



Nellan Tyree is a monthly columnist for *Adweek* and has worked as a consultant or agency branding/business development specialist for numerous leading shops. His most dramatic nonadvertising venture was producing and performing in the off-Broadway flop *Big Noise of '92: Diversions From the New Depression*. Said *The New York Times*: "Mr. Tyree bears a passing resemblance to Tommy Tune, if Mr. Tune turned into a campy, mugging self-parody. When he isn't baring his teeth, rolling his eyes and flailing his arms, he talks and sings in a seasick monotone that occasionally echoes Tallulah Bankhead." Tallulah, Tommy and Mr. Tyree can all be reached at ntyree@adweek.com.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL ARSENAULT

Man About Town

Come back to the five and dime, Erik Moe, Erik Moe

Art and commerce? What a perfect place for this column to be. Particularly this month as I focus on people who cleverly keep one foot in each. I've discovered a host of folks who have carved out exciting and productive advertising careers while also pursuing artistic endeavors outside the business.

Sadly, however, agencies too often lose talented people who feel obliged to use their advertising efforts strictly as a stepping-stone to "get out." And, once gone, too many often don't return. That's worrisome.

I hope that's not the case with Erik Moe. You may recall his hilarious efforts at Goodby, Silverstein. Remember the penguin in the funny/creepy Bud Ice spots? Or maybe the loudmouthed Crash Bandicoot taunting Sony PlayStation's competitors in a parking? That was during Erik's stay at TBWA\Chiat\Day.

With a pedigree like that, you may wonder which fab agency he works for now. Actually, the only agency he deals with today is the one that represents his show-biz interests. Erik's gone Hollywood. Comedy Central. Universal. Etc. He's off and running.

Like so many others I've spoken to lately, Erik showed lots of personal initiative years ago. I'm sure he's not the only creative to talk about writing a book, but he's one of the few to do so. Published in 1996, *Tales of an Urban Failure* holds a special place in the hearts of many of its early fans. (Note to Chronicle Books: Why is this out of print? Get it back on the shelves now.)

I wanna scream, "Come back, Shane! I mean, Erik!" Couldn't he publish books and develop movies and TV shows and still ply his advertising trade? Wouldn't that be cool? For him? For agencies? For clients?

It has worked for Mike Venezia. An evp/executive art director at Leo Burnett, Mike is the quintessential

example of someone who has successfully forged dual careers. June 12 marked his 33rd year working at the same agency, and during that period, he has published 44 books!

As a young illustrator, Mike was frustrated by the lack of fine-art books that would be appropriate for his kindergarten-aged children. Rather than moan about what was missing, he did something about it. The result: Children's Press has now printed 30 of his books on famous artists, as well as

It's hard keeping 'em on the farm once they've seen Paris. Isn't it possible to enjoy both town and country?

14 on composers. (For more, type in "Mike Venezia" at Amazon.com.)

I wonder if the fact that he got the support he did from his agency way back when has something to do with his longevity at Burnett. (Ya think?)

He never, for example, felt like this was something he had "to do in the dark." Of course, it would have been a problem for him to accept freelance work for a competitor. But he's carved out a niche in publishing, which has, he quickly agrees, enriched the work he's done for his clients. His career at Burnett began on Pillsbury and continued over the years on Kellogg's and, more recently, McDonald's.

Other agencies have been similarly supportive of talented employees. You might be surprised to learn, for

example, that *501 Great Things About Being Gay* (at bookstores everywhere, on- and offline) was published by a creative director at Grey's G2. Or maybe not. Edward Taussig expected to be "the next Jacqueline Susann" when his hilarious book came out last year (so to speak). Given its somewhat delicate subject, G2 may have erred on the discreet side, but was nonetheless very supportive.

Likewise at J. Walter Thompson. Kesu James is a copywriter fresh out of Princeton. He's also one of the stars of off-Broadway's *The Donkey Show*. Fortunately, he has the support of worldwide CD Bill Hamilton, who apparently thinks it's terrific that Kesu has to zoom out of the office at the end of the day to trade his baggy jeans for a gold thong and body glitter.

Hamilton must see that such an unorthodox "night job" keeps his creative "creative." In fact, there are plans that may allow the talented hyphenate (writer-dancer?) to continue at JWT and also tour with the show in the U.K. this fall.

Unfortunately, we may have already lost some other advertising stars. Like Jan Karon, who traded in copywriting to publish *At Home in Mitford*. Or copywriter Melissa Bank, who wrote the critically acclaimed *The Girls' Guide to Hunting and Fishing*.

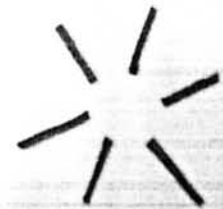
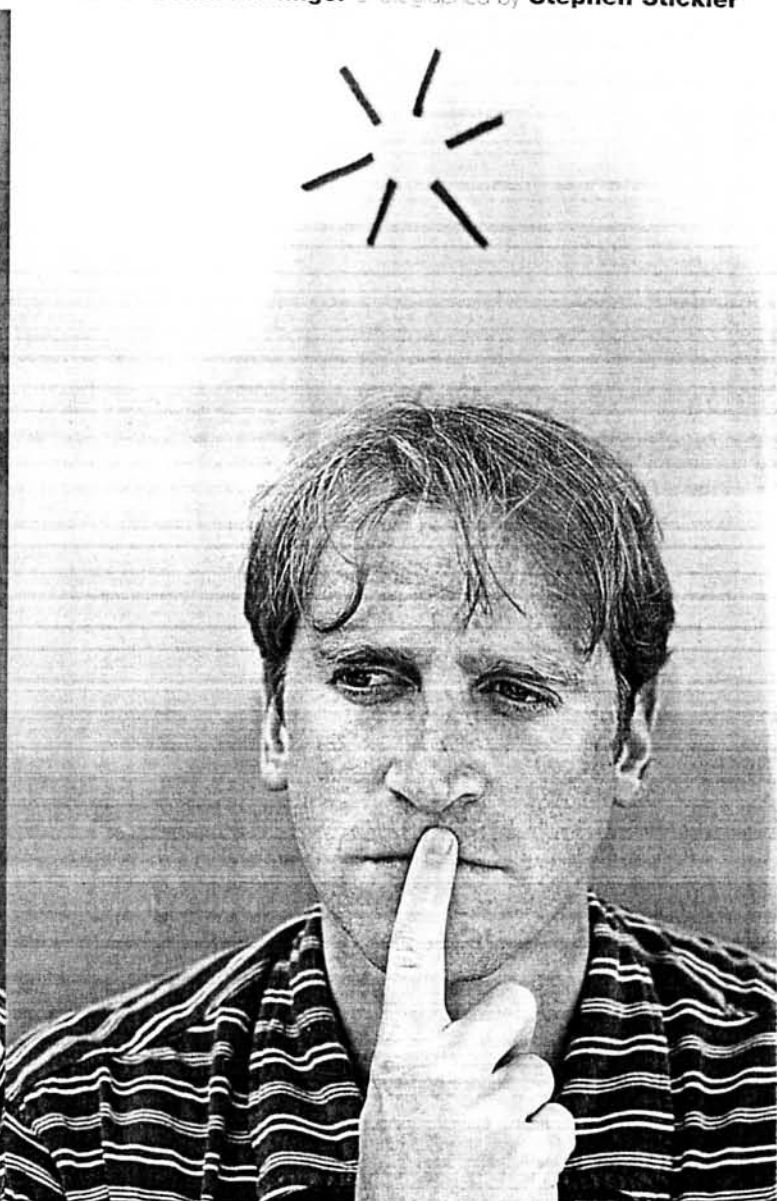
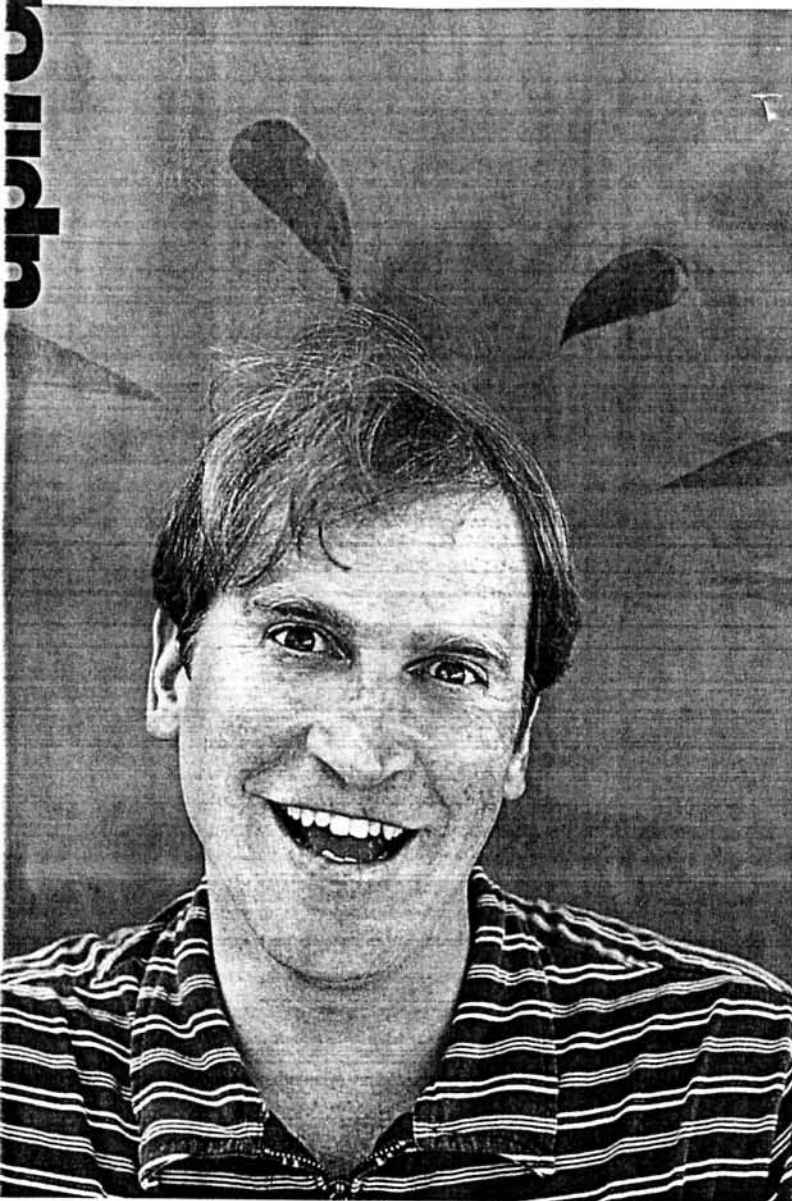
I say it's time we smarten up. Go talk to your HR recruiters and ask how easy it is to fill slots these days. Wouldn't it make sense to hang on to the talented people we have? Sure, we'll lose folks to dot-coms, but they'll come crawling back eventually.

As the old cliché goes, it's mighty hard to get 'em back on the farm once they've seen Paris. Isn't it possible to enjoy both town and country? Kudos to those who can do just that.

And my message to my old copywriting friend? "Come back, Little Sheba ... I mean Erik." ■

Less Is Moe

Written by **Bonnie Eslinger** photographed by **Stephen Stickler**



SUCCESS WILL RUIN ERIK MOE.

Dressed in khaki pants, tennis shoes, and a purple T-shirt, Moe looks a tad out of place amongst the industry dealmakers at the West Los Angeles eatery where the Wisconsin transplant is describing the shame of being a failure.

"I remember this overriding sense of anxiety," says Moe, the son of a dairy-equipment manufacturer. "I think a lot of humor comes out of pain, because you've got to be able to laugh when you're in the middle of it."

The problem is, he's quickly losing his loser status.

Buzz on Moe's somewhat autobiographical cartoon-novel, *Tales of a Young Urban Failure* (Chronicle Books), has been working its way through Hollywood boardrooms. The self-deprecating 33-year-old already has an agent and a development deal in the works with Comedy Central, while the *Chicago Sun-Times* described Moe's on-page persona as "a stick-figure Albert Brooks."

"He's really not that big of a loser at all," insists a former co-worker, in a somewhat backhanded defense. "He's just humble. It's a good way to look at yourself, to think of all the really dumb things that you do." Moe's publisher, meanwhile, would like to market him as the voice of the slacker or "X" generation. Moe says they've pegged the wrong guy.

"I don't presume to speak for any generation," he says. "I'll leave that to Eddie Vedder."

The author's very personal tale of angst began immediately after

bitten apartment," he recalls. "My cousin has a music company in Chicago that does jingles for commercials, and I ended up working for him." Moe displayed a talent for writing, as well as recording commercial voice-overs (moonlighting as the voice of Pizza Hut's Pizza Head and the conniving Bud Ice penguin), but his foray into advertising was temporarily derailed.

"My own cousin fired me," he admits, with a very non-L.A. giggle.

Still, advertising eventually beckoned Moe back, and he moved to Northern California for a brief tenure at a big-name agency. Dave Devencenzi, who worked with Moe, believes that *Tales* fans are sympathetic to Moe's struggles. "Erik's like a modern-day Charlie Brown," he says. "When he first wrote that book he was driving a scooter," says Devencenzi. "Now he's driving a Saab."

And just last year, Moe got married after sending a former co-worker his cartoons. "She claims that's why she fell in love with me," he says. Still, Moe has no plans to amend his reputation as a romance-reject in his impending sequel. "No love life," he says adamantly. "A lot of the humor comes out of his love woes."

In addition to a second book, Moe is developing a *Tales* script for the execs at Comedy Central, who envision a weekly show with a mix of real people and animated cuts of his cartoons. Nonetheless, folks that know Moe say he may no longer be a failure, but success really hasn't changed him, either.

"Underneath all his California-isms, he's really a cheesehead."