

# VANITY FAIR

Media

## **So Long, City Section**

by *Claire Howorth*

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Last weekend, the New York Times' City Section was printed for the last time. The section, published from 1993 until now, was home to the quirkiest dealings, personalities, and outright oddities of the five boroughs. Pieces that, as one Times writer put it, were not sexy enough for New York Magazine, "intellegentsia" enough for The New Yorker's Talk of the Town, or hard-newsy enough for the Times' own Metro section—but still, to continue the paraphrase, great articles—found their home in the City Section.

And so last night's informal goodbye to the bosom of Big Apple vagaries, held at Brooklyn's Object Image Gallery, channeled the spirit of the deceased—a tinge wistful, often funny, and completely New York. The gallery's director, Bob Weiss, himself a onetime City profilee, opened his Fifth-Avenue doors to the section's writers, subjects, and aficionados, a well-rounded clique if ever there was one. But those doors, like those of the City section, won't be open much longer; Weiss's gallery, filled with cityscapes of New York and its peculiarities, is closing for good after eight and a half years in business. Introducing himself before six writers read their favorite City pieces to the gathering, Weiss expressed concern for what the shuttering of his gallery and an entire section of the newspaper meant for the fate of the city.

But perhaps the recession will be the mother of reinvention. It was hard not to see a hopeful parallel between the metropolis of today and the one John Freeman Gill described in his essay, which he read to last night's rapt audience, on growing up in 1960s and 70s Manhattan, when the city was beginning to find its modern self. And perhaps it will again.

Every hat in the room tipped to City editors Lynda Richardson, Frank Flaherty, and Connie Rosenblum, who took over in 1999 and whose editorship is generally regarded as the section heart and soul. Steve Kurutz read a piece about a lawyer defending, it seemed, every lost cause in New York; Jeff Vandam and Jake Mooney (the evening's de facto host), who were once roommates in Brooklyn, spoke respectively about General Tsao's chicken and the lightbulb changer of the Brooklyn Bridge; Alex Mindlin went on with panache about Ugly George, notorious midtown lady-hound; and Saki Knafo duly waxed lyrical on Wall Street.

Throughout the readings, buses screeched past, babies burred by in their mammoth Park Slope strollers, and beer cans cracked and hissed. Nevertheless, it was decided the door should remain open to let in the New York hubbub and a lovely May breeze, both appropriate for the evening.

Towards the end of the evening, an older woman from whose head sprouted a myriad of tiny blue braids, wandered in. She glanced around the room and demanded to know what, exactly, was going on in the gallery. A group of writers

celebrating their dearly departed newspaper section, she was told. “Oh, then I need to immediately speak to the person who covers criminal offenses. I must talk about some wrongdoings,” she insisted, and pushed her way into the crowd—a character right out the very pages being toasted.

After a final round of Brooklyn Lagers and farewell hugs, the section and the people of its city went gently into the good night.

*Photo illustration by Hamish Robertson.*

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