



GREY HAIR & LADDERS

by Ben Stein, BWI President

The last month has been quite a ride for me. Early in May, my oldest child, Molly, graduated from high school and begins her journey to college soon. Shortly after her graduation, while working on my boat, I took a four-foot tumble off a ladder and snapped a bone in my right arm. 10 days after my fall, the four of us left for a 10-day trip to Paris to celebrate Molly's graduation. While in Paris, I got an email letting me know that due to changing budgets, my monthly column is now a bimonthly column. As I said, an eventful month.

My broken wrist, subsequent surgery, and transatlantic flights have provided me more time to sit and ponder things than I might like. In between trying to avoid accepting both my own frailty and aging, I've also been pondering the implications for our industry, of further cuts to magazine budgets and of seemingly the last steps in an industrywide march towards consolidation.

I feel fortunate that my professional life is diversified. I run my own online publication, write for several print publications, and consult. However, without that diversification, news of reduced budgets and hence reduced work would hit harder.

And we can all only take so many hits before looking past the marine world for our living.

Some of the best work I've read was written by younger writers who have more recently entered our trade. If you've attended any BWI events recently, you know that gray heads of hair outnumber any other color by a wide margin. Although that trend is easily explained by the current realities of marine media, failing to inject new blood into our ranks is cause for concern.

Although business machinations have changed the landscape of marine titles, I don't believe the boating public's appetite for our work has diminished. In fact, I am often surprised at the conversations I have with people I haven't met who read my, and so many other BWI members' work. That interest and engagement in what I write is why I do this.

Like the readers I have the privilege of talking to, I'm a boater and I love boats and the water. I wake up every day excited to tackle a new day of messing about in boats. Now, the question is, how do we help the next generation of passionate boaters become boating writers? Frankly, I wish I had more ideas and a better

answer to that question. But, if you do, I'd love to talk. For the health of our industry and our organization, we need them. Not just graying old guys who can't even climb a simple ladder without drama.

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DIVERSIFY! DIVERSIFY! DIVERSIFY!

Ever since the T-word started dominating the news, the stock market has looked like a cycle of SpaceX rocket launches followed by “rapid unscheduled disassembly” events. From one OMG to the next, anyone with a 401K or an IRA has bounced between euphoria and abject terror. And if that includes you, you’ve almost certainly heard about the value of being “diversified” as we navigate this (shudder) market uncertainty.

Diversification is a fundamental strategy we’ve all been hearing about for as long as there’s been a stock market, but it took decades for me to realize that it was also an effective strategy for making a living as a writer. Many of us think the safest way to enjoy a secure income is being employed by a publisher. Two acquisition-triggered layoffs and one employer bankruptcy later, I can confidently say: ummmm... nope!

Although the income flow and benefits are certainly better as a staffer than as a freelancer, the job security most certainly is not. In 30-plus years of fulltime writing I’ve been on one staff or another for about half of that time, with each stint ending thanks to someone else’s business decisions. Thank goodness, I never held a staff position without maintaining some level of freelancing on the side. And as a result I always had some level of diversification that allowed me to maintain an income when the road became rocky.

As a freelancer on the other hand, I fear suffering only from my own decisions—not from someone else’s. Sure, a client can still fire me at any time, but with a widely diversified portfolio of clients, I’d have to do something really stupid to get fired all at once. Yes, there can still be economic trauma that causes layoffs in the form of cancelled contracts. But with a diversified portfolio of clients, it would take a massive economic disaster for them all to shut it down at the same time.

Diversification can take many forms. In my case it’s a mix of boating and fishing spread across print publications, online publications, and books, but in yours, it might be a mix of boating and gardening, or fishing and skin care, or outboard mechanics and snowboarding. You might write for a mix of magazines owned by others and a website you own yourself. Whatever. Just as long as your eggs are spread among multiple baskets, you can build your own level of job security that’s far better than drawing a paycheck from a single company that could at any moment be snapped up by some private equity firm.

Heck, maybe I’m dead wrong about this and God forbid anyone listen to some relic fish-head who slept through Econ 101 in the 1980s. But for what it’s worth, I have honestly come to believe that for a boating writer, the strongest form of job security is diversification. So get out there and generate some new clients—even if you do have a job as a staffer—because spreading your bets is an excellent hedge against an economic rapid unscheduled disassembly.

Lenny Rudow is the Angler in Chief of FishTalk, current BWI board member, and past BWI President.



GENERAL NEWS

ADVERTISING OFFERED IN 2025 BWI ANNUAL DIRECTORY

It's that time again when we will be creating the BWI Annual Directory which will be distributed this summer. And once again, BWI will be accepting advertising in a special section to highlight our Supporting Member businesses. The digital directory is distributed to all current Active and Supporting members. Price is \$300 for a 4-color, full page ad in the front section. Please contact Executive Director, Zuzana Prochazka at info@bwi.org to place an ad or with questions.



NEW CONTACT FOR SUZUKI MARKETING & OTHER POSITIONS

Susan Shidler joins Suzuki as manager of advertising and marketing. An avid boater and angler, Shidler comes to Suzuki from the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and will be the key point of contact for advertising and marketing while Ron Ballanti continues with press related activities. In addition, Suzuki promoted two veterans to key positions: Brandon Cerka is now Vice President, Sales and Marketing, and Jacob Ewing is now Vice President, Operations.



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SUMMER



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