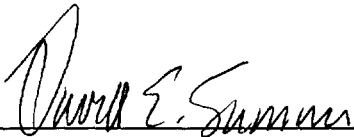


*The Saturday Evening Post:*  
America's Lost Cultural Icon

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by  
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## Abstract

This discussion of *The Saturday Evening Post* analyzes four areas of the magazine: (1) *The Post's* audience, (2) the subject matter of feature articles, (3) the subject matter of departments, and (4) *The Post's* overall quality of writing. This thesis examines one year (six issues) of *The Post* from September/October 1998 through July/August 1999.

Based on circulation reports and journalism writing techniques, this thesis analyzes and critiques the four areas previously listed. This paper offers recommendations to the magazine's editor by advising her of ways to attract new readers, as well as those who no longer read *The Post* due to its change in editorial content. This project suggests how to increase *The Post's* audience in order to reach more and different readers. These recommendations offer ways to improve *The Post's* editorial content of both feature articles and departments. Finally, this thesis gives suggestions for how improved editorial content and writing quality can entice the 3,150,000 of *The Post's* readers who are not subscribers to become subscribers.

## **Acknowledgments**

Thank you to my thesis advisor, Dr. David Sumner, for his time and willingness to assist me in my project. His ideas and classroom teaching were the basis of this thesis project, and I appreciate his input and helpful suggestions.

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## Introduction to *The Saturday Evening Post*

As America's oldest magazine, *The Saturday Evening Post* has withstood more than 270 years of turmoil and change. *The Saturday Evening Post* was first published as *The Universal Instructor in All Arts and Science and Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1728. Inventor, writer, and scientist Benjamin Franklin wanted to create a weekly publication and hired a printer to launch *The Gazette*. In October 1729 Franklin began to publish the paper on his own press and simplified the publication's name to *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. *The Gazette* became the best-known paper in the Colonies. Throughout the late 1700s *The Gazette* was known for supporting national political causes, such as the Stamp Act. Franklin eventually turned over the production of *The Gazette* to David Sellers. Franklin continued to contribute articles, essays, and his famous cartoon of a disjointed snake with the caption "Unite or Die" in 1753.

In August 1821 the weekly's name was changed for the last time to *The Saturday Evening Post*. The magazine gained popularity and attracted famous contributing writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and James Fenimore Cooper. After the American Civil War, *Harper's* new English-style magazine caused a decline in the popularity of all American magazines, including *The Post*. *The Post's* popularity consistently decreased until 1897 when Cyrus H.K. Curtis and his Curtis Publishing Company bought *The Post* for only \$1,000. At that time *The Post's* paid circulation was less than 2,300 copies per week, and its advertising revenue for 1897 was less than \$7,000. Previously Curtis bought another magazine, the *Ladies' Home Journal*, and made a success of it; he wanted to do the same for *The Post*. Curtis hired George Horace Lorimer as editor, and together they spent nearly 40 years rebuilding *The Post's*

reputation. “*The Post*’s circulation multiplied 15 times during the first year of the Curtis-Lorimer regime, tripled again in the second, doubled in the third, passed one million a week in 1909, two million in 1913 and three million—after setbacks during World War I and the depression—in 1937.”<sup>1</sup> At its peak *The Post*’s total circulation was more than 7 million readers. Artist Norman Rockwell’s first cover appeared in May 1916. Rockwell’s illustrations have defined America in that era. Through its writing and artwork, *The Post* became a prestigious American magazine and a cultural icon.

From the time Curtis purchased *The Post* until the late 1960s, the Curtis Publishing Company changed *The Post* in several ways in order to pique reader interest. But the opposite of the desired reaction occurred: readers abandoned *The Post*. *The Post* was trying to compete with television’s popularity and large audience. “Of course, that was impossible,”<sup>2</sup> says Jim Kobak, a former president of the J.K. Lasser and Company, an international accounting and consulting firm. During his years at Lasser, many of Kobak’s clients were members of the magazine and book publishing industries. Kobak believes the combination of fighting to increase its circulation along with a badly run company caused *The Post*’s ultimate decline. “The management didn’t know what it was doing,”<sup>3</sup> he says.

In 1968 the magazine broke all previous loss records when it lost \$20,900,000. But the Curtis Publishing Company and *The Post* could not recover from these losses. *The Post* ceased publication in January 1969. Soon after *The Post* ended its production, Drs. Beurt and Cory SerVaas, a prominent Indianapolis businessman/politician and his wife, purchased the magazine and moved it to Indianapolis. The couple wanted to revive *The Post* and to return it to its previous high status in America. Instead, the SerVaases

changed *The Post* from a general interest magazine to one focused on health and fitness. Dr. Beurt SerVaas named his wife as Editor-in-Chief of *The Post*. Now editor Dr. Cory SerVaas calls the magazine “a communication medium for and about health, nutrition, fitness, and preventive medicine.”<sup>4</sup>



## Audience Analysis

According to *The Saturday Evening Post's* online media kit, *The Post's* total audience is 3,583,000. The Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), a highly regarded auditing organization in the communications industry that verifies media's circulation data, said from January to June 1999, *The Post's* average paid circulation was 410,064 readers. How can the editors of *The Post* improve its editorial content in order to entice the 3,150,000 of *The Post's* readers to become subscribers? What can the editor do to encourage new readers to subscribe to the magazine? Before *The Post* can attract new readers, its editor must know the types of people who currently read the magazine.

*The Post* does not aim its material toward one sex more than toward the other. The percentages of men and women readers are split at 41% and 59% respectively.

More than 58% of *The Post's* readers attended college. This is higher than the national average of 27%.<sup>5</sup> Overall, the majority of *The Post's* readers are highly educated. But they are not necessarily educated in medical issues and terminology, which are frequently included in *The Post*.

The average household income for readers of *The Post* is \$40,370, which is above the national average of \$35,172.<sup>6</sup>

The median age of *The Post's* readers is 51.6 years, and 62.5% of readers are married. The Audit Bureau of Circulations and *The Post* do not provide any information regarding the numbers of White and minority readers of the magazine.

Because *The Post* calls itself a general interest magazine, these seem to be expected demographic figures.

When considering which advertisers to include in a magazine, editors must determine which companies best appeal to the publication's audience. Therefore, the types of products advertised in *The Post* help define what types of people read the magazine. The issues analyzed for this project show *The Post* directs its advertisements and editorial content to Americans over 50 years old. This segment of the population is nearing retirement or already retired, is willing and able to spend money, and is in need of health-related services. Advertisers in *The Post*, such as Covenant Retirement Communities, Miracle-Ear, and the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), appeal to this older age group by offering products and services these readers need.

Other companies that frequently advertise in *The Post* include pharmaceutical companies and drug manufacturers. The majority of full-page advertisements in *The Post* are dedicated to prescription drugs, such as Pycnogenol (an antioxidant), Lipitor (a cholesterol-lowering medication), Quanterra (a prostate herbal supplement), and Detrol (a bladder control medication). These advertisers are seen frequently in *The Post* because it is focused on health and is aimed at older Americans.

## **Analysis of Subject Matter of Feature Articles**

Six feature articles were chosen for this analysis, one from each issue from September/October 1998 through July/August 1999. These feature articles were randomly chosen from the coverlines on the cover of each issue.

*The Post's* feature article writing excels in two areas. First, *The Post* publishes articles that include information on timely topics. For example, one feature article from the January/February 1999 issue discusses colon cancer and how readers can reduce their chances of developing this deadly disease. In this helpful article titled "Colon Cancer: A Guide to Risk Reduction," author Carolyn Hughes, M.D. includes a description of colon cancer, treatments (both present and future), misconceptions, and techniques for prevention. This was a timely article because one year earlier Jay Monahan, a legal analyst for NBC News and the husband of *Today* show host Katie Couric, died of colon cancer. He was 42 years old and had undergone surgery for colon cancer only seven months before his death. Another timely article published in *The Post* was "New, Safe Drug for Arthritic Pain" in the September/October 1998 issue. This story presents a possible new breakthrough drug for treating arthritis.

The second area in which *The Post* excels is its presentation of information. Articles in *The Post* include valuable facts, but the magazine's art director effectively uses graphics, sidebars, and pictures to supplement the information in each article. For example, in "Swimming for Lifetime Fitness," (July/August 1999) senior swimmers are profiled in four separate sidebars throughout the article. The swimmers discuss why swimming is healthy and enjoyable in their later years of life. Another sidebar for this

story highlights an interview with Mel Goldstein, the article's author and former president of the organization United States Masters Swimming. The colon cancer article in January/February 1999 includes three important supplemental sidebars: famous baseball players diagnosed with colon cancer, a new virtual colonoscopy test, and foods to eat and not to eat to prevent colon cancer. All these sidebars complement the information presented in each article, but they are not redundant. Since many articles in *The Post* feature health issues, there is often a list of organizations readers may contact for more information. This additional information is well presented in a graphic at the end of articles.

But there is a negative side to *The Post's* graphics. Instead of photographs, cartoon illustrations frequently accompany feature articles. These drawings do not add credibility to the writer or to the magazine. The illustrations seem too child-like for the serious health issues discussed in *The Post*.

In addition to the two positive aspects, timely topics and presentation of information, there are three areas of *The Post's* feature articles that need improvement. First, the magazine uses the question and answer format more often than necessary. Question and answer articles are appropriate when journalists interview famous celebrities who have interesting responses to probing questions. Because they contain so much information, question and answer stories in *The Post* often are longer than other articles. This makes the stories distracting to read and causes the information presented in the articles to be boring. The question/answer format is a way to avoid writing complete articles—it is easier to transcribe an interview instead of interpreting the topic and what the source said. Question/answer articles in magazines usually are acceptable for only a

few articles each year. But during the one year of *The Post* analyzed for this project, an average of two question/answer articles appears in each issue. None of these articles highlights a famous person the majority of the magazine's audience should know. Instead, writers in *The Post* interviewed lesser-known professionals in the medical community. Often these doctors used medical jargon that can be difficult for a layperson to translate. *The Post's* writers should have written traditional, informative articles in order to clarify such complex medical issues and terminology.

A second downfall of *The Post's* feature articles is that the writing does not follow basic journalism writing techniques and skills. Half of the six analyzed articles do not have attention-grabbing leads, are not clear, and lack pace. For example, the September/October 1998 article about the new treatment for arthritis does not have an interesting lead to attract readers. Readers must read several paragraphs of the story before they know what the article's purpose is. Many readers may not continue to read if an article's lead does not grab their attention.

One of the greatest faults of medical articles in *The Post* is that writers use hard-to-understand medical jargon. In this analysis, two articles include large amounts of medical terminology—"New, Safe Drug for Arthritic Pain" (September/October 1998) and "Making Strides in the Battle against Alzheimer's Disease" (March/April 1999). Among the medical vocabulary used in these articles are "prostaglandins," "homocysteine," and "COX-2 inhibitors." In these stories, as in others in *The Post*, the writers do not clearly define medical terms but use them as if every reader understands their meanings.

Articles in *The Post* lack pace. They are extremely long, which may cause readers only to skim an article or not read it entirely. Because of the articles' length, they can have as many as four page jumps throughout the magazine. This is distracting to readers and may discourage them from finishing an otherwise informative article.

The final area of improvement for *The Post's* feature articles is a lack of variety of topics. Typically an issue of *The Post* has a few general interest articles interspersed among many medical and health articles. Holly Miller, *The Post's* current Travel Editor and former Senior Editor, calls this a "hodge podge"<sup>7</sup> of article topics. *The Post* unsuccessfully tries to maintain its general interest status while at the same time it includes very detailed medical articles. This would be acceptable for a medical publication, but *The Post* prides itself on being a general interest magazine dedicated to educating the "general lay public."<sup>8</sup> *The Post* repeatedly reports on the same topics. Popular subjects overused in the magazine include arthritis, swimming, diet, cancer, and mental disorders. Instead of placing excess emphasis on a few health issues, *The Post* should include more general interest articles to appeal to more readers.

## **Analysis of Subject Matter of Departments**

*The Post's* departments are the only articles that give the magazine its general interest status. The departments add variety to *The Post's* editorial content and break up the monotony of as many as five health or medical articles in each issue. Some of the best writing by *Post* reporters is found in the departments. The departments analyzed for this project exemplify the variety of articles for which all general interest magazines strive.

Five departments were randomly selected from three issues: September/October 1998, January/February 1999 and March/April 1999. The five departments chosen were *The Post* People Page, Food, humor columnist Maynard Good Stoddard, Travel, and Medical Mailbox.

### ***The Post* People Page**

*The Post* People Page profiles three famous and prominent personalities in movies, television, science, or medicine. For most Americans, the celebrities highlighted on *The Post* People Page are well known, but they are generally the same age as readers of the magazine. For example, dancer-actress Cyd Charisse is featured on the September/October 1998 People Page. While many older Americans are familiar with Charisse's work, members of younger generations may not know who she is. By adding young celebrities to the People Page, *The Post* can attract young, new readers.

The short biographies listed with the celebrities include updates on their careers. To make these biographies more interesting, *The Post* should include the celebrities' personal information, such as their family lives, in addition to news on their careers.

## **Food**

Each Food department has a special theme, for example “Think Fish” in March/April 1999. Due to its health focus, *The Post* uses healthy recipes in its Food departments. Each Food section usually includes eight recipes made with a variety of foods—vegetarian meals, seafood, sandwiches, salads, soups, and pasta.

Along with the recipes, *The Post* features a short history of the foods or a description of why the ingredients in the recipes are important for healthy eating. These introductions to the Food section are well written and include useful background information unknown to typical readers. This is an added benefit of the healthy recipes in *The Post*’s Food department.

## **Maynard Good Stoddard**

Humor columnist Maynard Good Stoddard is the most popular staff writer, according to readers’ letters to the editor. If Stoddard’s writing is absent from just one issue, readers write to the editor because they are concerned something happened to their favorite writer. Stoddard gives a humorous twist to everyday events and topics. He writes in first person, is easy to read, and provides pace to his stories.

Even though Stoddard is humorous and entertaining, young readers may find his situations unappealing. For example, in the September/October 1998 issue, Stoddard describes how members of his generation did not have the advantages of the medical technologies we enjoy today. He discusses times when his mother used “mustard plaster” and castor oil to cure him of mild childhood illnesses. In addition, Stoddard consistently mentions his old age (“...you *have* to be younger than I.”<sup>9</sup>) and uses awkward and archaic language, such as “The silence that followed I laid to the good doctor trying to formulate a tactful response....”<sup>10</sup> Young readers may not easily relate to this language or to



Stoddard's topics for articles. This may be one reason young people do not subscribe to *The Post*.

Cartoon illustrations are frequently used for Stoddard's articles. These drawings seem more appropriate for his stories than for feature articles. The illustrations are whimsical and humorously illustrate the events in Stoddard's stories better than photographs ever could.

Overall Stoddard's writing is a fresh change from *The Post*'s formal, informative reporting on medical issues. Stoddard draws in readers and continues to entertain them with his creative and witty writing.

### **Travel**

The Travel department adds a creative touch to *The Post* lacking in the magazine's other articles. Travel articles are more descriptive than feature articles and use more colorful writing. Readers can picture themselves at the exotic locations featured in Travel sections. The writers use captivating words to describe these places and do not provide excessive information. If readers visit any of these destinations, they will discover places and activities not profiled in travel articles.

In its Travel department, *The Post* does not highlight typical vacation spots. For example, the March/April 1999 issue features a travel article about a unique cruise vacation—a steamboat ride on the Mississippi River. This article, as well as others in the Travel section, provides readers a unique glimpse into a new vacation opportunity.

Travel articles in *The Post* are extremely well written. The travel articles are more entertaining to read than other departments and most feature articles. Travel writers use leads to lure readers into the stories, anecdotes to allow vacationers and resort employees

to speak of their own experiences, and conclusions that leave readers wanting to visit each destination.

Another impressive element in *The Post's* Travel department is its attractive layouts. These articles creatively use breathtaking pictures and tastefully stray away from the traditional, rigid design seen throughout *The Post*.

### **Medical Mailbox**

Based on readers' positive letters to the editor, Medical Mailbox is the most popular department in *The Post*. In this department, editor Dr. Cory SerVaas answers readers' questions and concerns about medical issues and conditions. Readers also have opportunities to share their own solutions to their personal medical problems. Other features in Medical Mailbox are contact information for medical organizations, other doctors' opinions (besides Dr. SerVaas' comments), and a sidebar presenting recent progress in the medical community. Medical Mailbox, along with feature articles in *The Post*, often features advances and updates of medical issues around the world.

Medical Mailbox has three negative features. First, in her responses Dr. SerVaas continually uses medical terminology and does not clearly explain the words' meanings. Medical Mailbox, similar to *The Post's* feature articles, uses too much medical jargon for the general layperson.

Second, the advice in Medical Mailbox, especially readers' personal advice, includes home remedies not yet approved by medical professionals. For example in the September/October 1998 issue, one reader suggested eating gin-soaked raisins for back pain relief. Dr. SerVaas' response to this was simply, "We're glad it works for you."

This brings us to the third negative aspect of Medical Mailbox. *The Post* does not include a disclaimer encouraging readers to consult their physicians before applying the

advice given in the magazine. Sometimes Dr. SerVaas says readers should suggest to their doctors the new treatments presented in *The Post*. Unless *The Post* includes some type of medical disclaimer, one day the magazine could face legal difficulties for giving medical advice to a large group of diverse people.

Overall *The Post's* departments are more enjoyable and easier to read than its feature articles. The departments cover a variety of issues, mostly not medical concerns. This allows readers to be informed about different areas instead of reading articles filled with medical jargon. Department articles bring a much-needed change to *The Post's* continual health focus.

## Recommendations

As a 22-year-old college student, I am part of the age group *The Post* should target in order to increase its circulation. As a member of this age group I can provide an educated, critical, young perspective on how *The Post* can improve its editorial content.

After analyzing one year of *The Saturday Evening Post*, I found four areas of the magazine that can be improved. If *The Post's* editor applies the following suggestions to the magazine, paid circulation could increase, and a larger variety of companies may want to advertise in *The Post*. These recommendations could attract new readers and increase the magazine's nearly non-existent readership between ages 21 and 51.

### **Editorial Content**

Editorial content is the most important area of *The Post* to improve because it defines the magazine's personality. Currently issues of *The Post* include numerous medical articles. Instead of containing so many articles focused on health, *The Post* should limit its medical information to two general medical stories per issue or only the Medical Mailbox department. The medical information in *The Post* should focus on general family health not on elderly health concerns. Based on the table of content pages from 1975 to 1999, editor Dr. Cory SerVaas slowly introduced medical issues and articles, making *The Post's* transition to a heavily medical-focused magazine a gradual change. *The Post* is denying its readers of its traditional investigative journalism and historically revered editorial content. If *The Post* quickly improves its editorial content, the magazine will attract more readers looking for its traditional editorial content.

There are several simple ways to change *The Post's* editorial content. By eliminating some medical articles, there will be space in *The Post* to add more general interest articles. Potential article subjects that may interest more readers are family issues, advancements in technology, jobs and careers, and social issues. Another way *The Post* can increase circulation and return to its former popularity is to include reprints of fiction stories previously published in *The Post*. In the past *The Post* was well known for attracting famous authors, such as C. S. Forester, Stephen Crane, and Rudyard Kipling, and creating a platform for their work. One fiction reprint in each current issue would be a pleasant change from *The Post's* current editorial content filled with medical information.

### **Writing Style**

Generally the quality of writing in *The Post's* articles is stiff, formal, and filled with medical jargon. Writers for both feature articles and departments should attempt to resemble the high quality of writing in the Travel department by using creative and colorful words. Readers will find articles more interesting if they are more creative and informal than they are now.

One problem with *The Post's* writing style is the length of articles. Three- to four-page articles are easy to read. Twenty-one articles analyzed for this project are longer than four pages; some reach as many as seven pages. In many cases the long articles contain numerous page jumps through the back of the magazine. For example, the "Fats for Mental Health" article in the March/April 1999 issue has four page jumps and page turns that make the article distracting to read.

One serious fault in *The Post's* articles is their overuse of the question and answer writing technique. Writers in *The Post* use question and answer articles too much, an average of two articles per issue in the one year analyzed for this project. Question and answer articles are used most effectively for interviews with very famous people. The problem of using too many question and answer articles is easy to fix. The editor of *The Post* should create and enforce a new editorial rule: no question and answer articles will be allowed in the magazine unless the celebrity featured in the article is a very well known personality. The people profiled in *The Post's* question and answer articles from September/October 1998 through July/August 1999 are not famous enough to warrant the question and answer style. Only one story in *The Post* each year should follow the question and answer format.

The biggest problem of *The Post's* writing style is its excessive use of medical terminology. The medical articles in *The Post* are aimed at people who are educated in medicine and health, which is only a small fraction of *The Post's* readership. Readers trust the information in each medical article is accurate because the authors and editors have medical backgrounds. If *The Post's* writers explain the medical terms they use, more readers will understand the important information presented in *The Post's* medical articles.

### **Art and Illustrations**

*The Post* often uses cartoon-type illustrations instead of photographs to accompany articles. These drawings are appropriate for Maynard Good Stoddard's humor column and other informal articles, but cartoons frequently illustrate articles about

serious health issues. For these articles *The Post* should use professional-looking photographs instead of cartoon illustrations.

The most famous artist ever featured in *The Post* was Norman Rockwell. His paintings and illustrations adorned the covers of *The Post* for thirty years. Often *The Post's* covers still feature Rockwell's illustrations, as well as other famous artists'. But this gives a false impression that the current *Post* is *The Saturday Evening Post* of the past. New readers may be misled to believe they are buying *The Post* they remembered years ago.

This happened to one such reader, and he explained his dismay in a recent letter to the editor published in the January/February 1999 issue. "The nostalgic anticipation with which I purchased the December 1998 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post* was dispelled all too quickly...just geriatric-oriented articles and ads that imply that you have those same readers who read the magazine in my long-ago youth."<sup>11</sup> If one reader described his confusion and disappointment in *The Post's* editorial content, other readers must be experiencing the same frustration.

### **Advertisers**

Many of the current advertisers in *The Post* promote prescription medicines and health services for the older American population. When *The Post* decreases the median age of its readers, the magazine's advertisers should change also. Potential advertisers *The Post* should seek out include household product companies, automobile manufacturers, credit card companies, retail stores, and computer and electronics manufacturers. When it includes this variety of advertisers, *The Post* will attract more and different readers than it currently does.

## Conclusion

Under a new owner, publisher, and editor in the early 1970s, *The Saturday Evening Post* began to abandon its traditional editorial content of current events, fiction, and culture. Since then *The Post* has continued to evolve and now is known as a health and fitness magazine. In its 30 years of change, *The Post's* readers aged along with the magazine. But during this time *The Post* failed to gain young, new readers. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), from 1985 until June 1999, *The Post's* paid circulation steadily decreased from 674,400 readers to 410,064. The only two years to boast slight increases were 1992 and 1995 (Table 1). This significant decrease in circulation can be attributed to many causes, but the change in *The Post's* editorial content is an important factor to consider when analyzing *The Post's* declining status in American life during the past three decades.

*The Post* has slowly diminished its influence on Americans. In the past *The Post* was highly regarded for its honesty, integrity, and quality editorial content. Now Americans have lost interest in *The Post* and some do not know *The Post* is still being published.

*The Post* does not take advantage of its status as a cultural icon. Because of its past popularity *The Post* can effectively use its name to draw in new readers. If *The Post's* editor applies the suggestions for improvement presented in this analysis, *The Post's* circulation eventually may grow back to near its record high of 7 million subscribers.



**Table 1**

**The Saturday Evening Post's Paid Circulation Rates:  
1985-June 1999**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Paid Subscribers</b>
1985	674,400
1986	636,200
1987	612,200
1988	611,800
1989	582,900
1990	555,300
1991	474,100
1992	510,800
1993	472,800
1994	448,000
1995	455,500
1996	455,200
1997	450,600
1998	440,200
1999	410,064

Total loss in circulation from 1985 to June 1999: 264,336 readers

Average loss in circulation per year: 17,622 readers

Holly Miller agrees that *The Post* does not use its well-known name to attract readers. She also believes *The Post* has changed dramatically from its popular times in the beginning of the twentieth century. “It’s not the magazine it used to be,” Miller says. “It’s not even close.”<sup>12</sup> Miller has worked at *The Post* for more than 20 years. She believes the magazine suffered before it became a health-focused magazine in the 1970s. Miller calls it a “losing venture.”<sup>13</sup> She says after Beurt and Cory SerVaas purchased *The Post* they began to run the magazine in their own way and did not follow advice from knowledgeable people in the magazine industry. The SerVaases did not know how to improve *The Post*’s reputation. Miller says this contributed to *The Post*’s decline in circulation.

As a magazine consultant Jim Kobak worked with the Curtis Publishing Company during its problem years before *The Post* ceased publication. Kobak believes the editors and other employees of *The Post* at that time did not know how to run a magazine and how to improve its circulation. Because of this, Kobak says *The Post*’s decline in circulation was based on economics not the magazine’s editorial changes. “The problem was strictly from a business standpoint,”<sup>14</sup> he says.

Miller believes *The Post* can change, but it would be a long and exhausting transition from a medical-focused magazine to a general interest one. She says *The Post* must totally reinvent itself in order for the magazine’s circulation to increase. Miller says *The Post* does not have a clear audience or a clear editorial focus. She says even if *The Post* reinvents its editorial profile, circulation may not increase. “I definitely think its days are numbered,” Miller says. “I don’t know how it survived as long as it has.”<sup>15</sup>

Jim Kobak also believes *The Post* can change but not easily or quickly. He says *The Post* would need to start over and create a new personality. “It would have to spend an awful lot of money to do it (increase circulation),”<sup>16</sup> Kobak says. “It would be like starting a new magazine.”<sup>17</sup>

Kobak says *The Post* could gain a good reputation among other general interest magazines. But he says unless it is bought by a multi-magazine company with publishing experience, *The Post* might be “out of business”<sup>18</sup> in the next five to ten years.

Harry Newton, who read *The Post* years ago, wrote a letter to the editor, explaining his disappointment in *The Post*'s current editorial content and provides a unique insight. “It seems to me that unless you return to a format less senior citizen-oriented, you never will be able to expand the scope of your circulation to again include younger readers like I was a half-century ago.”<sup>19</sup>

It seems *The Post* must make dramatic changes in its editorial content, writing style, art, and advertisers in order to appeal to a larger audience and increase the magazine's popularity. Perhaps *The Post*'s editor should take these suggestions seriously. Other readers should write letters similar to Newton's and express a desire to change the focus of *The Saturday Evening Post*.

Editor Dr. Cory SerVaas is not concerned about readers' declining interest in her magazine. She continues to publish *The Post* as a piece of American nostalgia to keep it from becoming another magazine only read about in history books. But if SerVaas changes her views, she could breathe new life into *The Saturday Evening Post*. This 270-year-old magazine could reach a new audience and become the leading general interest magazine in the new millennium.

## Notes

- 1 *The Saturday Evening Post Treasury*. New York, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954, p. xiii-xiv.
- 2 Jim Kobak, former president of J.K. Lasser and Company. Interview by author, 9 December 1999.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 "A Brief History and Overview," *The Saturday Evening Post* online media kit; available from <http://www.satevepost.org/history.html>; Internet; accessed 3 September 1999.
- 5 Jennifer C. Day and Andrea E. Curry, "Educational Attainment in the United States: March 1998 (Update)," *Current Population Reports*, U.S. Bureau of Census. October 1998, p. P20-513.
- 6 U.S. Bureau of Census, "Changes in Median Household Income;" available from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/mednhhd/14.html>; Internet; accessed 19 November 1999.
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