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EXIT INTERVIEW: KEN ALEXANDER  
Weekend Review  
**'Floored' by the changes: 'I wish it wasn't so thin'**

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He's smoking less and exercising more. He's spending more time with his wife and their two children. And he has a book on the go (slowly, slowly) – a “devilishly difficult” work he deems “historical fiction,” at least for the time being, “about the disappearance of Canada” featuring everyone and everything from authors Saul Bellow and Mark Twain, and independent MP Chuck Cadman to the incorporation of Chicago as a city and the Rebellions of 1837-38 in Upper and Lower Canada.

But there's one habit that **Ken Alexander** hasn't shaken from the almost six years he spent as publisher, editor and general lifeline of The Walrus magazine: He still awakens pretty much every day between 3 and 4 a.m. The big difference now is that this no longer marks the start of the 14- , 16- , sometimes 18-hour workday that made Alexander a legend of sorts in Canadian publishing. Now, as he confessed recently over a few beers in a pub near his home in Toronto's Riverdale neighbourhood, the wee hours are used for writing that book, drinking coffee, then waking his son and daughter to ready them for school. “I barely saw them for six years,” he confessed with a shake of his head.

Alexander, 48, quit The Walrus last June (the day before, he says, the magazine won six gold medals at the National Magazine Awards), “because it was just no fun any more. ... It was fairly apparent to me that the direction I wanted to go, the beliefs I had and so on and so forth, were considered unworkable.”

Life post-Walrus has been, he admitted, “an enormous adjustment,” not least because it was Alexander who in 2003 co-founded the magazine with fellow Torontonian David Berlin. When Berlin bowed out as editor in early 2004, Alexander became The Walrus's major domo.

Starting ex nihilo a smart current-affairs magazine modelled after Harper's, The Atlantic Monthly and The New Yorker in Canada is no one's idea of a cheap commitment. Alexander estimates that in The Walrus's early, volatile years, as the honours piled up and editors came and went, he sank almost \$2.8-million of his own money to avert its extinction (\$2.5-million came courtesy of his father, Charles, as an advance on his inheritance).

In late 2005, when the Canada Revenue Agency granted The Walrus charitable status, Alexander essentially became an employee of the magazine he started, beholden to a board and a publisher. He said he “especially enjoyed” this new status, at least initially. By late 2006, with paid circulation breaking past 60,000 and hopes high that it could reach 70,000, maybe 80,000 in a few years, “I thought of it as something I'd do for the rest of my working life.

“Unfortunately, things didn't work out that way.”

By mid-2007, relations were souring between Alexander and the board and especially Shelley Ambrose, who in the fall of 2006 had succeeded retired University of Toronto psychology professor Bernard Schiff as publisher. There were disputes over fundraising, distribution, the size of the magazine and cost-cutting. At one point, Alexander suggested that he would work for nothing if Ambrose and the magazine's creative director, Antonio De Luca, each went on half-salary. Someone had to give and his name was **Ken Alexander**.

Alexander still gets The Walrus delivered to his home. Asked what he thinks of his former infant, he paused, then said: “I wish it wasn't so thin” and admitted to being “floored, frankly, by all the stuff that was killed [by new editor John Macfarlane] in the fall” – articles, of course, that Alexander had earlier assigned or accepted and in some cases edited.

After Berlin departed The Walrus just four issues into its history, his name was placed on the masthead as

"founding editor." That identification remains. However, nothing of that ilk has been done yet to mark Alexander's contributions. Alexander seems in no hurry for the honorific. "The thing," as he calls the magazine, "has nothing to do with me any more."

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