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ATG Interviews Victor Navasky

Elizabeth J. Oktay

Vassar College Libraries, oktay@vassar.edu

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involvement with e-content, working with the likes of **ebRARY** and **statref** on other developing platforms.

ATG: *Where do you see Coutts going within the next five years? What directions will it take?*

AA: When I joined **BMBC** in the U.K. nearly nine years ago, we had a vision that we would become a key player in the library market with North American and European operations. Year by year that vision fell into place — almost down to the dollar value of expected turnover based on a five year strategic plan. The next five years are also mapped out and all that I can commit to is that we aim to keep the **Coutts** name going as a key supplier in the library industry. The market is evolving dramatically. The vendor landscape is unrecognisable from ten years ago. The library community is changing in its buying habits — tenders, consortia, purchasing officers working with acquisitions librarians, outsourcing.

We will inevitably move towards an information brokerage type operation. We will need to move yet further up the value chain with outsourcing and consultancy services as library infrastructures evolve and change. But in five

years our core business will still be the physical book with a few interesting little additions.

ATG: *Where do you find your greatest sense of professional accomplishment?*

AA: Working in a sales environment there are three areas of professional accomplishment that I have and continue to experience:

- 1) Seeing our company grow from a fledgling operation to becoming a key name in the global library market.
- 2) Knowing that your customer appreciates your service and that you are complimented on this — that in itself is the best reference a business can have and is my preferred selling tool!
- 3) Making sales breakthroughs with key clients that prove to the market that we can deliver.

ATG: *Finally, what do you do with your "copious free time?"*

AA: I can tell you what I would like to do with my copious free time — get back to reading a lot more — reality bites too hard sometimes so I need my dose of fiction — but nowadays I fall asleep after two pages and am also looking to acquire bi-focals because the text keeps slipping out of sight. I continue to be an armchair sports fan and keep in touch with my favorite U.K. teams by having the BBC on-line ticker tape running across the top of my PC.

In the past few months my North American colleagues have encouraged me to pick up a golf club — so I have started on another potential addiction — but at this stage I am not sure how it is going to work out.

Living in the Niagara region, visiting the local wineries and taking in the occasional tasting has become something of a passtime during the summer months. I still love to travel and my frustration is with all the wonderful places that I see in passing whilst on business, thinking that I must get back there and inevitably don't.

My wife has a great passion for American history, especially the Civil War — and is starting to slowly get me hooked — so Charleston here we come (again!)

ATG: *Andrejs, thank you so much for your time. Is there anything else you'd like to add?*

AA: On a personal level I have to say that the world of books has provided me with a career without a dull moment — and little did I realize that it would take me around the world. The experiences of visiting and working in different countries with different cultures are extremely challenging — but provide their own rewards. I might feel awful on a twenty-four-hour flight back from Taiwan, but at least I have been there and bought the "T" shirt!

ATG Interviews Victor Navasky

Publisher and Editorial Director, The Nation <vic@mail.thenation.com>

by **Elizabeth J. Oktay** (Vassar College Libraries) <oktay@vassar.edu>

Editor's Note: On March 26, 2003, I had the pleasure of interviewing **Victor Navasky**, the Publisher and Editorial Director of **The Nation** in his office on Irving Place, New York. Near the end of our meeting, **Victor** noted in response to one of my questions, "I have the best job in the world."

What follows is an edited version of the interview. — **EO**

ATG: *May we begin with your education, the people who influenced you, the events and experiences, books and other writings that have stayed with you through the years?*

VN: I had the ideal education, to be immodest about it. I went to an elementary school that valued the spirit, a high school that believed in social action and a college first and foremost about the intellect. My parents sent me to a **Rudolf Steiner School** from kindergarten through fifth grade. The **Rudolf Steiner School** believes in the spirit and in art. They literally believe in the spirit, that first we discover the world about us, then our bodies, and then the world of ideas. But the spirit is what counts.

Then I went to the **Little Red School House** and the **Elisabeth Irwin High School**, a progressive school in New York modeled on the **John Dewey** theory of education. They believed in community activism. My classmates knew

what communism was, which I didn't, and what socialism was. We went out into the community. It was a time of learning by doing. The **Steiner** experience, based on German culture, had been cut off from the world. I was Jewish and this was during World War II. At the **Little Red** we were really plunged into the community. We would visit a local prison and in high school we got credit for work on a political campaign.

At the **Little Red** I had an English teacher, **Mr. Marvin**, who had the capacity to inspire his students. He revered language, poetry and fiction. The summer between my sophomore and junior year, we were asked to read *Moby*

Dick. When we returned in the fall, he asked my friend **Richard Atkinson** what he thought of the novel and he replied, "boring." "*Moby Dick* is not on trial, **Mr. Atkinson**, you are," said **Mr. Marvin**. I also had a Marxist history teacher. I graduated in 1950 so this was in the late 1940's during the onset of the **McCarthy** era. Learning high school history from a Marxist at a moment when Marxism was under universal attack was invaluable.

ATG: *Where did you go to college?*

VN: I went to **Swarthmore**, a non-denominational school founded by Quakers where they believed in the intellect, in ideas and where they cultivated social values as well. I had been a good student in high school but like everyone else I got a B- on the first exam. The first year breaks down all of your old assumptions and if you are lucky, everything comes back together by the time you graduate. I had gifted teachers at all these places. I was in the Honors program. I co-edited the college newspaper, *The Phoenix*, and I graduated with a double major in English Literature and Political Science and a minor in Philosophy.

You asked about educational influences. In my first year at **Swarthmore** I had as my advisor a great teacher, the philosopher **Sidney Morgenbesser**. He told me that there was only

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one course worth taking at **Swarthmore**: his. He was young and brash. Later he taught at **Columbia** where he was a legend. He once went to a talk given by a philosopher of language who noted that in English a double negative has a positive meaning but there is no such thing as a double positive which means a negative. "Yeah, yeah" came from **Sidney Morgenbesser** from the back of the room. He was my Socrates. Many years later I invited him to be on the editorial board of *The Nation*.

ATG: And after Swarthmore?

VN: After **Swarthmore**, I joined the Army and served in Alaska at Fort Richardson. I was in the ski troops but those of us in the headquarters company were issued snowshoes instead of skis. I edited a military newspaper. This was prior to statehood and I had the opportunity to attend Alaska's constitutional convention. That was a very educational experience. They had invited political scientists and political philosophers from all across the country to advise them on the perfect constitution. So you heard these people explaining that a constitution deals with universal and general principles as opposed to legislation which deals with specific issues. A delegate from the Upper Peninsula raised his hand and said, "Well, we ought to put in the constitution that there should be no fish traps in the Seward Peninsula." No, no, he was told that it was too specific for the constitution. "To the contrary, fish traps in the Seward Peninsula are a life and death matter," the delegate replied. "That is a universal principle, the principle of life or death."

I thought that I wanted to be a writer or editor and I had an interest in public affairs and politics. I was entitled to the **GI Bill** and decided the world could wait for three more years to hear what I had to say while I carried on my education. I went to the **Yale Law School** where at the time it was possible to get a liberal arts education and not too much law. I studied Freud and Jurisprudence, Law and the Arts, and I took a course called Law and Public Opinion with **Fred Rodell**. He was another influence on me. He vowed about fifteen years earlier in a famous article that he wrote, "Farewell to Law Reviews," never to write another footnote. He taught two courses. In one, each of nine students assumed the role of a specific Supreme Court justice and had to represent that justice's opinion in all the conversations about cases in the class. In the other, we had to write papers about complicated legal issues but were not allowed to use any legal terms, such as due process. We had to translate them into English so it was a useful discipline. The other person at the **Yale Law School** who meant a lot to me was **Tom Emerson** who published the first casebook on political rights and civil liberties. I took the seminar with him and he hired me to help write and do research for the second edition of his textbook, *Political and Civil Rights in the United States*. I joined the **American Civil Liberties Union** while still at Yale and became editor of the newsletter.

ATG: Please tell us about Monocle.

VN: In law school I started a magazine called *Monocle*, a magazine of political satire. One of my colleagues was **Richard Lingeman**, who is with us at *The Nation* to this day. Our motto was "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king." We called ourselves a leisurely quarterly, which meant it came out twice a year. For the first issue I typed the words *Second Class Matter* on our masthead because I had seen the phrase in **Harper's** and just assumed that all magazines were *Second Class Matter*. We printed 400 copies and put 200 of these in the mail to friends and representatives around the country, including a friend from **Swarthmore**, then a **Harvard Law School** student, **Michael Dukakis**, who managed to get *Monocle* on the **Harvard** out of town newsstand. I got a pink slip in my mailbox the next day from the Post Master of New Haven demanding that I appear at the post office. So we prepared and armed ourselves with citations from **Justices William O. Douglas** and **Hugo Black** about free speech because we thought that some of the contents might be considered subversive. It turned out it wasn't that at all. They asked us by what right did we call ourselves *Second Class Matter*? To be *Second Class Matter* we would have to meet all kinds of requirements such as mailing issues at least four times a year. I tried to argue that we were first class matter and he pointed out that we were fourth class. So we had to take a blue pencil, cross it off, and write fourth class on each issue. Those first issues are now collector items.

I took the magazine with me after **Yale** and with others continued it through mail subscription. We also published something called *The Outsider's Newsletter*, which purported to report what was not going on. In the end we called *Monocle*, "A radical sporadical" with the last issue in 1965.

ATG: Please talk about your work experiences and writing prior to joining The Nation.

VN: When I left **Yale** I took a job as a speechwriter for **G. Mennen (Soapy) Williams**, the governor of Michigan. He was the longest running governor in the country having been elected to his sixth term. He was a great politician and I got to see the country with him and learn a little bit about politics.

I came back to New York City when **John F. Kennedy** was elected President. My friends and I raised some money and tried to make a business of *Monocle*. We all started to do other writing to support ourselves. I helped write the report of the Civil Rights Commission in 1961 and started writing for other publications, principally for *The New York Times Magazine*. During this time I signed up to do my own book on **Robert Kennedy's** attorney generalship. Also, I was offered a job at *The New York Times Magazine* as an editor which I accepted in 1970.

And *Monocle* went into the non-business side of publishing, what is now referred to as book packaging. We would come up with ideas for books that required research more than writing, hire researchers, and have an agent help us place our books with publishers. We called ourselves **Pentacle**. We did about thirty books from trivia to serious that were published without our

names on them. One was a book of famous funny telegrams, *Barbed Wire*. Did you know about the telegram that **Robert Benchley** sent after he arrived in Venice? "Streets full of water. Please advise." We did a book of selected **Beatles** news conferences and a collection of essays on the **Berkeley Free Speech Movement** with an introduction by **Irving Howe**. We researched and wrote the hoaxed book, *The Report from Iron Mountain* and **Dial Press** in 1967 agreed to publish it as non-fiction. It was a parody of think tank-ese and at the same time a critique of the military industrial complex which purported to be a suppressed government report commissioned by the **Kennedy White House** on how to make the transition from a wartime to a peacetime economy. The alleged commission concluded that without a threat of war the economy would collapse and thus according to our book, the report was suppressed. By this time **Johnson** was in the **White House**. When asked by a *New York Times* writer about the report, the administration, not sure whether there was or wasn't such a secret report, replied, "no comment." The book briefly became a best seller and was taught for years in both liberal and political science courses.

My book on **Robert Kennedy**, *Kennedy Justice* was published in 1971. I had become an editor at *The New York Times Magazine* in 1970 and written a story on the **Hollywood Ten**. After two years I left to begin work on the book that became *Naming Names*.

I took some time out from writing *Naming Names* to coordinate **Ramsey Clark's** senatorial campaign. I was his campaign manager. We won the primary but lost the election in 1974 to **Jacob Javits**. I taught part-time during those years at NYU on underground literature in their adult education program. From 1973-1977 I also had a monthly column in *The New York Times Book Review* called *In Cold Print*. I wrote about publishing from the writer's vantage point. I dealt with issues such as contracts, book distribution and editors' salaries. I taught, at **Wesleyan University** in Connecticut, a course on informers, cooperative witnesses. What I taught was really a way of helping me move my book along.

I was a Ferris Visiting Professor of Journalism at **Princeton** and while I was there *The Nation* came up for sale. While researching *Naming Names*, I had to read through all of the magazines that were publishing during the **McCarthy** years and came to respect *The Nation* more than any other for its domestic coverage, particularly on the civil liberties front. I urged several of my friends in publishing to acquire it. It was not my plan that I would be part of it. *Kennedy Justice* had been nominated for a National Book Award. I thought that I would be a writer.

ATG: Please continue with your story about The Nation and when you became the editor.

VN: The people I knew who were in the publishing world and had the money were not interested. I knew that **Hamilton Fish**, the son of the **Congressman Hamilton Fish**, whom I had recruited to do fund raising work in the **Clark** campaign had successfully raised the

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money which enabled the great film maker **Marcel Ophuls** to complete his movie on the **Nuremberg** trials. So I suggested to **Ham Fish** that he do the same and go out and raise the money to buy *The Nation*. He said he would do it on one condition, that I be the editor. I said, "I can't do that. I have a book to do and a wife and three children to support."

I told him that I had left the magazine business to be a writer. He said, suppose I raise enough to pay a living wage, you don't have to start until after you finish your book and you have total editorial control. I took a year and ended up starting before I actually finished the book. I came to *The Nation* in 1978 and *Naming Names* was published in 1980. *Naming Names* won the **American Book Award**.

So, that is how I came to *The Nation*. **Carey McWilliams**, whom I had interviewed for my *Naming Names*, had been a lawyer in California at the time of the *Red Hunt* and written a book called, *Witch Hunt*. He was a major influence on me. The first thing that I did when I became editor was to bring him back to write a column. He had been the editor and left the magazine a few years earlier. Whatever problems I would have, I would always consult with **Carey**. I don't know how I would have made it through without him. He always gave sensitive advice. He was very wise.

Carey once wrote that the editor of *The Nation* is a captive of its tradition. I didn't know what he was talking about until I got here. It is a great tradition. *The Nation* was founded in 1865 by people in and around the abolitionist movement. It was launched with what I consider one of the great, most courageous sentences in the history of magazine publishing: "The week has been singularly barren of exciting events." Living in the age of **Tina Brown** and the big buzz, it's interesting to remember that America's oldest weekly magazine was launched with that sentence. There is a moral in there.

In the magazine business, survival is the ultimate sign of success. My joke always has been that the secret of the magazine's success is that it has lost money for 138 years. It survives to this day because it is more a cause than a business. If it were primarily a business, then it would modify its tone to please advertisers. The more it modified its tone and the more ads it got, the more it would be like everyone else. So either it would go out of business because there was no longer a need for it, or if it really "succeeded" it would be a candidate for take-over and disappear forever. It is a for profit business because if we were non-profit, under the tax laws, we could not endorse candidates for office or devote more than a modest percentage of what we publish to influence legislation. It is *The Nation's* business to make trouble every week for the powers that be, to be suspicious of the official line. In every issue we aim to have at least one constructive proposal, one idea building toward a better future.

ATG: Please talk a little about the number of subscribers.

VN: I came to *The Nation* in 1978 and was told that there were 23,000 subscribers. When I got here, however, it turned out that 5,000 of them had expired. And when I looked at that list of 18,000, eight or nine thousand of these were libraries that were automatically renewing. I told this to my friend, **Jack Newfield**, and he said, "Oh, 9,000 libraries and 9,000 nursing homes." That was the image of *The Nation* subscriber back then. Now we are audited every six months and the last audit figures were 125,726. We have more than that since that audit. Last week it was 150,000 and we expect that we will end the year with probably over 130,000.

About 10 percent of our subscribers are in the New York area; about 12 percent are in California; and the others, wherever there is an intellectual community, you see a bump. It is a real national magazine. **Ham Fish** had a joke in the old days that "when our subscribers expire they really expire." These days they are getting younger.

ATG: When did you become publisher of The Nation?

VN: I was the editor in chief of this magazine until 1994/5 when our publisher made me an offer that I should have refused and sold me the magazine for money I did not have. I had to go out and raise the money both to pay him and cover our annual deficit and to grow the magazine to the point of it being self-sustaining. I then became publisher and kicked myself upstairs as editorial overseer and **Katrina vanden Heuvel** is our day-to-day editor.

When I became publisher I did a number of things. Firstly I went to a friend, **Samuel Hayes** who was on the faculty at the **Harvard Business School** whom I knew from working together on the **Swarthmore** Board of Managers. He had managed the college's portfolio and is a brilliant financial wizard. I made a proposal to him that I would open our books to him if he would make us one of **Harvard's** fancy MBA business studies. The problem to give your students would be how to take a magazine that has been losing money for more than 130 years and, without changing the magazine, turn the economics around. **Sam** first said, "Well you know, I don't exactly share *The Nation's* politics" and I said, "That's not really the issue."

So **Sam** agreed and said that we would do a case study, not for the MBA program, but for a program of owners, presidents and CEOs of some businesses, like **Ben and Jerry's**. This program is for people with real hands-on experience who have started their own business and want to learn how to run it; people who have joined the family business and want to professionalize it; and people from overseas who want to learn how the Americans do it. **Sam** said we could do a case study for them and I would have from 50 to 100 free consultants. These people meet three weeks a year for three years. **Sam** looked at me and said to me, you know you ought to take this course. He said, "You don't know what you are doing."

I thought about it and decided that if I'm ever seriously going to be a publisher, why not. So I went and did it. At that time I had to write up a business prospectus for the magazine with

a plan that anticipated a break-even point three or four years down the road and go out and raise the money. The first public person who made a major financial commitment to us was the actor **Paul Newman** — to the magazine and **The Nation Institute**, a public charity that supports research and conferences. I thought that we needed three million dollars. I did succeed in raising half the money from three or four investors like **Newman** but as I went around I found all these subscribers and other people who loved the magazine and who said that if we were looking for five, ten or fifteen thousand dollars, "count me in." So we ended up organizing a **Circle of 100**, people who committed to invest \$5,000 a year for three years. That way, half the money would come from our big investors and half from our **Circle of 100**, small investors. We got **Ed Koren**, the *New Yorker* cartoonist, to design the stock certificate and to number them, so I could say, "The value of your shares may go down but the value of your stock certificate is going to go up." Sure enough at the end of three years we hadn't come near break even and had to go back again. Last year we took in more operating cash than we spent but we still are not yet a profitable magazine.

ATG: Please explain your sources of income and tell us about The Nation Associates.

VN: Here is a rough breakdown of our economics. Of our revenue less than 10 percent comes from advertising, 75 percent comes from subscribers, and 15 percent comes from other. The other is primarily a group of people called **Nation Associates** who send us extra money because they love this magazine even though they don't get a tax deduction. Money given to **The Nation Institute** is tax-deductible. As a public charity, it is not allowed to pay salaries, pay printers, do direct mail for subscriptions, or the like.

Also under the rubric of **Nation Associates** we do an annual **Nation** cruise to exotic climes featuring panels with our writers. Then there is **The Nation Digital Archive**. The cruise makes money. **The Nation Digital Archive** may also down the road bring extra income. It is a new subsidiary right that the new technology makes possible.

ATG: Please tell us more about the Nation Digital Archive.

VN: **The Nation Digital Archive** is an extraordinary resource for all kinds of reasons. One reason is the historically determined coincidence that the magazine was founded the year the **Civil War** was ended and the **Archive** thereby becomes an alternative history of the United States. Secondly, having been founded by abolitionists, it has a point of view, although over the years it has undergone some fascinating political zigzags. For example, *The Nation* in 1865 was in favor of free trade, basically free market economics, and it was anti trade union. Until **Freda Kirchway** came around, its policy and its ideas about women reflected the mores of the day. However, under **Freda**, as an editor, it did extraordinary things on behalf of women. It has, from the beginning, been a very strong supporter of human rights, civil rights, and with one exception, civil liberties. The magazine was

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in favor of suppressing some Nazi materials during World War Two that I would not have favored. I am a **First Amendment** absolutist from my **Tom Emerson** days. The magazine has been anti-imperialism since day one. The reporting on the Philippines, Nicaragua, and Latin America is unparalleled. It is a journal of opinion that means that it is a views magazine rather than a news magazine and yet it has had, as **Ralph Nader** exemplified with his article on auto safety, some of the great investigative journalism of its time. **Fred Cook** did special issues—exposés on the **FBI** and the **CIA** when no one was writing about them.

The *Nation* contributors over the years—people like **Henry James**, **Emily Dickinson**, **James Baldwin**, **Martin Luther King**, (our civil rights correspondent), read like a who's who of American arts, letters and politics. Speaking of letters, one archive user discovered a Letter to the Editor from **Adolph Hitler**.

The thing about **The Nation Digital Archive** is that it not only makes this information available which runs counter to conventional textbooks, but because of the new technology you can search it by word and name within pieces in a way which didn't used to be possible. There is a whole new form of possible scholarship that comes from that, and a new excitement for scholars and high school students and for serious lay readers as well. Even though we get a lot of interest from individuals, libraries are at the center of the marketing strategy. That way it will ultimately be available to more users. We see libraries as kin—as our joint venture. We also have about fifty discussion groups that have organized themselves around the country and meet once a month to talk about articles in *The Nation*. We ask them to go to their library to see whether they have this or, if they don't, why not. It enables them to give historical depth to their conversations.

We are learning a lot about this new online world through this project, everything from pricing to how to respect our basic commitment that writers should share in the revenue from what they create. We didn't have any advanced expertise in this business so we called together a series of informal advisors. These include librarians at every level to people in the digital world, marketing and business types. They help us think through the tough questions. If an institution subscribes for ten years and then stops, what do they retain, if anything? How do you price it? How do you make it maximally available without going further in the hole?

ATG: How did you address writer's rights?

VN: We went to the **National Writers Union**, which is very interesting. We had helped organize the **American Writers Congress** in 1981 at the inception of the **Reagan Administration** and the **National Writers Union** was born out of this congress that was called to discuss ways that **Reagan's** policies were going to affect writers. An informal committee met in our office for many months in advance of the congress trying to figure out how to organize because it was said that for writers to organize

was a violation of the anti-trust laws. With the help of creative counsel, they figured out a way to do it.

Regarding electronic rights, we met with the **National Writers Union** and worked out a formula that we would make a payment to them for past works on behalf of all the writers *The Nation* had published over the years. They could use that payment to benefit writers as they see fit through health insurance or whatever. As a matter of good faith we are ready to pay for the past. For the present and future we negotiated a formula where, until there is a standard in the profession, we'll pay an extra 15 percent above our normal fee for these extra rights. We will look at it again each year. So when **Jonathan Tasini**, who has had some falling outs, brought his case against the court, he would cite *The Nation* as being a model of what companies ought to do. We are still vulnerable as there are writers who don't belong to the **National Writers Union**. Our position is that we are ready to reward and pay writers for the use of their work online. We built that principle into our contract with all writers so they get extra for the use of their work. We did the best that we could.

ATG: Please tell us about The Nation Website.

VN: Of course, when I did up my business plan for *The Nation*, the Website wasn't a part of it. **Christopher Cerf** and I, by the way, did a book many years ago called, *The Experts Speak* that we updated a few years ago with a new edition. It is about experts in every field who are wrong. It includes politics, economics, art, music, and criticism. Here are a few quotes: "There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in their home," (president of the **Digital Corporation** 1977). "I think that there is a world market for about five computers." (**Thomas J. Watson** 1943).

We didn't project anything about computers in the plan. We have, compared to most companies our size, spent less on a Website or adding technical personnel. We built it into our existing system and brought in some experts, who for a very reasonable price, helped us to build a Website that has won some prizes. The big surprise to us was that starting about four years ago we got 2,500 paying subscribers to the hard copy magazine who came to us through the Website. Three years ago we got 5,000, two years ago we got 10,000 and last year we got 15,000. This is happening at a time when direct mail is getting more and more expensive, so it becomes a very interesting and important way of attracting new readers. The Website is lowering the average age of subscribers but they renew at about one third the rate as the hard copy traditional direct mail subscribers. We have a very high over-all renewal rate between 75-80 percent so we are doing fantastically well compared to most magazines. This lower renewal rate from subscribers who find us over the Web is a potential concern.

Now, there are conundrums. How much do you put on the Website? I am one who believes that you put a lot out there. **Teresa Stack**, our president, fears that if you put too much out there people will not subscribe to the magazine. So it is a balance; you put enough to entice yet not everything.

I believe in the portability of the magazine, the serendipitous experience of the reader reading things side by side, and the editorial judgment, first of all, of how the page should look and how to pace a magazine. Those are things that will guarantee that the hard copy magazine will be with us as long as there are people to read.

What we can do online is use the Internet and email to organize and to get things out quickly and worldwide. We are ready to experiment in introducing an online magazine to high school students with a work study guide that is neither the magazine nor what is on the Website. It is based on themes taken from articles which have appeared in the magazine. There will be ones on slavery, race, the economy, the war and others. It will be continually updated and be sold by subscription. It is our way of introducing younger readers to our magazine. We also have talked about experimenting with ways to partner with magazines which have different politics than we do so we could offer students competing perspectives.

ATG: You are now associated with Columbia University. What do you enjoy most about teaching?

VN: Well, I am the **Delacorte Professor of Magazines** and the **Director of the Delacorte Center of Magazines**. The **Delacorte Center** is a virtual center. It doesn't really exist even though I have a nice office up there.

My primary responsibility is to run a workshop in the spring semester. It is six credits, half of the student's semester credits. The work product is a student magazine that is literally published. I thought that it would be simple to shepherd through one issue of a magazine in a semester as I am used to putting out an issue every week. It does not work that way. If you don't do it yourself, which you can't and shouldn't, it is very hard work. You want to help the students but you want them to do it themselves. There is a tension in the workshop. On the one hand you want it to be theirs but on the other they use it for job-seeking purposes and they are judged by it. The school is judged by it so you want it to be really presentable and professional and they are not professionals yet. Some are brilliant but it is their first shot at something like this. So that's very exciting because every time it is like launching a new publication. It is a magazine about the magazine business so they learn about the world that they are about to enter. The first year we did one called *Takeover*, about takeovers, mergers, conglomerations, and consolidations in the publishing business. The second year we did one about the relationship of words to pictures, images to content, which is at the center of the magazine experience. It was called *Undercover*. At the students' suggestion they put a translucent cover on top of the real cover with a very fancy design. That, of course, caused all kinds of production problems, delays and extra expenses and you learn a great deal about the magazine business by seeing the problems and expenses you incur.

I also teach a course on opinion journalism in the fall even though I took off last fall and the fall before that to work on a new book. I also run a lecture series called the **Delacorte**

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Interview with Michael Cooper

President and Founder, BUSCA, Inc.

by Jack G. Montgomery (Editor, *ATG*) <jack.montgomery@wku.edu>

ATG: Michael, what exactly does the word *BUSCA* stand for?

MC: *BUSCA* means Search in several languages (Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese).

ATG: Can you tell us a little bit about the company's history and its overall philosophy?

MC: *BUSCA* was founded in 1997 with the intention of providing personalized focus to libraries seeking excellent fulfillment for conventional monographs, help with difficult titles, service for almost all formats from almost all sources. Increasingly we are providing video, DVD, etc.

ATG: What, if any, specialized training or education did you receive before getting into the book business?

MC: I have been in the book business continuously since 1979. Prior to that I worked with a literary publication project while enrolled in college.

ATG: Who do you see as primary customers of *BUSCA*? Are you organized to respond to a certain patron group?

MC: Primarily we work with college and research libraries. We seem well organized to respond to our customers because they tend to praise our service.

ATG: So far, what has been your experience in dealing with Libraries? Have there been any unexpected issues? What elements have been challenging?

MC: *BUSCA* has wonderful relationships with numerous libraries. We are grateful for them. Unexpected budget shortfalls this year for some of our clients have been a challenge to them and for us.

ATG: Can you tell us how pricing is structured for your services?

MC: Our pricing is structured to be competitive in the marketplace. *BUSCA* welcomes interested parties to contact us at info@buscainc.com for details.

ATG: Do you find it difficult to compete with large companies/vendors?

MC: I respect most of our competitors. Apparently we are all facing genuine bottom line financial concerns as are our customers. Big vendors do have their strengths, but they also have higher costs in their multi-layered organizational structures.

ATG: I've seen your Website and it looks great! Do you envision an on order interactive Website?

five or six times. He told us to regard ourselves as unpaid consultants. We don't have to come to a conclusion about what an ideal curriculum should be. He does. It was a stimulating exercise because he invited us to speculate on what an ideal curriculum ought to be, rather than to criticize what is.

ATG: Please tell us how you first learned about the Charleston Conference.

VN: I first heard about the **Charleston Conference** on the **Nation 2002** cruise. A publisher of scientific journals told us that it is the best conference in the world on these matters and he would not miss it. I then called **Teresa Stack** from the ship to see if she or someone else could attend, but on such short notice no one was able to. We arranged to de-brief him after the conference and he gave a fond description. We are going this November.

ATG: Victor, thank you so very much. And as Katina, whom you met at ALA mid-winter, would say, "See y'all in Charleston."

MC: Thanks! We are working on a Web-based office with interactive ordering features.

ATG: How many staff do you currently employ and how is *BUSCA* generally organized?

MC: *BUSCA* has averaged nine employees in the past few years. We also outsource some functions. *BUSCA* staff members tend to be cross-trained while still specializing in specific departments.

ATG: How do you balance your time between the publisher and the vendor aspects of your position?

MC: *BUSCA*'s publishing activities at this time are a modest part of our operation. Eventually we may need to develop greater resources to accommodate an enhanced publishing program. We can keep a balance.

ATG: I notice you publish a lot of regional histories. How did you get into that aspect of publishing? What themes are you going to pursue in the future?

MC: Yes, we started-out by publishing some regional history titles. Partly that is due to my own interest in that subject and partly due to the ease of working with local authors. *BUSCA*, though, has been moving into new subjects, while continuing to publish autobiographical, anthropological, and historical works. Expect to see some exciting titles relating to depth psychology, shamanism, and Kabbalistic teachings.

ATG: Tell us about *Devil Dogs & Jarheads*. Any new publications?

MC: In **Victor Pearn's** new book, *Devil Dogs & Jarheads* (0-9666196-3-3, Paper, \$14.95), the world of a U.S. Marine enlistee in 1969 comes to life in buzz cuts, reveille, drill sergeants, rifle ranges, and purple hearts. As *Southwest Book Views* (Spring 2003, Vol. 2 No. 2) noted, "The experiences shared in this collection are etched indelibly upon the heart of the writer and now the reader in words that the world can little afford to ignore. This is undeniably exquisite work." Look for a favorable book review later this year in *American Libraries*. Our next title release is due 9/30/03:

The Essence of a Universal Kabbalah—Dawn of a New Consciousness (Stoff, 0-9666196-5-X, Hardcover, Approx. 300 Pages, \$29.50). **Dr. Bernie S. Siegel**, author of *Love, Medicine, & Miracles* will have a front cover quote, "This book is a wonderful resource for all those who can open their minds and learn to accept the truth."

ATG: Do you see *BUSCA* taking a position in the whole e-books trade? Do you envision eBooks as part of your inventory?

MC: As a library reseller, we have not been doing e-book business. However, as a publisher, *BUSCA* will eventually offer some of its titles for sale in digital format

ATG: Where do you see *BUSCA* going within five years? What directions will it take?

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Lecture Series. One year we had magazine editors-in-chiefs such as **David Remnick** of the *New Yorker*, **Anna Wintour** of *Vogue*, and **Charlie Peters**, founding editor of the *Washington Monthly*. Another year we had people from every aspect of the magazine business with an editor-in-chief, copy editor, designer, and the publisher, a sort of oral textbook in magazine publishing. The lecture series is required of all students in the magazine concentration and is open to the public. Interestingly enough, more students take magazines as a concentration than any other. I think that they think that it is the best place to get training in narrative prose.

ATG: What do you think of the proposed changes in its Graduate School of Journalism?

VN: **Columbia** is undergoing a reconsideration of the journalism school. There is a taskforce of thirty-three people that the president named and I am one of them. We've met