

What I Learned Looking for the Next Dear Abby

MARK MATHES: In the publishing race to replace Dear Abby and Ann Landers, I discussed international syndication with advice columnist E. Jean Carroll in the late 1990s when I was editor of international syndication at Tribune in Chicago.

Newspapers were healthy and often competed with other publications in the mid-1990s. The Internet and Craigslist had not yet crippled the 1400+ daily newspapers that almost always published Ann Landers or dear Abby. Dozens of newspapers hedged their bets and published both daily advice columns. Once a newspaper editor bought either advice columnist, they seldom changed. So in some ways, the advice column was like a dividend to the syndicates. A small 10,000 circulation daily paid \$8 to \$12 a week. A competitive metro in San Francisco, LA, South Florida or Boston might pay \$400 to \$900.

Tribune in Chicago was one of the oldest and largest international syndicators of content for newspapers, broadcasters and emerging new media. In fact, Tribune Company was an early investor in America Online and the search engine Excite years before Google was invented.

My job as editor of international syndication (1994-99) was to look for opportunities. Our competitors syndicated Dear Abby and Ann Landers who were aging and sometimes did not attract younger readers ("Dearie.")

So when the advice sisters experienced a health scare, that spurred me and competitors to find the next Dear Abby. it wasn't revealed until her death that Pauline Esther Phillips had wrestled with Alzheimer's for at least a decade.

My targets focused on this short list of candidates: E. Jean Carroll, Reba McEntire and Judge Judy.

Here is the rest of the story.

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**Book portfolio of many of my 80 published books since 2015.** Many as editor at regional independent Pelican Publishing in my hometown New Orleans.

**My website: writing, editing, publishing website with tips, trends, Florida author news**

Interview I did about publishing trends with author/podcaster Richard Bonte, one of my clients.

**President of Sarasota Fiction Writers.**