpected byproduct of the economic collapse's impact on the *Chicago Tribune*:

Among those of us left, there seems to be a — there's so few of us — it's kind of like we're in a small paper back in the day, where we all started out ... Everybody does everything, you know everybody, there's a — doesn't seem to be a lot of ego floating around, people seem to be, maybe it's just like you were in the foxhole for the last two years with these people and you survived. So it kind of brings you together, that's why veterans have conventions, to get back together with the guys they served with in Korea or whatever. But it — there just seems to be a professional effort on everybody's part to get along and do the best job possible. Not that we weren't trying to do that before but now there's this relief that we've survived and then we can make this whatever we want to make of it. And we're making the best of it, I think.



## CONCLUSIONS

This study focused on these research questions:

**\* How and why did economic coverage edge into lifestyle sections of newspapers during and after the economic collapse?**

\* What did lifestyle editors and reporters have to learn in order to adequately cover the impact of the economic collapse on their beat?

\* In what major ways did they see their content change?

\* In what ways did it stay the same?

\* Did covering the economic collapse alter their approach to their beat?

\* If so, how?

\* What did they learn?

\* Will they continue to implement said changes when the economy is no longer depressed but stable or even thriving?

\* Did their ideas of what topics or types of stories their readers would want to see change over the course of 2007 and 2008?

\* If so, how?

\* The economic collapse arguably changed the way people live. Will this be reflected in the lifestyle sections of newspapers?

Though the editors and reporters interviewed sometimes had divergent views, the overall consensus was that economic coverage predominantly edged into lifestyle sections in the form of consumer and service articles, news stories about the economy affecting art institutions or media companies, stories seeking to cover economic trends

from a different angle and features designed to humanize concepts such as bankruptcy and unemployment.

Each type of story edged into the lifestyle pages for a different reason. Consumer stories were run with an aim to help cash-strapped readers save money; news stories about the economy's impact on institutions ran simply because the lifestyle section is typically where news on art institutions runs.

Trend stories seeking to cover economic trends from a different angle crept into the section because editors felt it was important to show the wide swath of the economic collapse's impact and how it impacted areas — such as junkyards during Cash for Clunkers, as Rosenthal (*Baltimore Sun*) mentioned — that people wouldn't initially think of, or would be overlooked in other sections of the paper. "Those sorts of stories," Rosenthal said, "show how economic problems kind of trickle into a lot of the stories that you're going to write."

Humanizing features crept in because editors wanted to put a face on the basic statistics running in the A section or in the business section and show how they were really affecting people's lives. For instance, if a business story reports the foreclosure rate, an accompanying lifestyle story will try to show how it is really affecting people — profiling real estate agents or those who lost their homes, perhaps. Nolan discussed an example of this at the *Kansas City Star*:

One of our hard news people was talking about telling the story of what the real unemployment rate is when you factor in people who have given up looking, underemployed and all that, and they came up with a number, I don't remember what it was. Fifteen percent or something, I'm kind of guessing. And I remember saying, 'But what's the story?' Once you put that number out there, what are you going to do with it? And they just looked at me like, 'It's a story!' I'm like, where are the people, what's the story? ... I want to know what that looks like. And I

think sometimes feature people think about that more. What does this condition look like, not just what's causing it, or what are the effects of it — beyond the statistics. What does it look like for an average family? What's a poor person going through? What are the particular challenges that they're facing now that may be different from another time?

Many of the editors and reporters interviewed said that economic coverage edged into lifestyle sections as a result of efforts to help readers deal with a difficult time — both with service stories and features that highlighted the human side of the recession, such as those about job loss and scaling back budgets.

Overall themes discovered and recurring during content examination and through interviews combine industry struggle realities with the types of economic stories run in the sections and other trends: consumer reports, economic news about art institutions, covering trends from a different angle, humanizing features, fading conspicuous consumption, class differences, cheap entertainment, shrinking newshole, shorter stories and importance of newspaper lifestyle sections.

Using grounded theory, emergent themes are typically grouped together into concepts. This helps to further explain the results. In this case, consumer reports, covering trends from a different angle, cheap entertainment and humanizing features fit together as representing the concept of lighter content — specifically, the use of lighter content to cover a dark subject.

What distinguishes economic coverage in the lifestyle section and economic coverage in the business or front sections is that in the lifestyle section, stories often expose the bright side of a dour situation and cover the uncovered — that being, in this case, trend stories that examine economic scenarios from a nontraditional angle. Lifestyle sections covered the economic crisis by showing the ways a devastating event could be

made livable. This was reflected in interviews; Nolan of the *Kansas City Star* said, “One of the things in lifestyle we try to do is — not to just tell sad story, sad story, sad story. We are always looking for ways to get beyond that, to either give advice, to tell interesting stories. To have fun with some things.”

In this way, lifestyle sections perform an invaluable service to readers, by showing them that it is possible to find hope, or at the very least distraction from dismal news. Editors wisely realized that ignoring the recession wasn't an option — it thrust its way into almost everyone's life, regardless of their previous standing — and worked to find innovative ways to cover this life-changing story.

The significance of this, on a greater scale, is that even as they struggle, newspapers have evolved to serve many needs in readers. Providing hard news is just one of those needs — readers also want advice, information on how others are living, and content that provides hope and is fun to read. However, lifestyle coverage wouldn't be fun if the section was full of stories about things constantly out of reach — hence the decisions by many newspapers to downplay conspicuous consumption.

The themes of fading conspicuous consumption and class differences fit into the concept of readers' economic standing. It is fascinating to examine this concept as editors or reporters at three of the four newspapers said that rather than speak to all classes, they instead strove to hit a middle ground. The exception to this would be the *Baltimore Sun*, where Rosenthal said that efforts were made to cover all classes. However, all the newspapers did address class by downplaying conspicuous consumption and not replacing fashion editors or reporters.

A theme that stands on its own is economic news about art institutions. This theme fits into the concept of practicality, as lifestyle sections are in the habit of reporting about news relating to the arts and the media. If the news happens to be economy-related, it will still be reported in the lifestyle section.

The shrinking newshole, shorter stories and importance of newspaper lifestyle sections fit together as the concept of shifts within the newsroom. If the themes in ‘lighter content’ altered the landscape of lifestyle sections from the inside, newsroom shifts served as external forces, changing content by virtue of necessity.

The many themes discovered during research can be boiled down to four major concepts — shifts within the newsroom, practicality, readers' economic standing and lighthearted content. Each of these concepts show different ways the economic collapse has impacted the lifestyle sections of newspapers.

Practicality — the concept that the section reported on the same things it normally would, but that these things happened to be touched by the economy — shows more than anything else the wide reach of the economic collapse. So too, do shifts within the newsroom, which also impacted the lifestyle section at newspapers in a major way, and much more than it was originally expected.

And while lighter content definitely represents efforts by the section to show how a devastating event can be made livable, and to offer hope, there are other factors responsible for feature content making light of topics discussed more grimly in other sections of the paper.

As discussed with editors and reporters, the shrinking newshole impacted the lifestyle section in that stories became shorter and feature content was often exported to

other sections of the paper, such as the front section or the business section. When this happened, Rosenthal said, the story would be tweaked to fit the particulars of its new section. In this way, perhaps these sections — the front section, business and metro — are seeing a bleeding-in of lifestyle coverage as the lifestyle section sees an edging-in of economic coverage.

But reason stands to suggest that meaty, in-depth and more serious stories were probably more likely to be exported from features to the front section or to the business section. In this way, one consequence of the economic collapse is that lifestyle sections might have become even more the domain for lighthearted and uplifting stories than they were before.

Because lifestyle is where stories about people's lives and the way people live usually run, the economic standing of readers plays a significant role in dictating content — though not as much as originally expected. Though efforts were made at most papers to tone down conspicuous consumption, most examined did not make efforts to reach out to the differing struggles faced by the different classes. This was surprising both because the economic collapse pushed many into a lower economic class than they had previously been in and because the various classes were affected differently by the crisis — for instance, many in the middle classes grappled with the loss of their savings and their retirement funds as the stock market plummeted, while unemployment was a more serious problem for many members of the working class.

The fact that lifestyle sections chose to predominantly cover the economic crisis through stories that offered hope and distraction says that editors by and large perceived the need for offering a contrast to what was presented in the other sections of the paper,

and felt these types of stories would help people. Goidel and Langley found that the media over-reports negative economic news — the uplifting stories in the lifestyle section might be a reaction to excessive reporting of dire financial news.<sup>61</sup> Parker and Snow found that the media also tends to over generalize economic activity and to exaggerate its relevance.<sup>62</sup> The lifestyle section's answer to this might be stories that acknowledge the economic news on the front page, but seek to mitigate it by providing stories that let readers know how other people are dealing with economic problems and how it is possible to survive and even thrive during economic strife. Again, this also suggests that there is a need for multifaceted coverage of major events in society, and that successful lifestyle sections should address dismal events rather than ignoring them or offering an escape from them.

However, it was surprising to see that the lifestyle sections examined for this study tended not to address the needs of different classes, and also surprising to discover that service and consumer reporting featured so prominently, both in content and in interviews, when editors and reporters discussed the types of stories they were running. It was expected that trend stories and humanizing features would play bigger roles in providing lifestyle economic coverage that readers both related to and wanted to see, and while some editors and reporters found them to be very important, both in content examination and in interviews they were not as prominently featured as originally expected. For instance, Long mentioned that profiles practically vanished from the *Detroit News* — perhaps this contributed to the increase in service articles and consumer

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<sup>61</sup> Robert K. Goidel and Ronald E. Langley, "Media Coverage of the Economy and Aggregate Economic Evaluations: Uncovering Evidence of Indirect Media Effects."

<sup>62</sup> Robert Parker and David A. Snow, "The Media and the Market."

reporting in the features section, as they are easier to write shorter than a profile or in-depth investigative report.

The use of grounded theory has impacted this study greatly. Most of the questions editors and reporters were asked were generated by examining content or noticing what early interviewees felt was important to discuss. If the questions were, instead, generated before beginning research, the most important topics, themes and issues discussed with editors and reporters might only have received a cursory mention during one or two interviews. Some examples of these themes are class differences — this topic first emerged while researching the *Detroit News*' content — and consumer reporting, also a theme first noticed while examining the *Detroit News*' content.

The concepts and themes discussed above, which are the product of a study employing grounded theory, also relate to Gans' news values of responsible capitalism and altruistic democracy. Although many of the economy-related lifestyle stories highlighted were more lighthearted, they were about the way people dealt with money, they uncovered economic trends and they showed how readers could stretch their money and find ways to save.

In the front and business sections of the newspaper during the crisis, news about government bailouts, irresponsible lending — both by corporations and the government — and a portrait of society paying for its past excesses dominated the pages. These values — promotion of responsible lending and living within one's means — were echoed in lifestyle sections' stories that sought to inform people how to operate with less money and how previously-unaffected entities, such as junkyards, were dealing in the wake of the economic collapse.



In addition, one component of responsible capitalism, Gans argues, is that the news media tend to frown on the undeserving poor: “It is now accepted that the government must help the poor, but only the deserving poor, for “welfare cheaters” are a continuing menace and are more newsworthy than people, other than the very rich, who cheat on their taxes.”<sup>63</sup> The tendency of lifestyle sections, and newspapers in general, to strive to reach a “middle” demographic class-wise, even during an economic crisis, speaks to this to some degree.

This study has explored lifestyle journalism at newspapers before, during and after the economic collapse. However, it cannot answer the research questions completely for several reasons. The sample size is too small — only four newspapers were examined and only eight people were interviewed. For this study to be truly representative across the nation, a larger sample size of both newspapers and interviewees would be required. Second, three of the newspapers in the study are located in the Midwest and one is located on the East Coast. A more representative study would also examine newspapers in the country’s western and southern states. Due to time and budget constraints, however, a study of these proportions was not possible.

As previously mentioned, news values in the lifestyle section, from the constructed weeks examination to interviews with editors and reporters, did seem to edge towards responsible capitalism in some ways. However, it would be interesting to examine news values in the business sections of newspapers; this would be a good opportunity for a future study.

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<sup>63</sup> Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What’s News: A study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*, 47.

Other possibilities for further research include a study of how economic coverage crept into other sections of the newspaper, such as metro and the front section. In addition, as lifestyle sections shrank during the past year and it became more common to place features on the newspaper's front page or in its metro section, a study of how feature content migrated into other sections or impacted other sections would also be interesting. Another good study would examine how economic coverage crept into lifestyle sections from a quantitative perspective, by textual analysis, using a greater sample size.

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## APPENDIX 1

**Rita Holt, Deputy Features Editor, *Detroit News***

*You edit food, is there another section that you edit as well?*

Well I'm the deputy features editor so I'm involved in all of the sections basically, except for the specialty entertainment sections — movies and entertainment — and the Homestyle. But the daily features section, I'm very involved with planning stories for those sections.

*And did you start here in lifestyle or you started in a different —*

I started on the main copy desk. Worked there for three years doing a variety of jobs, came to features when they decided to have a full time copy editor in features, worked on the Sunday magazine for a while, when we still had one, and then just stayed in features, became the copy desk chief in features, and then moved up in the editing ranks.

*Do you think economic coverage did edge into lifestyle sections — into the features section, into Homestyles — during and after the economic collapse? Or do you think rather that feature topics were picking up an economic bent?*

I think that there's certainly a recognition now that we need to pay more attention to what's going on in the economy and to help people cope as much as we can. So I don't know that we changed — I forget how you phrased that question — I don't know that we changed but we —

*Or that coverage of the economy edged into the sections.*

Yeah, sure. Because that's a big part of people's lives with what's happening in the auto industry with people losing their jobs, we are trying to be aware of that and offer stories that will help people. One of the things — I just brought this in for you — this isn't lifestyle but it runs in every Monday. It's produced by one of the business editors but it's a personal finance page, Your Money. And if you look at the content, this one, 'Cut down the cost of splitting up.'

*Is this about divorce?*

Divorce, yeah. If you're going to have to divorce, how to save money. There's one along the bottom on —

*Food.*

On your food costs.

*And this is about, four ways to feel good in a bad economy.*

So this is a big effort on this page, it runs every Monday.

*On the metro page?*

It's actually, it's part of our Monday paper, and it's produced by the business department, in particular Brian O'Connor, but that's an example and we've — you know this page had gone away for a while but we brought it back on purpose because of what's going on in the economy and certainly, and the food section that I edit, I look for stories on saving money shopping, similar to what he put together, saving money, budget meals, you know, again I don't run something like that every week but our food writer Kate Lawson has addressed this several times over the last six months, and I look for those stories to run. and then just general lifestyle, some general examples, and maybe you were going to ask some of this stuff later but, for instance right now we don't really have a reporter covering fashion and shopping anymore, she left the paper about a year, year and a half ago, and so most of our coverage is from the wires now, and I don't really see a need, in view of the economy here, to talk about high fashion, and things that cost thousands of dollars.

*That's really interesting*

You know, maybe there are other papers still paying attention to it but trends —

*That was one thing I wondered about, if there would be less coverage of high fashion and consumption of celebrities, like expensive cars, stuff like that.*

Well, celebrity news we still cover. But anyway, the high-end fashion when I'm looking for stories, I just look for trend stories, like wide-leg jeans are in, or straight jeans are in, or whatever. Just general overall trend stories.

*Rather than something about —*

I don't really care what expensive designers are doing particularly. I mean I don't know that our readers are interested in that right now. One other thing we did do, too, as Michelle Obama planted a garden, and we figured there might be more people around here interested in doing that this year, so in the Homestyles section we did a story on how you can plant Michelle's garden and we're gonna follow that and our food writer is gonna offer recipes using food growing in the garden. Every few weeks I think they have planned. So I think that's something we probably would not have done, except for the economy.

*Cause it's something that people can do without spending money.*

People can do that and save money by growing their own food.

*As an editor, did you find that you had to watch business news and financial news more closely than you did before, in order to see if changes in those areas would affect the type of stories that would be relevant to your readers?*

Well, I go to the daily news meetings where every department talks about the stories they're writing, so I'm pretty up to date on what's going on. So as far as actually reading all these stories I wouldn't say I'm reading them but I'm certainly paying attention to what's going on and I know what's going on.

*Do you think more than before, or the same?*

Probably more than before. Especially again with what's happening in Michigan, with the car companies. It's affecting an awful lot of people.

*You kind of talked about this a lot, about — I was going to ask how content in features has changed following the economic collapse, but you mentioned Michelle Obama's garden and that the fashion editor has left and you won't replace her or cover high fashion.*

Yeah, she's not being replaced, and when we look — this is maybe me, but I'm the one that chooses these stories so. I'm just not that interested in couture now and I don't think our readers are. We have a feature that we've been running for awhile, now this predates the problem, called Last Day Deal. And it's just a little feature on — it used to run on Saturdays, 'Today's the last day that you can buy such and such that's on sale at Target or wherever' you know just pick out something on sale and tell people about it. We've been running that for awhile now, for at least two years I'd say, but we're still doing it.

*Do you run it more often now, or the same?*

One day a week. (same)

*Can you tell me how your content has stayed the same?*

Well, in the food section, for instance, we figure people still want recipes, people still are interested in some of the regular features we have, we haven't abandoned them, for instance, we still have a cooking for kids column, we still have our taste panel, and the taste panel is a reader panel, where there are eight panelists — readers — who meet every other month and test food products. We still do that.

*Are they the same people every time?*

We've had this panel for eleven years, and they've changed a little. I think there are two who —

*And they're not reporters?*

No, they're just people from the community, we still write about major holidays, I would say our food coverage for instance, has stayed the same, it's just that we look to add some content on saving money on your grocery bill or cooking economically. More so than we would have before.

*And do you cover restaurants?*

We do cover them. That's in our entertainment area, and I don't know that she looks for — are you thinking maybe she doesn't cover high-end restaurants? I don't know that that's the case there. I think that's stayed the same. General features, I don't see a big change there. You know we do not really do a lot of consumer reporting per se, that's done a lot in our business dept, so I don't see a big change, I think it's in some of our specialty sections that we're more cognizant of, you know, food and home style, for instance.

*Do you mean, more of a change in Food and Homestyle than in features?*

Yeah I don't — if we see a story, I don't know what an example would be, you know, we wouldn't do how to save money on your medical costs for instance, because that just wouldn't be a story we would do so I don't think it's changed a whole lot in our area.

*But a little?*

Just a little. If we come across stories that would be helpful to people. But again that isn't primarily what we do in features.

*Okay. You mean less service and more news?*

We're more of a news-driven lifestyle section. We cover — Detroit has a lot of entertainers here, and a lot of entertainment news, and big museums, and things and a lot of our focus is covering what's going on in these areas so in fact the majority of our reporters are entertainment-oriented reporters. So we do have a health reporter but again I can't say that — she doesn't concentrate on lowering costs in any way, her coverage is informing people about —

*Did awareness of the economic collapse affect your approach to your beat and if so how?*

I probably answered that, because I've mentioned fashion coverage, I've mentioned the food section. You know we did run a story two to three months ago, a lot of the venues



around town were having trouble selling tickets, so we wrote a story telling people that they could get special deals for concerts and stuff.

*I saw something, it looked like more of a profile of someone who worked in the theater industry, about how the theater — theaters in Detroit were having trouble selling tickets.*

That's of course covering the news. It's a news story. But it occurred because of the economy. But there was a period there where the different venues were reducing tickets, prices, so we made sure we had an item in the paper letting people know that.

*Do you think you would continue to keep the changes that you've made when the economy gets better or — or would you reconsider, like with the high fashion and saving money.*

That's an interesting question. Yeah, we might reconsider.

*I kind of wonder because a lot of media say this is a sign that our society will change, because we've previously been more materialistic and stuff, so I wondered about that.*

Yeah, the high end fashion, I don't know that there are that many people interested in it anymore. I think the more valuable stories for people are trend stories anyway. You know the runway, we just — there was awhile, a few years ago, we used to write stories from the runway, in New York, or whatever, I don't see any point in that now. Why not wait and run a wrap-up trend story?

*What regular people are wearing?*

Not even that, you know the biggest trends from New York, the biggest trends from Paris. You know just give people an idea like that so, and I don't see that changing. And the other thing, the other impact here that's worth mentioning is that the newshole is shrinking on papers around the country.

*You mean the amount of pages?*

The amount of editorial space you got in your print product. Papers are cutting back the size of their papers.

*How has that affected —*

Well, so you don't have the room. You have to choose very carefully what you're going to run. And you have to weigh how much interest there would be in a particular story. To run runway stories, for instance, from Paris or Milan, I don't think there'd be that much interest to waste valuable news space on a story like that. So that's part of what's going on in the newspaper industry. And that's of course also an outgrowth of the economic

problems newspapers are having around the country. So I don't see us ever going back to the days where we have huge newspapers.

*What about — do you run more stories online that you wouldn't see, to make up for that deficit?*

Not necessarily. Sometimes, I guess, or we'll run sidebars or something that there's not room for in the paper, we'll put online, for instance. I don't know the percentage, how frequently we do that, but that is an option now of course.

*What has covering features during an economic collapse and recession taught you about reporting or finance or anything else? Do you think it's taught you something?*

No. No, I don't think it's taught me anything, it's just something that we're more aware of and look for stories that will help people. If it's teaching you anything, it's teaching you that you have to be flexible in this business, you have to pay attention to what's going on in people's lives.

*Did you work here when — there was a recession in 2001, right?*

Okay, I don't know that we did anything in particular.

*It wasn't really very extreme.*

I don't recall it so it's certainly not like now.

*Do you think your ideas of topics or type of stories readers would want to see, did it change from April 2008 to April 2009 or from then until now?*

I'd say that I've probably talked about that so.

*And then I had some questions about editor letters and reader comments. Have you seen a change in those?*

Letters to the editor?

*Letters to the editor and reader comments online*

I don't pay a whole lot of attention to that, so I can't answer that. You'd have to talk to our opinion page editor, I think.

*You mentioned — I had some questions about the newshole, shrinking newshole, and you mentioned about that. Do you think at newspapers, changing employee morale affects coverage? In specific, coverage of lifestyle? If there are impending layoffs and people are worried about that?*

Affects coverage how?

*I guess the type of stories that would be chosen.*

No, I don't see that. I think when people are nervous, though, it's sometimes hard to concentrate.

*What I was thinking is, maybe if people are worried about that, then they're thinking about the economy more and maybe that comes into the coverage.*

I see. I haven't noticed that particularly, but I'm sure it would affect their story selection. Although again, an awful lot of our staff here are entertainment-oriented reporters so. But you know, even as editors we talk about how giving people information to help them is always a good idea, so I think we're all on the lookout for those types of stories.

*Stories that will help people?*

Yeah.

*How do you think lifestyle journalism at this paper compares to coverage in other cities?*

Well, I don't get to see a lot of newspapers, so I'm not sure I can answer that. I mean, I see the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* and they all have more space than we have so. The one thing I — and space, when you have a smaller newshole, again you, my view, you want to offer readers as much as you can. So — and I'm amazed sometimes when I see how long stories are in some of these newspapers. Things that come over the wire, you know, that the *Los Angeles Times* has run or the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*, you know they go on and on and on and I'm thinking, this would fill up a page of my food section, for instance. So it, to me, almost seems like some of these papers have not been impacted yet by the economic changes going on around them.

*Or they haven't really changed much?*

They haven't changed much in my view.

*Then I had some specific questions about what I saw when I looked through the archives. I saw about eight to ten stories that — of course it's my own judgment but stories that I thought were economy-related in the archives that I looked at and they seemed to be divided about equally into a story with a theme 'The economy's effect on X', the economy's effect on theatre ticket sales, there were several about layoffs at different organizations, a TV station, a radio station, stuff like that, and then the other type of story was, 'How you can save money on something'. So I wonder, if it was a conscious decision to have these two types of stories equally or if that's just how it worked out?*

Well the first group you mention, that's reporting on the news. If a TV station lays off people, if the Detroit Institute of Arts lays off people, and a lot of that has been going on in the last six months, the arts organizations are hurting in this area, and media too, so there have been layoffs, that's reporting the news, that's something you do, that's not a conscious decision, you're going to run those stories, that's just something you do. And then the other stories are, as I said, stories that you pay more attention to and look to run with the economic problems in this area. So in other words, the first group of stories we'd run anyway. Even two years ago, if a radio station or the Art Institute laid off 10 people, we would run that story, because that's a news story. It's not a story we only run because the economy's bad.

*Do you think it's run with more prominence now, or it might be run instead of something else?*

Perhaps, if it's part of a larger picture, where the DIA is laying off X number, the music hall is laying off so many, the historical museum decides to lay off a person and all of a sudden it's a big trend and pattern and very reflective of what's going on, then yeah, it might get better play I guess is what you're asking.

*Yeah. Which type of article do you think your readers are more interested in?*

Of the two you just said? Probably the consumer articles. How to cope, how to save money, but yet the other articles are a reflection of the economy in general in this area and perhaps might impact for instance, there was a time — maybe this was around 2001, I don't know — when the art institute was, shortened its hours because they didn't want to — didn't have the money to stay open as long and they laid off, as I recall, some security guards and shortened hours. Well, that story would impact readers who might want to visit the Art Institute so, you know, its hard to say I guess.

*Do you think people are more interested in stories that have a direct impact on them?*

Yeah.

*That makes sense. And then, one article stuck out to me that I read, and I can show it to you. I'm not sure if you had seen it. It was sort of a personal account of dealing with the recession during the holidays. She's talking about her own experience, and some of the things she wrote, I thought she must be a member of the middle class and for people in a lower class it's very different. So I wondered about your intended audience and if you — how you dealt with, everyone is struggling but the struggles are very different depending on where people are within the societal class structure.*

Alright, well Marnie Rich Keenan is one of our lifestyle columnists, so this is a column, and she writes about her family a lot, that is the main focus of her columns, they run twice a week, this one ran at midweek, she writes from her family perspective, I think

readers know that she's an employee of the newspaper, so is probably at a certain economic level, because she works for a newspaper. So, so I guess, what are you asking then? If you thought that this column would have relevance to everyone?

*Well I just, after I read that column I thought about how you dealt with addressing economic difficulties within different classes.*

I don't know that we do. I guess you know, Marnie writes from her perspective, and she's over the years written — she has three daughters — writes about different things going on in their lives. They're older now and one's in college, one's about to go to college. So anyway, I think as a columnist she can write her own viewpoint on this so. Anyway this is not a news story, I don't know if you recognized this as a column, when you read it.

*It was hard looking at — I wanted to get the microfilm, that's what I was able to get for the Chicago Tribune, so I could see how things were laid out and what got prominence but I had trouble getting the archives of the Detroit News. My aunt works at a library in Belleville and she had a password to some library database so I was able to get the articles but I couldn't see where they were on the page.*

So that probably ran, most likely ran on this page with her photo signature.

*That pretty much wraps up what questions I had, is there anything else you'd like to say about lifestyle coverage during a recession or, how it affected you, covering that during a recession, how ...*

I think I've answered all that, don't you?

*Yeah.*

**Tom Long, Film Critic, *Detroit News***

*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Your background, in journalism?*

Well, I never studied journalism. I didn't get a job until I was 35, I think, my first job, I started at a paper in Santa Cruz, California, went from being a clerk to being a general assignment reporter, did pretty much every job in the place.

*Wow.*

Became the entertainment editor, then became the lifestyles editor, all the time I was a columnist too, and then this place recruited me about 12-13 years ago something like that. And I'd never been in the Midwest in my life and I came here and since I've been here — I came here as the pop music critic, within three months I was just a columnist and I was also the TV critic and I've been the film critic for seven years now.

*Congratulations.*

So I've done just about everything you can do at a newspaper, and certainly everything you can do in a lifestyles section. I don't think there's a — I've been a GA, I've been the Editor-in-chief, I've been — I've just done everything.

*That's awesome, do you like it here in Detroit? You're from California?*

Yeah, um do I like it? I like it where I live, in Ann Arbor. I live in the country, sort of.

*My dad's from there, I went to a wedding there on Saturday.*

Where, in Ann arbor?

*Yeah, they both went to U of M so they got married in the Union.*

Yeah.

*Michigan Union, and then they had their reception at Cobblestone Farm.*

I don't know where that is but yeah ... anyway, I like it out there and I like — Detroit's a great news town so I mean it's where, news and all that it's a mess, so it's good for stories.

*Well, I have some more general questions about lifestyle and in general at newspapers, and then some more specific ones about here in Detroit. Do you think economic coverage has edged into lifestyle sections of newspapers during and after the economic collapse?*

Sure, obviously. How to pinch pennies, stories like that, things like that obviously, down on their luck people, so yeah.

*Anything else.*

Well it doesn't affect what I do a whole lot but of course it has, sure. We'll have — the entertainment section they'll do five things you could do for free, you know on a weekend.

*I've seen a lot of those, I looked through the archives before I came here.*

Yeah, that kind of stuff is happening a lot. I'm sure it's happening everywhere.

*And do you think that, in addition to coverage edging into the section, topics that are traditionally reserved for lifestyle sections are suddenly picking up an economic bent? You mentioned some of those, just more stories about things you can do for free and saving money but —*

And hard luck stories, I guess, that you're going to see a lot more of. You're going to see a lot more hard luck stories you know or — I'm trying to think if I've actually seen these stories. I would think that you'd find more miracle stories, 'Ah, this guy was down and out but boom! Look, now he's got himself a job somewhere and everything's straightened out!'

*We did — it's my school paper, but we cover the community, and we did five people who lost their jobs and what happened to them, and one person was able to get a better, more suitable job for her.*

Now with everything lifestyle, that could just as well play on the front page, you know a lot of lifestyle stuff has been blending in with just regular news report stuff over the last decade.

*Do you have stuff that, you write it as a feature and it gets picked up for the front page?*

Absolutely, lots. Not me, I mean me too, but mostly the other people. Yeah, that's common.

*Then, as a reporter, did you have to cover or not cover but follow business and financial news more closely than you did before, during this, in order to think about how it would change?*

Well, realize I'm the film critic, so I'm hardly out there doing the normal GA-type reporting. On the other hand, because Michigan is in such crappy financial shape, and a few years — a year and three months ago, they've passed a thing here called the film incentive bill, which is an incentive for Hollywood producers to come make movies here.

And because that stimulates jobs, for the last year it's been the biggest pain in the ass in my life, is writing all these stories about, how Hollywood is coming to Michigan when it's not in any particular way, but you know, when the stories go wrong or when they're reported wrong, hopefully not by me, they become very much rah rah, things are — happy days are here, Hollywood's going to save us stories which we've had way too many of, to be honest, our opposing paper's gone even sillier with it. They've had way too many of them — but those are all driven by sort of the economic freakiness of the current world. So the fact that someone might be bringing jobs, especially sexy jobs like movie jobs — the papers have gone nuts over them.

*And you said you don't write those stories.*

Well I try not to write the rah rah stupid ones. In other words, there's two ways of approaching this. You can either go, 'Yeah it's happening, man, millions of jobs are coming. This is incredible, yay,' or you can say, 'No, it's projected to be about 2000 jobs over the next five years. It's not really gonna have much of an impact.' It's sort of like you know, a new chain of delis is opening here, it's not that big a deal, I've been trying to do it that way, but either way the interest, and I've had two or three front page stories on this stuff, the interest is certainly driven by the economic times, so suddenly something that would've been of interest is of higher interest because of that — does that make sense?

*And personally in what ways have you noticed — you've talked about it a little bit but — how content has changed in lifestyle sections?*

You have to understand, Michigan's been messed up for a really long time, so it hasn't changed that much here. In other words, the economy became a wreck across the nation in 2008. The economy's been a wreck here since 2000.

*Since 2000?*

Yeah, everything's been messed up here. The car companies have been slowly dive-bombing for years now, so we — and plus this is Detroit, it's one of the most impoverished areas in the world, you know. Well not the world but certainly the United States — so these sort of economically-driven lifestyle stories you're talking about that have probably been popping up elsewhere have been a steady part of the diet here for years.

*You mostly do film, but occasionally —*

That's what I do.

*Okay, and specifically reviews?*

Film critic.



*Do you ever write trend stories about —*

Yes.

*Cause I know there was a big — we did several stories about more people going to the movies even though it's expensive to go to the movies, because it's a recession.*

I do big stories on the impact of popular culture and — yes, and on economic impact.

*So did you write some of those stories?*

Well I've written — last year I wrote stories about — sorry, I write hundreds of stories a year — last year's big one was on how new technology is going to drive whether theaters survive as community hubs and survive in the world of video games and television and all that because, you know, you can rent a movie for a lot cheaper than you can go to the movies. But a movie is something to go to, still a community gathering place, it's almost like church, you know it's one of the few things where people gather, you know, there's sports, there's church and there's movies, pretty much.

*Yeah.*

So I wrote about how 3D and HD and all these technological improvements and also subject matter improvements. You can now go to movies and see an opera broadcast from New York. In other words, it's not just limited to movies, sporting events. I've written about that, I've written about how movies remain a, comparatively, like going to a sporting event or going to a music concert, remain an extremely economical option for something to do to go out. I've written about that, that's about it.

*So would you say, I guess — Michigan has been economically struggling for a long time, but do you think your approach to your beat has changed because of economic conditions?*

No, sorry, just because money and that whole question of technology and what we're going to do for entertainment and how entertainment has changed, that's been the story just about since I started writing about these things, you know, in 1985. Because technology has changed so much. Because it's an ongoing story, it's an ongoing part of what I've been doing for the last 20-some years. So it just rolls right along with it. The money and the affordability and the reason for there even being movies anymore, that has been the ongoing story that I've been covering, so the economic plight or the economics of the situation are part of the ongoing story, you know, and so it really hasn't changed in terms of 'Wow, now it's really important.' No, it's been pretty important for the whole time.

*Do you think your ideas of what types of stories your readers would want to see has changed at all?*

No, sorry, wish I could tell you different. Again I think you're really in a weird situation dealing with Michigan here, this would be different than Chicago or the other places.

*That's why I wanted to —*

The depression didn't just hit Michigan, the depression has been Michigan for, you know, most of this century. When I said 2000, maybe it wasn't 2000, maybe it was 2002, but economically here has been for a long time and no matter what, it's Detroit. And that's been bad for decades, so money and economy and all that has always been a big topic here. Ever since I got here.

*I thought it — I looked at the archives of the Chicago Tribune and they introduced a new section, which was more like — a lifestyle section but also about living more simply, which they didn't have before.*

Our business section has a lot of stories like that, you know, how to not go bankrupt, how to save your money. I think we even had one today.

*I have — Rita gave me this one, something like this?*

Yeah, that's the business section. And in many places, that could run in the lifestyle section, especially the one on the bottom there, that could run in the lifestyle section just as easily, you know. [story was about cutting food costs]

*Do you look at reader comments and letters to the editor about, that regard your lifestyle stories at all?*

Sure, I get quite a few myself. What's the question?

*My first question is have they changed, and my second question is have they increased, have they decreased with an economic recession?*

The answer to the first one is no. I get a lot of response, I'm the movie critic, I get mainly 'You're a freaking idiot,' you know, or 'thank you very much,' mostly 'you're a freaking idiot,' and that's just the nature of the game. You know that's just how it is so. I get just as many you're a freaking idiots as before.

*Have you seen increased or decreased feedback?*

About the same, I get a lot of feedback compared to most. I mean it just comes with the job.

*Have you seen any letters or comments relating to lifestyle and money or the economy that stuck out to you?*

No.

*How much attention do you pay to reader feedback?*

Well, in terms of what I do, almost none. In terms of — you gotta understand, it's mainly people just plain out disagreeing with me. I either can sit there and go 'Yeah, I'm really bitchin' cause this guy says I'm bitchin'' or I can go 'Oh, I'm a complete fool cause this guy says I'm a fool.' I can't pay much attention to either of them. I like it that people are reading, that's what I always send back, but in terms of story selection or anything like that, no, there's certain things I'm going to write about, many of the things I write about readers really don't give a damn. You know, most of the trend stuff, it'll run on the front page with giant headlines and I'll get almost no reaction. I review transformers and I'll get a hundred letters. I can't let that shape — I do let it to an extent, I realize the main job I should do is to review movies cause that's what people seem to like to read, you know. When I go off into more esoteric sociological things they're just not as interested you know. But it's still important to do the sociological things and all.

*Which one would you rather do?*

I like doing both. Personally, but I'm just way aware that, first off you've got to draw readers if you're a newspaper. And people just far prefer reading the reviews. They could care less about — when I'm talking about how technology's driving the change in what movies mean to societies as a whole and all that, it's all very interesting to some people. But mostly people just want to either read a funny review about *Transformers* or argue with me, that kind of thing, and that's fine, that's the function I serve.

*Do you think reader comments have ever driven content change?*

I hope so. You mean to me, or overall?

*Both, I guess.*

I would hope so. I would hope that we would listen to readers, on the other hand I have to point out, only a — it's the same problem with focus groups. Only a certain kind of person has a life so empty that they'll really take time to write a letter to a newspaper. And just like only a certain kind of person is such a loser that they'll be in a focus group for no money or anything and give you their opinions, they're usually retired, old, bored, that kind of thing, so you can't take those things and go, yeah, this is what people are thinking cause it's not — it's what that kind of person's thinking — the kind of person, the very rare kind of person who would write a letter to a newspaper, that's something I learned long ago, or decided long ago, is that it reflects something, but it does not accurately reflect the readership. If you start going with that stuff, you're kidding

yourself. You're just kidding yourself. Just like the kind of person who will take the time — I've never in my life taken the time to write somebody and say, you idiot — I got too much to do, life's too short, there's plenty of fun stuff to do, why would I do that? So the person who does do that, right away it tells me, it doesn't make them wrong but it makes me wonder, couldn't they find anything better to do with their time? And I don't think they do so that's where reader comments come in. I think they should have some effect, I think we should listen to them, but they have to be taken in that context.

*With a grain of salt.*

Yeah.

*I talked to Rita about the shrinking newshole. How do you think this has affected lifestyle coverage here, at your paper?*

Oh hugely, there are so many things that affect it — can I just wander off on what things have affected it?

*Please.*

First off the shrinking newshole, overall at the newspaper — overall is probably what I think you're initially referring to and yeah, it ends up lifestyle is like the first place they turn to to gut. Because most guys who run newspapers are hard news oriented people, simple as that. It's the very very rare newspaper that's gonna have the lifestyle editor who became the editor and publisher. They're almost all guys who worked their way up through the city desk.

*But why?*

Why. Oh god knows. God knows and I think it's a terrible mistake myself, but that's just the reality of it. They're almost all — now there are exceptions — although I can't come up with an exception of a lifestyle person who became the editor of a newspaper. I'm sure that exists but I've never seen it or even heard of somebody who works for someone like that. So there's the hard news bias that we've got to cover the water board, you know type bias and that's more important than celebrity news or features or any of that so whenever. And then, next comes the fact that everybody knows that sports makes more money for the paper than anyplace else, so that's the last place they're going to cut. Business around here at this paper is a very high priority, we have a very good business section, and it has been traditionally that this is a conservative newspaper, how I got here I'll never know, but it's a conservative newspaper which means it tends towards the business community so business isn't gonna get gutted, so who are you gutting? Features. When I first came here this was a seven-day-a-week newspaper with a very healthy features section. Now I, to be honest I don't even pay attention that much. My section's still autonomous so I'm sort of in a different boat than most people. But I don't believe on Monday we hardly have a features section. On Tuesday it's barely there. By

Wednesday we get a little bit of one but it's inside — Thursday we have an entertainment tab that, obviously that's one thing I'm involved in and then Friday I have a films section cover. So they've kept up and I'm not sure this is, yeah I think this is the standard pretty much everywhere, they've kept up the entertainment stuff, entertainment is again also sort of a moneymaker but the general lifestyles stuff? That'll be your first to go. I could say I'm not exactly adverse to it. In other words if something is gonna go, that's probably where it should go. Why? Because a lot of the lifestyle stuff could be integrated into the other sections. Just like that story there could pass as a lifestyle story, business will quite often run things that are features, like we have a, the paper has a daily thing called 'Today's Focus,' which runs in the A section, which is almost always an in depth thing, and it can be very easily, it often is a feature story that gets stolen and put there instead. So those stories, those traditionally lifestyle stories could easily migrate to other sections. The features section itself doesn't have to be quite as big. Entertainment's harder to do that with, and specialty niches, such as like food, you're not going to put the food section in the A section so you'll keep the food section I'm sure. On the West Coast gardening sections still are strong and that's a strong moneymaker too on a year-round basis. Remember, I used to be a features editor on the West Coast so, whereas here gardening hardly exists because it's such a transitory thing but on the West Coast you garden year round. It's a constant thing to write about, so — What did we start with? You asked me why features sections were the first to get gutted, and that's why, because their content can be put elsewhere, in other places.

*So does that mean that, as the newshole shrinks, more lifestyle stories get integrated with other sections?*

Or they just disappear.

*And if they do get integrated into another section, do you think they pick up a different angle or bent than they would otherwise have?*

Sure. If you're gonna be in the A section, you're probably going to end up with a more newsy approach and probably end up being written in past tense rather than present, that kind of thing. If it goes into business, yeah, it'll have a business bent, sure, it changes it, as a guy who wants the paper to continue going though, I also see it as the thing that can be changed most easily, or integrated out. Entertainment can't, they're separate entities there. Entertainment and the niche, things like food, garden, that kind of stuff, that pretty much has to, they have to stay on their own.

*My hometown is Chicago. I don't live there anymore, but I know that they introduced fairly recently, in the front section they have a little, I don't know what its called, people and places maybe, where they do have a little of celebrity stuff and it's in the A section.*

Our page two. That's really kind of classic. That's a page two or a page three — usually a page three is an ad — because it's a facing page, that's what they want. But page two, this goes back decades really, and it comes and goes in terms of whether people think its

hip or not, but if you find our page two right now we have a celebrities column there, we have a columnist — as a matter of fact, the features columnists these have migrated to page two. And to give you an example — Neil Rubin, who's our features columnist, started out as a page two columnist, got hired to write there then. Things changed, ended up in features, now things changed again, he's back on page two, and that's kind of been how I've seen it go over the past 20 years. Sometimes everybody's doing a page two, that is these bright kind of features and things. Yeah, page two is almost completely written by the features section at this point. So it's in again, in five years it'll be gone again, and then in five more years it'll be back again.

*And then, do you think just in general the struggle of newspapers — beyond the shrinking newshole, do you think it has affected the lifestyle section in other ways?*

Well sure, better you know, what do you mean? In content or just in potential for content? You're not gonna read a 60-inch story in the *Detroit News* features section. Ever. Ten years ago, you would've. Quite easily, you would've. These days, a story, a lead story could be 20 inches long. Could be 18 inches long. A lede used to be 40 inches, 45 inches.

*So you think stories have shrunk?*

Of course they have. That's the great frustration of — depth has almost disappeared, you know, you're much better off tackling a story that's really almost a piece of garbage or that's really superficial and doesn't have that much to it or isn't opening that many — like right now I'm working on an essay thing that's going to be impossible to get into 25 inches but it — I would've had 50 inches easily to work with, now I'll be lucky if I get the 25. That's just a fact of life, that's happened with news stories as well, but it's happened with — features used to be where you got to go long, it's where you used to go hit the long ball, that's why a lot of people who were in features got into features because you could go in depth.

*Depth and analysis.*

Yeah. Now it's pretty rare, it's pretty rare. And I'm not just talking — like a profile, a really good profile, you used to be able to go 60 inches on a great profile. Now nobody even does profiles as a result cause you know you can have 20 inches. You can't get a guy's life into 20 inches.

*Do people ever, I know sometimes where I work, we sometimes have the shorter version in the magazine and then longer online?*

Yeah, sometimes, but there's something of a frustration factor in that.

*Because it won't be seen by as many people?*

Exactly. And you're publishing basically an aborted piece. A thing that is only half as long as it should be, so it's sort of better to try to make a good 25-inch piece and just get it right, or as right as it could be. And also, then you also end up doing twice as much work if you're writing it twice, so anyway. That can go on, that does go on. I don't do it, well like movie reviews, a movie review used to be 15 inches, for a standard, just your regular movie review, say my long movie review a week would be 25 inches, now my long movie review's 15 inches and my standard's eight inches so right there ...

*If the stories are shorter are you writing more of them or just spending more time on —*

I'll tell you it takes longer, for me at least, and I think for almost everybody, I think it takes longer to write a short story than it does to write a long one. Cause a long one you just let loose and say everything and then it's done, you know, to try and get all the important things in eight inches is much more difficult.

*It's very hard.*

Yeah.

*When did you start to see the change in that.*

*USA Today*, that's been coming for years, you mean just right here, or just overall?

*I just wonder if that was at all ... impacted from 2008 to 2009?*

Once again, this is Michigan and we've been dealing with it for a long time. No, I'd say the eight-inch movie reviews came in, I'm gonna say three or four redesigns ago, probably three years ago, four years ago. Probably four years ago.

*You've had three or four redesigns? Do you have one every year?*

No, and I shouldn't say that. We have changing powers and when the changing powers come and go, they often have ideas. Is it a complete redesign? No. Although I'm thinking we've had three redesigns here in four years, maybe 5 years, I could be wrong about that. Realize also I'm dealing with my own section, I have my own section, so my own section has changed three times in the last four years, that's for sure.

*Do you think employee morale or employee sense of stability affects coverage? Specifically in the lifestyle section?*

Sensibility or civility?

*Stability.*

I'm gonna go with morale. Side effect — no, I'm not gonna say morale, I'm gonna say what affects coverage is knowing what you can get done and what you can't. It's that 25-inch versus 60-inch thing. In other words, you will not go out and find a really cool story, or if you find a really cool story, you may be actually wary of doing something on it. Because you know you're gonna butcher it down to some meaningless piece of shit, basically. And so I think that ... those of us who try to do that have gotten it stomped on enough, which is virtually everyone at some point. You just go — it's not that you're demoralized, but you just go, okay, we're not hitting homers here anymore. We're going for a nice double if we can get one. You know that that will be as good as we can get. Of course the bosses would all faint to hear that but on the other hand, it's true. Now, I have to counter that with this Today's Focus thing that I spoke of that runs on the inside.

*Yeah, page two?*

No, not page two, this is, she didn't give you a full paper, did she?

*No, just this one.*

Let me get you a paper, I've got one on my desk, I'll show you.

*Thank you.*

Every day, somebody gets to do a big story, and so when I say, if you run into a good story, yeah you could pitch it for this, right, so it's not hopeless.

*So she wrote all, and it's connected.*

Right. So basically there's a clear page everyday for somebody to have an in depth story, so but this is of course spread among all the different departments, so this thing that I'm going to write, that I'm writing on Thursday, it could get hijacked and sent over there.

*What did you write about?*

It's basically about — it's kind of an essay type thing on, how do we know what to trust anymore. Does anybody trust anything anymore? Between things like Nipplegate, the Janet Jackson thing at the Super Bowl where her boobs — supposedly it was a mistake and then it turns out it wasn't. When Sacha Baron Cohen fell onto Eminem a couple weeks ago, do you know what I'm talking about?

*Yeah, he fell into his lap or something.*

Yeah, supposedly it was a mistake but then it turned out it wasn't. And then I'm tying that to weapons of mass destruction, reporting by the media that is obviously just wrong, and just basically saying, does anybody trust anything anybody says at this point. So I'm writing it just as an essay with some reporting in it. It could get yanked and put there in



which case I'll have to come up with all sorts of other garbage to go along with it too. So there is some chance of depth. I'm not saying it's been totally outlawed. But for the most part, you know that you're going to ... you're working within very strict parameters.

*And then, you did work in California before you came here.*

Yeah.

*You could talk specifically about California if you wanted, and you've talked a little about how this is different because Michigan has struggled for a long time, as opposed to other cities but — how do you think lifestyle journalism is different here than it is in other cities?*

In Detroit?

*At this paper.*

I don't think it is terribly. I mean, yes, with your economic question, yes, the economy is always much more — you have thousands of people being laid off every year in the last decade so it's always been a much more conscious part of what's going on. But as a general thing, no, the lifestyle section here, lifestyle sections everywhere have gotten truncated, like ours has, the lifestyles part has gotten bled out to other places, just as ours has, entertainment has become much more, there are papers that have just dumped lifestyles, and just do entertainment that you know at this point I would say entertainment is up there in the 70 percentile of what we do. It is mostly entertainment. There are very few GA features — by very few I mean 1, 2 maybe, out there. Pretty much, it's everybody has a beat that's tied to an entertainment thing, that's going on throughout the industry. Entertainment readership is a very steady readership — for certain types of entertainment. For ballet, nobody gives a shit, anywhere. For film, for music, for television, you know, huge audience, you're gonna connect with your readers that way, so, papers have responded to that.

*Has it been different here, what type of stories people want to see versus when you worked in California?*

No, if you look at pretty much national demographics, they really hold the interest and certain things are across the board. The only thing that's a little different is Detroit has a really high black population and the black population tends to actually have more interest in both television and movies and music. It's even more entertainment-driven than a general white population so, more blacks have cable TV, more blacks go to movies proportionately so, actually there's even a little bit more interest which goes along with Detroit, which has a huge entertainment history, and all that. So, it just fits in so, if anything, we're even more of an entertainment town than most towns. But all towns are gonna have that kind of stuff. On the other hand, I will say the niche stuff like food, that holds up really well across the board too, and if you get to the West Coast — yeah,

gardening's really, that's a really high interest subject for readers out there. Like I say here, or on the East Coast, not so much, you know cause winter comes, but out there that's very big. We always had a garden writer. I got here, paper's 10 times bigger than the paper I was at — no garden writer. They didn't even know what one was you know, so but the niche stuff, the niche stuff holds true pretty well, the entertainment stuff which is niche stuff, holds true. The general lifestyles, what is lifestyles? That's what's drifting off and I think that's happening everywhere across the country.

*When I looked through the archives I looked through a year, not a whole year but about one issue for each month over the course of, from April 2008 to April 2009 and the stories that I saw that were in features or entertainment but related to the economy, they typically had one of two themes. Which was 'how the economy's affecting X' or 'how you can save money on X' — service v. news. So I wonder which type of story readers are more interested in and how you make decisions about what to cover?*

To be honest, I'm not interested in either one so that's why I'm going — compared to a movie review, I know they're probably way more interested in a movie review or a TV review or a profile of a star or something like that. But then, we do do the lifestyles part of it, is that you do do these two other types of things. I guess I would be more, I guess I would think people are more interested in the how I can do stuff for a whole lot less money story, because there's some practical element rather than read here's how money is messing things up again. Because there is so much of that coverage in different ways — both — well, throughout the paper so I would think that the handy tips, five things you could do this weekend for free, five concerts you can go to for less than \$2, whatever, you know. I would think that those would be just more pragmatic, more practical type stories.

*And what would you rather cover yourself?*

Neither ... that's one of the good parts of having done this for a while, I don't have to do either.

*Detroit is a city that you mentioned, there's a large population that's impoverished, but then you have in the Metro areas people that have more money.*

There's tons of money.

*Can you say anything within the lifestyle section about catering to different classes, or striving to hit some general, something that would —*

This paper has always, because it's conservative Republican, it's always been geared towards the rich. I mean at least this was my perception when I got here. I couldn't believe how many stories were about places that I could never afford to go to in my life or things you know, trips, over the years just all these things and going, who is going and doing this? Who? But I think that has its basis in two things. One is that there was a lot of

wealth here and there still is to an extent, and it's Republican and conservative and so we would be their paper. And the other is, I just think there's sort of a long lasting fascination/fantasy type sublimation thing readers do ... like 'I can't do that, but isn't it groovy somebody can' or 'Don't I wish I could do that, don't I wish I had that life, you know, and so lifestyles of the rich and famous, they do, I guess to an extent, like reading about that I guess.

*What about the Free Press? Is there a big difference?*

They're a far more liberal paper, so they pull that liberal thing. This is such a weird state. See the deal is, far more liberal, and so they're union-based, so they're — they're gonna pull the union readers more, but the funny thing about union readers, and so you think there's the blue collar guy — union people in this town make \$100,000 for driving a forklift. So even though they have no education they have tons of money. The standard worker in Detroit for years had a house here, and a house in the Upper Peninsula, and a boat on the lake with a high school education. So when you're talking about having money, it's not really tied to education in this state. As far as the *Free Press* — they kept a travel section for a long time, I think they still might have one on Sunday, it's weak. For years they had a book section that was serious, once again for more intellectual types, liberal types. Now, I hate to speak to the *Free Press* for two reasons. One, I don't read it that much, so I'm not acquainted. Their features section has been somewhat gutted over time. They were bought by Gannett or taken over by Gannett which has a different — which used to own us — so I'm well acquainted with their philosophy.

*Gannett doesn't own this paper anymore?*

No, MediaNews owns this paper.

*Isn't there a joint operating —*

Sure is. It's a big mess, but in terms of who runs the paper, MediaNews runs this paper, Gannett used to run this paper until about four years ago. So now Gannett runs the *Freep*, so the *Freep* doesn't even have a movie critic anymore, they took a buyout.

*From the wires?*

Yeah, they didn't even replace him, same with a lot of it. They don't have a TV critic, they just didn't replace the one after they took a buyout.

*Sad.*

Yeah it is. So, to talk about their features section, it's kind of like this whole different animal because it's not entertainment-oriented because they don't have entertainment writers anymore.

*And demographics wise?*

What do you mean?

*I guess the Free Press must have more liberals reading it and this one has more conservatives.*

Yeah.

*And maybe more people with money are reading this one.*

I think this is known as the paper that has a better business section. They're known as the better investigative paper I would think. Personally I think our sports section's better but that's kind of a toss. So I don't know. I probably shouldn't speak to that. They have lots of good people there, I will say that. But they became a Gannett paper, and that changes — Gannett has a very specific philosophy of how it approaches newspapers, so it changed the *Free Press* quite a bit.

*Do they run it more standard, across all the papers they own?*

MediaNews has nothing like that. There is no MediaNews approach where there's very much a Gannett approach.

*How many papers do they own?*

Fifty, 60, I think it's the fourth biggest chain. It's us and the *Denver Post*.

*But they don't have a big concept, but Gannett does.*

No — yes, very strict, very rigid form.

*One of our buildings at school is called Gannett, I think cause they donated money.*

I used to work for Gannett, they treated me very fairly.

*In Santa Cruz?*

No, here. They owned this paper. But they have a corporate philosophy, a philosophy that goes through all the papers. MediaNews doesn't, which is, trust me, much nicer. I would say they treated me very fairly, I have no arguments with Gannett, but there is a, it's a standardization thing. I doubt if they'd even say anything different. Everybody knows this, that's in the business. They have a specific way that they think things should be done and that's how it's done.

*It makes sense, when organizations get bigger and bigger.*

Corporate-wise it does. Cool newspaper-wise, not so sure.

*That pretty much wraps up all my questions, is there anything else you'd like to say about lifestyle, journalism or covering lifestyle during a recession?*

Let me just say, big changes were going on in the way lifestyles were approached before recession. So I don't think anything really changed because of the recession particularly. It's just that things were changing anyway. Newspapers are changing drastically anyway. So you know, it's sort of like, the two things ran into each other. So there were big changes going on even before things had hit the fan.

*And this is what you talked about, shorter articles and less space for them?*

That was happening already. I'm sure you've studied that newspapers are not making near as much money as they used to and that there was a, I won't say more relaxed, but there was a more relaxed, more open way of running things virtually everywhere. Now they're in a panic to make money and things have just constricted over the last five, six, seven years. Visibly the economy just made it even worse, just made things tighter. You do that our paper — the way that our paper is run and all that, papers only delivered on certain days a week.

*That's a recent change.*

That just happened in April.

*So people that get home delivery, they only get it three days a week — two days a week?*

For our paper they only get it Thursday and Friday. And then they get a Sunday *Free Press*. And for the *Free Press* it's Thursday, Friday, Sunday and — but it's still printed and it's still out on the street actually. Street sales for us are extremely healthy but ...

*How about the Free Press?*

I don't know, I really don't know how healthy their street sales are, I'm sure they're okay. You know, the big deal was how much it cost to print newspapers and put gas in the car and drive cars and deliver the newspapers and all that.

*It's huge.*

That the amount that they saved by doing that, not to mention the pollution and everything else, that the amount they saved doing that more than offset the loss in circulation. And amazingly, supposedly, most of our readers kept the paper, didn't dump us. But to be aware, that sets us apart from any of the other papers that you'd be talking to, cause we're just a different animal these days. So okay?

*I guess that's about it.*

**Linda Bergstrom, Features Editor, *Chicago Tribune***

*Do you economic coverage edged into lifestyle sections of newspapers during and after the economic collapse — either here or elsewhere or both?*

Think economic coverage has what?

*Edged into lifestyle sections of newspapers during and after the economic collapse.*

What do you mean by economic coverage?

*Stories that have more of an economic bent.*

Yeah. So we definitely have, I think it's true across all of the newspaper. We're definitely budget-minded and consumer-focused and doing some performance reviews. That's one of our company's goals is customer focus and relevance and utility, so in the lifestyle areas we've tried to really take that utility to heart and give people guidance on dealing with, you know, having less money, less finances but still able to, you know, make smarter decisions. So we try to give them information to try to make smarter decisions. So I would say yes, it has crept into — but I would think that we were doing that before, we were doing it before and it's just probably a little more emphasis now. We are rethinking that, but also trying to mix in some other things, cause people don't always want to be hit over the head with cheaper, cheaper, cheaper. You have no money, no money, no money, so ... We're trying to think of ways to break out of that a little bit.

*For example ...*

We were discussing a new magazine that we're going to do on home entertaining. So we were gonna do something on affordable luxuries like, where should you spend your money, what little luxuries should you allow yourself. So it's just tweaks like that cause, and thinking and travel — maybe people are traveling beyond going to Iowa so, not losing focus that there are people who still have resources and, you know, want to get that information too. Cause a steady diet of the same thing gets boring.

*As an editor, did you find that you had to cover business and financial news more closely than before?*

No, not really, we have a pretty healthy business section and so if there's anything that has to do with, for instance, Macy's and their economic condition, they pretty much handle that, so we haven't had to do that. That's one of the nicer things about being at a larger newspaper.

*Division of labor.*

Yeah, that's kind of separate.

*Did you follow it more to see what might be impacting your section and what people are doing?*

Well we did something called, we had a team that started in September, a small team, that talked about, kind of a recession team, and I was part of that team, figuring out ways to tailor stories about the recession for readers, so yes, in some ways I was following it, and in January, February we did recession relief, which was all features-oriented just to kind of give people a respite from all the recession. So yeah, we follow it but ... you know, its there because of the day-to-day business so you don't need to follow it too much more.

*So the recession relief stories, were those totally unrelated?*

They were related to the recession but it was just, 'Hey here's some fun ways to handle the recession or here's some fun ways to take a break from the recession.'

*And you did that in January and February.*

I can look it up for you.

*Thank you.*

We did it in April, last week of April, so starting April 19.

*And then, you've touched on it a bit, but would you be able to say in what ways the content, in the different sections that you edit, changed following the economic collapse or just as the situation progressed?*

So we have a — there's the economic collapse and then there's the business reality of the *Chicago Tribune* company. So the business reality of the *Chicago Tribune* company is that we entered bankruptcy in — I don't know when that was, because I try to put it out of my mind. Last year, so in the last year we've had more change at this newspaper than has been in many years that I've been here.

*Was that before or after the redesign?*

It was before the redesign.

*I think the redesign was at the end of September.*

Yes. The redesign was at the end of September so, I don't need to tell you that it's a tough time in the newspaper business but we still have been — bankruptcy filing on Monday so that would have been December 8 . We filed for bankruptcy December 8. So, that has meant, in the economic reality that has meant much smaller staffs, much much smaller staffs. I think we're probably down to half or even a third of what we used to be.



*From when?*

Since about 2 years ago. But even since your time period [April to April] probably half as much staff. So we've started something that we call content-sharing. So we create modules ... for lack of a better term. And what we do is we make these shapes of stories that go into either our newspaper or our sister papers. Our sister papers are Orlando, Fort Lauderdale, Baltimore, and lifestyle has definitely been a huge part of that. So we're either getting these from other sources such as the *Los Angeles Times*, which is one of our newspapers, or TMS which is Tribune Media Services which is our media service or wires, and so where you would find at one point every newspaper or us would be creating content for every single hole in the newspaper now we aren't. we are creating it one time to be either used by us and then to be used by other people so ... it's kind of an efficiency, so that's been a big big change as far as writing, editing content.

*Did you do almost everything in-house before that?*

Yeah.

*That's a big change.*

It's a huge change. So you're familiar with wire services, yeah.

*Yeah, like AP.*

Yeah, so this is kind of a different ... In the simplest terms, it's a different kind of wire service. So a wire service would send over a story that is just a story. And then you get a photo from somewhere and someone would have to edit it and design. So this, the editing and the photo editing and the design is already done so it's just — and it goes around common ad-stacks, so you don't have the production cost. So as companies are looking for efficiencies and economic efficiencies, this is the *Tribune's* solution. So that's been a big change in the lifestyle content area cause we do these modules under home, travel, food health family and fashion .. did I get them all? Yeah. We also do entertainment.

*So would one be printed in several different papers?*

Yes.

*And some of them are made here but others —*

We make them all here, we get content from different places, so we are the makers. We draw content from different places. So the change has been, we aren't doing as much local in those, so the sourcing is different, because we use national sourcing as opposed to local sourcing, so we fill in the rest of the paper with local. So you have your national module and you fill in local around it. So that's been a huge change.

*That's huge.*

That started in the beginning of this year. I think it's only been about six months.

*And the result of that is a decrease in local content.*

It is a decrease in local content and a decrease in staff.

*Would you be able to say in what ways has content stayed the same?*

Very little has stayed the same. Except kind of holding onto our core values of what we think are important. So we think food is important and we think travel is important, we think home is important, health, family, so ... kind of ... it's a different way of thinking. So where we would think before around sections, like we have to do the Good Eating section, and we have to do the Travel section, and we have to do the Home and Garden section, now you think, we have to do home content and the home content could go into a module, the home content could go into a special magazine, it could go online, it could go into news, it could be local ... so we are organized more around content than we are around sections. So that has been a big change. And it's a harder change for everyone. We're kind of getting there now so ...

*Do you share content with the Redeye as well?*

Some. So Redeye kind of works ... they basically pick and choose what they want, and edit it to their needs. So they have all these resources at their disposal and then they edit them to fit what they need.

*Do you think awareness of the economic collapse affected your approach to your beat or your approach to covering lifestyle?*

Just in the way that you know we talked about budgets and trying to be aware. Not putting, you know, \$2000 chaise longues out there which is — we had a story from Los Angeles, they had a outdoor piece of furniture, one chair, that was \$2000 and we're like, no. No one's going to be buying that right now, just being aware of that kind of thing.

*Do you think you'll continue implementing those changes when the economy is better?*

So I think what will happen is that the economy and the newspaper business are kind of linked in some ways and so because of the newspaper business changing and — so I think we'll get to a close. We're getting close to where we are, quote unquote bottoming out as far as changing different content and think that there will be opportunities to grow. I don't know if its gonna be in newspapers or online or in specialty magazines but we will grow. And I say we, I mean the content providers and the content. So I think we're kind of at the bottom, I hope we're at the bottom. So I think there will be opportunities

so, in some ways this has all been kind of a course correction for what the '80s and '90s, the '90s in particular, were a fat time for newspapers, really big time for lifestyle content, the features. If you look back at newspapers from the 1970s, 1980s, there wasn't much feature content, we're almost back to what that was. So what we call the sectionalization of newspapers has kind of reversed course. So it used to be a newspaper was just news, business, sports. Then they added one feature section, and it was usually called the women's section, and then they would kind of come around and add a weekend, what to do on the weekend section, and then they would come around and add food, and then some of the specialty sections you see, the Smart section that we did or Style or Play or On The Town, as you look around the country those different kinds of niche publications were added on and so the advertising was growing. Now that advertising is not growing, those have been cut. And I would have to say that the temptation is for publishers and editors to cut lifestyle first.

*The person I interviewed in Detroit said the same thing.*

Yeah. I don't agree with it, because that's what people come to newspapers for is relaxation and they can get their news elsewhere, but I think it's a little misguided, so I think you'll find lifestyle and entertainment coming back cause its kind of a unique thing that newspapers can provide so I think they'll find the errors of their ways and it'll come back.

*Do you know why, it's so often lifestyle that gets cut first?*

It's because newspapers are based on news, and they don't — most editors and publishers don't consider lifestyle to be news. They consider it to be softer news, soft stuff, so you know, it's just what your definition of news is and, it's also, they also try to think, well is it content they can get elsewhere, well maybe, but you can get other news content elsewhere too. So I think that, I think that's the kind of thing that you'll see grow again when things get a little bit better, well I want — There's nothing in the newspaper to read, is kind of what you hear a lot, and I think that's a reaction to not having different kinds of stories that are not necessarily news-oriented. And I think people want fun in the newspaper. You go for fun as much as you do news. Is that what the person in Detroit said too?

*Uh-huh. The other thing that he said was that he's seen a decrease in depth of the stories and that the stories are more often shorter and shorter and shorter and I asked him if he was writing more stories since they were shorter, but he said it takes longer to do a short story well than it does to do a long story where you're just throwing everything in there.*

Dumping your notebook as they would say.

*Have you seen that as well?*

Yeah, everything's shorter. So these modules that we do, 800 words is the maximum. So that's not very many to tell a whole story individually. So yeah, and so I think again, when they, there's nothing to read in the newspaper I think, when you hear those kind of comments I think that's a kind of a reaction to these kind of story lengths. Now we'll never go back to the 2000 words and maybe we shouldn't, but I think there will be targeted ways to get longer stories in the newspaper.

*Did your ideas of what topics or types of stories your readers would want to see change between April 2008 and April 2009 or — if that's too rigid a time frame —*

It's kind of related to what we were doing with the modules and stuff like that. So it's hard for me to separate out the economics with our economic reality and the changes that we had here so I don't think necessarily.

*Not necessarily. I also wanted to ask about letters to the editor and reader comments on the web site. Do you —*

So we get some letters to the editor, we do have reader comments on our stories, they are in most cases, somewhat, they are monitored, we do have some instances where — I forget what is called, where you let the readers and the comments, people who comment kind of self-police. Most of the time we do monitor in case people say, we won't take off anything that's negative, we won't take off anything that's just silly, but we will take off stuff that's you know, swear words and, you know totally off topic or racially motivated et cetera et cetera. And you'll see a lot of those on there, so.

*Have you seen a change in either the amount or the content in those?*

No, I don't think — If anything, if I were guessing, a relatively few number of people comment. It's just a weird thing to do. Cause you're just anonymous, I find them very frustrating. I don't really read them because they're usually so off topic that —

*The online ones or letters to the editor?*

The online ones. Letters to the editor are usually well thought of, and even if you don't agree with it, people have a right to express their opinion, and whenever people call or want to write, I say yes, please write, we want other people's opinions. I don't have to necessarily agree with it but it should be a good forum. We always say we're starting the conversation so you want the conversation to continue.

*Are there any editor letters or comments related to lifestyle and money or the economy that stuck out to you?*

No, not really. We got some good feedback on the recession relief, but not really, in particular.

*How much attention do you pay to reader feedback?*

We've tried different ways to incorporate readers into the section, so I'm always open to feedback, and I think some of it's very valid. But I'm not necessarily looking at the comments on the pages.

*Would you say that reader comments or letters to the editor have ever driven content change?*

No. We do have a very good corrections system here, and if something needs to be corrected, we correct it. So, but not content change.

*Overlooking through the past year, I noticed that there were several new sections, and Tempo was replaced with Live. Can you talk a little bit about the rationale behind changing the section names?*

Anytime you change the newspaper you want to change the names. When you change a name, you signal that there's real change. So, Tempo went from being a preprint, which most people didn't know that it was preprinted, to being a live section.

*What does that mean?*

So preprints mean that if it was a Friday section, that we did it on a Wednesday, so it was two full days in advance. Most of our sections are preprints, Sunday, the new Sunday section will be On The Town, it is, Play is, Good Eating is, Travel is, it has to do with production and deadlines at the plant so since Tempo went live and part of the regular part of the newspaper, they wanted to signal that hey, this was a change and you were gonna get your up to minute news, or as up to minute as newspaper is, in a section so, we spent a lot of time talking about names, a lot of time and you know what, people get used to it. It's like no big deal ... like okay, it's called play now, okay. So inside newspapers we spend a lot of time talking about names.

*One of the classes I took, they said the taglines on Cosmopolitan magazine, that they will be in a room in an office for 10 hours figuring out what they are, which is so funny, cause they're so short. From what I saw there's a new section on Sunday called Smart.*

Yeah. So last Sunday was Smart's last week.

*And it's being replaced by?*

This new Sunday section, which is gonna be kind of a best content from home, garden, food, health, family. And the magazine is going away, and House and Homes is going away, so the new lineup will be Sunday, something called Money and Real Estate which will be the money content and the real estate portion of House and Homes. Travel —

*So House and Homes is ... no more ... and the magazine is —*

No more, and Smart is no more. A lot of their content is going into the Sunday section. So that's what we're working on today.

*I was going to ask about Smart because it looked to me that it replaced Q, and that the tagline is faster, cheaper, better so I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the motivation for making that section even though it's going away.*

So that's a good ... when we were doing the redesign it was part of the economics, I would say that was definitely a reaction to the economics. Q was more of a general section and then we thought, well where are we now, it was definitely a women's section but the common refrain is people don't have time, they don't have money, so we kind of came up with those faster, cheaper, better taglines as a way to filter everything that was going into that section. So here's how you can live your life faster, here's how you can live your life cheaper, here's how you can live your life better, so I think they did a good job of tailoring the content to that.

*And now Smart will be replaced by this Sunday section. Is there a tagline?*

No. It's basically how we live now is what we're kind of going into so, here it is ... (reads section introduction) Welcome to Sunday, a section that explores how we live now. Each week we will find stories about people and how they connect in their homes, through their families, by living healthy lives. There's also, we have a four page pullout on puzzles. Believe me, that's one of the things — you joke about it — but puzzles are huge with people.

*People like puzzles?*

And that's one thing that newspapers can give that other people can't, so we're going right after that. Here's more puzzles.

*When I searched the archives I counted when I saw stories that were directly related to the economy or prices of things, service stories about how to get things for cheaper, and I didn't really see an increase or decrease but I noticed that the Live section, from what I've seen, it had more articles focused on entertainment and less on lifestyle trend and —*

Well, yes.

*I had seen in the first six months that I looked at lots of shopping stories, like where to buy X, Y and Z and it seemed more —*

So the last six months is right, they've had an editor change over there, and the entertainment editor is now in charge of Live.

*So it's more entertainment-based?*

It's all, pretty much entertainment. Before it had a popular culture bent and now it is entertainment-based.

*So the decision to change that was a conscious decision to make the section more entertainment-based.*

It has to do with some reorganization that we had here where we went into different — so I talked about the modules and we're part of what we call a national content team and entertainment is part of another team so there's not a real true features section anymore, a true features department anymore, we're in different sections and it has to do with organizing around content. So we are organized in features around content rather than sections and entertainment is going into pretty much, the entertainment editor is in charge of Live so it's all entertainment.

*So that's one reason why the change is.*

Well, yeah. And I think they were looking for a more focused section, I would guess, but that's not my section so I don't know.

*You mentioned something about the \$2000 chaise longue and that maybe there were less shopping stories because of that, like people aren't buying as much*

No, it's not related to the recession — it's internal as opposed to related to the recession

*How do you think lifestyle journalism here at the Tribune compares to coverage in other cities or at other papers?*

I think we still have some very strong reporters and editors, even with the changing things, everyone has kind of this really pride of ownership, so I would still put our content up against a lot of other publications. Are we doing less? Yes. Are we doing it differently? Yes. But I think what we're doing is pretty good.

*And you mentioned that USA Today — They haven't really changed at all?*

If you look at *USA Today* in content, it really just, you know, they've had some tweaks, but they — their articles were shorter, so I don't know about the recession and the focus of their stories but the way that the newspaper's put together and the shape of the newspaper has not changed that much.

*Would you be able to talk a little about your readership and if you cater to readers with different budgets or of different classes in the lifestyle pages?*

So we have, every section and everything that you produce should have a person in mind. We did a lot of research. I was in charge of the last redesign of the newspaper and this one also I've been involved in so you should have a readership and a mission in mind. We have something called different prisms, in research they identify people by economics, lifestyle, et cetera and they fall into different prisms so we have like, frenzied families, and they tend to be people with two to three kids, they live in the suburbs, they earn this much money, and XYZ. And then they have carefree couples, with two people who married, or just living together and they have no children or the children are out of their, have flown the coop and they tend to live in the urban areas etc. So I'd say we're more aware of what the *Tribune's* target audiences are than maybe we were. This is in the last two to three years, not just in the last six months. Where the *Tribune's* targeted audiences are and where they think they can kind of make inroads so, whereas 10 years ago you would never hear anything like that. Now you pretty much have targets. So you say, okay, that seems counter to what journalism is, but it has to do with you want to provide readers what they want. So for a lot of times newspapers kind of had their head in the sand, this is what you should do, and this is what you should be reading, and this is what you should get and so there's been a little bit of a, I would say a sea change within. Newspapers think, okay what does our readership want, who are our target audiences, in different places within the newspaper and how can we best serve them, that's not to say that we change our content, that we change our mission, that's not to say that we pander to these people.

*I was gonna say that versus how was it before?*

So before 'I think we should do a story about, it's best in news, we're gonna do 95 stories on Washington politics whether people want it or not.'

*Because people need to know. We decide what they need to know.*

Right. As opposed to what readers are looking for. So it's a slight tweak and it does not change our journalistic standards or journalistic ethics but it does maybe make a difference in where you present stories and how you present stories. It's just as simple as that, and especially with, in features sections you should have a target, you should have a mission, and everyone who writes for that section or edits that section should know what that mission is because then readers will then understand it better.

*Are there any specific examples of editorial decisions you made based on our current economic climate?*

I would say the recession relief was a big one and the recession series that we did. That's probably the best. So recession, if you look at the paper, there was recession bugs, in the first, from September to December, and then Recession Relief was in April. So you'll find them in the newspapers.



**Bill Hageman, Reporter, *Chicago Tribune***

*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and what you usually write about?*

I've been with the *Tribune* newspaper about 30 years, with the company a little bit longer. I started out as an editor in the sports department, did that for about 12 years, then I moved to the features department. I preferred editing over writing at all times in my career, so it was great. Slowly but surely they eased me into writing, out of necessity — we need somebody to do this, whatever, and I ended up writing a little bit and then it was a 50/50 split for a while and then they just moved me over full-time to writing. I've written for just about every section of the paper. Back in last October they eliminated the section I was working for, the Q section, and I had been there for five years. And before that, the predecessor of the Q section was Health and Family — and I was with them for three years. So I've always been doing those topics, health and family. And the Q section was kind of an odd section that did the kind of stories that you wouldn't see elsewhere in the paper — a dancing dog convention — these are things I have covered. We had a Peeps diorama contest where the readers make dioramas out of Peeps and send us photos. That was the Q section, it was kind of an offbeat section and it was a lot of fun and it also had useful stuff. It had a good health component, fashion, a lot of family things, some book reviews all that kind of stuff, so it was a good section and they eliminated it. So after that, I've been all over the place in the past six months. I ended up going to the Live! section which, it was the Tempo section at that point, then it became Live!, and then I ended up going to the travel section, cause the staff had shrunk to the point where there was a travel editor and one travel writer. And if the travel editor wanted to go on vacation it was doomed, there was nobody there to do it. Cause all the people who knew how to do what he did were gone, so they brought me over to help him out and do a little bit of writing for everybody, with the hopes that I would pick up enough of how he did his job so when he goes on vacation I can kind of fill in on that. And that's what I do now. And then in April there was the last big layoff, it was 53 people, and that just forced a major reorganization of everything. We're seriously bare-bones everywhere now, I think, and those of us who are left, we pretty much have to do everything. You have to edit, you have to write, you have to kind of hustle — you've always had to hustle — you kind of have to think like a manager sometimes. Sometimes we take our own photos. Not very good photos, I will be the first to admit, they're horrible, but we have to do everything.

So with the reorganization, I kind of got attached to several sections. I could do stuff for Travel, I could do stuff for the House and Homes section, for the Smart section, for the Live! section, it was all sort of in the ballpark. In the lifestyle ballpark, and all those sections had stuff for me to do, and I was doing the stuff for all of them. But now another reorganization is here and they've eliminated the Smart section and the House and Homes section and they've started this new Sunday section.

And basically for me, I'm still hustling, still working, still doing the same stuff. It's just going to appear elsewhere, maybe a little different form, but I'm still churning out stuff as much as I ever was. So I think it's had a much bigger impact on the editors of those sections that are going away, and what they have to do now is under the Sunday

umbrella. More impact on them than on me, the other writers. And there are new features in these new sections so they're trying to get those up and running and coming, 'Can you give us something on this, something on that' — it's just like it was before, I'm just getting assignments on things and coming up with ideas and doing the stories. So that's basically what I am and what I've done, what I'm doing now.

*So I have some general questions and then more specific questions about your position and the Tribune. Do you think economic coverage, as in stories with an economic bent about saving money or how the economy is affecting something, has edged into lifestyle sections of newspapers during and after the economic collapse?*

Oh definitely. When they killed the Q section, which was a lot of frivolity, they replaced it with the Smart section. And the marching orders for the Smart section — 'smarter, faster, cheaper, sharper, taller,' whatever — the section was designed with that thought in mind. It was October and the country was edging into disaster and it was obvious, and they thought this would be a way to give readers leads on ways of doing things. So it definitely popped up quickly at the *Tribune*, a section basically devoted to — and now that, even though things are getting better and the Smart section is going away, a lot of that content is going to be in the new Sunday section. So we're gonna continue that. I'm trying to think of what I've been working on. Again it's a — the idea of interesting new products that are smart and make sense — I'm doing something on some swim goggle thing that some woman in Chicago invented. I guess little girls when they go swimming, they put the goggles on and the straps pull their hair. It's really painful, she invented something that you put on the strap so it doesn't pull and it doesn't tug. And there's a bonus — when the goggles get tossed around, they don't sink, it makes them float. It brings them to the surface. So we're doing something on that, it's just kind of an interesting product somebody might want to go out and spend not a ton of money on, but it might be something that is useful and economy-minded maybe.

*Do you do more stories like that than service stories about how to save money on X, or —*

Me, I do everything. There's nothing that really takes the lead. I'm doing a profile on some guy, I'm doing the goggles woman. We have something called My Sunday coming up in the Sunday section, where you find somebody who works on Sunday and they do something kind of interesting on Sunday, but we're doing not just a piece of their day but their whole day, their Sunday ritual. We've got some guy who has been a little league umpire for 800 years or something, but he does that on Sundays. And I'm going up to the Bristol renaissance fair — hoping to talk to the guy who barbecues the turkey legs, he does that every Sunday. But what's the rest of his Sunday like? Almost more like people stories, in a way. Smart people, Smart section — in the Sunday section, they wanted me to do something, kind of like a little thing for parents. 'What do you do when the cops call and say your kids been arrested? What do you do?' I had three kids and they grew up —

*I think the Smart section I looked at, it had — ‘What do you do if you find marijuana in your kid’s room’ — or something like that.*

Yeah, it’s all the kind of stuff that, I don’t think it’s a spectacular story, I’m not thrilled at it, but what the heck, I’ll make it interesting, talk to some cops, when do you call a lawyer? I just did something for them. What do you do if your dogs bites somebody, or if you get bitten by a dog?

*My dad got bit by a dog.*

Yeah. I had never thought about it. I always thought the first thing you do is make sure you got the dog secure and call the cops. And they said that’s the wrong thing to do. The first thing you do is wash the wound, and almost all dog bites are dogs that you know, so you know where they live, you don’t have to go secure them, that’s just going to piss them off even more. Just grab them by the collar — so again, I actually learned something from that story and it turned out okay. You don’t call the lawyer, you don’t call the cops, you call animal control. Of course if you call the cops they’ll just call animal control. So that’s the sort of useful stuff, the Smart section, that’s that the little component.

I did something for good eating, an Iron Chef competition for kids. And the goal was to raise awareness of childhood hunger. Particularly in Chicago, because they have programs during the school year where the kids can get breakfast and lunches and stuff, but during the summer, there’s nothing. So there’s an organization that is working to teach kids about nutrition and things like that. It’s a pretty good cause. I ended up going out there and spending a Sunday watching some pretty cool kids. All these little kids, nine years old, just food network geeks. With their little aprons, and they were very serious about it. It was kind of sweet.

And then the House and Homes, the gardening component, again this is something that might fit in — we’re all kind of being dumped into areas that we’re not used to. I grow tomatoes on my driveway every year and our garden section declared this year the year of the tomato. And we were going to have a whole series of tomato stories from the get-go in February, and what you need to do to raise spectacular tomatoes. So we had a really good gardening writer who started it, Beth Botts, and she was moving along and doing well, and then she was working on the third installment of the series, and then she was one of the people let go in April. So the next day they came to me and said, can you do tomatoes? And I said yeah, I guess, why not? So I did the next two things in the series. Staking out your tomatoes, how to stake them, and the other one was, how to prune them, and it’s basic journalism. You go out and find some experts and you talk to them, get a lot of good photos and just get the information and convey it. I had never done gardening stuff before, so suddenly I became the gardening guy. I did a real estate story for last weekend. I’ve never written about real estate in my life. So it’s forcing us to explore new areas, which is good. Because it’s really easy to get stale doing this. And you get dumped into areas where you got to produce this other stuff. Having been around long enough to know what you need to put into a story, you just apply — instead of writing about hockey players.

*Do you think it makes the paper fresher?*

I think so, yeah. It's making people hustle more. Some people maybe didn't hustle as much. But now you have to do so much, in so many areas. It does keep you fresher, and I think the stories reflect that. It's like you're covering something you weren't familiar with, so maybe you tend to work a little harder to get that expert, to understand it. Linda and I were talking earlier. There's a tendency maybe, if I was writing the same thing all the time, all the time, and you see that in some papers and some magazines. Sometimes people always go back to the same expert.

But now what they've got us doing now, I think she showed you the modules. They told us to stop thinking locally. If you're writing a module, think nationally. Look for the best expert you can find anywhere in the country, not the best tomato grower in Chicago. For a writer, that's great. And they're kind of turning you loose and you can spend a little bit of time finding somebody who really knows their stuff. I just did something on lawn ornaments for the garden component for the Sunday section. And if I was going to do that before, I would have gone — there's a place up in Addison or Arlington Heights that does statuary, and they've got a million lawn gnomes and things, and a life-size Bigfoot you could get. And that would have been fine, but I ended up talking to someone who makes really high-end stuff. Companies located in England, I talked to them, I talked to the lawn ornament editor for *Better Homes and Gardens*. And that's not exactly his title but whatever. And he was great, because he just came out of a full day of really dull meetings, so he was ready to cut loose. We just sat there and talked for 30 or 45 minutes and he was just telling these funny long stories of things that he's seen and written about. The modules have kind of opened the door to the writers. I haven't talked to other writers about this but I kind of think we all are grateful that we can do that instead of being so focused on Chicago. We can get a wider view, and you get more expertise and make the stories applicable to our other papers. Although writing about growing tomatoes in Chicago would seem to be something that should be pretty local. Cause the weather conditions aren't the same here as in Pennsylvania or Connecticut or Florida. And I think the boss has kind of recognized that, but it's one of those things we can't do anything about.

*Is there anything else about the content in the features sections that has changed following the economic collapse, that you can think of?*

I don't know if it's by designation or if it was planned this way, or just out of necessity, and it maybe hasn't affected other people. But I'm finding, stuff that I'm writing, I'm having to write much shorter. And that's better. Shorter's always better. And they'll tell me they need something at 700 words and invariably it'll be 850, and then I'll whack it down to 800 and hope we can negotiate the rest.

*Why do you think shorter is better?*

Cause it forces you to kind of boil down all the information, and get it. Not to the point where you're leaving crucial stuff out. If there was a situation where they said, gimme 500, and the story could not be told in less than 700, I would tell them. And speaking for myself, the editors are always very understanding on something like that. They say, 'Well, if you need 700, do what you need.' The dog bite story, I said 'How much do you want?' She said, 'Can you do it in 500?' I said yeah, she said, 'If in your reporting, you decide you need more, we can go to 900.'

I got it in 510 or something like that. But it just — also, instead of talking to six or seven experts for a story, which entails a lot of phone calls and a lot of interviews and transcribing notes and all that, maybe you only do three or four. And that saves a lot of time, and maybe time is really at a premium. That's a big thing I've noticed too. They told us, some stories, maybe you only want to talk to one or two people instead of four or five. And that would have been sacrilege, at least to me, a year ago. There would be stories where I would talk to 10 or 15 people for it. Only six or seven might get in, but still. Again, it's that idea of trying to get as much information as possible, so I could convey the key stuff onto the readers. But now you kind of have the mindset, 'Well, don't need that many people,' and it cuts your interview time in half or more, and that's a bonus for us now.

A month ago, Cindy from the House and Homes section asked me to do something called the Tale of Two Bungalows. Take one that had been thoroughly modernized, totally updated, bringing it into the 21st century, and one that had been restored to its original coolness. And we're gonna side-by-side it, photos, what the owners had to consider and all that.

But now, with the House and Homes section going away, and her content going into the Sunday section, she doesn't have the space she had. So this week we just said, we're going to kill the one. It's gonna be a Tale of One Bungalow. We're gonna kill the old restoration one and just go with how to modernize a bungalow to make it compatible. You have modern conveniences and such, into a classic space.

With the restored one, we got as far as getting photos and everything, we had everything set up.

*And theirs was restoring one that was more traditional?*

Yeah. Stripping all the woodwork back to the original wood, floors and all that. And they sent me all the before and after photos. I would've loved to have done that story too. But she just doesn't have the space. And rather than do two bungalow stories a few weeks apart, she just wants the modern one, which I think might be more useful, more interesting. Cause everybody knows you can restore just about anything. It just takes a lot of effort, a lot of elbow grease, a lot of planning and some dough. But this is the way she did things, which is very cool. So that'll be a fun story — again — she's a very chatty lady, we're just going to sit there and talk away and it's a small house. It's not like I have to look at the Soldier Field or something. We'll just chat, go room to room. I see it, as I see almost everything I do, as kind of a fun story. And it's fun and I'm going to enjoy it and hopefully that can come across when I write it.

*We've talked about how content has changed. How has it stayed the same?*

I'll go back to the Smart section. They had an idea, readership service sort of stuff, and it sort of evolved over the life, whatever it was, seven, eight month life of the section, and what was there last week in the last Smart section, is gonna kind of evolve into the Sunday section. So there are certain things that work for the readers and that we will continue to have, from what I can tell. But it's always just evolution. The Sunday section, it comes out this weekend. It may look spectacular — we all may love it, but three months from now when they say, 'This isn't working as well as we thought it would,' readers might like it but if it's not selling ads or too big of a pain to produce, we will make adjustments as necessary.

*You've written for all different parts of the paper. Did awareness of the economic collapse affect your reporting at all? The type of story that you would pitch or how you would approach a story?*

No. It went against my grain to approach everything as a story about the economic collapse. I think too often, the stories that we would do, we would kind of twist a good story to make it fit that mold. The mold of telling people how to do things. To the point, sometimes you can give readers really good advice, sometimes you can just tell them really stupid stuff that any 6-year-old on the street knows. And putting that into a newspaper story like you're breaking news for the readers, I just think that kind of stuff makes us look silly. I tried to steer clear of pitching anything that seemed to me to be too obvious. Stuff that the readers could find in any number of places. But that's just me.

*It sounds like you personally, because you cover more slice-of-life entertainment stories — a lot of them you didn't want to give an economic bent because it would spoil the point of the story.*

If there was none there, I don't think we should do everything through the prism of a bad economy. It just seemed that — I did a feature on a college radio station — there's just no way that a bad economy affects them.

*Which station was it?*

WONC.

*I used to work there.*

Did you really? Great station, did you know John?

*John Madormo? Yeah.*

So I did that story — I've always thought it was a very well-run operation, even when the kids are on the air and not that good, it seemed to be a pretty professional effort. And I

just pitched the story. To make it timely, one of their deejays last year was voted the top deejay in the country. And they won a couple other national awards last year. And they've won all these national awards and I thought it seemed interesting. A large chunk of their audience is older people like myself who just listen to it. It's just a nice story, how John came in there and did it. So there's no way the economy should be filtered into that story anywhere. It's a non-commercial station, so it's not like all their advertisers fled, so, and they're going strong. It really didn't impact them at all, so that just turned out as a regular old story which would have been the same now as it would have been two, three, five years ago.

*It's neat that — most of my friends that worked there went into other fields. A couple guys that I worked with, they now work at Q101.*

What did you do there?

*I did music deejaying, news and traffic, whatever ... I loved that. At any rate, you've mentioned that it didn't really affect your approach to your beat —*

Only in the way that, I mean, there are other little ways it would affect it. Do a story on something, you got a source you want to talk to, you call that source, and that source is no longer working there. That sort of thing. There's little bumps in the road, which is all tied to the economy. But little things like that sometimes would pop up. But I didn't make the economy the first thing I thought about with every story I approached.

*Did your idea of what topic or type of story your readers would want to see change at all?*

Me personally, no. I continued with the same approach. But in the *Tribune's* quest to become more, shall we say, reader-friendly, to react to the economic crisis, the editors may have had more ideas for stories along those lines that they would ask me if I would want to do. So maybe I did more stories about that, I don't know. It could be looked at that way. But if I did, it was probably generally stuff that was pitched to me that they said 'Can you do this?' and I said 'Yeah, sure.'

*Do you follow reader comments to your stories at all, online?*

Not online, no. I do get e-mails. People liked it, didn't like it, and I answer them all.

*Have you seen a change in reader feedback?*

Actually, I probably see less of it now. Because the stories I was doing, like the Q section for example, they tend to be fun and lighthearted and stupid. The section was designed to be fun and lighthearted and stupid, and kind of an antidote to the rest of the Sunday paper. And I think a lot of readers picked up on that, consciously or subconsciously.

And they would go to the Q section for a good laugh, so they'd contact me, send me a funny story. Let me tell you about my aunt Hilda, what she did, blah blah blah. So those are the comments, or phone calls. I used to get a lot more phone calls when I was out in Naperville but being moved around, this is like my third phone extension since February. So I've pretty much managed to wipe out my trail, people can't find me. The PR people and stuff, 'I thought you got fired, cause I haven't been able to find you.' 'Well. I've been kind of hiding.'

*How much attention do you pay to reader feedback?*

Well if the reader has a complaint or points out an error, we jump on it and make sure we get it corrected. If you do a story and they say, 'You know what would've been good in your story, if you'd talked to so and so or you mentioned something,' you can't really do anything with that cause you can't rewrite the story two months later. But I'll thank them. 'Yeah, you're right, I should've included that in the story' sort of thing. I did a big blowout for the Live! section back in February on Bozo.

*Bozo the clown?*

Bozo the clown. I was at WGN, and I was standing in the studio, and I looked down and there were these two big tape marks on the floor where tape had been. And I said to somebody, 'What's that from?' And they said, 'That's where they used to set the grand prize game.' And I started looking around and there were all kinds of remnants of Bozo at WGN. If you're in the studio where the bleachers were, for Bozo, where the kids sat, that's right where the lottery ball machines are, every night, when they do the drawings. It's the exact same spot and if they were ever to pan up and look at the ceiling you would see up, along the top of the ceiling, it's painted kind of like a brownish, like the inside of a circus tent, and it looks like the poles are painted up there. So that's when they had the acrobats performing, and they shot up — you would see — it would give the impression that you were in a circus tent. And they had all this stuff, props and things left over. And they're just stored away, here and there, all around WGN, so that was the story. And then I did the story, talked to the producer, I spent a week getting hilarious stories, just talking to all these people, talking to the last Bozo, Joey Diori, and all these people. And we ran a list of all the characters, all the people on Bozo. Everybody who was — when they were on the show, when they died, character. Most of them are gone now. And somehow, I left out Cookie the Clown. And I got six emails. 'You know, you left Cookie the Clown out of that chart.' Oh no! and I apologized to everybody. The strange thing was, a month before the Bozo story I did a story on Cookie's widow, who lives in the area still, and she was selling off a bunch of his paintings, cause he was an artist. And he did clown paintings and paintings of Garfield and stuff like that. And he left behind two giant trunks full of paintings, which she occasionally used to give out, but then she found out that you can sell them for four or 500 bucks a pop. So I did a story that she was putting some more of them on eBay. She's really sweet, really nice lady. And after talking to her, she would call me back, sounded like a heavy smoker, 'Hey Bill, how you doing? It's Lulu,' and we would talk. She called me at home all the



time. So she was right in the front of my brain and I somehow left her husband out of the story, I just felt so bad. But I think we went into the Web page and included a note, we put him in there. So if people checked it online they would see he was in there. That kind of thing is an inexcusable omission on my part.

*It happens. Do you think reader comments ever drove content change? As in — people said, I want to see this type of story, then you would take that into account?*

I don't think reader comments do as much as focus groups do. And I'm not really sure how good focus groups are cause I think focus groups, you can make them say what you want them to say, I think. So I don't know if reader comment would drive change. I do think that reader comment, if they're really happy with something you're doing, it can push you on, kind of like the mode we're in now, Illinois corruption. That's really struck a nerve with readers and I've got neighbors — really cynical and really despise the *Tribune* — and they just me how much they love what we're doing. Going after politicians, University of Illinois, how they just said that's really great. And they had written off the *Tribune* long ago.

I don't know if we've won them back yet, but they're seeing us in an entirely different light, and I think that's really a common word-of-mouth sort of thing. And I think that at least it indicates to me, and I hope it would indicate to the people that run things, that maybe we're on the right track. And it's something we shouldn't screw around with. In fact, maybe it's something we should be doing even more. Reader comments — online comments — I don't know if that does anything. But word of mouth — and I told my boss, I said, 'Hey, people are saying really good things about us.' Just like when people say really bad things about us —

*Were there any letters or comments you received relating to lifestyle and money or the economy that stuck out to you?*

Comments — letters or comments? Yeah. This is like probably last summer, for the Q section, before things got really bad, but when people were starting to lose their jobs, somebody told me that people were giving up their pets in greater numbers to shelters. So we did a story on it, but we went kind of beyond that — we did the story before anybody else did — it went beyond just taking your dogs to the anti-cruelty because you can't keep them anymore. People were just opening their doors and letting the dogs go and the cats and turning them into strays. People would — place is foreclosed and they would close up the place and leave the animals in there and go. So it was a really bad problem. And we kind of took it not just, this is really bad and people are being stupid, we kind of approached it as, what can you do to avoid that. So we talked about food pantries that had pet food, numbers you could call, organizations that would take your animal from you and take care of it until you got back on your feet. So it was kind of a reader service kind of thing.

Again, I was just talking to somebody in the animal welfare community — I have a lot of background in that — and they just said, 'This is something that's going on, can you do anything?' So I said 'Yeah, okay,' and it turned out to be one of those useful stories.

*I think we've talked a bit about the reduction in staff and the shrinking newshole. How would you say this reduction — anything else you'd like to say about how the shrinking newshole and reduction in staff affected lifestyle coverage here at your paper?*

Yeah, just kind of like what we touched on. We all have had to —

*People are writing more stories for different sections.*

More stories they've never had any interest or knowledge about, and they're being forced to kind of become better reporters, really. People working harder. Back when I was working out in Naperville, I was perfectly content to work on three stories at a time, just juggle them. Right now I'm working on six or seven. But again, these stories will be shorter, they'll need fewer interviews to do them, so it forces you to manage your time better, and I like to be kind of organized. So me, I just come in early, check my list of jobs for the day, and just jump around, do stuff. Gotta call a guy at a golf course for a story that's probably not going to run until the end of August or even September. I just kind of lay the groundwork and I figure, if you know you're going to do the story, do it, as fast as you can, just get it done right away, get it done and throw it over your shoulder. Turn it in, okay, now what? Just keep going. Moving ahead. That's the best way to look at it. And another thing about the reductions — I lost a lot of friends. And it's not like, they weren't low-hanging fruit, these people weren't lazy slobs, they worked really hard and they were really good writers, really good editors.

*What happened to them?*

Last august, in the Q section, we had two writers, me and another guy, and he got the axe. He still doesn't have a job. It's not uncommon. People who left a year and a half ago — some of them are teaching, part time teaching jobs, they took their buyouts and left. So they're — they got something going for them. But I think a lot of them are just getting other things. We had a really good reporter who was out in Oakbrook. He went to work for some urban planning company on Michigan Avenue. Lost a great reporter. He just left on his own, he didn't — this was a week before the last wave of layoffs. We all knew it was coming. He just figured well, beat the crowd to the unemployment line sort of thing, so just lost a lot of really good people so — and not just friends, good people, great institutional memory, the whole deal. And there's no way those of us left behind can make up for that. We could try but we're just a different product.

*Do you think employee morale, and changing morale, and sense of stability has affected content?*

I can only speak for myself. The axe has been hanging over our heads for so long. The staff, for two years, right after, even before Sam Zell came in. And all we would hear from the bosses was, 'There's gonna be big changes. I don't know what this place is gonna look like a year from now.' And sure enough, regular waves of layoffs. And I was

always coming in, and it was always a question that would be asked, among the survivors, 'Is this it?' 'Well, we don't know.' And right away you took that to mean, 'No, there's gonna be more,' and there always were more. This last wave, I don't know, it seems to be this feeling that we're about as bare-bones as they can go. We kind of think that this is where they wanted to be all the time. This is the number of bodies they wanted. And with the survivors — those of us who have survived — smaller papers — we're a different paper than we were six months ago or eight months ago. I just kind of feel there's, and with the economy getting better, seeming to get better, I just kind of feel that we may be over the hump and it's, I'm not gonna say it's a promising future, but we can stop worrying about that crap and can focus more about what we want to do, what we have to do. So I just, there have been days when I've actually felt energized, and I don't know why. And maybe it's cause I'm doing so much different material, maybe it's because things are looking up a bit. Even six months ago I was talking to PR people. They said things like, it seems like things have bottomed out for us. They weren't laying people off, things didn't seem so dismal. Some of their clients were coming back, new clients were nosing around, looking to hire them. It just seems in the PR field, at least, they were a little bit ahead of things and just that promise that something might be turning in the right direction. It kind of buoyed our spirits, cause I wasn't the only one that heard that. Other people on the staff heard that sort of thing. So we were all thinking, I see some advertisers coming into the paper, that's good to see, new ones, so I think there's, if the bosses will let us, we're not going to be looking back. I think the staff is just ready to tackle whatever challenges come at us, whether it's the new section or writing about swim goggles, and I think we've kind of stopped worrying about layoffs. There's more important things to do right now than worry about that stuff. And among those of us left, there seems to be a — there's so few of us — it's kind of like we're in a small paper back in the day, where we all started out.

*Everybody does everything.*

Everybody does everything, you know everybody, there's a — doesn't seem to be a lot of ego floating around. People seem to be, maybe it's just like you were in the foxhole for the last two years with these people and you survived. So it kind of brings you together. That's why veterans have conventions, to get back together with the guys they served with in Korea or whatever. But it — there just seems to be a professional effort on everybody's part to get along and do the best job possible. Not that we weren't trying to do that before, but now there's this relief that we've survived and then we can make this whatever we want to make of it. And we're making the best of it, I think. Like with the Sunday section, I think it's gonna be a nice product. I'm not usually gung ho about new *Tribune* ideas, but they actually have come up with some nice ones recently. I think we're doing a good job.

*Can you talk a little bit about that — about changing sections and how that denoted content change in the paper?*

You mean me personally? Or eliminating some —

*Well, a big change that I noticed was Q disappeared and it was replaced with that Smart section — and you were a reporter for Q and then you became sort of an everything reporter.*

Yeah. I didn't go to Smart.

*Why didn't you go to Smart?*

I think they realized that I wouldn't have been happy there.

*Why?*

Well, the Smart section had a lot of content that was like family-oriented — raising your kids and stuff. And I've done that, I've been there, and I've written about that. And they had better people to do it. They had a couple writers who are raising kids right now. So they were more new to it, more clued in. They would go online to research topics on their own, so they're more aware of things that I have no interest in. I'm sorry, my kids are off and gone, and I'm perfectly happy. And they were never arrested so I can't use that other story. So yeah, I think the Smart section — personally I believe it really shifted gears from the Q section. So for a while, a lot of the same people were doing it and a lot of the content transferred over. I think it was kind a shock to a lot of readers cause it didn't have that Q playfulness mentality. Which could mean it wasn't goofy. It wasn't as goofy, it was more of a serious helpful section than Q was. And again, I don't know how that translated to readers. I just know I got an awful lot of e-mails, people complaining about it.

*Really? Is that why Smart is becoming Sunday?*

Maybe, I think it might be more advertising. It's been pretty thin the last couple months.

*Cause it's several sections getting condensed into one. Is that why?*

The magazine was losing a lot of money — getting smaller and smaller. The Smart section is down to six pages. The ones in my zone that I get — a six-page section every Sunday, that's pretty small. House and Homes section — I think that was — again my opinion — a mishmash cause you had real estate and you had gardening and you had home security, and it just didn't seem to come together nicely. There would always be rumors that they were gonna take the gardening and the home décor stuff and put it into the magazine, which I always thought made pretty good sense, you could probably get some advertisers to migrate over too. I guess the magazine is a losing proposition as a weekly thing. It's expensive to produce, we don't print it here, we use higher grade paper, so there's a lot of lead time. So I think that just condensing these sections, hopefully taking the best of each, and kind of reinventing some stuff. Hopefully the puzzles, puzzle island —

*Four pages of puzzles.*

Yeah, I think it's a great idea. If somebody likes a puzzle, well they're gonna like four pages of puzzles. So I think this gives us a chance to eliminate some problems and move forward in ways that could be kind of cool, if they sell ads.

*Have you noticed how lifestyle coverage at the Tribune is different from coverage at other papers in other cities?*

No, I can't really comment on other cities. The *Sun Times* — I don't read their Sunday paper — but when I read it nothing pops out at me as being lifestyle coverage. I think maybe again, if we had the number of people they had, we wouldn't have much lifestyle coverage either.

*They have substantially less there?*

Very small and always losing people. We just stole another of their photographers this week. We took their number two guy from sports about a month ago and they're talking about more layoffs and they're losing money, they're having problems. So I would think lifestyle coverage — a lot of lifestyle coverage — would probably be expendable when you're struggling to be viable. They're reporting the news, they do a great job, and man if they had the bodies we have, they might be killing us because they've always done a good job in the city covering hard news.

*I interviewed the film critic at the Detroit News, and when I spoke to Linda, they both mentioned that when content gets reduced, lifestyle is often the first thing that gets condensed or reduced or migrated to other sections or cut overall, would you agree with that?*

I think so, yeah, it seems to be seen as maybe the fluff, the fat, not by the people who do it certainly — but I think the readers enjoy the stories. Papers everywhere are eliminating TV and movies and critics. Well okay, you can save a lot of dough doing that, but I think that's a real good reader service.

*People like to read those.*

Yeah.

*And I think they like to see the same person every time. And if it's from the wire it's probably not gonna be consistent.*

If you read Roger Ebert all the time, you know what he thinks about movies and if you generally like what he likes, then you'll go see it or whatever. If he says it's a lousy movie and you come to trust his opinion — if he says it's lousy, don't go! And I think

they kind of put a face on it too, which is good. Hopefully we — a lot of papers are eliminating all their critics, a lot of their critics, but we've pretty much kept ours. We still have a theater critic and we still have a cultural critic so that's great to see. I imagine there have been a lot of fights over this, people from features fighting to keep their people. And it's not like they're fighting to keep some guy on the copy desk who just writes headlines and shuffles through and just helps with production. These are people the readers have come to look for. And if we were relying just on freelancers to review movies and concerts and things, totally it would not be beneficial for us I don't think.

*As far as your readership is concerned, when you do reporting or pitch stories, do you think about catering to readers of different classes, especially in a recession, when it maybe is affecting different classes differently?*

Not because of the economy. I've always taken the approach that the *Tribune* ignored certain segments of the population and it wasn't a racial thing so much as an economic thing. We always used to joke that the *Tribune* didn't know Chicago extended beyond Roosevelt Road or west of Damen. So especially when I was with the Q section for example, I would make an effort to find things that normally were a little bit outside of the *Tribune's* sphere. Profiling some guy in Englewood who takes kids who are headed on the wrong path and teaches them martial arts, but before he would take them to their classes, he would make them bring in their report cards every week. He would have study time with them and turn them into students first before he'd turn them into little martial arts enthusiasts. Things like that. That's the kind of story on the news side I don't think they — but the Q section loved it. Things like that. So people talk about diversity — we gotta be diverse — I don't know if we always did that, we always have done that, we're better than we were, much better, but I always tried to look at — 'This is not a *Tribune* story, this story wouldn't be in your parents' *Tribune*' — 'Okay good, then I'm interested in doing it'. It would just — this stuff is so much fun to write, it's interesting. I always tried to make an effort to expand the *Tribune's* horizons. I tried to do it with a story I'm working on now which I worked on all week and I think we're probably going to end up killing it.

*What's it about?*

There's a guy in Chicago, I heard about him a couple years ago, he's known as Party Steve. And what Party Steve would do, this is how he got famous in his circle of friends, he would ride around on his bike all morning and all afternoon, all the time, all over the city looking for parties that were going to be happening. He'd look for flyers, word of mouth, talk to friends, talk to people he didn't even know. 'Yeah, there's gonna be a small three member band from Cincinnati and they're gonna play in so-and-sos basement.' A little art show, people showing some of the films they made, at so-and-sos loft. So he'd gather up all these things and he'd judge them, figure out which ones he liked, a list of 10 or 12, and then he would text 40 or 50 friends with a list of addresses. This is where we're starting out. And then he would get there with a couple of his buddies and they'd scout it out and if it was good, they'd pass the word on, and if not,

‘No, we’re gonna move on to so-and-so.’ And they called it blowing up a party. And the people he texted to also texted four or five friends each.

So you could be having a party, sitting around drinking a couple beers, watching some kid’s animation that he just finished at Columbia College and by the end of the night 50 people, you have no idea who they are, would just show up and just enjoy the party. And they weren’t crashing the party. They weren’t coming there and drinking all the beer and running out, stealing the furniture, they would just appreciate the party. And Party Steve would just get the reputation of being the guy who knew every party in Chicago. And he moved to Philadelphia two years ago and he was in town last week and we went to a bunch of parties. I was talking to a guy who was his roommate in Philadelphia. And he said — he just sits around the apartment all day on the computer — he’ll get a call from somebody in Chicago, ‘What’s going on in Chicago this weekend?’ And Steve would text back right away — ‘There’s a party here, there’s a party there, there, there.’ So he’s got his finger on the pulse. Interesting guy, very quiet, kind of big bushy head of hair, wears thick glasses, kind of nerdy, giggles a lot, doesn’t speak in complete sentences very much. I found him kind of interesting. He goes to these parties and he doesn’t — no drugs, no alcohol — he just sits in the corner and enjoys the party. People come over, they’re glad to see him, people are always glad to see him, ‘Steve! I didn’t know you were in town’ Big hugs, handshakes.

So I talked to his associates and they’re all telling me interesting things about him, war stories, parties they’ve survived, one party ended up at some gang headquarters, and it ended up a big fight. All the gang members went after each other and they were all like beating each other, so him and his friends had to leave quickly. But he’s known as Party Steve, and I asked him what his name was, and he said he didn’t want to tell me right away. That was a little red flag. I said why, he said, ‘I don’t use it, I don’t want it out.’ ‘Okay, I won’t put it in the story. What’s your last name?’ He gave me a name. And I didn’t believe it. But I said okay. Over the course of the evening, three or four times — two evenings, I said, ‘Now, you haven’t told me any lies have you’ ‘Nope. Everything I told you’s the truth.’ So I talked to a couple of his close friends and I said, ‘Do you know his last name?’ And then they all claimed that they didn’t. They’ve known him for five years, they don’t know his last name. Maybe they don’t, it could be.

So — I’m not gonna do the story without his name, I won’t put it in there, but I got to know what his last name is. So he gave me this name and I know for a fact that he used to sell beer at Sox park. I’ve seen photos of him hawking beer. So I talked to a guy I know at the Sox and I asked him, can you tell me if this guy ever worked for you? And they went through their files and said, ‘No, nobody by that name ever worked here.’ ‘Ok, thank you.’ So we ran — I don’t know where they ran it — some of our reference people, this morning — ran his phone number, his cell phone number, and it came back with a different name. Which is the same name that I got on caller ID when he called me at home one night. Allen K——. We found out that it’s Allen S. K——. So I’m suspecting his name is Steve K——. So it looked like he lied to me about his name, and I told him, ‘If you lie to me about your name, I can’t believe anything you’ve told me.’

So we’re gonna talk this afternoon, but I’m suggesting that we just kill the story. Cause as interesting as all these stories I heard about him were, if they’re based on a guy who — who knows. I mean we found one record of one arrest in Philadelphia for giving police a

false identity. So the red flags are starting to pop up. And it would be a very interesting story, appealing to — focused on the hipster community, which the *Tribune* doesn't do anything with, maybe rightly so, but the demographic on the story would be people in their 20s which — not that any of them read the paper, but it's a representation of a demographic that we don't really do much with. So it would be kind of interesting. I've talked to several of his associates. One guy, only name he would give me is Rotten Milk. That's his name. Rotten Milk. He's a musician. I said, 'What's your real name?' He said, 'That's between me and the police.' I said come on. 'Nope, can't tell you.' And he is known in the music circles around Chicago as Rotten Milk. Very nice guy, really quotable, some very pithy things, a lot of his friends had things to say that were very interesting, kind of analyzing and stuff. So it would have been an interesting story. But if he's not telling me the truth, if it's all based on — almost like performance art. Like he's not a real person.

*And all that work that you did?*

Yeah. I was out with him 'til three in the morning Saturday night, and all the loud horrible music I had to sit through, and the bad tattoos I had to look at. (Laughs) It was not fun, but it was interesting. But like I say — I put eight hours in on Friday night, then went out with him on Saturday night, and it might just fall through. But that again was an effort to reach out to a community that we don't do anything with and would probably rather that we didn't do anything with them, but still they're out there, they're part of Chicago and it's a pretty interesting subculture from what I've heard and what I've seen and what I know for a fact. Like the moped gangs. I heard about moped gangs in Chicago. And one of my kids said 'Yeah, there's this guy named Kurt and he's the head of a moped gang.' Okay. So I contacted Kurt and Kurt turned out to be one of the most interesting people I've ever met. He's a musician, a rapper, and he heads this whole group of guys who — some people would call them slackers but I don't know, they find old mopeds and they fix them up and they ride around and they'll do like 60 or 70 and they'll just ride all over the city, go out to the beach, spend the night sitting on the beach, and again it's just a bunch of really nice kids. These kids I was with last weekend seemed to be kind of jerky.

By and large the moped kids were really good, and I've actually used some of them as sources for other stories. They got to know the *Tribune*, they appreciated the story I did, and for other stuff that we needed a young voice, an intelligent young voice, I could call one of these guys and say, 'You want to comment about this?' 'Oh sure!' So again it's kind of opened the door a little bit to the younger demographic which I think we don't always — two years ago I was talking to the guy who was in charge of all the features departments, Jim Moore, he mentioned that we had only one person of all the features people. One person, editors, writers, under the age of 30. Actually I think that guy was 30. And everyone else — all these old farts, and so I said, 'We gotta make an effort to reach out to younger readers, somehow.'

Cause the old folks don't know any of this stuff is going on. They don't know mopeds — they knew what they were, but — 'There are people that ride together in bunches?' 'Yeah. Take over parks and they do everything else.' They have their own little moped



shops and I heard a rumor that somebody found an abandoned garage full of two dozen old 1970s era mopeds rusting away in Ohio, and they hopped on their bikes and they went out there and they bought them all. And then they rented a truck and brought them all back here. They're just really a bunch of nice kids. Enterprising, and having a good time with their lives, it was perfect Q fodder. So yeah. That's the kind of thing we need to do is reach out where we can, and we're aware of it and we try, it's just that sometimes we don't know where to look. And if I hadn't stumbled across Party Steve, I wouldn't have even thought of this story. Somebody told me about him. Told me a few of the legendary stories. Which now are maybe just stories. Legendary fiction. But now I'm ready to just chuck it. It's not worth the aggravation. Anyway, what else can I do for you?

**Mary Lou Nolan, Assistant Managing Editor, Features, *Kansas City Star***

*How long have you worked at the Star?*

Since 1976.

*Have you always worked in features?*

I started on the news side, started in a suburban bureau, as a reporter and photographer, did a little stint in the state capital, worked as a consumer reporter, worked as an assistant city editor on the news side, moved to features to become the travel editor. I was the travel editor for 10 years, that was a great time to be a travel editor, and then I took this job about 10 years ago.

*How is it — features versus news?*

I think in almost any newsroom there are feelings about metro and in particular the hard news folks versus the soft news folks. Despite all that I think we're really friendly, we do a lot of things for A1, we work metro shifts, we'll run some metro stories. So I think it's pretty cooperative, but like any paper there's certainly a difference in the culture of the departments. We have the best food.

*I bet. As far as the economic collapse in September of 2008, my project is looking at six months previous to that, about April of 2008, to about six months past that, which would be March of 2009.*

The worst of it.

*Would you say that economic collapse had edged into lifestyle sections following the economic collapse or even leading up to it?*

Well certainly, a good lifestyle department is about writing about and telling the story of people's lives. And if we're going to tell the story of people's lives in that time period one of the things we're going to do is write about how the economic conditions are affecting people's lives. So definitely yes.

*And would you be able to give any examples or types of stories that came in?*

Actually I can. Coincidentally, yesterday I had to go through some old sections. We keep copies of our front pages and I was looking for something else and I started to see some stories around the economy that I had forgotten about so I pulled a couple of them out. This one was a takeout on several people who already were saving money before the collapse and giving advice to people about stuff to do. One of the things in lifestyle we try to do is — not to just tell sad story, sad story, sad story. We are always looking for ways to get beyond that, to either give advice to tell interesting stories. To have fun with

some things. We've done everything this year from an A1 that a feature reporter did on following someone for 30 days who was looking for a job, a tech guy that had been laid off from somewhere, and what that was like, it was a really moving, moving package, to things like this which is just kind of a fun sidebar. The \$700 billion economic stimulus, what you could get — House and Home is our Sunday section about homes. This was, how to party on a shoestring. Different things. We also did probably my favorite story, very high concept, for Halloween, we took a bunch of pumpkins and then wrote on them things like, economic collapse, and just all these things that had to do with — gas prices going up — whatever — and then a reporter took them and destroyed them in various ways. We dropped one off a building, couple of our folks took guns out to someone's farm and actually shot a couple of them up, we had an elephant at the renaissance festival smash several of them. Smashing Pumpkins was going to be in town before too long, which was sort of where it all started, but it was really fun and it's a great video. So we do serious and not so serious.

*One story that I saw, it was looking at, entertainment wise, how people were staying inside more than going out — but the story really emphasized the positive side of that, which I thought was interesting.*

I think that's something we probably do we think about more than some other departments. Probably because we want people to have an impression of us that we're informative and that we're authoritative but that we're also entertaining, so we work on things like that.

*You mentioned that you've worked on the news side before but in terms of the past couple years and what's been going on, did you find that you had to cover business and financial news more closely in order to follow — did you cover it more closely than you had before*

You mean the whole paper or myself?

*Yourself — following those departments. In order to see ... how it would affect your own department.*

Well, certainly if you're going to write informed stories about what people are encountering in this economic collapse, you have to understand as best you can what's going on. So I mean, I read the *Wall Street Journal* everyday, it's the only paper that I still take in print other than my own. The *New York Times* is here, I don't have to subscribe to that, but the *Wall Street Journal* is one that I still look at every day. I think they do a fabulous job, not only of explaining what's going on in the business sense, but also of relating those changes to people's lifestyle in their features section. So you have to understand it or you wouldn't know. We had a reporter out who was tracking — was looking for a street where he could tell a story about foreclosures and unless you really understand what's going on, how the process works and know how to track records so you can determine the escalating values of the homes over time and then the crash, you can't tell that story. And that's what a lot of people were going through.

*So would you say, in addition to yourself, other reporters and editors were also following it more?*

Oh, definitely, yes.

*So did you read the Wall Street Journal more than you had before?*

I certainly sought out, on a national basis, more information about the economy than I have before, in order to understand what's going on. Plus I'm just interested. I'm in the middle of it too.

*Would you be able to say what ways the content in the features and entertainment as well as the home section changed in the months following the economic collapse?*

As I pointed out with a few of the stories — we might be taking traditional topics — like home entertaining and putting an economic spin on it — we run a mom's Web site called Mom2mom and they've done a fair amount of things about frugal living, and in fact we're waiting for some changes on the site's structure so that we can have a designated area for frugal living, which is very much of interest to a lot of people who come to that Web site. So that's one of the ways.

*I noticed that as well at the Chicago Tribune. They changed a lot of their sections to reflect more frugal living advice for people in the lifestyle section than they had before. In the paper paper are you planning any section changes?*

We had a reorganization in March that changed some of our sections around and now all our business, metro and national news is in one section and they've — out of the business desk they have launched a pretty successful blog called Dollars and Sense. Which is good, it's what people are living.

*Has the paper gotten smaller?*

From where it was a year ago? Yes, it has gotten smaller. I think that's a reflection both of the difficulties in the newspaper industry, but also an effect of the recession on advertising has a large impact. I'm sure you read Web sites and advertising is off somewhere between 20 and 30 percent or more across the country so that's gonna shrink your newshole to some extent.

*Has it shrunk the newshole in features and homes?*

I would say it shrunk the newshole in every section of the newspaper. Even if it weren't a section that had a strong advertising base, the fact that revenue is off elsewhere in the paper would make you look at, well can you save a little space here or there. So we're all very aware of what a page of newsprint costs and we try to, where we can, tighten up

without hurting the readers. At the same time, I don't think we're stingy. I'm sitting here editing a story for — either this Sunday or next Sunday, A1, and it will probably take one or two inside pages, just by itself, so we're still committed to some big projects.

*In-depth stories.*

Yeah.

*How has it changed, how you consider using that space, when it becomes smaller?*

I'm not sure I'm following you. How you decide to use the page?

*Yes. Do you run shorter stories ever, than they would have been before?*

Sometimes. One example, on Mondays we made a tactical decision that we were going to make our Monday section smaller than other days of the week, that that's where we were going to take space out. The belief that Monday is a busy day for folks and that that might be a good time to tighten up. So we committed to a cover that only has one story that jumps off of it. A columnist who runs there jumps inside. Other than that the cover is self-contained. And we use it for, it's a very graphic presentation, of events, primarily entertainment, that are coming up in town, during the week, it's always called 'What a Week.' And then at the bottom, there's a reader, visual reader profile called 'A Case of the Mondays' where we interview a person about a few things and then at the end you ask them what they like or dislike about Mondays. So that was a very strategic thing. So I think if you can do a couple things like that, then you don't have to worry about space day after day after day, which kind of frees you up to be more creative and to spend more time researching rather than worrying, 'Where am I going to get my eight columns this week,' you know. So some decisions we make on the fly, but things like that I think have been very helpful to us.

*Did your awareness of the of the economic collapse, the fact that you followed it so closely, did it affect your approach to your beat ?*

In general, if you're telling the story of people's lives, and people are suffering in the economy, you're going to look for an economic angle to many of the traditional things you would do. And you're also gonna have your eye out for what's new and different. That you haven't seen happening before. I think we had a reporter did a little piece for A1, just a kind of little scene-setter. Early on, we started hearing tales that people were going to pawn shops and were getting rid of more valuables to try to free up some cash, and we just went out and did a piece, talked to some people who were coming and going from pawn shops. You wouldn't know to go there unless you were paying attention or were really really good at guessing what people would do.

*I wrote a story about pawn shops for my school magazine as well.*

Did you?

*Looking at an economic collapse from the lifestyle angle, do you think it's taught you something different about finance or economics than you would have if you were looking at it from the news side, the hard news side?*

Let me think for a minute.

*I think it's interesting, the dichotomy of looking at it from a strictly business standpoint versus looking at it from the completely other side of how it affects people's lives.*

One example I can think of — we were in a discussion, news folks, feature folks, business folks. Early on, talking about what kind of stories we wanted to do about the economy. And one of our hard news people was talking about telling the story of what the real unemployment rate is when you factor in people who have given up looking, underemployed and all that, and they came up with a number, I don't remember what it was. Fifteen percent or something, I'm kind of guessing. And I remember saying, 'But what's the story?' Once you put that number out there, what are you going to do with it? And they just looked at me like — 'It's a story!' — I'm like, 'Where are the people, what's the story? How do you tell that story?' It seems awfully depressing to say the real unemployment rate is 15 percent and here's how we calculated it. I mean, I want to know what that looks like. And I think sometimes feature people think about that more. What does this condition look like, not just what's causing it, or what are the effects of it beyond the statistics. What does it look like for an average family? What's a poor person going through? What are the particular challenges that they're facing now that may be different from another time? And what about for a rich person? And what about for a young person or an old person? We used to use a technique occasionally, when we were brainstorming, and there's nothing revolutionary about it. It's probably done many places, where we would take a topic like the economic recession and the people sitting around the room would each be given kind of a demographic to represent and then you would talk about, okay, if I'm a 25-year-old college student, what do I want to know about the recession? If I'm a 65-year-old retired person, what do I want to know about the recession? If I'm a mom with two young children, what do I want to know about the recession? And the recession is a big topic. You'd probably break it down a little more. But then you just start writing all this stuff down, and then decide, okay, is there a story in all these things, or is there one story that's so compelling you want to tell that, the story of the graduate student with \$100,000 in loans who can't find a job. And that's a pretty compelling story in and of itself. So, I think that's one of the things that helps us find stories about people.

*You said you've worked here since 1976. Our country has seen other recessions, not this severe, in the early 80s, early 90s, maybe 2001 — after September 11. It must be hard to compare, because those ones were smaller, but how is the coverage different?*

I'm not sure I could talk about the coverage being different. I certainly think because of the size of this recession and the fact that it's combined with such a downturn in newspapers has brought it home to people in newsrooms more so than some earlier things. I can remember in the early '80s, my husband and I bought our first house. And we paid an incredible interest rate — it was 12, 13 percent. And we just did it, we were young, you move through it, and the recession really wasn't hurting newspapers so terribly, you know, it wasn't threatening jobs there, so you feel good about it. Right now there's so much going on, and it's so much worse for a couple different reasons. It's hard to compare that to earlier coverage.

*Do you think the fact that it's so severely impacting people in newsrooms specifically, do you think that is affecting coverage?*

I don't think that. I should say I don't know. But my gut feeling is, and certainly talking to my folks out there, is that because they're living through it in a little more dramatic way than they have in the past they certainly identify more with people and perhaps maybe want to tell the stories more. I'm not sure about that, but that's just based on my folks. It would be hard right now to overestimate the importance of good coverage of the economy. So if there's more, as long as it's good, I'm all for it.

*Did your ideas of the topics or types of stories that your readers would want to see change from that time period — roughly April 2008 to April 2009?*

I think we acted on the belief that our readers would want to see innovative coverage around economic issues and lifestyle issues. But at the same time, you can't do that day after day. You can't, that can't become everything you do because that would just be too much. Everyone is still leading a life whether they've got less money or they don't have a job. They still want to know what movies to go to or how to cook a soufflé, we had a huge national election. There was an awful lot going on.

*It's been a crazy news year. And as far as editor letters and reader comments on the Web site, have you seen those increase, decrease or change noticeably?*

Because I don't deal directly with letters to the editor, I don't know exactly what the volume is. We print a certain amount every day and we have no problem filling out that space. I read them, I'm interested to see what people are talking about. And there's been a lot going on in the city politically that has kept a lot of people busy. As far as comments on the Web, I don't put a great deal of store in comments on the Web. In general they tend to be so negative, and it's kind of a certain —

*Subset.*

I guess. I don't know quite what to call it, but I certainly don't think of comments as a sampling of average opinion and so I don't worry about that too much. I'll look at them

from time to time on a particular story. Sometimes people just have interesting takes on things — but I don't think it's reflective of our general readership.

*The film critic that I interviewed at the Detroit News, he talked a lot about how when the newshole shrinks, lifestyle and features are usually the first areas that get cut, and his reasoning was because a lot of the times the publishers are more hard news people. Would you say this has been true for your newspaper?*

There may be that perception out there. I think one thing to think about at least at this paper and probably many papers — the features sections are a larger percentage of the paper than your news sections. At one point here, I don't know how many sections we were putting out. Half the Sunday paper was coming out of the features department. When you start taking space out proportionally is it going to look like features gets hit more? I think that could happen, just cause we have so much more to begin with than some of our other sections. But at the same time I'll say, when we reorganized in the spring, we have three freestanding sections every day, and all our news went into one section, and sports and features. So there was a real commitment to the idea that a features section is something that's important to readers as an independent thing in the mix, not just something that you can continue to cut away at.

*That's really interesting, because it's been different at the other papers I went to.*

Is that right?

*The Chicago Tribune, they eliminated their magazine, their Sunday magazine, and they had created a new section more about giving people advice about surviving in the economy that was called Smart. But that only ran for five or six months, and as I was going there they were getting rid of that and they had a new section called Sunday, which encompassed almost all of the different Sunday sections in one package, which is kind of sad.*

Yeah — I will say we just relaunched our Sunday magazine in February with more local content and a redesign of the product, so we're still holding onto the Sunday magazine, which is one of my favorite things.

*That's good.*

Yeah.

*Would you be able to comment about how you think lifestyle journalism here in Kansas City at your paper compares to that in other cities?*

I think a lot of papers that I'm familiar with, the best sections are very reflective of their local communities and some may be more arts/entertainment driven than lifestyle. Some may be more high-end, high-concept, off the wall. We certainly look to make that part of



our mix. I will say, in the fall we won the Missouri lifestyle journalism award for best feature section from Mizzou, and we were a finalist in AESFE, the five finalists in the large newspaper category.

*AESFE?*

That's the American Association of Sunday and Feature Editors. I'm also a former president of that group. We've done, I like our section, I think we do some things that are a little out there, like shooting the pumpkins. For Fourth of July we had a reader contest. We asked people to dress like hot dogs, and take pictures and send them to us, we just kind of like to take an idea and just kind of push it every once in a while and just see what — how far you can go. At the same time we do a lot for A1. I'm editing this package right now that our food writer did about large-scale composting using food waste, keeping it out of the landfill and creating this really wonderful compost that you can then — they're doing this with businesses in town, this little family-run business started it. It's going to be quite a package when it's done, about the issue, and I think it was a bit of a stretch for our food writer to do that but she's really really well-informed and an excellent reporter so that sort of became her big A1 thing for the year. So we try to balance things out between the light and highly creative I would say. My folks are, they're really fun people and they're bright people.

*Would you be able to talk a little about your readership and catering to readers who might have different budgets or come from different class backgrounds?*

You mean in terms of what kind of stories we might do? Well, I think that we're always striving to write stories that people of any background will find value in. I think stories about people often do that. We don't do a lot of stories about how much to spend on a house, or what to do if you don't have money for this event. I think we're often looking for common ground rather than to try to hit a specific demographic, if that makes sense.

*Are there any specific examples of editorial decisions you made based on the current economic climate or post-collapse?*

Certainly. I think any editor with any budget or any staff is thinking about how to be more resourceful and how to get the biggest bang for the buck. Also weighing decisions, I have a decent expense budget, and I look at what I budgeted more than a year ago for travel, what kind of stories we were going to do, for example. And so you might look at that and say you know, I probably don't need to send a music writer — this is one I'm dealing with right now — I don't need to send a music writer to New Mexico for the big summer opera festival or whatever is up there right now. Maybe that's not so important anymore, and so then the decision comes, should you spend that money on something else that you think will be of value to more people, or should you offer it back as a savings to your newsroom budget. I don't always get to decide that. But I do evaluate whether things seem to be critical and seem to be priorities and those things can change as —

*That sounds like a lot to think about, thinking about the content but also the budgeting at the same time.*

Well, this — I know my budget, and you just keep notes. I just did my freelance budget for the month, and we'll spend thousands and thousands of dollars on freelance out of the features department this month, and we'll be within \$50 of what's budgeted. You just have to keep track, you tell people how much they can spend, and then get out of the way and let them make good decisions about what we need to cover.

*I have some questions based on — I looked at — they call it a constructed week. It's if you take six months of content and you look at roughly one day of the week from each. For example, a Monday in January, a Tuesday in February, so you cover all days of the week over six months for the two time periods I'm covering. In looking at that I did find a fair amount of stories that mentioned or reflected on the economy.*

The whole paper or just features?

*Just features. Features and homes, travel, books, entertainment. I did notice one day in particular — I can't remember which day it was — there was a story about a fashion show, but on the page previous there was a pretty big story about bargain shopping. So I was wondering, if you have a story that's more about going out, spending money, high fashion, do you try to counter it with —*

The editor who planned that day's paper might have, and unfortunately she's in Paris, so I can't ask her. Certainly fashion is one of the areas this year where you look at what's on the runway and what the couture costs are and you look at the ways to highlight the trends and show those trends at different price points. I think we've always tried to do that, but there's certainly more emphasis on that now, and also I think we've done stories about — maybe this isn't the year to buy the new suit or the new great dress, maybe you buy a bag and new shoes, a lot of things like that, about coping with less money to spend.

*While still being about to live and —*

We would never want to give up on high fashion in the sense that, I care about it, I want to know what the trends are, cause I'm going to be seeing them in the department store at many different price points. Are you familiar with Robin Givan?

*The designer?*

She was the fashion writer at the *Washington Post*, she won a Pulitzer last year, she's an incredible cultural observer and she's in Washington now, I think she's covering Michelle Obama. She's wonderful on this very topic of why fashion is so important. I heard her speak at a conference about a year ago. But it's not just a multi-million dollar industry. It affects millions of women and how they make decisions about how they're

gonna spend money and what they want to look like. What's more basic to lifestyle than that? So you just want to make sure you can do it in as accessible a way as possible.

*That's a good way to put it, accessible. Could you talk a bit about the FYI section, does that run Monday through Saturday? How it has evolved over the past couple years.*

FYI was launched as a section in the early- to mid-'90s. Our previous features section had been called Style. It was a smaller section, there was a decision made to go after women readers in particular, and that led to an upgrade of the features — and other features sections — the creation of FYI, improvements in other features sections and an increase in the features staff to do all that. So that was kind of the launching of FYI and it was always with a mission that women see themselves in those pages and women find content there that they're interested in, without denigrating or turning off male readers. And actually, because of the demographic studies that we do, we know that FYI has very strong readership with both men and women. Slightly more with women than men, but it has strong readership with both. Our paper redesigned about three years ago, and out of that came reorganized FYI and I would say if anything it's — we have become more and more local — especially in terms of turning national events, finding a local angle, but also focusing on stories in our community. And I think that probably holds up well as space gets tighter. You really want to focus on what you can tell now. It's a rare day that you will find an FYI lead that isn't a local story. Meaning both locally-written and about something going on in this community. Something going on in Topeka or Wichita, interesting as it may be, you're not going to find it in FYI. You won't find it in the lead position in FYI. You might find it someplace else, you might find it in our local section, or one of our news sections, but not there. So that's kind of a rule that I've followed that actually makes it easier to decide, it takes some of the things out of the way. Now we do travel and we would feature arts and entertainment topics or events on FYI, or in our arts and entertainment sections that didn't take place here. I think that's the big difference that our Arts and Entertainment coverage is going to go out of the area.

*What about the home section? Has that changed very much? Housing was such a big part of what happened,*

Our homes section was created, I'm estimating five or six years ago, and when we developed our concept for that section it was about helping people develop their personal style, and really didn't have anything to do with buying or selling of houses or what the hottest — we do cover trends, but we take the trend and then we try to help people figure out how they can adapt it if they like it and we also do some history things. We did a series once on development of different Kansas City home styles over decades. I think we did five or six different periods. And we would relay what was going on in the history of the town, of the country, at the time a particular style like a Tudor — why were Tudor houses popular at a certain time, what was going on, where was the city stretching, what was going on, so I don't think our coverage has changed much. Other than we probably have a little more emphasis on being affordable or how to get an expensive look with some affordability, but it's always been a very stylish section.

*More style than buying and selling?*

One of the hallmarks of the section is if we have product in there, you're going to know where to get it and how much it's going to cost. I mean that was also from the very beginning. So they have no problem featuring an expensive couch, but in the mix they're going to have inexpensive ones too.

*Have there been a lot of staff changes over that time period in these sections, and did it alter content?*

We're a smaller staff than we were in March of 2008. And we've lost some dedicated positions in those reductions, for example we don't have a fashion writer now.

*That happened also at the News in Detroit.*

But we still have a food editor, at the moment the job I really want to fill is our restaurant critic's job. This wasn't because of the decreasing size of newsrooms, our restaurant critic passed away at Christmastime, she had an aneurysm. I would very much like to fill that position, it's one of a few positions we will fill at some point, but the fact that the economy has been so bad since January, I have not been able to get approval to fill that spot. So that's still out there and we will have a restaurant critic again but I don't know exactly how we're going to get them.

*At the Tribune they're part of a pretty big network of newspapers and they talked about, at all of those newspapers, they had to let a lot of people go, and then as a result they were running more wire stories, and more — they had a service that wrote generalized stories for the Tribune Company, and they were running more of those stories that weren't local, than they had been in the past, and that weren't written locally either.*

*Kansas City Star* is part of the McClatchy Corporation, which is smaller than Tribune Company, but it's a network of 30 papers and they have a wire service too. And we're probably running more — no, I can remember our wire editors saying we didn't have much room for wire anymore. Because we are smaller, we still have a pretty good size staff to manage what we're doing. So while there have been a few times when we've gone to wire probably just because we didn't have anything else, I don't think that's been a dramatic change, but certainly our staffs are markedly smaller in our newspaper, markedly smaller than it was at the beginning of the time period you're talking about.

*Do you use more freelancers than you did before?*

Probably not, because I really haven't — I was able to increase the freelance budget to cover some specific needs after we lost staffers, but quite frankly there's no, we're pretty okay. I have some people who've left the department who freelance for us now, maybe the composition of who's freelancing has changed, some of that — I had a woman who

was both the editor for the home and the food section who left the paper, and she now does some freelance for the home section, a little bit, but mostly for *Star* magazine, she does some things there, I have a hard time thinking of that as freelance, kind of a staff person.

**Lisa Gutierrez, lifestyle reporter, *Kansas City Star***

*I wrote down lifestyle reporter, is that your title?*

Lifestyle reporter, but right now I'm concentrating on entertainment news. We just started a new entertainment blog called Stargazing and I'm the lead writer on that, so that right now is taking up probably about 75 percent of my time, posting to the blog. And it just launched in May, middle of May, and we've had some pretty good numbers in our first full month in June. We almost hit 700,000 hits so we're doing well with it, but it's all the Hollywood stuff, you know, celebrity stuff, and that's both a blog online and then I write our daily column in the paper, and that's also called Stargazing. But I also do GA stuff.

*GA stuff for the features dept?*

For features. The thing is, here in this newsroom without walls, as they say, we contribute to the front page frequently, and in fact that's almost a mandate now, that all departments here contribute to the front page. They get a good diversity of stories out there and different writing styles. So we contribute to the front page, writing for FYI features section, I write for our magazine, our Sunday magazine, occasionally I write for the food section, so we're doing a little bit of everything and I think that might be reflective of what you were going to be talking about, how are we able to do more with less. I think we're all having to tap into wells of creativity that we haven't tapped into before, because we are doing maybe some writing that we haven't done before. I don't usually do food stories but, we'll be doing some of those now, and that'll be fun. You get to stretch yourself, and I have never really done a lot of entertainment writing either but it's something I'm obsessed with in my personal life, so now they pay me to do what I enjoy doing. So that's fun too, finding my way through that, and I never blogged officially, so that's something new too. I think that's the upside of having to fill in for people who've been laid off and —

*That's what the other reporter I interviewed in Chicago was talking about a lot — writing what he hadn't written on before.*

Exactly.

*He thought it was a good thing, because it can push you out of your comfort zone, but can encourage you to be more flexible and creative than you were before.*

Yeah, I think so and — a good example of that is the Stargazing column, the entertainment column that I write every day, that person who was writing it was laid off. So I kind of stepped in to do that and they had already been thinking about coming up with a companion blog for it so they obviously asked if I wanted to do the blog, and I was a little hesitant at first because I'm not used to doing that kind of writing, but it really

surprises and shocks me how I've taken to it, because I really enjoy it, I really enjoy blogging.

*How is it different than writing?*

It's a lot less formal and I'm also having to be, I think, a lot more careful with sources, because I'm not doing a lot of original reporting, that's the main thing. I can't interview Angelina Jolie and I can't interview Nicole Kidman or Kevin Costner, though I would love to, so I'm basically looking at wire reports and what other entertainment sites have done and taking maybe even five or six or seven different stories and distilling them into my own story and thoughts on it, so that's different for me because I'm used to — you pick up the phone and you call somebody, you do an interview. You get it straight from the horse's mouth, you're good to go. And now I'm kind of, it's a lot of compiling and rewriting and by the way, let's throw your own opinion in there too, and it's different, it's an entirely different kind of writing, but I love it. So I'm hoping that I can stay with this for a while. But the other thing too about having fewer people, I think the main way that the budget changes around here have impacted us is that it feels like our sections are getting smaller. I mean I know they are, which means there is less space for the stories that we are working on, so sometimes there does seem to be a conflict if you will, when you have a story that you need to go in right away, but there's no place to put it, so they're maybe looking at, 'Okay, if we can't run it on the front page of the features section, which is where they would typically go, maybe we run it on the inside, or Showtime, or whatever.' So there's a lot of having to figure out where to put stories as our newshole gets smaller and smaller and smaller. And I think what'll eventually happen is some stories may at some point just appear online. Online there's an infinite amount of space.

*Are you not doing that yet?*

No. Well, my blog — that's online only — but I rarely write a story that's only gonna be online. They're always in the paper first or simultaneously, but I know the other papers are starting to do that, but I don't see that. In features we're not necessarily doing that too much. I'm not, now I'm not familiar with what A&E, the other sections are doing, but I don't — I'm not doing that yet, so.

*But you anticipate —*

I think it will, I think it's going to have to, especially if our section keeps getting smaller and smaller. You can only fit so many stories in, and the way our sections are created, for instance Wednesday is almost always a food story — on the front — so there's a big hole that's filled with just food, on Wednesday. And then Friday is movie day, and Thursday we lost our freestanding features section and now it's the Preview magazine. So we don't even have a Thursday quote unquote features section anymore.

*What's the Preview magazine?*

Preview is our entertainment magazine. So it's everything that's going to be coming up on the weekend, but Thursday just sort of went away. So now there's one less day that we have to fill and Sundays, we don't have a Sunday features section, it's the Arts and Entertainment. So you take away two days of the week, that leaves us with five.

*So the FYI section, that's gone on Thursday?*

Yeah. They took the components that were in the freestanding features section and kind of shoved them into Preview, so Preview is kind of like preview/FYI. For instance, my column is in Preview magazine now, and — do they have the comics in there? It's been awhile since I've looked at it — but they have other things that used to be in the section. But the point is that we don't have a big FYI feature hole anymore, so if I have a story that I really need to get in, I can't run it on a Thursday, cause that's the magazine day, Friday is the movie day, Wednesday is the food day, so that hole is getting smaller and smaller and smaller but who knows. Maybe things will change but I doubt it. But I'm doing all the talking here.

*My first question is more — I'm looking at six months before and after the collapse of September 2008, so from April 2008 to about April 2009 is the time frame that I looked at so if you can roughly recall — do you think following September 2008 or even before that, economic coverage has edged into the lifestyle section of your newspaper?*

It really has, there for a while after things started getting tight, I felt like we never did a lot of consumer type stories, those were typically handled by the business section, but yes, I would say that when the economy started going down the toilet and we started hearing and even feeling it ourselves, how all of this was affecting everybody. Then we did start doing a lot of brainstorming, 'How are we gonna cover this?' And I think to Mary Lou's credit, she actually had us thinking about it a little bit before everything started going down the tubes. She's actually been one who's very interested in finding features stories that affect how we live. But yes, and I was trying to think of some examples, when I read your question, because it seems to me that we did a whole series, because I did a big story on people who find creative ways to save money on everyday groceries and medical expenses, so I went out and found the woman who clips coupons. We took a really cool photo of her buried underneath a gazillion coupons. That was interesting, cause I had to clip out all those coupons. So we have tried to figure it out, and again I think a lot of it does stem from what we are feeling in our own lives, cause we'll come in and we'll say, 'Oh my god, did you see how much gas was?' Or 'Oh my god, so and so is riding his bike to work.' So we're — when we start to feel it, then we start thinking, okay, maybe. But to the bigger question, yes, definitely in lifestyles we did acknowledge that in the way we were looking for stories and the way we were trying to get more real people into the section, and I wouldn't say that that's gone away necessarily but I think within the last few months we have kind of fallen a little. It's eased up. But I think also that's cause our sections are getting tighter and tighter, so we don't really have the space, exactly. So we want to do a big expose on someone who's living on food



stamps, and they've never lived on food stamps — we don't have the space in our section anymore. We could sell it to the front page and that certainly could be a legitimate place for that, but in features we wouldn't have, and I also don't think we would have the time to do that. We move very quickly in features. We tend to get in and get out of a story pretty quickly. So we don't have a lot of time to spend on those bigger projects. I don't know if that dovetails with what Mary Lou told you. She probably told you, we want to do all the big projects but we don't have the time. Frankly, we don't.

*As a reporter, did you find that you had to follow business and financial news more closely than you had before in order to think about changes there and how it would affect the types of stories that you would be writing?*

I wouldn't say that I would necessarily — I think I was probably watching the same thing that everybody else was. CNN, and anything that I could see online. But no, I wouldn't say that we all of a sudden became business reporters, again that's because I think we think a little bit differently. We're more people-oriented so again, going back to what was happening in our own lives, I think we often use that as a starting point for a lot of our stories. And if we're paying more at the gas pump, and we're seeing that milk is \$4 a gallon, it's happening to everybody and we're seeing it but no, I wouldn't say that I necessarily started studying up on ...

*So you see it more from a lens of how it affects the way people live — and then on the other side, they're looking at it more like statistics.*

Exactly.

*Do you think in any of the stories you've written, maybe the coupon story, did it teach you anything about business, finance or the recession?*

No (laughs).

*That's okay — honesty is good.*

No, no.

*Did your ideas of what topics or type of stories your readers would want to see change between April 2008 to April 2009, and if so, how?*

Yeah — I think so, because even not just looking at the stories we were writing but what everybody else was writing, there I think — September, October, November, I was starting to see — and not just in features — those sort of 'what am I going to do with my future, my 401k is gone,' there was almost a certain level of panic I think, a tone of panic in some of the stories. And I think that that has, toward the end of the year, especially after the first of the year, people started calming down and settling down and I don't know, honest to god, why that happened, whether there was a reflection of a new

administration coming in, or all of a sudden everybody was just tired of talking about the bailouts, and all this. I don't know what happened, but I would definitely say that there has been a difference in the tone of the stories. Like I said, at the very beginning it seemed like everybody was just really panicked and in this, oh my god, what's going to happen to us, almost fearful, frightened tone. And now — as we've all gotten used to it — we're kind of living with it — and like, okay, our 401k is gone, well, we're never gonna get it back.

*Just move on.*

Exactly. Gas prices have kind of settled down now, we're not paying whatever, \$60 a gallon or whatever, and, it almost seems like the economy is maybe starting to get a little bit better, so people aren't as panicked and we're starting to kind of move away from brainstorming those ideas. Like oh my gosh, how should people live, in a bad economy and how are they faring in a bad economy. I think the tone really has changed and maybe it's for the better, maybe we're being a little bit more optimistic now, but I definitely noticed a difference. We're not that panicked to people anymore.

*When would you say — ?*

I would say we were still kind of in that sort of, panicky, panic kind of mode until maybe after the first of the year. I would say actually within the last two or three months, that's when it really started to feel like things are calming down. And maybe my perspective is skewed because things are really bad around here, at the start in that time period that you were talking about. I mean, last year was both for the morale of the newsroom and for the employment ranks, we went through several rounds of layoffs —

*Stressful.*

And it was frankly horrible. It's hard to do your job when you don't know if you're going to be here next month or two months from now. And it's certainly horrible or harder to do your job when your best friend gets laid off or the person sitting next to you is suddenly gone, so I think, and we weren't the only ones going through it, that was happening at all newspapers, happening at a lot of businesses. But certainly newspapers took a big hit and like I said earlier that what's happening to us is happening to everybody else. I think that's true. We were feeling it firsthand ourselves. And it kept happening, over and over again. I think we had, I lost track, I think we had three or four rounds of layoffs, and it was bad. They started last summer — I think we had three before the end of the year, and another one after the first of the year — so it was bad.

*Do you think morale affected coverage? The type of stories that people were interested in covering?*

I don't think morale affected the types of stories, but — and I wouldn't even say that morale affected the quality of our work because, this sounds stupid, but we're all pretty

professional around here. We know how to do the job regardless of what we're feeling. You compartmentalize after a while, you feel like crap because of everything that's going on around you, but you still gotta put out a paper, so you learn how to — 'Okay, I'll think about that later, but right now I gotta get this done.' So I don't think if you were a reader of the *Kansas City Star*, you would've been able to tell — 'Wow, those people are really feeling like crap, because everybody's getting laid off.' I don't think that would've been reflected in it. But certainly it made our jobs more difficult. When all you want to do is sit around and tear your hair out and go, 'Oh my gosh, what's happening?' or you start talking to a friend in the hall and that's all you can talk about are the layoffs, or you go to the cafeteria and that's all you talk about, are the layoffs — it was just there, it was a cloud, and don't let anybody tell you otherwise, it was a definite cloud that we were all operating under. And like I said, within the last couple months it truly feels like the sun is starting to come out again, I would say April, May, June, feels like we're kind of starting to turn the corner and things are getting a little less gloomy around here, which is a good thing.

*The reporter I interviewed in Chicago, he mentioned the same thing. Because they've had layoffs there at the Tribune, but that the people that are still there are very close now, and that that has been a change that he noticed that people that went through it together and made it — they're all a lot closer.*

I don't think that's necessarily true here. Because we're not as big a staff, so when we're a smaller staff to begin with, we were already pretty tight. I don't know that it made us any tighter, I could see that happening at the *Tribune*, because they're so big and if you get smaller all of a sudden you're starting to get to know somebody that you didn't know before, but we're all pretty tight here. But no, I wouldn't say that. But there is — I don't know whether he talked about survivor's guilt — there's a lot of guilt that you have to deal with — because the layoffs were so random — it felt like there was a sniper in the building and you would literally just sit there on the day of the layoffs, at your desk, and you didn't know what was gonna happen. You're almost afraid to answer the phone. Because the way they did it here, the top editors would meet in a conference room down the hall and they would basically just call people for a whole entire morning, and you know if your phone rang and they called you down there, you knew pretty much that you were getting canned. So the two or three days that that happened, it was, there were people saying 'I'm not even going to bother coming in on that day, if they want to lay me off, they can call me at home.' Or, 'I can't stand being there on that day because everybody's going to be so sad.' And it was sad, it was horrible. There were tears, there were tons of tears and lots of anger, lots and lots of anger, that's not something we'll forget anytime soon, but yeah the survivors guilt is all about ... thinking it doesn't make any sense to lay that person off. I think at one point looking at someone who'd been laid off and saying, I wish it had been me. Because then you start thinking, that person has a family and they have small children, or they have to put their kids through college, and start comparing your own life to everybody else's and you think, well, it might be easier for me to find another job. All these things go through your head. And then you sit there and think, well, I don't know why they laid that person off, they should have laid that

person off, the things that go through your head, it was just amazing. But, so now you start getting the picture of, yeah, we gotta put out a paper, but all this other stuff is swirling around and you really just gotta stand strong and you have to stay focused. Keep your head down and just do it, plow through, and I think that's how we all got through it. Knock wood we're not looking at the possibility of any more layoffs, but like I said, we certainly will not forget that time any time soon.

*That sounds really awful. This is kind of off topic — but you write a blog — do you get a lot of reader comments on that, and —*

(Laughs)

*I figured you would. When did you start that?*

We started that in the middle of May and it took a while for people to feel comfortable posting because we've never written an entertainment blog. This is all new territory, but the *Kansas City Star* had never had an entertainment blog. But we have thousands of blogs here. Everything from 'Mom2Mom' and 'Crime Scene Kansas City' and business blogs and sports blogs. Every sports writer has a blog of their own. But we never had one specifically for entertainment. And I think it was so new that it caught people a little off guard. They were — 'Should I be commenting on Nicole Kidman, or Susan Boyle?' So I think it took a few weeks for people to start feeling comfortable with that kind of a forum and that topic, but now, it's, everything's a free-for-all now. And you get to know pretty quickly the people that are following you regularly, cause you see their little signatures or their names on there a lot, but yes, we do get a lot of feedback. For stories that are in the paper, we get e-mail feedback from time to time, but I think it takes a special kind of story to get people either really riled up or so happy that they feel compelled to call you. I get a lot of phone calls, not so many e-mails, but more phone calls. There was a story I did just recently where there was this woman who started a program at a school in Kansas City that's primarily African-American, and she took the sixth grade boys there, and she had them writing poetry, and then there was a group of local Kansas City artists who took their poems and created art pieces to go with the poems. And they put them together at an exhibit, and I wrote a story interviewing the little boys and it was so haunting to hear these 14 or 15 year old little boys from the — kind of a rough part of town — writing poems about, 'My cousin was shot at the park.' 'My dad is in prison.' 'I hate my dad.' 'I don't know where my mother is.' 'People make fun of my hair.' It was just one right after the other — the woman who started the program was hoping that this would tap into their creativity, but what it turned out to be was almost therapeutic for them. Because they had never spoken about some of these deep feelings they had about their situations and their environments, so we ran that story and that got a huge response. I mean it really tapped into something that people — it was new to people, it really opened up a lot of people's eyes — so stories like that get a big response. Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt, eh, not so much, but we're getting there.

*Have you seen any comments or received calls relating to any story that you did that touched on the economy?*

On the economy, when we ran the story on the coupon clipper I did get a lot of e-mails, but those were mostly from people giving me more tips. I don't know whether people think we're going to do follow-ups, which we sometimes do, not necessarily a lot in features, we're kind of in and out, we've moved on, but that one especially. People were like, 'Well did you know, blah blah blah, and check out this Web site.' They were actually giving me information, like it's something that I had missed, maybe, or, 'If you ever want to write about this topic again,' so there was a lot of feedback to that story and you could tell from the level of comments, the number of comments, and what they were saying, that people really had been doing their homework, and finding Web sites that offer promo codes, there are Web sites that list promo codes. For instance, if you go to Old Navy and you hit your subtotal, if you punch in your promo code that you got from another Web site, you save like free shipping or whatever. So there are people out there who are big on that. So yes, I could tell from that particular story, that people were doing their homework and they were being really careful, and they wanted to know more. 'Well, you didn't talk about blah blah blah.'

*That was a fairly recent story.*

Yeah, that was last fall or earlier this year. I'd have to look it up.

*Mary Lou had pulled out that cover page cause she was going through archives for some reason. Cause I remember seeing the woman with the coupons. Did you then consider doing a follow-up?*

We probably should have, but we didn't. Being around here we just —

*A lot to cover.*

It is, it is. And we have a really good business staff. They really stepped up to the plate and consumer news, consumer news, consumer news. For them, during all this. So in a way, that was sort of our, well they were covering it, but again we still had to look at it from a lifestyle perspective. Not taking anything away from business writers, but, (laughs). Anyway ...

*Would you say that reader comments or information from readers ever drove content change that you can think of?*

I don't think so, not from my perspective. How did Mary Lou answer that?

*Same. And the other papers. And then, one reporter that I interviewed from the Detroit News, he told me that its been his experience that when newspapers have to reduce their*

*pages, lifestyle and features are often the first place that they go to to cut pages and he said that happened at the News. Was that your experience here or —*

I would venture to say that it was the opposite. And this is probably true at the *Detroit News*. Sports is sacred here — sacred cow — so they have lost very little, as far as sections, but early on I would say that they were really trying to save us, that's the feeling that I got, because we didn't experience any cuts at the very beginning. But then I think it got to the point where it just — the need to cut just became so great that they had to start looking at sections that they wouldn't have normally wanted to cut. But no, I wouldn't say that we're the first. Having worked at other papers, I will say that I would concur with him at other newspapers cause I have seen that happen. They'll come in and they'll take out maybe a page of comics or whatever, because I think there is that thought at other papers that features are, it's the fluff and it's, we can cut, we can do without. But that's definitely not the case here cause I wouldn't work here if it was.

*Why do you think that is?*

I think because they value — we have really good writers I think, and we're popular, I'll just say it, people read our section and it's one of the most popular sections, so why would they cut it. But I'm curious, did Mary Lou think we were?

*No, she had pretty much — said the same thing as you, that they had — business and the front section and another section had gotten condensed into one but —*

They condensed it, but they left us freestanding. So when you open up the paper, the A section which used to be freestanding A, freestanding B, which was all local news, now that's all A and B together. But FYI, yay! We survive, we still have our own freestanding section, now we're one or two pages down. But no, they left us alone so it's local, FYI and sports.

*Okay. Lifestyle journalism here — you've worked at some papers in other cities — so how would you say lifestyle journalism at the Star compares to coverage in other cities. Did you work as a lifestyle reporter in the other cities?*

The only other was in Rochester, New York, and we actually are very similar, as far as the way the beats are set up. The one difference here, and it's only cause the *Star* is bigger, we have a lot more general assignment reporters here, and we have a larger arts and entertainment staff. Although the arts and entertainment staff in this last round of layoffs took a huge hit, and they made almost all of our arts and entertainment people part time. So now we're looking at a mostly part time arts and entertainment staff. They lost a reporter, and there are four general assignment feature writers left here on staff. We didn't really, now I think about it, our GA staff in features really didn't take a hit, which was shocking. We're pretty much the same that we were before, like I said it's very similar and we're looking at the same types of stories, you know, how are people living, what are the hot trends, fashion, we do it all. So no, I think it's the same.

*As far as your readership goes, would you be able to comment about catering to readers who have different budgets or readers from different class backgrounds? Or is it more shooting for a general demographic?*

I think it's more shooting for the middle. Mary Lou, did she say something about, we had this one freestanding section that it wasn't FYI. I think it was more like an advertorial, but anyway it was only sent out to the uber-rich in Kansas City, and I don't think we do that anymore. Probably because there aren't any uber-rich. I'm just kidding. But we are very conscious of trying to shoot for that middle, because we — that's all I can say, we shoot for the middle —

*Are there any specific examples of decisions that you made on stories that you wrote or editorial decisions based on the current economic climate?*

Mmm. Can't think of any, cause I'm not an editor. That's probably a better editor question, cause I don't make — I don't assign people to do stories, and I'm kind of taking their assignments anyway, so those decisions have been made before they even get to me.

*Do you think there's been more of an effort made to focus — as far as entertainment goes — to focus more on economical entertainment?*

You know, I'm thinking somewhere in the back of my mind that we did do a few. How to have fun on the cheap, and we were always brainstorming. That is very true — that we would brainstorm from time to time, where can you go, or how much fun can you have on \$10 or whatever. So yes, there was, at the height of everything, we were looking for basically fun on the cheap, but again I would say that's kind of gone away now, so yeah. I wouldn't say it's gone out the window, but it's kind of calmed down. Now we're back to buying \$50 concert tickets (laughs) but yes, we were always looking for fun on the cheap.

*Do you work in the home section at all?*

No.

*You talked about this a bit — anything more you'd like to say about how staff changes, especially reduction of staff, how that has changed content — or if —*

My observation is that one good example — as we've lost people and our section has gotten smaller, I think we're doing less of the bigger lifestyle stories, because again, those take a lot of time that we don't have because how many of us are doing two or three different jobs at once now? So we don't have the luxury of time to focus on those bigger pieces and beyond that, we just don't have the space anymore. Features — so as far as doing long narratives, we don't do those anymore, we rarely do, and if we do, they go on the front page. So as far as longer narrative pieces, not so much.

*That's both a time and a space issue.*

Both a time and a space and a manpower issue. I feel like our stories — because there's less space, are getting shorter. There does seem to be more of an emphasis on shorter, tighter-written stories, because there's just no room for longer pieces, but also, I have a colleague who's working on the books page, and this goes back to some of us doing things that are outside of our comfort zone or things that we never would have written before, and so if he's working on books or I'm working on the entertainment blog, we're not writing general assignment feature stories, so something's not getting done. But it has to happen that way because we're only human and we can't do 50 million things. We have to make choices that way. Right now, for instance, with the entertainment blog, we're kind of in this uncomfortable spot because I was — am a highly productive writer, but I can't do that anymore because I'm doing this. So where do we find the balance? Where does Lisa find the balance between writing stories for FYI and doing the daily blog and the entertainment stuff? Cause I've made it very clear to my bosses that I can't give both of them 100 percent. And I shouldn't have to. If this is 75 percent I can't give this 25 percent, 100 percent. Like I did before. So we have to make choices and I think those are the choices that we don't want to make, because we want to keep up the caliber of the section, we want the section to be as good and timely and lively and entertaining as it always was, but the fact is, we have to make some concessions here and there, just because we have to. It is what it is. We can only do so much with the people that we have and it's ... I think my job is a very good example of that. Because I think a lot of us are, we're doing this, doing that, trying to shuffle all these different assignments. But there comes a point when you have to say, I can't. And your bosses don't want to hear that, and you don't want to say it. You want to be a team player, like, 'I can do everything,' but you know what? I can't! So this all goes to the choices that we have to make. Does our section look different? Yeah. I think maybe the stories are a little bit shorter. But shorter also means snappier, cause you don't have a lot of time to get to the point of the story, so — you're right in it, and you're in and you're out and you're done. Another way our section's changed, I think our section is a lot more visually engaging and that's maybe because we recognize that we don't have as many people writing. So we don't have as many words, so we're gonna come up with a different way to present news in a visual way. And a good example of that is on Mondays now, we have 'The Week That Was' — so big pictures, little — yeah. (looking at paper)

So here, this is a good example. In a previous life, even a year ago, July, this would have been entirely different. This would have been a story by me, maybe a 30-inch story, with a couple of photos out here and a jump, and more photos. This might have been 2 stories down here, but what's happened now on Mondays, there's no space for anything by me. Why? Because this has turned into a visual display, this is always here, this always anchors the bottom of the page. I do write these too. So, I mean, you would see my name here.

*So this is a reader profile?*



It's not necessarily. It's a few words about this person, and then we ask them fun questions. About, what was the last movie that made you cry, what are you reading right now, but it's just a way to get real people on the page. So because it's so segmented now, there's no place here for a story, for a narrative, for — I think that is another big change, here's my column, this is Stargazing, this is what I write. So I've got all the celebrity stuff, usually on the back page or somewhere in the inside, and then again I'm writing it on the Web too. But anyway, so yeah, I think we have a lot more visual dynamics on the cover, but that's space that there's no words there. Fewer words there, anyway.

*It's short and boxy. They mentioned that at the Tribune, there doing more of that as well.*

Yeah. Those little brights, little hits. The irony is that it takes almost, sometimes, just as much time to compile all that —

*As it would to write a longer story.*

Well not a longer story, but a pretty decent-sized story anyway. So it is kind of ironic, but it is what it is. Anyway, but I love my job! I have to say, I wouldn't work in any other department, I love FYI.

*I think that was my last question actually. Is there anything else you'd like to say?*

No. You asked good questions!

*Thank you. This is my third paper so I had some practice at the other two.*

**Dave Rosenthal, Head of the Good Life and Entertainment, *Baltimore Sun***

*Do you want to talk a little bit about any changes that have happened since you started editing the features section and what you do exactly?*

Sure. Again, I supervise the entertainment section and you'll talk to Tim Swift, who's more involved with kind of hands-on, assigning stories, that sort of thing. I work with him and then I also supervise our coverage, kind of lifestyle coverage and that includes health and medicine, the environment, topics like that. They're designed to be topics about how people live their lives, but not in a way that relates to government necessarily or schools, but just the other things that are important in people's lives. So I came to this area in May when we reorganized the staff, and we kind of broke down some of the departments we had earlier and reconfigured the staff and at the same time put a much bigger emphasis on online reporting. So probably, we haven't done anything in changing the sections since I've been here, anything dramatic, Tim could tell you more about how the sections changed earlier. We used to have a couple Sunday features sections, we collapsed them into one. We used to have a daily features section, now we only have it on Sunday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. And those are — Thursday's a weekend calendar, Friday is movies, Wednesday is the food section called Taste. Since I've been here the shift has been to, much more attention is paid to online. We've created blogs for religion and healthy living and one for environment living so those are three areas we've devoted a lot more resources to. They don't show up always in the paper but there's a lot more in the paper online every day now.

*Are you seeing traffic to those, or is it still the beginning —*

Yeah. Like any new blog, it takes you a while to gain traction. I know, having done mine, it took really six months before people were coming back on a regular basis. But after a while you hit that little rise and then it turns into a bigger rise. Like just for example, the book blog, we probably had — it started in May of last year, so 2008, and in the fall we were probably getting 3500 a week on average. And some a little higher. But then it started to take off and then in the spring it was more like — a little bit higher — and now it's more in the 10 to 20,000 a week. Once you kind of get that momentum and learn more about it, you can do it much better, and then it really takes off. So like last week was 23,000 and we're kind of on the pace this week to do the same, so as you know working at NPR, you kind of learn how to do search engine optimization and do other things that make people come back.

*It's interesting. I don't know if you do it here but they look at — if they see that an article is getting a lot of hits, cause they can see that, then they'll put it front and center, if it was down at the bottom before but a lot of people are looking at it. They'll move it up. And then if they have something at the top that nobody's looking at they'll move it down.*

Yeah. That's a real difference from how newspapering was. How you would send a story out there and you wouldn't really have a sense of how many people are reading it. Now

you can judge those a little better. Back to the new blogs — they've been gaining traction, people are commenting in the — you can see there's a good trend — I don't think they've caught fire but I wouldn't expect them to cause they've only been up for a few months each. But they're good signs, I think there doing well. And I think they also fill a niche that we didn't have at the paper. For people to pay attention to their health and green living and their religion too.

*And do you write the blogs too or you oversee?*

I oversee — we have reporters who are in charge of them.

*Have you seen a shift in content since you've been here? More attention paid to the economy — health would be an example — are there any examples of editorial decisions you made based on the fact that our country is in not as good economic situation as we were before?*

Yeah. When the economy went in the tank we started to focus — not just our department but the whole paper —

*And where were you before?*

Before I was doing this I was in charge of our Sunday paper. So I'd get involved in picking stories for Sunday and making sure they were edited and had photos and graphics and all that. So coordinating the weekend paper. Even back then we started to focus a lot on the response to the economic downturn. We did stories about people out of work and looking for new work. Some very practical, 'how do you find a job,' some more kind of touchy-feely about what people were going through. And then when we came over here we did the same sort of thing. Our parenting reporter did a story about how, the family dynamics of a parent losing a job. Now dad lost his job and he's home a lot more. What does that mean to the way the family routine works, what does it mean to the kids, are they afraid? He found that some kids actually like it cause dad can come to school now and be the room parent and go on field trips and that sort of thing, so we focused a lot on different types of stories related to the economic downturn. And now that healthcare reform has come along because our reporters are involved in medical coverage, we've also done a number of stories on healthcare reform. Who are the uninsured people, how hard it is to get them to sign up even if programs are available, and we have a number of stories still while the issue's being debated in Washington to go along on that theme, so again when we do these stories, generally lifestyle stories, we try and focus on the things that are really happening in people's lives. I think newspapers for a long time have been dominated by crime coverage and government coverage and I think it's really important that our front page reflects what's happening in people's lives. Whether they're concerned about unemployment or, 'Am I getting swine flu' or some big topic in faith or some big topic in the environment. I think those are the sorts of things the paper has to have on its front page all the time, or else it's going to be dominated by 'city council did

this,' or 'the state legislature did that,' or 'Washington did that' which I think — you need some of but it can't be the whole diet for people.

*So there's more of an emphasis on what impacts people and how they're being impacted.*

Yeah. In our department that's what I really want to stress. I think papers all over have done not enough of that and I think we need to do more.

*What I've seen in the different papers I've looked at within the lifestyle sections, stories that touch on the economy they tend to fall — the categories I see a lot are more service, how to get whatever for cheaper, or 'This is the way you can save money on something.' Or then, on the other side, more news-hook — 'The economy is affecting this in this way.' Within your section do you have a preference for either type of story or do you think your readers prefer either type?*

Ours is, because of the way the newsroom is organized and the way the sections are set up, since we don't have a daily lifestyle section anymore, our stories run in the A section. Unless they're Food on Wednesday or Calendar on Thursday or Movies on Friday or General Arts and Entertainment on Sunday. So the stories, we don't have quite as much room as some people who have their own daily lifestyle section, to do that sort of thing. So the stories we do have to meet a front page bar. So they have to be good enough to run on the front page or they can run inside someplace. But the ones we're aiming for are the ones that would compete for the front page so some of the consumery things that the paper does are done within the business section. We've kind of carved out consumer reporting within business. So some of those that other papers might do in lifestyle run in Business on Sunday or during the week. Ours, they tend to be lifestyle but not quite as consumer-oriented as maybe some of the other papers you've looked at.

*How does it change your editorial thinking if you're assigning a piece that you want to go in the front section or on the front page instead of before when it would be —*

You have a higher bar to reach and you have to compete with an indictment of the mayor or a big murder in the city or news out of Washington. So you have to be very careful about which stories you pick and make sure the ones you pick meet that high standard to compete for the front page. Cause otherwise they could just wind up on page five or nine inside and not get good play. So it forces you to be really selective about the stories you pick, that's probably the biggest thing. You have to be very tough about which stories you choose.

*Do you think stories with a news hook have a better chance of getting into there than the more service —*

Definitely.

*Why?*

Just because again for the things you're competing with on the front page. I think there's kind of an internal premium that we place on having the word yesterday in the lead or tomorrow in the lead or today in the lead. So the more you can do that and the more you can make that timely, the better. Stories that are evergreen and could run today or could run next week — they might be a great story and they might be worthy of the front page, but it's just sometimes a little harder to get them on the front page if they're competing with —

*Something that's more timely. Cause you could always run it later.*

So anything that does have that time hook, it's much easier to put in the paper.

*Since the economic collapse — you used to be a business reporter, so you're an interesting person to talk about that. One of my questions I've been asking editors and reporters is if they covered business. Looked at business and financial news more carefully since the collapse, if that affected how they viewed it.*

It hasn't really changed the way I view it so much, just because I have a business background and I always have read the *Wall Street Journal* for years and the *New York Times* business section and other sections. So I've probably paid more attention to it than most people. So it really hasn't changed all that much for me. But I do think that in the general newsroom that people are paying more attention to it and they have to kind of have it on their radar, what's going on with the federal government. For example the Cash for Clunkers program, which was big government program, we did a story just looking at, and I think it was one of the first ones I saw. Chicago did it after we did it and I think a lot of other papers did it after we did it, but that's always nice to see. We did a story not on the program itself but on, what does this mean for junkyards, what are they doing with all these cars, do they like it, do they hate it. And that was an interesting piece from a features perspective. But it also got into a little business so even for a feature/lifestyle reporter who would do a light piece on that, they had to pay attention to what the program meant and what was the economics behind it and what was the government trying to achieve. So even those sorts of stories show how economic problems kind of trickle into a lot of the stories that you're going to write. And even for our foods section, we've done stories on making your own vegetables, doing your own gardens, making your own cheese, things like that that people might in a recession, sorts of things that they might pay attention to. For our Travel section, we've done a lot more stories on regional travel because I don't think people are spending tons of money to go to Asia or Europe or Hawaii anymore. So a lot of our stories revolve around, what are some things you can do in a day trip or you can do in the Mid-Atlantic region that are pretty cheap. So again, ways that the economic problems seep into all the stories that you might not think would be economic stories. But you have to be aware of what the readers are thinking and kind of address their needs.

*Do you think being so close to DC where a lot of these decisions are being made impacts it as well?*

I think the people in Baltimore are probably more attuned to what's going on in Washington than others. We have a lot of people who live in the Washington suburbs and commute up here to work. So they see what's going on in DC just by reading the *Post* all the time and talking to their neighbors. So yeah I think just because we're here we kind of are more attuned to what's happening there. Another example — David Zurwick, our TV critic, did a nice front page story recently about how television commercials reflect the recession and what the message is and how they're starting to give a message now of hopefulness. Again, aimed at people who have had hard times, they're trying to twist it and say we're looking for a new day. So that's another. You wouldn't think the TV critic would be writing a story like that, but it's another way the economic downturn has influenced our coverage.

*Has your idea of what kind of story your reader wants to see change?*

Again, I think along the lines of even in food and travel, we know everybody's mind is on, 'Do I have a job, am I gonna keep my job, if I've lost my job what does it mean, how can I stretch my money' — so we're always looking for things that kind of reflect those topics. In any medium, whether it's radio or TV or newspaper, you have to be really aware of what people are thinking and go after that. And with a story sometimes it's online, sometimes it could be just a blog post about giving away things — you see people are very interested in getting free things now. So you try to do some giveaways on our blogs to kind of help people cope too.

*Some of the other papers I interviewed, they kind of talked about how at times it's a struggle, because you want to cover what's going on in people's lives, which is an economic downturn, but then they still want those stories to be a fun escape from the gloom and doom in the rest of the paper. Have you struggled with that at all?*

I think it has to be fun but it also has to be relevant. People do look for an escape. So I guess our movies section hasn't changed at that much. We still write about movies that come out and local connections to films and that sort of thing. That section and our calendar section are probably the ones that are most immune to that, and maybe Sunday arts and entertainment too. So those tend to be still kind of cultural touchstones for the community. What are the new movies, what are the new activities this weekend where you can have fun, that sort of thing. But even within those if there are topics — I don't think we shy away from the things that are relevant in people's lives. Again as we mentioned in travel or if something in our dining coverage, paying more attention to specials and restaurant closings — we're not just out reviewing restaurants over and over, we have to pay attention to the news also. You have to find a balance. You can't just make it pure fun or else you're just escapist.

*Do you think that would alienate readers?*

I think they want a little of it but I don't think they want you to ignore something like — we had a big movie theatre — old style, one screen, big old seats — that went out of business recently and we wrote a lot about that and you have to, even though our movie critics cover movies, you have to write about the business side of it too. So we do that when our food critic writes about restaurants going under and what's happened to them. And in her blog she writes a lot about specials people are offering. So again I think you have to combine the news of the day with something that's a little bit lighter.

*Interesting. Do you get a lot of and pay attention much to reader feedback?*

Yeah. We pay attention to it whenever we get it. Those are the people who are our customers, so you have to listen to what they're saying. We get a lot of requests for stories. Some we do, some we have to say no to, because there's not enough people out there to cover everything we want to cover, so that's one way that people are talking to us. The other is reaction to stories and we'll see that either in phone calls on our blogs. We'll see a lot of comments to people. It's an important part of the business. And the nice thing about online is you'll see the comments right away. You know, it used to be if you think of a letter to the editor, we used to run an opinion column, somebody would read it, write a letter to us, take a while for the letter to get here, we'd read it, verify that they wrote it, and so maybe a week later it would turn up in the paper. But right now with online the comment is so much faster. So they might put online today that 'Hey we're writing about this topic for tomorrow, if you have something to say about it, let us know then' — so getting input even before they write it. And once they write it, getting instant feedback from people commenting on it. So within 24 hours, you have that whole weeklong cycle condensed into 12 or 24 hours. And in the same way, on our blogs, is probably where we get the most comments on topics. And they can be something very serious like swine flu or health reform. Or it can be something lighter like today, the woman who writes our blog about pets, there's a TV show with these big burly tattooed guys, and they go into town and they try and fight against animal abuse. And we've had a lot of cases of that recently. So our blogger said, we should get these people to come to Baltimore and film a show, and maybe if we say we'll get tattooed, they'll come. Cause these guys have tattoos all over the place, they're biker guys. So like 30 people were writing in, I'll get tattooed to get them to come. So that's kind of a quirky thing but its readers responding to what you're doing.

*Do reader comments ever drive content change? It sounds like sometimes you do write stories that readers have requested.*

Yeah. Sometimes they'll come to us with good ideas. And sometimes they'll just say 'Look, the way you covered this topic maybe wasn't fair.' Recently there was, the Eastern part of our area is kind of blue collar town. It used to be steel and other manufacturing in the area so it's, doesn't have the best reputation of areas in the Baltimore region. And I remember one woman called in to me because one of our bloggers had written about going to a bar there and talked about it. And she thought he

was making fun of the area where she lived. And she was an elderly woman, proud of where she lived, a newspaper reader which is great, and it ran on the blog, it also ran in the paper, so she was responding to the paper. But she just thought the tone was wrong. So I listened to her and I tried to tell her the tone — we don't try to make fun of different areas — and the blogger said he had a great time there, people were very friendly, but it was a little bit of the tone she was reading into it. And I had her speak to the blogger too. You should probably speak to the blogger directly. So he — if he is trying to write again about this area he keeps your thoughts in mind and doesn't slip up. So when they call in we always try to talk to them personally and see what they have to say.

*Have you seen any reader comments or received any letters that were economy-related in reference to feature stories?*

Nothing that really comes to mind. Again when we do things in blogs or we write stories, there's a section where you can comment on the story itself. And then we have talkboards as part of our Web site, where people can talk about different things. So there's lots of comments going on but not in the way that they would call me. So it's more just electronic commenting.

*Okay. Do you think the fact that newspapers in particular are struggling right now, do you think that has affected coverage of features?*

Yeah. We used to have the daily features section, and now we have it the four days a week. We used to have two Sunday sections — one was arts and entertainment, one was more like home and family. So we've squashed those together on Sunday, we've gotten away from coverage of certain areas, and this happened before the economic collapse. This was part of a cycle we've been going through for five or six years. But we've squeezed our coverage a lot, we've gotten out of the business of covering fashion. We used to have a fashion reporter, we don't have a fashion reporter anymore. So we've had to become much more selective about what we cover. And we have less real estate in the paper to cover it. We don't have as many reporters, we don't have as much space devoted to features in the paper so, that — when you talk about the structural changes, because of it, the way newspapers have been under pressure, that's really the biggest one we've seen. The sections collapsing, fewer reporters and having to give up certain beats. So you have to become very selective about what you cover and look harder at each story and is it worth doing. Does it have a chance to be on the section front or the front page, and if so, let's do it, and if not, let's maybe think twice about doing it, or maybe do it online. Still get it out in front of the public but do it in a different way that you could maybe do it quicker — and/or in a whole different manner — maybe you do a photo gallery instead of a story. You have to think different ways about reporting now and editing. So that's kind of the toughest thing.

*Do you think it has affected depth? Are the stories shorter now?*



Yeah. Overall the stories probably are shorter. The stories we do in our sections we probably have a little more freedom to write, but if you look in the A section there are a lot more 8- to 10- inch stories than we've ever had in the past. And again it's partly a response to readers who don't have time to sit down and read a lot of long stories, so that's one response, is to write quicker and save your space for the big stories that you want to write longer. And then it's also just a fact that there are fewer pages in the paper. So you have to write very quick so you can have room for your stories.

*And it sounds like you are just commissioning some stuff that just goes online.*

Yeah. We do a lot more reporting now that's online only. Certainly the blogs. I mean we take some of the blog material and put it in the paper, but most of it 80 to 90 percent of it is just online. And we'll often write stories online too that might be out of date by the time the morning rolls around but at least we've gotten them out there quickly for the people to react to.

*Cool. Do you think — you talked about doing features about the economy, but more of a twist about how it was affecting people's lives in different ways than would be covered in the business section like, the Cash for Clunkers looking in the junkyards. Do you think that affected your views on finance or business or the economy in a way differently than if you had been covering it for the business section?*

Yeah, if I were in business I think our business section and most business sections are kind of focused more on corporate companies themselves. Sometimes there's a component of, 'What does it mean for you in the workplace as a career person' — how do you , career advice, there's a little bit of consumerism too. But generally they tend to write about, 'Here's how Company X is doing' and 'Here's how Company Y is doing.' So here I think with the economic downturn — the paper as a whole and certainly within features we've been thinking, so what does it mean to you as a person. How do you react emotionally to losing a job, what does it mean to your family, what does it mean to kids when that happens. And then, sort of, practically in food or in dining or in travel — how do you change how you live your life, because of the economics, so it's less kind of a corporate view and more kind of a person, how do they react to it.

*Some of the editors and reporters at other newspapers, they talked about — how when a paper shrinks, the lifestyle sections can be the first sections to get folded and get cut, and then other people I talked to said it wasn't like that at their paper. That was at the Kansas City Star. How about you?*

I think that's a really big danger, that lifestyle — you don't want lifestyle to seem frivolous and say, 'Oh, we can do without that.' And I think papers who do that make a big mistake because then your paper just becomes government reporting and cops reporting and I don't think that's a formula to keep readers really. You have to write about what's going on in people's lives. And if that means — it doesn't have to be all frivolous but it should be relevant to their lives. If it's, you know there's a huge green

movement now — ‘How do I buy locally produced vegetables, how can I do that, how can I create my own garden, what can I cook, who are the people who are producing that,’ those are all things that are going on that everybody’s thinking about every day. ‘Should I carry a plastic bag, from the grocery store, should I bring my own bag, should I shop in thrift stores now to save money,’ so those are things all tied to the green movement. Health is the same way. How can I be more informed about my health, so I’m not dependent on doctor’s advice, but I should bring some knowledge myself to the table when I have a problem. How do I protect myself from swine flu, how do schools react to that, how do hospitals react to that, but there are all sorts of things again about how you live your life that if newspapers are getting rid of that sort of coverage, they’re going to be troubled down the road. Cause I don’t think people just want to read about crime and government.

*Do you think they would lose readers?*

Yeah, I think so. And when we restructured our staff in the spring, our editor Monty Cook made a very conscious effort not to get rid of these things, but to place them kind of on the equal footing with the traditional government reporting and crime reporting and schools reporting. To make sure that we did have a healthy balance with what’s happening with people in their lives.

*This is a Tribune Company paper. When I interviewed the Chicago Tribune, one thing that the editor talked about a lot was the use of modules. Do you use those here?*

Yeah, we do. We use them in news on the national/world area, especially in the news section if you looked at the inside of our paper, a lot of the nation and world would come to us like in a chunk, like a half page.

*And designed already?*

Yeah. And there might be a half page, a full page, another half page and we might select, with the space we have, which ones we would run. So we run a lot of those for nation and world coverage. So the *Sun* used to have, when I started, had eight foreign bureaus, and now we don’t have any. And we used to have a really large Washington bureau of our own, and how we kind of have one person and a Tribune Washington bureau. So we’re drawing much more of our national and foreign coverage from that. They also within lifestyles send, in health, they’ll send us modules that we use when we have health coverage in the paper, like a dedicated page and a half on Mondays. We use some modules there, we use some in the food section, movies section, not so much in the Thursday calendar because that’s local events. And a little bit on Sunday, but again that tends to be more locally focused. So we do tend to use them. In travel we use some there. Again, a result of consolidation and kind of cutting back. Trying to make one resource for the whole chain be available to everybody. So you try to consolidate and save money by producing it once and not have everybody reviewing the same movies or writing the same story about the speech the president gave or writing about the same TV show maybe. But

the battle for us is while we want to do that and make our resources go further, so much of what we write about now is local, cause we've really kind of turned our sites away from national bureaus and away from foreign bureaus into what's happening right here in Baltimore.

*There's more of an emphasis on that now, than there was before?*

Yeah. A lot of our coverage, when we're gonna send reporters, we're gonna write about local events and we're gonna feature stories on our front pages, in our front sections, we want to feature what's happening locally. So the modules don't always fit that. They're more like generic. And a movie could be opening here, and that's fine, if it's going to be opening in Chicago the same day and they write a review and we get it, that's fine. But it's not a cure-all. It helps somewhat but it's not a cure-all because you really have to dedicate yourself to writing about what's happening in your community. A good example is, recently there was a module for travel on Hawaii, trips to Hawaii. Well from Baltimore nobody goes to Hawaii now. There's just not any — people are traveling locally so. If you were in LA that might be relevant, on the West Coast or even in Chicago might be fine, but for us it didn't really fit very well so we used a different sort of module inside that was more sort of consumer-oriented about travel, and for the cover we had our own story about regional travel that was more relevant to folks here, especially during economic downturn. That's where people are traveling, so you don't want, again in concept it can work sometimes, but sometimes in reality you have to be attuned to what your readers want.

*So are you finding that you're pretty selective in deciding to use them or not.*

Yeah. It's not the sort of thing you can just slap in automatically. You have to think does it make sense for the people here. And often they do but you can't just — you have to have your own editorial judgment too.

*I don't know how much you've had the opportunity to see other newspapers, but would you be able to say anything about how you think features and entertainment coverage here compares to that of other newspapers.*

That's tough. I read the *Washington Post* everyday. I see the *New York Times* everyday. And the *Wall Street Journal*. They seem to have —

*That's a lot of papers to keep track of.*

We have to read Washington just cause its right down here and we cover a lot of the same things they do. So you want to see what they do, or are we missing something. In New York, because it's really cultural capital of the country, it's interesting to see what they do with trends. So they have really strong lifestyle coverage and culture coverage in New York, I mean they do a great job with it. The *Post* I think has a really good style section. They managed to keep it very strong. And the *Wall Street Journal* added their personal

journal where they do a lot more of that coverage than they ever used to. So those are three that are doing well but I don't think they represent America either. I don't really know about the other papers around the country like Kansas City, I don't get a chance to read that, I see Chicago periodically but not on a regular basis. But when I travel around I'm looking at the *Hartford Courant*, or the *Boston Globe*, or Philadelphia. We traveled out west to Denver over the summer. So I get a chance to see other papers from time to time. And I think they're all like we are. I think we're all kind of fighting the same battle to keep — trying to do really good work in the face of tough economic times. There's no getting around it, it's a hard time in the newspaper business. And we're trying to experiment with things online, find new ways to reach readers and do interesting things. Online our — we do something like a fashion gallery on Michelle Obama, or local parties or we have one that's called Glimpse that's just of local people on the street, and we kind of talk to them. 'What are you wearing and why are you wearing it, where'd you buy it,' that sort of thing. It's pretty short, it's about six inches in the paper with a photo, but online it's more of a photo gallery with three different people, and those are every day one of the top two or three best performers online, of anything. So it's trying to find things online that you can't do in the paper that you can get tremendous readership online. It's interesting that way you get to experiment with a lot of new things like blogs and photo galleries and any number of other things we can do online, to do it more cheaply than we — just like printing more in the paper. You couldn't possibly do a photo gallery in the paper, it'd be enormously expensive.

*At school I learned the three biggest expenses. I can't remember if it was for newspapers or magazines but it would probably be the same and it was paper, printing and postage. And they're all eliminated if, you don't have to pay for any of that if you're putting the stuff online.*

The other big one is people.

*I guess maybe you have to pay for bandwidth.*

Yeah, eventually. But that's nothing.

*And you mentioned that you don't have a fashion editor anymore, or a fashion writer? The same thing happened at the Detroit News and at the Chicago Tribune. And I think the Kansas City Star are a smaller paper so I don't think they had one in the first place, but I thought that was interesting. Would you be able to talk about that?*

That kind of happened before I came over here, but we had a woman who covered fashion. She left and we just, again you kind of look at your staff and try and figure out, if we replaced her, where would we take it from? Would we take somebody who's covering local restaurants and put her in that spot or somebody who's covering movies? And it turned out we just didn't have anybody who was a good fit for it, or we'd be taking away from other valuable areas so we lost that coverage. But recently again we've started trying to figure out other ways that we can bring it back. So we've created online a

fashion page within our features page. So we've tried to do something online to shortcut it. Short of having our own stories we can maybe draw from other stories that are out there. We can draw from stories that are being written other places and are out there, we can do photos, locally so we're trying.

*Do you use the modules at all? I don't know if they make fashion ones.*

We don't. Since we don't have a print section every day, we don't have a spot to fit fashion coverage in the paper anymore. It doesn't fit in food.

*So you have entertainment on Thursday and movies on Friday.*

Wednesday is food and Sunday is arts and entertainment in general. So fashion could fit in there from time to time. We run fashion stories but we're a little bit constrained now. We don't have a good spot for paper coverage of it. We can do it online and that's nice that you can just do it and snap your fingers and it happens. It doesn't require tons of preparation and tons of production work to get it online. So we were able to fill it. But I'd still like to do more. We're thinking about ways that we do even more with that, cause that's a hole. We used to have also more people that kind of pay attention to home, furnishings and that sort of thing. Design. We don't do that many stories on that anymore and again that's an area I think there's kind of a hole now.

*Because of the economy or because —*

Staff shrank. We lost a home section on Sunday and it got squeezed into arts and entertainment. We moved more towards entertainment and kind of away from that. We still do some garden coverage and home coverage but it's not like it used to.

*Most of the cities I went to, I asked about coverage for people of different classes and how you deal with the fact that your readers are running across the gamut, from having a lot of money to not having much at all. And then of course after the economic collapse everyone had less.*

Yeah, I think that's an important thing to keep in mind and sometimes newspapers forget that. I think sometimes we err more on covering the very poor and leave out the people in the middle. Again I think it's because we've written so much about government and government programs to help the poor and that sort of thing. I was traveling in another city and I read the coverage that day, and every column was either about government or about the poor. It was funny and it made me think about why that is and I think it's kind of a newspaper's default sometimes to write about government programs and they tend to be focused more on the people that are poorest. So I think it's important that we keep in mind that if we write about everybody, we write about — like healthcare reform, it's not really designed for the poorest people, it's designed for people in the middle class, struggling to keep insurance, so our stories should always reflect all across class lines. And in a city like Baltimore where you have some desperately poor parts of the city and

some really incredibly wealthy areas too, it's not hard to forget that. Because you see them all the time. The roughest neighborhoods are probably within 20 blocks of us right now. And then another 20 blocks in another direction and you're in beautiful homes. In a place like Baltimore you see it all the time and so you don't forget that there's a stretch but you also just have to keep in mind that your stories reflect that. Because papers almost, they don't ignore the poor they write almost too much about government programs for the poor and how they — you want to write about how they live, you don't just want to write about government programs. We wrote an interesting story — we wanted to write about how, in the poorest neighborhoods in Baltimore, how there aren't any grocery stores for them and maybe they're not getting healthy food because of that, because they have to go to the corner store and all they have is white bread and fast food and Twinkies and junk. They don't have fresh fruits and vegetables, they don't have whole wheat bread, that sort of stuff. So we wrote one story about a program by one of the universities to try to bring — try and get those stores to carry healthier food, more whole wheat bread, more fruits and vegetables, that sort of thing. That was kind of an interesting story. And then recently we came back with another story that found that a lot of the people who live in those areas catch illegal cabs — they call them hack cabs — so you see someone on the sidewalk going like this and that means they want someone to come pick them up and take them to wherever they want to go. Not a regular cab —

*Not a cab, just a person?*

Just a regular person, like you or me. Anybody. But there are people out there who just do that, as kind of a way to make some money. So we did a story about that phenomenon, that people in the inner city, because they don't have grocery stores, are using these, and they're illegal, cabs to go to the grocery stores. And the grocery stores themselves know that the customers come from the city and they have organized these illegal cabs by giving them badges and doing background checks on these people to make sure they're not criminals. And so there's been created this strange little subculture of illegality that the cops kind of ignore it, they let it go, and the businesses, you would think, would be worried about it, but they're trying to help their customers get to the store and get good food. And that's a story about people who are very poor but it's not about some government program that's helping them, it's just about how they live their lives and whether they can get good food or not. And those are the sorts of stories I think we oughta be doing. Not just solely about government programs. But I do think it's important that we do write all the way across class lines. And in a city where you also have to pay attention to racial diversity in a city — a predominantly black city, but not a majority black region that we serve, so you have to kind of make sure that you have people represented on your pages and photos and stories and that sort of thing. So you try and cover everybody.

**Mary McCauley, Arts Reporter, *Baltimore Sun***

*How long have you been here at the Sun?*

Since March of 2000.

*Did you always work as an arts reporter?*

Well, I've been in journalism since February of 1984 and for the first 12 years of my career I was a metro reporter. Did a lot of police news, court coverage, city government, that kind of thing. And I actually came to the *Sun* as an assistant arts editor with the stipulation that in two years I would be allowed to go back to writing which was what I really wanted to do, and they let me do it! And then I was theater critic for two years. It was lots of fun. And I still — my primary emphasis as an arts writer is theater and books, although I do a little bit of everything. I do much more stories in those two disciplines and I still run the theater beat, than I do in visual arts or pop music or film or anything else.

*And do you mostly focus on Baltimore?*

Yes. In Baltimore, some Washington, but primarily Baltimore. I've got a story in the paper today about Bruce Springsteen coming to Baltimore. I'm working on a story about a big new exhibit opening at the Walters art museum. I'm going to New York in a couple weeks to write about a production of ragtime on Broadway with a bunch of Marylanders in the cast and that'll be a lot of fun.

*So my project covers from roughly April 2008 to April 2009 and how content and structure of papers changed in that time and how the economic collapse impacted lifestyle coverage. Do you have any comment on changes within your department following the economic collapse or maybe even before?*

Well, there have been huge changes. Which I'm sure you were attuned — and Dave told you about — in terms of staff reductions. I don't think anybody likes them or thinks that they are good. And it's, unfortunately, the economic necessities are what they are and it's not an ideal situation. I keep thinking, I don't know whether we're just in such a period of transition now, nobody knows what's going to happen. But I don't think that the straits and circumstances under which we currently exist are necessarily going to exist forever. I think there is still a huge need for what we do, which is essentially to kind of ask questions about the world and to try to make sense of it. And it may be that it's all on the Internet and there isn't a newspaper anymore. While I personally am really fond of newspapers — but the need for what we do is still there. The format is changing and I think it's going to take a while for it to shake out. But I think it will shake out. I think that we will figure it out. So I guess to a certain extent I'm a little bit of — hang on through the rough parts and try to adapt to the new parts, and it's incredibly cyclical. Things will

change. And I do believe things will get better at some point in some way that is difficult to imagine right now.

*I hope so. And as far as content goes, have you noticed changes in content?*

Stories are shorter. There's a lot less criticism. We are going into Washington even much less than we did, even 12-18 months ago. This wasn't in the past year, but book review coverage has virtually disappeared. Although it's really interesting that one newspaper — I think in Greenville, South Carolina or North Carolina — do you read the Poynter website?

*Sometimes.*

It was just on there — had actually decided to reinstate their book coverage. Which I thought was a hopeful sign, it absolutely is. It's all part of this whole thing of people trying to figure out who wants us, who needs us, who's going to pay for it. What can be done better by other people in other situations. I don't think anybody would pretend it hasn't shrunk.

*Have you covered stories that — relating to the economy — it sounds like more of what you do is criticism.*

I don't do any criticism anymore, I haven't done any criticism since April. But I've written a few — and even when I did criticism, I never was just a critic. I always was a reporter and a writer. So I did do some stories about how the economy was affecting theaters, the choices they were making in terms of reducing, cutting back on shows and offering different types of shows and firing staff and that kind of thing.

*After the economic collapse or during, did you follow business and financial news more than you did before?*

You know, no, I still followed it, but one of the weird things that happened is that when I was in my college and in my early 20s I could have cared less about financial news. But as you get older that becomes something that's more and more interesting to you. I'm not a huge reader of it but I have always kind of been curious what was going on in the real estate market.

*Did you learn something about economics or finance or that world by the stories that you wrote — that related to the economy?*

You always find out something from the stories you write. Did I find out anything — did the stories that I write teach me economics?

*Or did you have to learn something that you didn't know before, about business maybe, when you were covering businesses that are struggling?*



Not in that sense. I haven't done any real business reporting. But again it's a little bit hard. Because everything you do — I did this Springsteen tickets story yesterday. I knew nothing whatsoever about ticket distribution systems before I wrote that story. And I had to learn pretty quickly. That's one of the reasons why people are reporters is because you have to learn. And I had to learn pretty quickly, and so, it's a little hard to say 'No, I didn't learn anything about economics,' but if you asked me what I did learn I wouldn't be able to tell you necessarily. It depends on — I was following very particular theater companies, doing very particular things. They weren't trend pieces or anything like that necessarily.

*Do you pay much attention to feedback from readers?*

Absolutely.

*Is there any feedback that sticks out to you that related to the economy?*

No. Cause they wouldn't be. Readers tend to respond in terms of, you screwed this up, or I completely disagree with you, or not so much in terms of, these troubles are really killing me.

*Do you find that you or other people here pay more attention now that the paper has been — newspapers in general are struggling?*

More attention to what?

*Reader feedback.*

No. I really do think it's something we've always been concerned about. We've always been in the public eye, and it's great that people have always felt very passionately about certain things that we do. No, I really don't think that has changed.

*Have you found yourself thinking more, the same or less about the business side of the newspaper than you did before?*

I'm sure that that's true. I'm sure that — yes, I think so. I'll check Poynter a couple times a day, although that's something I've always done. Ever since I was in Milwaukee. But yeah, it's certainly, it's, in the past year, there have been more and more stories about, 'Here are — these companies are forcing pay cuts and these companies are having unpaid leaves and these companies' — there's been just a ton of chatter about, 'Can this business be saved?' And here are different models for saving it. And the pros and the cons. And that's — I would say it's hugely increased in the past 18 months or so. It's really kind of interesting. Before the economy kind of went belly-up, a lot of the angst of the conversation was around the Jayson Blairs, and the fabrication. Stephen Glass. It seemed like there was a new fabricator a minute. And before that I don't know, it had to do with

diversity in newsrooms, and both of those being legitimate issues. But there suddenly isn't much talk about this anymore. Because the more significant issue of survival has supplanted them. And so I'm kind of curious what the next one is going to be, once this one has passed, what's the next — I'm sure there are still people out there fabricating, but you don't hear about them anymore, or very rarely.

*It's kind of scary — that maybe they're out there proliferating and people aren't paying attention.*

Well, like sometimes — I also thought we went a little to the opposite extreme in terms of trying to police ourselves sometimes. And in terms of pillaring some people who had made pretty innocent and fairly understandable mistakes. It was just a little bit of an overreaction in terms of trying the group that we were a peer.

*So you think the fact that newspapers are struggling and therefore it's something that everyone in the newsroom is thinking about, do you think that has impacted coverage?*

Yes, I do.

*How so?*

Well, in every conversation — it hasn't been so bad in the past four or five months, but it might get worse. Okay — I remember telling someone that every story we were writing these days had to be the economy, economy all the time. And that I think that newspapers do look at the world through a certain set of lens that is affected by their preoccupations at the moment. And I think there was a time when — I don't think it lasted that long — but that when everything that happened was somehow being interpreted as a result of a bad economy. And that wasn't always the case. And it wasn't that people were deliberately trying to skew coverage. It was that we were all so worried about our jobs, and the newspapers, and what was happening with them, that that was just what we were preoccupied with. So we tended to see things from that perspective. And it was sometimes very very difficult to step outside that. To say 'Oh, is this really what's happening here.'

*Do you get a chance to look at other newspapers and see how lifestyle journalism here is different than other newspapers?*

I do less of that than I did in the past, again as we're becoming more and more Baltimore-centric there's kind of less and less. But if you're going to ask me — everybody's always — love the *Post's* coverage and the *Times* coverage — and I've worked at other newspapers, so I've thought about how they do things differently, but if you're going to ask me now if I have opinions about other newspapers or other coverage, I'm going to assume that whatever problems we've been having is probably reflected in a lot of the decisions that are getting made in a lot of other places. This whole thing with critics. Critics have been reduced at newspapers nationwide, and there are some that are doing

without them at all, and, in that sense, I'm familiar with it, but I don't on a routine basis read the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* or the *Miami Herald* or —

*I noticed that at this paper, because I looked at some of the archives before I came here, and other papers too, in the lifestyle section when they cover stories about the economy it tends to be more news — 'The economy is affecting this,' or a service — 'You can save money on this.' Do you have a preference for covering each type of story? Have you covered both?*

Well I've done a little bit of both. We've done a little bit of, here are five things you can see for free, or at a very reduced cost. And the others I guess tend to be — although, because I'm an arts critic, everything has to have a strong arts angle. Pretty much everything. So I did a piece about — here is how the economy is affecting what Baltimore audiences are going to see on stage next year, and looked at some decisions made by several different companies. So it wouldn't be — that kind of a thing as opposed to, I don't know, I think they're both valuable. I read all those tips myself about how you can save money, but I think that the social trend stories are usually pretty interesting.

*Has your idea about what readers want to see changed over, during that time, from April 2008 to April 2009?*

No, I mean, I think a lot of times newspapers pretend that we're doing things for the readers, but I don't think anyone has a really clear idea. I don't think that what the readers want has essentially changed. I guess. I tend to think that — I divide readers into two kinds. There are readers who are primarily interested in information, and readers who are primarily interested in storytelling. And most people will tend to trend heavily in one direction or the other, and so I think the basis of the newspaper has shifted from a storytelling — we're not as much a storytelling newspaper as we are an information-based newspaper, and I think that the information-based readers are probably happy about that and the storytelling readers are probably unhappy about that.

But as soon as somebody gets to be the editor of a paper they immediately, and I would do this too, if it were me, but they immediately remake the newspaper kind of in their own image. So that for a while we had a superb editor who was completely obsessed with lacrosse, and so we covered lacrosse and sailboat races like nobody's business. And that's a very natural, very human kind of thing is to assume that, cause it really boils down to taste. And to assume that your tastes are everybody's tastes. Whereas I think that, I would do this myself, I'm not exempting myself from this.

But in an ideal world, an ideal newspaper, if we had the money, if we had the staff, would reflect a little bit of everybody's tastes in it. It's just much more difficult to do that these days. So I don't think what readers want has changed. And I think that it's very difficult, people say, 'Well we've done all these surveys, and these surveys show that readers want a,b,c and d,' and I think it's very difficult to tell from any survey what readers really want because they might not know how to tell you what they really want or what they really want might be one thing and then something else. There's kind of a classic example of that. You know about the New Coke — market research for New Coke? Market research

for New Coke was — Coke was worried because Pepsi was beating it. And so they came up with a soda that was going to taste as much like Pepsi as possible and called it New Coke. And all their marketing surveys and all their panel tests and all their consumer groups showed that New Coke was going to be hugely successful and it of course bombed.

And the reason it bombed — and it took them a long time to figure this out — is because they would give people these little sips and say ‘Which one do you like better?’ and they would all pick New Coke. But people that would pick that as a sip would not want that for a full eight-ounce drink. And so it wasn’t that anybody was lying. It was that readers really didn’t know what they preferred until they actually went into the store, buying something and trying something and didn’t like it and went back to something else and that’s why I tend to be somewhat suspicious of all those group surveys. And because they’ll never account for everybody. I mean it’s — too diverse.

*I always wonder about that — and polling — cause I don’t know how they do it now, but they used to do it by landlines, and not everybody has a landline anymore, so I wonder how they do it to account for that.*

Right.

*I interviewed a reporter at the Detroit News that said at his paper, when newspaper pages are reduced, they often cut lifestyle and features first because the publishers are hard news people. And what they want to hold onto is hard news and sports. Do you have any comment about that here?*

I don’t think that that has been the case here. I mean, if only because newspaper editors often tend to be hard news people, but often at the same time, entertainment sections tend to be among the most profitable, and so they want to keep what is most profitable. Everything here has just taken — business — we don’t have a business section anymore, which breaks my heart, actually. It just breaks my heart. So I don’t think that our managing editor here was the lifestyles editor for many many years. So I have not — it’s been a really really rough year, but I do not think we have been the stepchildren, or badly treated in that sense. And at the same time, as much as I am passionate about the arts and am passionate about storytelling and that kind of thing, if it really came down to, we can only afford to hire 30 people, the real core is metro news, of the paper. That is the reason why we exist. And I think that that has to go last. Cause if people don’t know what’s going on on the streets, if they don’t know what’s going on in their schools, I mean that’s really —

*That’s important.*

Yeah. And I love what I do and I am not volunteering to have all of us axed, but I do have a certain sympathy for the decisions that newspaper owners and publishers are trying to make. It’s really rough and I have never thought that newspapers should be allowed to operate at a loss. That to me is just not a — it’s like if there really isn’t any

demand for us, then we shouldn't exist. And I guess I don't believe that. I do believe there is a demand for us, its just that it's changing, it's not clear yet, what form it's gonna take, who's gonna pay for it, but —

*You've been working here for a while, do you have any ideas about what will happen in the future?*

(Laughs) We all wish we did, we all wish we knew, and it's a subject of countless endless speculation on a daily basis and I don't have a clue and neither does anybody else. I mean I really don't. Sometimes people say — you read it on Poynter every day, well I'm sure that this is gonna be the way of the future, or that's gonna be, and it's not. You just don't know.

*It's a crazy time.*

It really is a crazy time. I mean nobody would have predicted this. Nobody would have predicted this even two years ago.

## APPENDIX 2

***Detroit News: “This holiday, give the gift of a little less”***

**By Marney Rich Keenan**

**December 17, 2008**

There’s no doubt about it. The Christmas season is looking especially bleak this year.

Consider the magnitude of bad news. There’s the credit crisis. GM and Chrysler are on the brink of imploding. Ford’s not looking too hot, either. Foreclosures are at an all-time high. Bankruptcies, both personal and business, are up 30 percent over last year. The hits, as they say, just keep on coming: the stock market plummeting, the unemployment rate soaring, the national debt quaking in the trillions and on and on and on.

It’s hard to believe that Christmas is eight days away, even harder to get in the spirit of giving when so much has been taken away.

And yet, in spite of all the dreary news, there is a fool-proof way to don an attitude of gratitude, maybe even discover the truth in tidings of comfort and joy.

This simple but effective mindset can chase all the bah-humbugs away. Better yet, it has nothing to do with homemade gifts or arts and crafts. There is no sewing, baking, knitting or caroling involved. I’m not even suggesting, as our governor did, purchases of automotive company stock as stocking stuffers for the kids.

Are you ready? The epiphany is the form of four simple words: You are not alone.

You are not the only one telling your kids how much Santa is scaling back on presents this year.

You are not the only one trying to find where, in the family budget, if anywhere, you haven’t cut back already.

You are not the only one who has lost his job, is on the verge of losing it, or is expecting to lose at least one source of income next year. You are not the only one living in fear and uncertainty over your livelihood.

You are not alone.

Everybody is suffering. Some economists are warning that, as the global economy slows, the risk of world recession rises. Many suggest we haven’t hit bottom yet. The show “60 Minutes” reports a second disastrous wave of mortgage defaults is on the horizon.

No one, not even the elite, seem untouched. A massive fraud scheme by the former head of NASDAQ is taking down some very sophisticated and extremely wealthy investors.

I don’t mean to imply that misery loves company. I do mean that a tad of deprivation and sacrifice in the abundant wealth in which we, as a country, live is not such a bad thing.

Maybe we need to be humbled in this, the season of retail orgy, mall rage and raised expectations. The good news is we don’t have to do it alone.

This is not my usual M.O. In years past, at this point on the calendar, I’ve started hyperventilating, every hour on the hour. I’ve got lists of presents to buy coming out my

ears. I'm grouching to my husband about how I do ALL of the gift planning, purchasing, wrapping, cooking cleaning, etc. I swear like a sailor in crowded parking lots. I am near tears taking my place in lines to cashiers backed up like airline security mazes at peak flying times.

But this year, I'm a stress-free shopper. Why? Because this year I can't buy anything I can't pay for. What a concept.

Early on, we told the kids to lower their expectations. This year they will receive one nice present and the rest will be stocking stuffers. They said: "That sounds great. Don't go all out, Mom." And I think they mean it. Gone are the requests for Ugg Boots, North Face coats, phone upgrades and digital cameras. Kids get it: even self-conscious teenagers are hip to conspicuous consumption.

We haven't sent out cards yet. We didn't put up the tree until two nights ago. Christmas this year is slower, less hyped, less anxious, more as it should be. That's not bleak. It's a gift.

***Detroit News, “Channel 56 lays off 11 employees”***  
**By Kimberly Hayes Taylor**  
**January 22, 2009**

Eleven Detroit Public Television employees were laid off Wednesday, a station official has confirmed.

From the reception desk to the promotions and accounting departments, the reductions represented about 16 percent of the station’s staff, said David Devereaux, vice president of communications for Detroit Public TV and sister radio station, WRCJ-FM (90.9).

One radio station employee also was let go, he said. The 12 employees’ job cuts were effective immediately, but they were given a severance package, Devereaux said from his Detroit office Wednesday.

He assured viewers and listeners that they won’t notice the staff reductions. In fact, he said, station officials had donors in mind when it made the cuts.

While the station’s fiscal year doesn’t end until June, and station officials don’t how much money will be donated to the station, he said some action needed to be taken immediately because of continued economic decline.

“We’re always looking at ways to control costs and manage our donors’ money wisely,” he said. “While we can’t predict future revenues, we can control our costs now. We all hope the economy is going to improve.”

Sixty employees remain at Detroit Public Television.



***Detroit News, “Basement renovation need not be costly”***

**By Jeanine Matlow**

**September 27, 2008**

Long gone are the days of the dark, dingy basement. Today’s homeowners are turning the once neglected space into a family destination.

When Rick and Kelly Deneau bought their White Lake home 10 years ago, the unfinished basement was on their to-do list. While renovations of any kind can be costly, the couple saved money on many details.

“My wife’s first premise was to keep this project on a reasonable budget,” Rick says. “Everything was done with an eye on keeping the cost down.”

Their sister-in-law, Darcel Deneau, was a great resource. The fine-arts painter, who also studied interior design, gave suggestions for color and other concepts.

“My wife and I love purple and green,” Rick says. When Darcel told them a third color would make a difference, a soft silver was added to the mix. The stained concrete floor was painted with an assortment of colors and given an epoxy seal.

Walls were given a multihued paint treatment with a wallpaper brush. “It has a brushed aluminum look,” Rick says. “It’s a little unconventional.”

So is the modern design. “We both like wide open spaces, with not so much clutter,” says Rick, who kept the exposed ductwork to gain ceiling height and an industrial vibe. Thanks to the 9-foot ceilings and new windows that take advantage of the southern exposure, the space feels less like a basement, which was part of the plan.

As Rick explains, “We wanted to get the TV out of the main family room.” A black slate fireplace provides a focal point for the lower-level seating area that features a flat screen TV.

The couple went to Lowe’s for lighting and Target for some of the seating. Barstools purchased years ago, made from camshafts and wheel rotors, were reupholstered with leather seat cushions for about \$15 each. The custom bar features a curved steel pipe that acts as a footrest. An old pool table that belonged to Rick’s grandfather was updated with flat black paint and a purple felt cover.

During their travels, Rick and Kelly gather ideas and score some deals along the way. A metal picture holder purchased for \$50 in Arizona, lends a sculptural quality to the space. Another trip solved a design dilemma for the couple. “I wanted a workout room in the basement and my wife wanted a bedroom,” Rick says. With the inspiration for a Murphy bed from a hotel room, they were able to have both.

Now, the modern-day basement gets plenty of use. “We like the open layout very much,” Rick says. “It allows you to have a lot of people who can be having a private conversation, but still be part of a larger group.”

So, what do their guests think of the unique space? “It gets rave reviews,” Rick says.

***Baltimore Sun*, “Beers, Wines that won’t break your gift budget”**

**By Rob Kasper**

**December 17, 2008**

During the holidays, many of us like to give and get good things to drink. This December, the economic climate is so harsh that we are searching for beverages that deliver cheer on the cheap.

I gave myself the assignment of finding wines and beers that I not only would like to receive as a gift, but also cost less than \$25 and in most cases less than \$20. On the wine front, I found a couple of winning sparkling wines, a classy French white and a fruity yet balanced red from Argentina.

On the beer front, I discovered that good things come in large packages - 12-packs. Variety packs are popular this time of year, said Joe Falcone, beer manager at Wells Liquors in North Baltimore. Some brewers put hard-to-find styles - Old Fezziwig Ale for Samuel Adams, Irish Red for Saranac - in these packages at the holidays. All 12-packs offer a wide selection of beers and are, Falcone said, “an easy gift for Dad or a son or the guy next door who helped you put up the Christmas lights.”

Here is my take on downmarket, down-the-hatch gifts. I included the names and phone numbers of Maryland distributors who can direct you to a store in your area that sells the product. In parentheses, I put the name of the store where I found it.

**SPARKLING WINES**

Tissot Cremant Rose du Jura, \$23

Potomac Selections, 301-583-8844

(Found at Chesapeake Wine Co.)

This wine is French, gorgeous and tart. This sparkling rose, almost as red as Santa’s coat, lifts spirits with enticing raspberry aromas and crisp fruit flavor. It is a blend of 60 percent pinot noir and 40 percent Poulsard grapes.

Bellenda Prosecco 2007, \$21

Potomac Selections, 301-583-8844

(Found at Chesapeake Wine Co.)

Italy’s answer to champagne, this sophisticated sparkler is dry (there is a slightly sweeter brut version) and would be delightful to sip on Christmas morning.

**WHITE**

Domaine Belles Pierres Les Clauzes de Jo Coteaux du Languedoc 2006, \$17.99

Oslo Enterprise, 301-326-2056

(Found at Wine Underground)

This classy French blend of 60 percent roussanne, 20 percent grenache blanc and 20 percent viognier is smooth, with complex flavors usually found in more expensive whites.

**RED**

Aguaribay Malbec 2006, \$9.99

Monsieur Touton Selections, 800-220-1223

(Found at the Wine Source)

Holiday bargain hunters would do well to prowl the Argentine aisle of wine shops. This Malbec, which hails from a house connected to Baron Edmond de Rothschild, delivers smooth, rich fruit and good acidity for about 10 bucks.

#### BEERS

Flying Dog Sampler Pack, 12 bottles for \$16.99

Bond Distributing Co., 410-945-5600

(Found at Wells Liquors)

A package that delivers a variety of beers - five different kinds - for a little less than a buck and a half a bottle. Much to the delight of local beer drinkers, this award-winning brewery recently moved from Colorado to Frederick.

Hook & Ladder Variety Pack, 12 bottles for \$14.99

Chesapeake Beverage Group, 410-429-1601

(Found at Wells Liquors)

This package of holiday cheer and beer comes from a Silver Spring operation that won a gold medal for its Gold Ale at the Great American Beer Festival and donates part of its proceeds to hospital burn units.

***Baltimore Sun*, “A bargain roast — inexpensive chuck can keep your holiday table festive on a budget”**

**By Jill Rosen**

**December 17, 2008**

At Eddie’s market in Roland Park, cuts of beef beckon behind glass like a jeweler’s gems. Behold the rib roast - upright and regal, luxuriously marbled. As for the tenderloin, the store displays only tiny, tantalizing pieces - the whole roast, the cut of kings, is ensconced somewhere behind the counter.

Beef is an exclusive commodity indeed. But in a recession, a roast topping \$20 a pound seems almost gauche - if not outright out of reach.

According to a Consumer Reports poll, 76 percent of those surveyed vowed to cut back on holiday spending this season. Even at Eddie’s, one of Baltimore’s more upscale grocery stores, butcher Troy Allison has noticed people watching their wallets. The folks who typically order ready-made Thanksgiving turkeys opted to cook their own instead. “Christmas,” he says, “is going to be the same.”

Still, for many, roast beef is the quintessential holiday choice, the elegant anchor of a festive table on Hanukkah (which starts Sunday), Christmas and New Year’s. Luckily, “affordable” and “roast” are not mutually exclusive terms.

Robert Fahey, executive chef at the Hyatt Regency Baltimore, can make a cut of meat that rings up at just over \$3 a pound look and taste just as decadent as what his well-heeled guests feast on at the hotel’s New Year’s carving station.

His trick is looking past the prime cuts of meat, but not all the way down the food chain to stew meat. Chuck is Fahey’s answer.

Though it comes from the less-gracious end of the cow, and though it’s got a reputation as a more challenging cut of beef, chuck can pay dividends to those who treat it right, the chef says.

“The chuck is a great piece of meat,” he says. “It’s quick and easy and tastes like a million dollars.”

Fahey says when he’s cooking for himself, he rarely buys tenderloin - which is up to \$21.99 a pound at Eddie’s. “Unless I see the sale sign,” he says, “I walk right by.”

Instead, he scouts the meat aisle at Sam’s Club, where he recently found chuck roast for \$3.28 a pound. A 5-pound cut of that, which would cost about \$16, will feed as many as eight people, Fahey figures.

Fahey prepared his economical roast recently at the Hyatt’s kitchen. His recipe is almost shockingly simple. The ingredients can be counted on one hand - with none more exotic than garlic.

And as for the technique, it’s season, sear and roast. That’s it.

First, Fahey rubs fragrant chopped garlic into the meat, and then liberally sprinkles the beef with salt, pepper and steak seasoning.

“It’s going to come out tender and flavorful,” he says. “You’re going to have a very tender piece of meat.”

Next is the searing - the secret, Fahey says, to elevating humble chuck into the stratosphere of chic.

He pours a little oil into a frying pan, cranks the burner heat up to high and drops in the meat. He allows it to sizzle, snap and smoke on each side for about a minute before flipping it with tongs.

“By searing the outer layer, it keeps the juice inside,” he says. “If you just threw it in the oven, it would be dry; everything would just come out with the heat. It’s one of the first things they teach you in culinary school.”

The chef’s only caution with searing: Consider the smoke alarm.

Fahey laughingly says he’s triggered his own alarm this way more than a few times. “You might want to open a door or window,” he says.

After the searing, he transfers the meat to a roasting pan and pops it into the oven, where it will stay for 45 minutes to an hour.

“When you see the finished product,” Fahey says, “you’ll be like, ‘Wow.’”

As the meat roasts, Fahey chops an assortment of vegetables for a side dish that’s just as easy, elegant and frugal as the entree.

He’s chosen hearty and colorful wintry vegetables - beets, red potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots and onion - but the combination can easily adapt to any family’s tastes. Squash, zucchini, mushrooms and parsnips would all work. Fahey thinks throwing in a few cranberries would be particularly festive.

He tosses the vegetables with olive oil and roasts them alongside the meat in a separate dish for about 30 minutes. He likes to turn on the broiler for the last few minutes so that the vegetables turn an enticing golden brown.

When Fahey pulls the crusty, fragrant roast from the oven, he lets the meat rest for about 15 minutes before he slices it so that, as he puts it, the juices have time to soak back into the meat.

As he starts cutting into the meat, he can’t resist a “Wow.” It’s glistening and browned on the outside, deep pink and juicy inside. “This looks really good. To me, that’s a perfect medium rare, a nice beautiful pink.”

He creates a restaurant-caliber presentation by slicing the meat thin and fanning about four slices onto a plate. He nestles vegetables next to it and drizzles the roast with a little gravy.

Fahey says that “any gravy from the grocery store” will work with the recipe. Even in a bull market, he’s partial to the kind you can make from a packet.

“You’ve got the colorful holiday roast, but you didn’t go over your budget,” says Fahey

No one will miss the tenderloin, he says.

You’re not depriving anyone of anything this holiday season, he says, “if you give them chuck instead of rib roast.”

And you won’t be the only one.

“It’s going to be more chuck roast and rump roast this year,” says Allison, Eddie’s butcher. “Less rib-eye and tenderloin.”

#### TIPS FROM CHEF ROBERT FAHEY

\* Five pounds of meat will serve six to eight people. Figure on about 1/2 pound per person with leftovers.

- \* When buying meat, look for nice marbling and meat that hasn't oxidized - you know it has if it's begun to turn brown. "You want a bright ruby red," Fahey says.
- \* Always sear the meat to seal in the juices before putting it in the oven.
- \* For medium-rare meat, which Fahey prefers, the meat should reach a temperature of 120 degrees. For medium, about 140 degree works. And for well-done, the meat needs to hit 140 to 160 degrees.

**Baltimore Sun, “Flying Europe on the cheap”**  
**By San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News**  
**April 6, 2008**

*I’d like to travel from Venice, Italy, to Frankfurt, Germany, and then to Amsterdam, the Netherlands. How can I find a low-fare airline on the Internet?*

Two sites that have listings of low-fare airlines flying throughout Europe are Whichbudget.com and Attitude travel.com. Popular carriers include Ryanair, Flybe, easyJet and LTU - although they might not fly to your destinations.

In fact, although we found a 50-euro fare on Ryanair from Venice to Frankfurt’s Hahn Airport, we weren’t able to locate a low-fare airline that flies from Frankfurt to Amsterdam. However, we found fares for less than \$200 on KLM and SAS on Expedia.

Remember, although low-fare carriers offer rock-bottom prices, they often charge hefty fees for checked baggage, overweight or oversize baggage and handling fees for using a credit card.

*My husband and I would like to rent a beach house in California. How can I find an affordable place?*

One good spot to start: Homeaway .com, which corrals all the inventory on similar house-rental sites it owns, such as Cyberrentals.com, Vacationrentals .com and Alvacations.com. The company, based in Austin, Texas, claims to list almost 100,000 properties in more than 90 countries.

Eileen Buesing, a spokeswoman for Homeaway, did a search of homes in Los Angeles County located on or near the beach and said you can expect to pay about \$1,800 for a one-week rental of a two-bedroom house this summer. Prices vary depending on the property, number of bedrooms and distance to the beach.

***Kansas City Star*, “Night life comes home to roost”**  
**Jeneé Osterheldt**  
**November 18, 2008**

Over the last few months I’ve been doing a lot less going out and way more going in.

I’ve gone to a house party, a movie night, a “Grey’s Anatomy” watch night, a tea party and even a Wii party. My friends and I are turning our homes into the new hangouts.

Just last week one friend hosted a chili and cornbread night while another had an old-fashioned game night.

All of this new domesticity turns out to be not just good for our pockets, but it’s good for us, too.

People are putting down their BlackBerrys and iPhones. They’ve cut back on happy hours and clubbing. Hanging out in their homes, they’re finding an intimacy you can’t get out on the town.

Meaningful conversations take place when you’re comfortable enough to say anything and you aren’t in a rush to get anywhere. I’m watching people who have hung out together at bars for a year or two get to know one another on a more personal level.

Sara Asmussen says she and her friends have been finding creative ways to have fun to combat the new economics.

Last summer they had porch nights instead of going to bars. They have weekly dinners, and soon they plan to have a craft night, including a session on making holiday gifts instead of buying them.

“Things are becoming a lot less social and a lot more communal,” says Sara, 26. “My friends and I used to go out pretty frequently, but it’s nice to be able to share the normal parts of your life with other people.”

Daphne Cox has been going to a lot more potluck dinners lately. She’s seeing more game nights, book clubs and intimate socials than she has in a long time and agrees that it’s bringing people together.

The uncertainties of a slowing economy seem to have forced us all to slow down, think about what’s important in life and reintroduce ourselves to quality time.

“Co-workers, neighbors and associates are taking the time to become friends,” says Daphne, 40. “We are spending less time being busy just to be busy and more time being busy with quality of life.”