

Someone once told me that if you do what you are supposed to, success will follow. Toni Brown is the epitome of this philosophy.

Currently the publisher, editorial director and owner of *Relix Magazine* - Toni has played a major role in transforming the magazine from a black & white typewritten newsletter into the professional full-color, glossy journal that now focuses on the Grateful Dead community and "intelligent music alternatives."

Based on the popularity of *Relix* and its reputation for providing unique and up-to-date information relating to the Grateful Dead and music of like kind, it is clear that Toni Brown is exactly where she is supposed to be.

Toni Brown's dedication to *Relix* stems from a long and fruitful exposure to the Grateful Dead, their followers, and the philosophies that have flourished around the Grateful Dead experience. Truly a veteran, Ms. Brown lays claim to being one of a small community of Dead Freaks, as they were known in the early days.

Her introduction to the Grateful Dead came in 1969 at the Pavilion, a remnant building from the New York's World's Fair. "I was about 13 or 14 years old," she recalled. "I remember getting caught up in this chain of people just twirling and dancing... everyone grabbed hands and before I knew it I was spinning around the floor in an incredible swirl. I had never experienced anything like it and I knew I really loved being amongst these people who seemed to connect so easily." Her initial response was not to the music itself; it would not be until a year or so later that she would become acquainted enough with the music to gain what evolved into a lasting appreciation. "It was the people that really drew me at first. The energy was very intense from the first moment that I walked into the venue," she added. "It just took me and held me in."

Brown described the early Dead community as a small circle of friends who embraced many shared values which were easy for her to accept. "Fortunately back then, [the Grateful Dead] played a lot. I remember going to see them in New York, walking up, and leaning on the stage and watching the show. I was very comfortable."

As in all of life, however, the situation changed. "In 1972, there was an interesting transitional point. The Grateful Dead started to play larger venues and a lot of my friends stopped going to shows. It was their way of boycotting. My feeling was - 'If you like the music, let's share it with more people, what's wrong with that?' I think the people that walked away from the Dead back then missed out on a lot."

Toni's love for music extends beyond simple appreciation for the work of others. Toni Brown is an artist in her own right. She began singing in choruses in sixth grade and by age 15, played in a band. Her gift for poetry became apparent as early as elementary school, and she soon discovered her talent for writing. "I always knew how to string words together," she said. "It came pretty easily. I could always turn a phrase. It helped me express myself."

But it was Grateful Dead lyricist Robert Hunter who truly motivated Toni to pursue her artistic talents. After Hunter gave Toni her first guitar, Toni began to take playing music seriously. "I was such a huge fan. This was the man who wrote our Bible," she said. "People quote the Bible we (Deadheads) quote Grateful Dead lyrics. Robert's words are the backdrop of my life." Hunter showed Brown how she could apply her gift for words to music.

Toni first became involved in *Relix Magazine* in 1979. The magazine, originally a newsletter entitled *Dead Relix* and billed as "The First Free Underground Tape Exchange," was

in its fifth year and starting to blossom. Toni and Les Kippel, the founder of *Dead Relix*, had been friends for several years. Toni was taking time off from her career as an insurance broker, and Les needed help answering telephones. Because Toni was available to manage the office, she played a key role in bringing the magazine

we want to do. "When I went to my first Grateful Dead show, I never envisioned that I would be fortunate enough to make my life's career around music, never mind the music that I love. I have been able to spend the last 17 years immersed in the Grateful Dead community, getting to know the musicians I've long admired. I am very fortunate to be able to meet these people, get to know them and call them friends."

Toni believes that *Relix Magazine* is at its finest hour. "Every issue is exquisite. I am putting all I can into making sure it stays that way... I know who I am writing for. I read every single letter that comes in. I'm a part of the people out there. A publication that gets too big loses focus. That is the one thing I've never done is lose focus. Since Jerry died, we've done more on the Grateful Dead than ever before, because there is just so much to say. Things that didn't fit before are in perfect perspective now. The Grateful Dead are more important than ever."

Jerry Garcia's death affected Toni profoundly. Even now, a year after he passed, she experiences sorrow. "I don't miss him for myself as much as I miss him for all of us," she said somberly. Brown feels a sense of great responsibility to the Grateful Dead community, to provide information and a means to connect and come together now that the Dead will no longer perform.

It is a responsibility she never expected, but one she gracefully accepts. Indeed *Relix Magazine's* circulation has increased by an estimated 30,000 subscriptions since Garcia's death.

Toni's love and her passion for the music provide the driving force behind her endeavors. She works on the magazine day and night, on weekends, holidays, and even on the beach. "There is always work to do," she quipped. "I take the magazine very personally. I take being a Deadhead very seriously as a result."

Toni also takes her talent as a musician very seriously. Earlier this year, a lifelong dream became a reality for Brown when she released her debut CD, *Blue Morning*. "It was truly a labor of love," says Toni of the album. "Even though I started on it before Garcia died, his death motivated me to see it through and release it."

Blue Morning is a collection of Brown's originals, Grateful Dead classics and one of Toni's favorite Flying Burrito Brothers tunes. Joining

Brown in the studio for the *Blue Morning* recording sessions were such special guests as Jorma Kaukonen and Michael Falzarano of Hot

Tuna, and David Nelson of New Riders of the Purple Sage.

As anyone might expect, the album is a hit with Deadheads. It seems that Toni's love for the Grateful Dead community has reflected back to her.

What is the future of *Relix Magazine*? "I only plan for *Relix* what I see that day. *Relix* is a giant organic jigsaw puzzle. It comes together under my hand in some miraculous way. I don't plan it. It's been that way for seventeen years." One promise Brown makes, is that *Relix* will continue to be what it has been: True to its readers, always looking for musical alternatives and focusing on the Grateful Dead members and what the band has given us. "I see a future for *Relix* and a future for Deadheads. Our culture will survive. I've always said that Deadheads have existed independently of the Grateful Dead," she said. "(The Dead) are an inspiration, but we've made our own way."

Indeed we have and what a long strange trip it's been. Thanks Toni!

Poet, Journalist, Publisher, Musician, Recording Artist, Business Woman & Inspiration...

TONI BROWN

The Wonder Woman of RELIX MAGAZINE

from infancy to what it is today.

Relix Magazine went from being a hobby fueled by a passion to a full-fledged business. When the editor left, those responsibilities fell into Brown's lap. Being a natural-born wordsmith, she rose to the challenge.

She took total responsibility for *Relix Magazine* in the early eighties. Around that time, *Relix* began to branch out from its base coverage of the Dead and such related bands as Hot Tuna, New Riders of the Purple Sage and Commander Cody. The magazine expanded its coverage to reggae, new wave and heavy metal. It featured an interview with Ozzy Osbourne in one issue, and displayed *Beat* editor Tom Lounge's feature interview with Joan Jett on the cover of another.

But the Deadheads who had supported the publication in its early years did not embrace the new changes in editorial coverage. Circulation had dropped dramatically after the change.

When Kippel decided to focus on a new spin off, *Relix Records*, Toni agreed to concentrate on the magazine providing she could - "Put the Dead back in *Relix*." Toni purchased the magazine, temporarily reincarnated its original title, *Dead Relix*, to emphasize the return to its roots and became the creative force behind what is now known as *Relix Magazine*.

Toni again guided *Relix* through a "frightening time" in 1985. With the success of the album, *In The Dark* (which spawned the Top 40 hit "Touch Of Gray"), the Grateful Dead went from playing theaters to performing in arenas. The Dead had a new legion of fans, a fact that old time Dead Freaks appeared to resent. As crowds swelled, tickets were harder to come by and some followers were so angry at the band's success that they dropped out of the scene completely.

The backlash cost *Relix* a good deal of readership initially, but Brown and her staff prevailed by attracting the new fans and wooing back some of those who had drifted away. *Relix Magazine* became recognized as the primary source of information on the Grateful Dead and became very successful.

Other turning points for *Relix Magazine* and the Grateful Dead community included - the 1975 band hiatus and the band's rejoining for the album, *Blues For Allah*; Jerry Garcia's coma; and the passing of Dead keyboardist Brent Mydland. At every turn, the Dead community looked to *Relix* for the latest news, enabling the magazine to diversify. While Toni's experience and knowledge of the Grateful Dead is a veritable goldmine, she insists that *Relix Magazine* is "much more than just a Grateful Dead magazine. We are a Deadhead magazine because everything we do should or would appeal to most Deadheads."

Toni is a believer in the premise that we can all do anything

by Eric Lambert



Photo by Chris Fallo



(Top): The very first issue of DEAD RELIX back in 1974.



(Right): The most recent issue of RELIX now on the stands.