

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Elliott Woods** <elliott@elliottwoods.com>
Date: Wed, Aug 11, 2010 at 6:58 AM
Subject: Urgent from Elliott Woods, VQR contributor
To: robin.wilson@chronicle.com

Dear Ms. Wilson,

I'm writing to you from Kandahar, Afghanistan, where I just finished reporting on a story for the upcoming *VQR* special issue on global mining. Now, I am afraid this fascinating, hard-hitting piece of investigative reporting may have as little chance of seeing the light of day in *VQR* as Afghanistan's underground mineral wealth has of transforming the country into a center of global mining.

As you well know, *VQR* has had a catastrophic couple of weeks following the suicide of Kevin Morrissey, a man I knew and worked with since my time at *VQR* as an intern in 2008, and who I have known since as a regular contributor to *VQR* these past two and a half years, along with the other staff members at the magazine.

I graduated Phi Beta Kappa and with Highest Honors from UVA in 2008 after serving in Iraq with the US Army. *VQR* was a critical element of my success at UVA, and the magazine has been a consistently thought-provoking, stimulating, and challenging part of my working life ever since. It brings me to the verge of tears thinking that Kevin's suicide and the subsequent slandering inside the *VQR* office may undo all that Kevin worked for, and may also irreversibly damage the man who has had more to do with *VQR*'s astonishing growth into an award-winning magazine over the last six years than anyone else—Ted Genoways.

It is my understanding that you are preparing to publish an article in the *Chronicle* about the troubles at *VQR*, and that you have received a litany of complaints from staffers at the magazine—Molly Minturn, Waldo Jaquith, and Sheila McMillen—about the tension between Ted Genoways and Kevin Morrissey leading up to Kevin's suicide. I imagine that you are also aware of the utterly baseless accusation from *VQR* staff that Ted was having an affair with assistant editor Alana Levinson-LaBrosse. It pains me and infuriates me to know that—in the midst of an already sad and tragic episode in their lives—Ted and Alana are now also dealing with this embarrassing and completely false accusation. I have known Alana Levinson for three years, since we were both involved in the Jefferson Literary and Debating Society, and I have watched her friendship with the Genoways-Andrei family grow since she started working full-time with *VQR*. Ted's wife and Alana are good friends, and there is nothing but friendship and professionalism in the relationship between Alana and Ted—I know, because I know them both very well. I find it repulsive that someone would threaten Ted's family and his reputation in an attempt to bring him down, out of anger, bitterness, or jealousy, I don't know.

The saddest part about this entire ordeal is that three individuals from the *VQR* staff and Kevin's family are channeling their sadness and anger—two natural accompaniments to suicide—toward a completely innocent man, amplifying the tragedy of Kevin's death, and they are lying in the process. I have worked extensively with Ted on six stories, four of which have already been published in *VQR*, and another two of which are forthcoming—or were forthcoming. One of those stories—"Hope's Coffin," about youth in Gaza following last year's Israeli offensive against Hamas—received a citation this year from the Overseas Press Club for best reporting in the print medium with a special focus on the human condition. I couldn't have done it without Ted's steady support and highly involved editorial attention. He guided me—a young, developing reporter and photographer—from beginning to end. In fact, it was Ted who linked me up with the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting in 2008 and got me started down the road to Gaza in the first place; he challenged me, and he believed in me, and then he helped me see it all through to a level of professionalism I never could've accomplished on my own.

This is the Ted Genoways I know. He is gentle, full of aw shucks humor, and incredibly committed to the magazine's reporters. Ted is the first person who saw potential in me as a reporter. We met at a short story competition hosted by the Jefferson Literary and Debating Society in 2007 where I read a partially autobiographical story about Iraq. Ted was head judge. I didn't win, but I won in the end because Ted took me aside and invited me to lunch to talk about working on a non-fiction essay for the magazine. That story—"A Few Unforeseen Things"—was my first published piece of non-fiction. Again, Ted saw it through from beginning to end. That issue, conceived of in its entirety by Ted, like every issue I've worked on, was one of the first major treatments of war on the homefront. The cover, by renowned *New York Times* contract photographer and VII mentorship associate Ashley Gilbertson, was one of *Time's* top ten magazine covers of the year. And an essay by Joshua Casteel inside about his time at Abu Ghraib has received international acclaim. Laura Browder's story about female soldiers, "When Janey Comes Marching Home," was an in-depth exploration of the motivations and experiences of our women veterans, something that doesn't receive nearly enough attention. Brian Turner, author of *Here, Bullet*, published poems in that issue from his unpublished book *Phantom Noise*. Turner is *the* foremost poet of the Iraq experience. The reason I am going into all this detail is because I was an intern at the magazine when that issue—Fall 2008—was under production. I saw Ted corresponding with and offering creative assistance to the corral of writers behind the issue, and, spending a considerable amount of time in the office, I saw the easygoing environment of the magazine firsthand. It was a quiet place, occasionally interrupted by a phone call or the creaking of the door when someone would drop by for a visit. It did not seem to me a stressful place in any way, and from what I saw, every staffer was respected as a competent member of the team—it was anything but a rigidly hierarchical place overseen by a tyrant.

The portrait of Ted painted by the staff at *VQR* in the wake of Kevin's suicide is a portrait of someone I have never met, and I am horrified by the inaccuracy of the rendering. It makes me wonder what these people are out to accomplish—do they want to ruin the man, do they think that ruining Ted will somehow make Kevin come back, or avenge his death? And they are willing to lie and destroy *VQR* in the process? If so, they are biting the hand that feeds—Ted is the creative genius responsible for the magazine's success; there weren't even original photos on the cover or in the magazine before he took over, after Stage Blackford's death. It was all plain black type on off-white paper. In fact, the office wasn't even wired with internet; they still received all submissions in manuscript form. It was a crusty old literary magazine then, loveable in a way, but certainly not the force of journalism and literary expression it has become in the years since Ted took the wheel. Ted hired Kevin, in fact, seeing in him a great partner with a lot of potential to help take the magazine into the future. Ted also hired all of the other staff.

And, most interesting of all, it is Ted who has been shoring up a defense against the budget cuts that are closing university journals like *VQR* all over the country. He has been reaching out to supporters all over the country and within the university administration to try to develop a low-residency MA in Journalism program that would have *VQR* at its centerpiece—the idea was to empower *VQR* with secure funding, ensuring its existence well into the future, but also to make the intense creative process involved in writing for *VQR* a launchpad for emerging journalists. I spoke to Tipper Gore, a potential donor, just a few weeks ago in Charlottesville during the LOOKBetween photography festival for the ninety top emerging photographers in the world. *VQR* was co-sponsor of that fantastic event. This is the world that Ted Genoways is trying to build, and the world that these recent events and the lies of the *VQR* staff in particular, who I can only imagine are led by Waldo Jaquith, are poised to destroy.

Waldo Jaquith is a blunt, stand-offish person who in all of my years of working with the magazine has never warmed up to me, I don't know why. In his email communications he is short and unfriendly, and he is the same way with me in person, despite the fact that I try to approach him with humor and I have repeatedly thanked him for his work. I don't know what his problem is, but unlike him I am not willing to invent lies or vicious speculations to try to get at the answer.

In April of this year, Ted brought several *VQR* contributors to Charlottesville for the events of the Virginia Festival of the Book. I flew in all the way from Gaza, at my expense, because I wouldn't have missed it for the world. We all got together at a restaurant in Charlottesville on a Thursday afternoon and started what would be one of the most motivational weekends of literary and journalistic discussion I've ever experienced. Neil Shea was there, a *National Geographic* writer who freelances for *VQR* because he loves the creative freedom Ted encourages.

Jason Motlagh (another UVA grad) was there, who worked with Ted to produce an experimental four-part online only story about the Mumbai terrorist bombings. He'd just received news the day before that his Mumbai story won the National Magazine Award for online journalism—a new award, won by a writer-editor combo who saw took a chance on an opportunity to push magazine journalism into the future and leapt at it. Nick Schmidle and Malcolm Garcia were there, two *VQR* contributors whose writing for the magazine has led them on to book projects of international acclaim. Louie Palu was there too, who I just had breakfast with in Kandahar this morning. Louie, a Canadian photojournalist, is represented by Zuma press and makes more money from one photo he submits to the newspapers than he makes from an entire *VQR* essay. Just last month he had four separate photos on the covers of *Newsweek* simultaneously, portraits of soldiers in Afghanistan. Louie told me he works for *VQR* because he loves the creative freedom and the joy of working with Ted. Ted has assembled an amazing stable of writers, photographers, essayists, and poets—he has worked tirelessly since taking over the magazine six years ago to build a publication that is not only worthy of UVA's money, but also provides an outlet for and encourages the journalism, photography, and creative writing that will change the national discussion on long-form reporting and the role of a literary journal in society.

I have to be honest—I have a bigger stake in *VQR* than most other journalists. I am twenty-nine, and *VQR* was my first publication, and the one I've worked with most since I decided to pursue my dream of becoming a journalist three years ago. A month and a half ago, I was in Charlottesville having conversations with Ted and Alana and the other writers about how to continue using *VQR* as a vehicle for pushing forward the entire craft of journalism; we had ambitious ideas about the potential of the magazine, and we were already working on ambitious projects to see it through. The media world is changing so fast it's making our heads spin, as you must know, and it has always been so comforting to know that *VQR* is there, a solid anchor for my work with an editor who cares about me as a person and as a writer, and who challenges me on every story to reach for more, to get deeper into the characters and the events, to do it differently. Ted is the fulcrum of the discussions about the future of *VQR* and, honestly, the future of journalism. He is someone that magazines like the *New Yorker*, *Harper's*, and *Mother Jones* have taken notice of—he leads them from the periphery as much as they stimulate our work from the highest heights of magazine journalism. When the new editor of *Granta* came on board, an interviewer asked him how he would like to develop the magazine. He said he wanted to model his editorship on that of Ted Genoways at *VQR*. Under Ted's editorship, *VQR* has won four ASME awards and been nominated for fourteen. Its writers have been featured countless times in recent editions of the *Best American* series. It was Ted who nominated my Gaza story to the OPC, and that was fitting, because Ted made the whole thing happen.

Ted is the star at the center of *VQR*'s constellation of writers, poets, and photographers. Ask any of the contributors and they'll say the same. Kevin was a nice guy, and I mean no disrespect to his memory, but he was neither the braintrust nor the driving workforce behind the development of *VQR*. He corresponded very rarely with me, and never while I was in the field reporting, and only about contractual things. I don't know a single *VQR* contributor who wouldn't agree with the statement: "I don't know if Ted ever sleeps." And yet, he is still cheerful, humorous, and full of energy. He is just easy to be with, I cannot recognize the "workplace bully" of these accusations, and I am beside myself with what I see as the betrayal of Ted by the *VQR* staff and the University of Virginia in this tragic time.

VQR is much bigger than the office, than Ted or Kevin or Waldo or Sheila or Molly—*VQR* is a loose network of some of the best writers and photographers in the world; we all communicate with each other, share ideas, and even work on stories together. We are all committed to the magazine, more so, I have to think, than Waldo, Sheila, and Molly. Ted works his tail off for us, and gives us no end of encouragement, support, and reassurance, and for that reason a lot of us give Ted and *VQR* a first look at our work even though there are a dozen more profitable publications out there. The current staff of *VQR* are claiming that Ted was not committed to the magazine or didn't contribute his share of the work—this claim is so beyond ridiculous, I have to laugh in shock. But, I am afraid this is not a time for laughter.

The *VQR* staff's claims that "Kevin shepherded each issue from concept to finished product" and that the upcoming mining "issue was left nearly complete by Kevin" is nothing short of absurd. Whatever Kevin's involvement was in the production of *VQR* as a magazine, it certainly was not shepherding it "from concept to finished product." In all my years working with *VQR*, I never brainstormed story ideas with Kevin Morrissey or submitted work to him. Ted is the editor of the magazine. Ted is the one who conceives of the issues—with support and consultation, yes—not Kevin, and Ted is the one who works most closely with the writers and photographers to bring them to completion. That's the truth, and you should probably talk to the writers and photographers who work hardest to make *VQR* a reality, and who take the personal risks in places like Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, and Sinaloa to do it. From where we stand, Ted is our editor, and we very much want it to stay that way. He has given us so much, and we want to give back.

Your publication's website says that you write " 'enterprise' stories for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. These are in-depth articles about a controversy or issue that often examine the matter in a new light and sometimes run contrary to conventional wisdom." I also read that you focus on faculty, often on a very personal level. Well, here's your chance to do your subject justice. If you look into the life and work of Ted Genoways and the reality of the office dynamic at *VQR*, and if you expand your network of contacts beyond the handful of staff who work

inside the office—who are a fraction of the bigger body of the magazine—you will find plenty that is "contrary" to Kevin's family's and the staff's recent allegations about Ted.

One of the most disturbing facets of the allegation that Ted drove Kevin to his death is that no one, not his family or the staff, acknowledge that Kevin was a depressed man for a long time, well before he met Ted in Minnesota or got hired at *VQR*. His family must know that Kevin did not suddenly become dangerously depressed when he walked through *VQR*'s doors, and the other staff at *VQR* must have seen Kevin's moodiness, his quiet and withdrawn behavior. The only thing I can think—and my fear when I first learned of his death—is that it is easier for them to avoid their own creeping guilt, over not noticing the signs that Kevin's condition was worsening, by blaming Ted and directing all of their sadness and guilt against someone else. In the same way, it was easier for Kevin to blame his unhappiness on another person than to look deeply inside of himself and find happiness on his own. But Ted is not responsible for Kevin's suicide—he did not kill Kevin, and he did not drive him to his death. Kevin killed himself while Ted was out of the office on leave for his Guggenheim work, so it is hard to swallow the accusation that "things had gotten so bad in the office . . ." It's just not the way it was. Kevin must have been sick for a long time, and I am sure everyone—Ted included—wonders what they could have done differently to help Kevin, wonders why they didn't notice that he'd gotten dangerously depressed. But no amount of blame—and particularly not blame based on baseless accusations and a false picture of reality—will bring Kevin back. Blame will, however, ruin an innocent man who I respect immensely; it will humiliate his family, cause undeserved pain to his wife and son; and it will ruin the greatest little magazine I know. And for nothing.

You have a responsibility to examine the truth behind these allegations from as many sides as possible before you run your story. As an ethical journalist you have an obligation not to print slander, like the completely false allegation that Ted was having an affair with Alana, for the sake of a story about "controversy." I will hold you accountable to those responsibilities, and I believe that if you really look for the truth it will not be hard for you to find. Think very carefully about what you are doing here. About how many people outside of the office are involved in this magazine and love working with it, and have poured hard work into it and risked their lives to make it great. All of us are behind Ted. As a person and an editor. Think about that.

Please get in touch with me at your earliest convenience. You can call me in Afghanistan at [+93 70 517 3694](tel:+93705173694). If it's easier for me to call you, please give me a time and I'd be happy to do so. I'll trust you'll do the right thing where this story is concerned.

Best,
Elliott D. Woods

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Robin Wilson** <robin.wilson@chronicle.com>
Date: Wed, Aug 11, 2010 at 8:53 AM
Subject: Re: Urgent from Elliott Woods, VQR contributor
To: Elliott Woods <elliott@elliottwoods.com>

Elliott-

Thanks very much for taking the time to layout the situation as you see it. It is very helpful and is all I believe I will need from you because of the time pressures I face. My article will go to press tonight -- and most likely be posted on The Chronicle's site tomorrow. As you know, journalists face dual pressures -- the need to get the story down as thoroughly as possible and the need to get the story out quickly. I've been a reporter for 30 years and, as always, I will do the job professionally and as I see fit. I very much appreciate you taking the time to detail your experiences there. I wish you good luck and thank you again for your e-mail.
ROBIN

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Elliott Woods** <elliott@elliottwoods.com>
Date: Wed, Aug 11, 2010 at 9:38 AM
Subject: Re: Urgent from Elliott Woods, VQR contributor
To: Robin Wilson <robin.wilson@chronicle.com>

Ms. Wilson,

It's not simply a matter of how I "see it," it's a matter of *truth*. This is not a story that needs to "get out quickly"—give me a break!—it's a story that needs to get out *truthfully*. I can't imagine that the readership of the *Chronicle* is sitting on pins and needles waiting to find out if the editor of *VQR* had an affair with his assistant or not; I can, however, tell you that you will be making a huge mistake and potentially damaging a lot of people if you do not take time to get behind the primary sources of your story and find out the truth. Maybe you have already done so, I don't know, you give me no indication in your email. Your lack of interest in talking to me is, however, worrisome.

As you say, you will do as you see fit, and I can't stop you from doing that, but I hope along the way you've spoken to a broader group of people than the ones slandering Ted Genoways.

Best,
Elliott

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Robin Wilson** <robin.wilson@chronicle.com>
Date: Wed, Aug 11, 2010 at 10:06 AM
Subject: Re: Urgent from Elliott Woods, VQR contributor
To: Elliott Woods <elliott@elliottwoods.com>

Elliott-

So you know, this is not a story about whether the editor of *VQR* had an affair with his assistant. I'm not quite sure how you made that determination, but you didn't get that from me. You are right -- that is not what readers are waiting for and it is certainly not what I've been spending my time talking to sources about. A man died here -- his family and other people close to him allege that he killed himself because his boss at one of the nation's preeminent literary journals bullied him in the workplace. That is what the story is about.

I just printed out the e-mail you sent me and it totals 5 pages. If there is anything else I think I need from you, I will not hesitate to e-mail again and ask.

thanks, ROBIN

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Elliott Woods** <elliott@elliottwoods.com>
Date: Wed, Aug 11, 2010 at 10:16 AM
Subject: Re: Urgent from Elliott Woods, VQR contributor
To: Robin Wilson <robin.wilson@chronicle.com>

Robin,

Yes, I know the story is not "about" the alleged affair, but I also know that the rumor of the affair is one of the damning articles of falseness flying around this whole ordeal.

I knew Kevin Morrissey—my heart sunk when he died. I knew him for more than two years, and I was and remain very sad for him and for his family. That Kevin Morrissey was extremely depressed—so depressed that he took his own life—should be the heart of your story; you cannot possibly think that the workplace culture in a literary journal could ever be singlehandedly responsible for driving a man to his death. Why isn't anyone mentioning that Kevin had a history of depression? That he'd shown signs of that depression around the workplace for years, and in previous jobs as well?

The email I sent you is five pages because I care deeply about making sure the truth emerges from this situation—something that the University of Virginia administration and the journalists who've covered the ordeal so far haven't shown much interest in. One man died—that's tragic enough—there is no need to amplify the tragedy further by damning the reputation of an innocent person.

Again, I don't know what you'll right, but I can offer you a list of contacts with whom you should speak before you go to print. They are in the States and would be ready to speak immediately, I am sure.

Best,

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Robin Wilson** <robin.wilson@chronicle.com>
Date: Wed, Aug 11, 2010 at 10:21 AM
Subject: Re: Urgent from Elliott Woods, VQR contributor
To: Elliott Woods <elliott@elliottwoods.com>

Elliott-

You're just going to have to trust that I'm doing my job as a journalist and talking to the people I need to talk to in the time I have and writing the story in a fair and accurate way. I didn't mean to criticize you for sending me a long e-mail. I appreciate it. I just mentioned it by way of explaining that I think I have what I needed from you for the kind of story I am writing and don't need to also speak to you by phone. Of course people have talked to me about Kevin's depression. That is at the heart of the story. You'll just have to trust that I have the experience to handle the piece -- something your sources do with you, as well, I'm sure.

thanks, ROBIN