

"Esquire" Articles Editor Ryan D'Agostino

Life, Love and the Pursuit of the Written Word.

Meet Ryan D'Agostino, Articles Editor for Esquire, debut author and new father. How did he do it? Find out what he has to say about building a career as a writer and editor.

Life, Love and the Pursuit of the Written Word. The Lattice Group recently met with an affable gent in his early thirties who is well on his way to an impressive career as a writer and editor. His name is Ryan D'Agostino, and he is an articles editor for Esquire, just completed his first book with a significant book deal, and had his first child. Ryan expresses great gratitude towards his wife, Sarah, who he describes as being "incredible." This is not the first time The Lattice Group has heard that having an understanding partner has a lot to do with enabling success. You're lucky if you find that (and stats show you're more likely to if you're a man, while career-driven women have a tougher time).

I bet many of you reading this are aspiring writers desperate to make it in an industry that is becoming tougher by the day, amidst rampant predictions outlining the imminent death of print media. Just how did Ryan D'Agostino do it? And what is it like, life behind those glossy pages?

What was your dream job in college?

"I wanted to go into journalism. I wanted to be a writer. I had pretty much known that since I was in high school. Middlebury College didn't have a journalism department, which I think is probably good because I studied so many other things instead that I think have helped me. I was the editor of the newspaper in high school and I was the editor of the newspaper at college. I had a very clear goal, which was to get into journalism somehow and then figure out what I liked."

So tell us about the position you have now.

"My title at Esquire is Articles Editor, which basically means that I work on all kinds of stories, large and small. The roles at Esquire are not that clearly defined. Which is great. If you come up with an idea and you have a writer you want to work with on it, and you can get it greenlighted—which is the hard part—it's yours. You do it. So my job now basically consists of coming up with ideas for stories. And matching them up with a writer. The writer writes. You edit. You work with the art department to make it look good. The biggest part of the job is ideas. That is what every magazine needs. And this happens to be a magazine, under the current Editor-in-Chief, that is really trying to push the idea of what a magazine is and can do. When you pitch a story he'll sometimes say that it sounds too much like something a magazine would do. That may sound strange, but you think about it and it means that we don't want to do the expected. I like this job because every month here you are basically starting with 130 blank pages. It's a great and challenging position I'm in. It's a lot of fun."

How did you get to this position?

"Two weeks after my college graduation I started as a reporter for The Westport News, and did that for a year. But I really wanted to come and live in New York City. The Westport News was actually a really good training ground for me. I covered the local politics and stuff. It was a pretty fun job. Then I moved to New York City without a job. Did some freelancing. I got a job for a short time in a corporate PR department but then I went on the road with Dispatch (the independent rock band) as their manager for about 6 months. Then I decided that I really wanted to come back to New York City and focus on the writing. I kept freelancing. And through the freelancing I got a job at Details, a Conde Nast owned men's magazine. I was there for 6 months and then one day the whole office was fired because the magazine was being shut down. That was my first real journalism job, so that was crazy. It was a fun week in a way. Because we went out every night as a staff. It was a real bonding experience. And what it also meant was that I now knew 40 people on the editorial side who would be spreading out in editorial positions all over the city. I suddenly had this big built-in network all over the magazine world in New York City. So, that was good. I didn't have a family or anything at that time, so I was fine."

"Then I took a job to be a reporter for the New York Observer. It is a very cool, quirky paper with a lot of attitude and a lot of good young writers. I was there for a few months but it wasn't quite the same as Details had been with the bonding experience. So I ended up working with two other people who had worked at Details with me on a new project called MBA Jungle, a magazine for business school students. What was attractive to me was inventing a magazine out of nothing. It was us, three guys, sitting and creating a magazine out of nothing and trying to make it fun and interesting. And it was the experience of a lifetime. Working on a start-up is an unbelievable, cool, rollercoaster journey as you can imagine. Trying things, finding writers, figuring out how to get by with very small budgets. Work until midnight every night, ordering pizza. It was emotionally draining. It was creatively draining. It was really, really fun. I ended up staying there for four years. By the end I was Editor-in-Chief of the thing. We got nominated for National Magazine Awards, which is the pinnacle of the industry. We worked with great writers. I wouldn't trade it for anything."

"After four years I had had enough of the start-up thing. So I worked for Money magazine. I edited one of the columnists

there and I worked very closely with her. She happened to have a connection with Esquire and through her I met the Editor-in-Chief and on that way it went."

What is the work environment like at Esquire?

"The work environment at Esquire is great. It is an open newsroom kind of environment where very few people have offices. So there is constant communication. Even the Editor-in-Chief, who has an office, always has his door open. You can see him all day; he's extremely accessible. You walk in there, pitch a story. You kind of lean back in your chair and bounce ideas off each other: it's that kind of place. There's certainly an underlying pressure to come up with great ideas, but I look forward to coming here everyday. Everyone is smart."

What are the best aspects of your job?

"I would say for me the best aspect of the job is helping to create what is one of the most respected magazines around. Creating what I think is an excellent magazine that really does push the limits of what a magazine is. So that alone makes it a really great job. But then in the process of that, because it is such a good, smart group of people working here, it is also great being able to bounce ideas around with people who are so smart and talented. That's what I look for in a job, really, right there."

What about the worst aspects of your job?

"For me, I guess I create this in my mind, it's the pressure to do better. It's not a place that's big on complacency. There's no resting on your laurels. You can do a hell of a story one month, but then: what are you doing this month? I don't necessarily see that as a negative part of the job, because I think it is what makes the magazine so good, but it's hard. It's really hard. It's hard to reinvent the magazine every month. We always say, don't look at what we did last year. Forget what we did a couple of years ago. Do something new now."

Where would you hope to be in 10 years, when you are 42 years old?

"Hopefully, at that point print media hasn't completely disappeared, which I don't think it will, by the way. I really enjoy what I am doing right now. If I was still working here, I wouldn't complain. If I had written a few more books after the one I am working on right now, that would be great too. So I think somewhere between working full time for a magazine as an editor and then writing books on the side, is pretty good. It's a pretty good life for someone in this field. It's nice to have the books on the side, if I can do more of that, as an added security. Personally, I think we're probably not done having kids yet. I don't know where we'll be living. We've been talking about that a lot. Will we be in the city, will we be outside the city, or will we be in rural Vermont? We've talked about all kinds of scenarios. Schools obviously being the most important thing for the next 18 years. It's a little stressful but it's fun."

How does having a family affect your career?

"Well, being married doesn't affect it as much as having a child. Now I feel as though every minute I'm not home it sucks because I'm not hanging out with my son. Part of this job is that there are social things you should do. It is productive to go for a drink with the people you work with. I think that is true of any career. Especially here, where we might get two story ideas out of having dinner with a couple of other editors. I usually miss my son anyway because he goes to bed before I get home, but sometimes I catch him for a half an hour or something. It's the obvious pull between a job I love and want to excel at and devote every bit of myself to, and a son that I want to devote every bit of myself to as well. So Sarah has been a hero in that department in terms of being completely understanding and encouraging, and totally getting that, once in a while, this job extends outside of the office. It's just something I have to focus on even when I'm home, or stay later, or that I go out and have a drink with people. She understands that. I think I have a pretty good balance."

Did you take any paternity leave when you had your son?

"I was going to take a week paid and then take a vacation week as well. But it didn't work out that way because I got the offer from Esquire right at the end of Sarah's pregnancy. So we came home from the hospital on a Tuesday and I was at work at a new job the following Monday. It was pretty tough. But after a while, the husband is like, just there. You don't have anything to do. So you might as well go back to work. I'd almost rather take time off when the child is, like 8."

Do you think that having a work-life balance is realistic?

"I do because I feel like I have that. No one ever looks back and wishes they spent more time at the office. But based on my experience, you always want to spend more time with your family. But if you can get into a career where there is something you love doing it makes it a little easier to leave every day and wave goodbye to your son. Then, you're not just going to a job, you're going to something that you feel is a big part of who you are. I've been wanting to do what I am doing now since I was in high school. So I think, idealistically, there shouldn't have to be a work-life balance. I feel as though my work is a great part of my life. It's maybe a work-family balance that is the real tough part. I'd love if I could skew a little more towards my family. People say that you have to find work that you love. It sounds cliché but having done it, I can't imagine not loving what I do."

"I wrote a book about how rich people made their money. I went door to door and spoke to people and people starting saying that you have to love what you do. But they really truly believed it. That was a legitimate piece of their success. Because you're going to work harder, and you're going to want to work harder, if you love what you do. If you can't wait to get out of the office, you're not going to make more money. You shouldn't want to take a job because you've heard it'll make you a lot of money. Because if you don't enjoy what you do you won't make the most you can, even at a job like that."

Moral of the story? Do what you love. And find a person you love who will help you do it.