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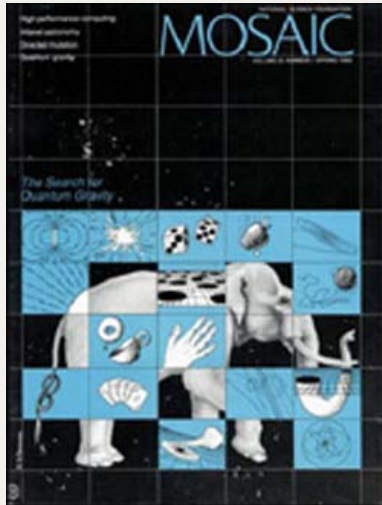
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Like a Phoenix . . .

Posted on November 17th, 2009 by earlehollland

Warren Kornberg's email was as unexpected as a snowfall in July, and equally as welcome.

Years have passed since I'd seen him, decades perhaps. Who can remember such things? But Kornberg was of the "old guard," the troop of masters who reigned in the wondrous heyday of science writing in the late 1970s and '80s. He's as much to blame, or credit, for the kind of writer I became as anyone.



National Science Foundation's Mosaic Magazine 1970-1992

In 1978, when I landed at Ohio State as a science writer, only a handful of similar jobs existed at American universities. While the research role of higher education was skyrocketing, the commensurate obligation to translate these wonders to the masses was mostly, as yet unrecognized.

But in the mass media of the time, science reporting was sprinting. Monthly science magazines seemed to grow like weeds – *Science 80* (by the AAAS), *Discover* (by Time Inc.), *OMNI*, *Science Digest* and a half-dozen more glossy, four-color pubs were prominent at newsstands around the country at the time. More than 100 newspapers around the country had decided to devote special sections to science and medicine and the promise that research seemed poised to provide never before seemed as great.

Science and research institutions began considering whether they themselves should take on a publishing role to tout discovery and the wonders of science.

Kornberg was already there in 1978 as editor of an acclaimed science magazine, *Mosaic*, published four or more times a year by the [National Science Foundation](#). While less glitzy than its newsstand competitors, *Mosaic* was a favorite among the best science writers in the country, primarily because of the space it allowed for individual stories and the emphasis Kornberg placed on seeing the science broadly.

While the trend elsewhere with the new publications seemed focused largely on the benefits or novelty that new discoveries offered, Kornberg and

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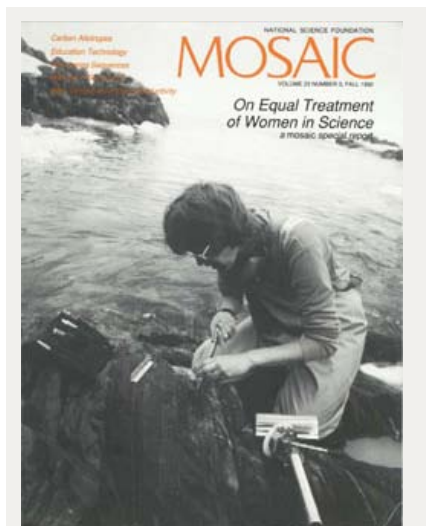
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Mosaic embraced science's breadth and complexity and looked at wide areas of inquiry, emphasizing interconnectedness among researchers.

It was, quite simply, a more accurate and less "packaged" way to explain science in all its complexity.

Its last issue arrived in the Fall of 1992 with a cover photo of OSU's own **Anne Grunow** studying rocks along the shoreline on Sprightly Island, Antarctica. By that time, *Mosaic* had published 110 issues, carrying a total of 539 stories on broad topics and written by at least 84 different authors, most of which were the best in the science-writing business. The majority of all of that had been accomplished under Kornberg's steady direction.



Last issue of *Mosaic*, Fall, 1992

In an epilogue published in the newsletter of the **National Association of Science Writers**, Arthur Fisher, the long-time editor of *Popular Science* magazine and a *Mosaic* contributor, pointed to both the challenge the magazine's story assignments represented and to their massive length – 15,000 words was not uncommon.

"Most of them could not have found a place in *Popular Science*, where I've been science editor for untold years!" he wrote.

Kornberg himself wrote in his last editor's note in the magazine, "During its lifetime, *Mosaic* became — of we tried to make it — unique in science journalism, seeking to reflect the substance and processes of research rather than the phenomenology that dominates so much journalism. We wanted *Mosaic* to be useful to the community it served. We tried not to be presumptuous."

Kornberg's email was more than just a voice from the past. He had, along with colleagues, compiled **an archive of all that was *Mosaic***, a digitized compilation of 23 years of science reporting, searchable by topic, by author and by issue.

"The stuff," he wrote, "if you remember, is still too good to lie fallow."

"More than just as a warm bath in cool memories, I think it's still a resource for students and teachers in all kinds of science/tech and science writing programs."

Agreed.

This was a time, long since past, when science communications wasn't constrained by a sound-bite mentality or Twitter-like communications.

And now it's available for all. Earle Holland

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4 Responses to “Like a Phoenix . . .”

[John Ludwigson](#) // Nov 17, 2009 at 10:30 pm

Well said! Thank you.

And FWIW, here's the url for the continuing online archive of Mosaic articles:

[Susan Wunder](#) // Nov 18, 2009 at 4:33 pm

This is a great find! I wrote articles for Mosaic (under the name Susan Wintsch) on cetacean intelligence, the beginnings of the Internet and solar neutrinos, quite a stretch for a geology major. I'm very glad to have digital copies—and continue to work as a technical writer/editor for the DC based non-profit SUSTAIN (www.sustaintech.org.)

Best to all!

Sue

[Cheney Lyon](#) // Jan 24, 2010 at 7:00 am

Science writing has certainly come along way from the times of the earlier science writers and is now quite a booming industry these days. I think the reason for this is that science writers now recognize the importance in writing science articles that can be read by a wide range of people, and that these days, you don't need to be a scientific genius to follow a well written scientific article.

[national association of science writers](#) // Mar 4, 2010 at 1:28 pm

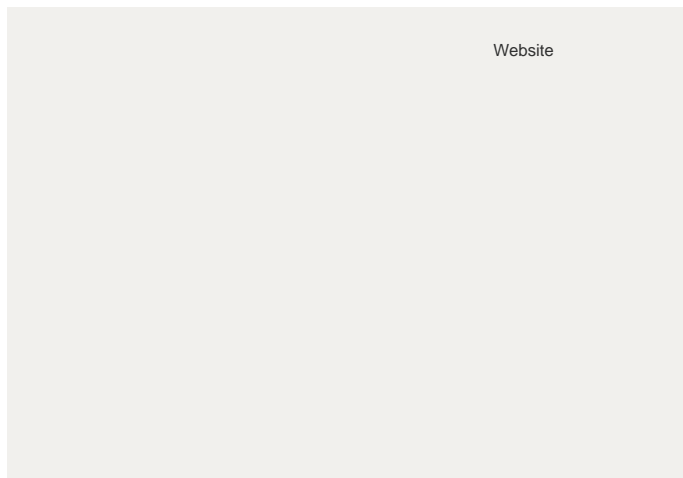
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« Fifteen minutes of fame . . . In the bullseye . . . »

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