

**Carol Smallwood Interviews
Michael Foldes, Founder,
Editor-in-Chief of Ragazine**
<https://www.ragazine.cc>



The Global Online Magazine of Arts, Information & Entertainment appears every two months with such sections as: Literary; Art, Photography; and, columns including Politics, World, Education, Resources. Well-illustrated, the free on-line popular zine has a search option to quickly locate and welcomes submissions from artists, photographers, and a wide variety of writers.

Smallwood: You graduated from Ohio State University with a bachelor's in anthropology and also attended other institutions. You've been a newspaper columnist, copy editor, and an electronics businessman. Please tell readers about your service with the Campaign for an Informed Citizenry:

First of all, Carol, thanks very much for asking me to do this interview with you. I'm most pleased you've taken an interest in what we're doing and how we do it.

The [CIC](#) is an organization founded by Dr. James Palombo to promote political and social awareness, not just to push personal issues. Jim and I became acquainted several years ago when an article appeared in the local paper about "a new zine in town," and Jim called to ask if I wanted to meet for coffee or a drink.

We have similar positions on social and political issues, and later on, when he asked if I'd be interested in working with him to help promote the group, it seemed logical to sign on.

As the political editor of *Ragazine*, Jim is a regular contributor. His books and columns in *Ragazine* explore issues concerning political, legal, and social conditions in the United States and elsewhere, which pretty much reflects the core sentiments of CIC: free and open dialog to encourage citizens to educate themselves and others to make informed decisions that will affect the future in the most positive ways possible.

Smallwood: You reside in the state of New York; how did *Ragazine* get its name, and how/when did you establish it? What was the most challenging part?

I was still living in Columbus, Ohio, in the early 1970s when a group of friends started an alternative tabloid, arts-oriented magazine called *Ragazine*, to which I contributed. Later, I moved to New York City to work for *High Times*, and while *Ragazine* continued for some time in Columbus, it eventually dissolved.

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My wife Margot and I were living in Tribeca and had made a number of friends and acquaintances who were artists, writers and photographers. It seemed like a good idea to start an alternative zine that would promote their work, and hopefully fill a need that was not being met by *Soho Weekly*, the village Voice and other alternative zines.

I had left *High Times* and gone to work with a construction crew renovating lofts and apartments in the City and tried my hand at publishing another alternative variously called *Extra Extra* and *Monitor East*. The idea was to give each issue a different cover name. I've never been very good at fund-raising, and couldn't afford to independently pay for printing, typesetting, and the other expenses that go along with print publishing. I think we made three issues when it went under.

A couple of years on, I changed occupations, moved upstate and went into the electronics business. The desire to publish never left. And, in 2004, with the Internet just coming into its own, I decided to resurrect *Ragazine*, which was—and is—something I could do in my spare time that other people use to play golf, fix up old cars, fish or go boating. The real key was, online publishing is relatively low overhead compared with print publishing.

Fortunately, I still had contacts with a number of creative friends who were—and are—willing to share their work. We've never had a cash flow to pay contributors, or the people who have worked to bring *Ragazine* online. We have had some donations over the years, but selling "space" has never been a big part of our effort. Just getting the work out to a larger audience has been the reward. The zine is free online, neither contributors nor staff get paid—all our income goes to covering overhead, such as our hosting site, contact distribution program and our free online daily published through paper.li.

Smallwood: Your poetry has appeared in *Mobius: The Poetry Magazine*; *Paterson Literary Review*, *Rosebud*, and other journals. When did you begin writing--and in what genre?

I began writing as a child. I had written a poem and showed it to one of my parents' friends, who when she read it had tears in her eyes. I didn't understand why at the time, but I did realize then that thoughts and words had power, and I've been writing one thing or another ever since. While in Ohio, after college, I published a series of poetry chapbooks, one with tipped-in prints in a special edition. I guess I've always had it in me to publish cooperative ventures—perhaps to camouflage my own work, which I've declined so far to self-publish in collections. I love the power of word and image combined, and I think that's what's helped make *Ragazine.cc* stand out among online publications today.

Smallwood: Please tell a bit about *Fashions and Passions (Me and Utopia)*: How did you become involved in translations?

I came across the series by Christopher Panzner, whose *Fashions and Passions* is a collection of altered images based on generally well-known historical works. Chris is an American artist living in Paris. I was inspired enough by one of the images to write a poem about it, and sent it to Chris.... Soon I was writing poems for all of the series, and to my surprise, he took the poems, combined them with the images, and made a series of

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it. There was no translating involved. All the poems were written in English by me to go along with the specific image to which they're attached in the series.

I have had poems translated into Hungarian (by Paul Sohar, also a *Ragazine* contributor), Spanish, French and Slovenian.

Smallwood: What columns seem the most popular with readers?

Steve Poleskie's column, *Then and Now*, deals with a variety of topics of contemporary and historical interest. Steve is an artist and retired Cornell professor with wide experience in the New York City art scene. He started Chiron Press, which published fine art screen prints by a number of well-known artists in the '70s and '80s.

I would add that all the columns have—or have had—their own followings. Galanty Miller's *Re-Tweets*, Fred Roberts' music columns, Jim's political essays, Mark Levy's columns with free legal advice for "starving artists", Barbara Rosenthal's articles sharing her experiences as a working artist, Fabia Wong, a Canadian who writes from France, and so on. A full list of contributing columnists and editors appears in *About Us*, with short explanations of what each is about. We've also been fortunate to have columns by Henry Giroux, who has kindly allowed us to reprint them from their appearance in *TruthOut*.

Smallwood: What countries are represented by contributors and readers?

We have had contributions from Slovenia, Hungary, England, France, Spain, Japan, Germany, Canada, South Africa, and more. Our readership is global, and we espouse that the arts are a unifying ideal through which people can share in a variety of ways to gain better understanding of themselves and of one another.

Smallwood: Many magazines charge contributors fees or have ads but *Ragazine* does not. How does it manage?

Good question. Most of the expenses in an ongoing basis are covered by yours truly, but we do have some contributors whose names are listed on our "donors and contributors" page. Some people contribute a few times a year, and occasionally we get a large individual contribution, such as one that allowed us to incorporate, and others that seem to come in just as we think we'll never be able to pay one of our service vendors.

As I mentioned above, we've never been able to generate the cash flow needed to pay contributors—or staff—who certainly deserve whatever we would be able to pay them. It takes a very large amount of time to get out each issue, and doing it any more often than every two months with a minimal staff is out of the question without a living wage for doing it.... I don't apply for grants, as it seems to be a crap shoot who "wins" them, and I don't have the time for that...or for selling ad pages, for that matter. Occasionally we'll find a gallerist willing to kick in something, gratis for an article or just because, but that's rare. Recently I succumbed to accept a paid editorial, something I said I'd never do...it was tough decision and just covered a six-month fee from one of our vendors to ensure we stay on line for the next few months...another "just in time."

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We've always hoped that enough people would get exposure, and that enough others would appreciate what they do, to keep the circulation growing. In today's world, hope is not the answer. There's just too much competition, and while you may have the reputation as offering something different or special, if you can't make people aware you're alive, you'll be trampled.

Fortunately, the work keeps coming, and people keep reading. That's what it was about in the beginning, and it really hasn't changed.

Smallwood: Writers and readers have much to thank you for! Do you have any changes planned or a wish list for *Ragazine*?

Ragazine has a limited lifetime ahead. We will have one more open issue, September-October Volume 15 Number 5, and then a regional issue Volume 15 Number 6, comprised of the work of local/regional talent, and regular columns. After that, it appears we'll be closing shop. We plan to discontinue publishing in January for the foreseeable future. Word is out that Chuck Haupt, our art director, and I, will be stepping away and are looking for people to step in to take it over, but no one's come forward, yet.

Chuck and I worked at the Binghamton Press together in the early '80s, where he was as staff photographer and I was on the news desk and writing columns. He has been extremely helpful putting the zine out since coming aboard several years ago. Chuck is a Red Cross volunteer and recently accepted an expanded role there leaving him little time for *Ragazine*. If you know anyone.... It's been a good run, 15 years without missing an issue. You can go back and visit some of the early work at www.old.ragazine.cc.

As for a wish list? A lottery jackpot might do the trick. We'd be back in the blink of an eye.

Carol Smallwood is a literary reader, judge, and interviewer. A recent poetry collection is *Patterns: Moments in Time* (Word Poetry, 2019).