

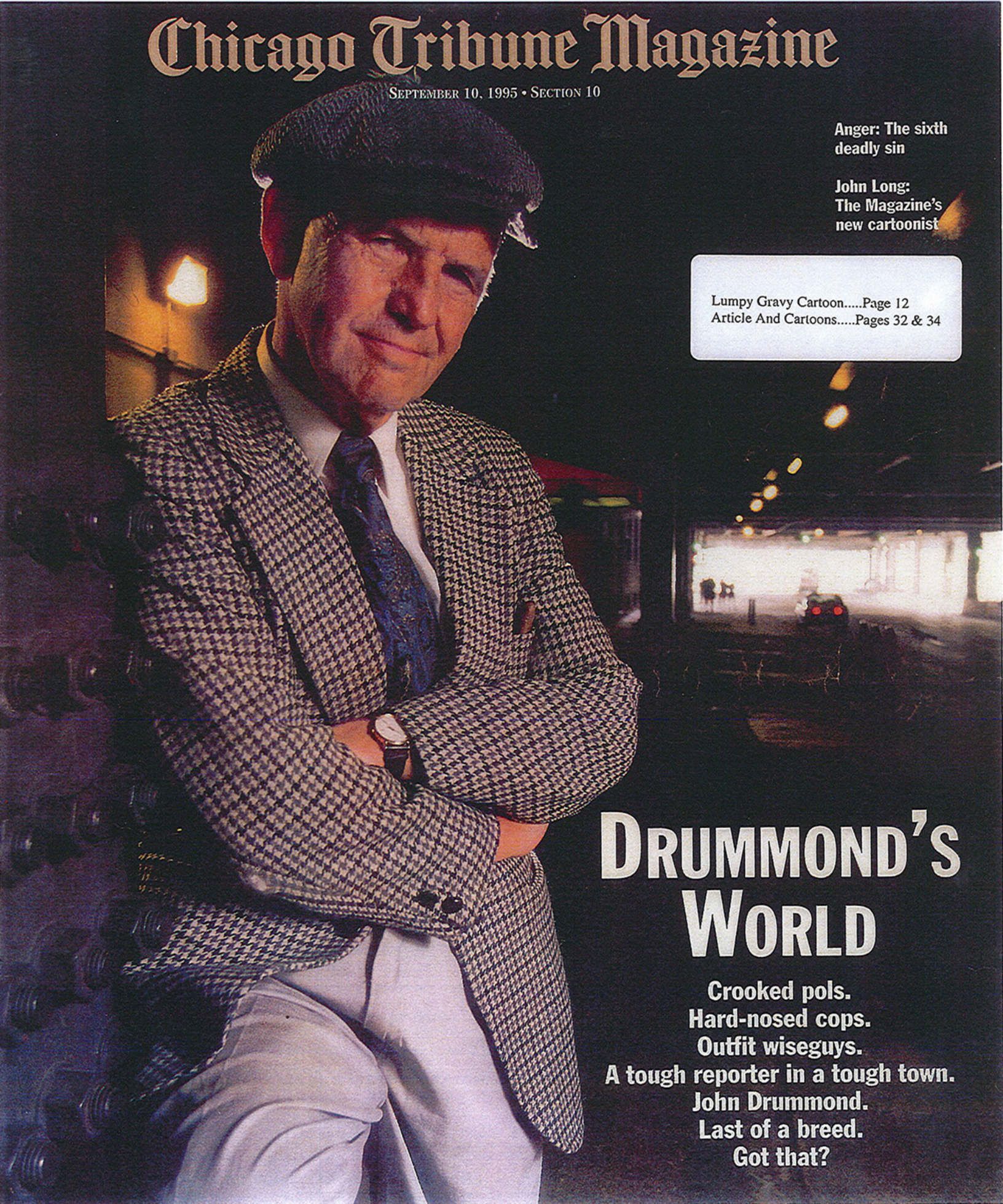
Chicago Tribune Magazine

SEPTEMBER 10, 1995 • SECTION 10

**Anger: The sixth
deadly sin**

**John Long:
The Magazine's
new cartoonist**

Lumpy Gravy Cartoon.....Page 12
Article And Cartoons.....Pages 32 & 34



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"Vince and Larry" © 1995 U.S. DOT

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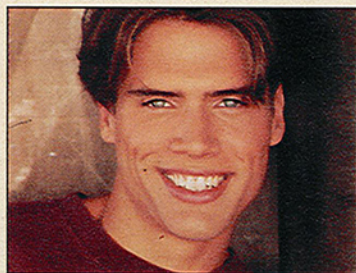
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Chicago Tribune Magazine

FAST TRACK

By Cheryl Lavin



Joshua Morrow

Birthday: Feb. 8, 1975.

Birthplace: Juneau, Alaska.

Occupation: Actor.

Current home: Hollywood.

Marital status: Single.

Working on: I play Nick Newman on "The Young and the Restless."

The last good movie I saw: "Crimson Tide."

I stay home to watch: ESPN, MTV and "The Simpsons."

Favorite pig-out food: Lime Jell-O.

Nickname: Shwa and J.J.

Favorite performers: Daniel Day-Lewis and Larry Bird.

Prized possession: My snowboard.

I've never been able to: Get mad at my little sisters. I have three: 8, 10 and 18.

I'm better than anyone else when it comes to: Smiling.

If I could do it over I'd: Try harder at baseball. I always wanted to be professional ball player.

I'd give anything to meet: James Dean.

My fantasy is: I'm in a feature film, doing a love scene with Michelle Pfeiffer. Robert De Niro is my dad and Madeleine Stowe is my mother and I have an Oedipus complex.

The worst advice my father ever gave me: "Grit your teeth." I had dislocated a couple of fingers playing ball and they were sticking out at a 90-degree angle. He pulled them back in place, taped them and said, "Grit your teeth and get back in there." I never did go to a doctor. They're still crooked to this day, but they work.

The one thing I can't stand: Traffic.

People who knew me in high school thought I was: Talky, smart, athletic.

My friends like me because: I'm fun and easygoing and kind of rambunctious.

Behind my back they say: "He's a bit arrogant."

If I've learned one thing in life it's: Floss or you get tartar buildup. I'm a fanatic about my teeth.

Major accomplishment: I've been a great son and big brother.

Three words that best describe me: Confident, driven and impatient.

REPLAYS

"You speak like an angel. It's too bad we're living on the Earth."

—From "Ragtime"

"In Paradise you will be the great artist God meant you to be. Ah, how you will delight the angels."

—From "Babette's Feast"

"Time is man's angel."

—From "The Death of Wallenstein"

"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

—Hebrews 13:2

"Dear George, Thanks for the wings! Love, Clarence."

—From "It's a Wonderful Life"

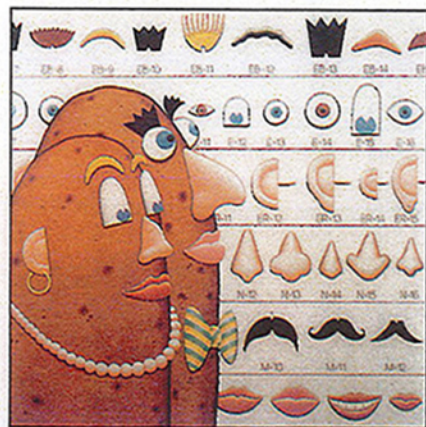
A profile of new cartoonist John Long is on page 32.

JOHN LONG



A young Pablo Picasso with his parents.

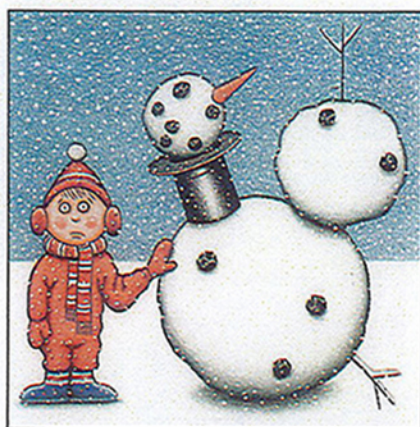
The Long View



Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head consider plastic surgery.



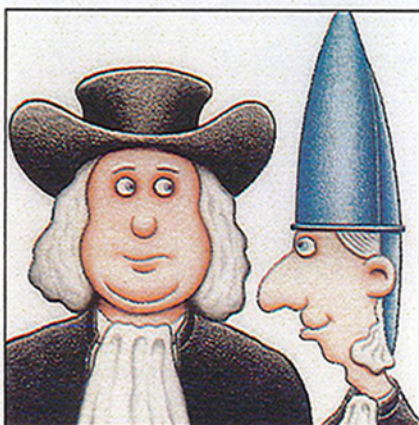
The Three Blind Mice . . . dressed accordingly.



Dyslexia.



Mr. Potato Head has an excellent poker face.



William Penn with his brother Bic.



The wicked witch of the Midwest.

Firefighting and romance sparked the career of the Magazine's new cartoonist

By Barbara Mahany

Doesn't take long, no more than a few lines actually, to bump into the word on cartoonist John Long's resumé that makes you look once, twice, before mumbling, "This is not your everyday funny guy with a sketch pad."

There it is, "Fireman," the word typed out just before the dates 1972-1988 listed after "Work," under the category "Facts."

And so, scribbling a note, you make this biographical blip Topic No. 1 for a little tête-à-tête with Long, whose full-color absurdist twists on life are coming to the Chicago Tribune Magazine beginning today. (They will appear each week beneath Fast Track, which this week is on page 12. His cartoons will replace those by John Callahan, which have appeared in the



John Long wants to "take cartooning to the next level," through the use of "more lofty" subjects and fine drawing.

magazine since January of 1994.)

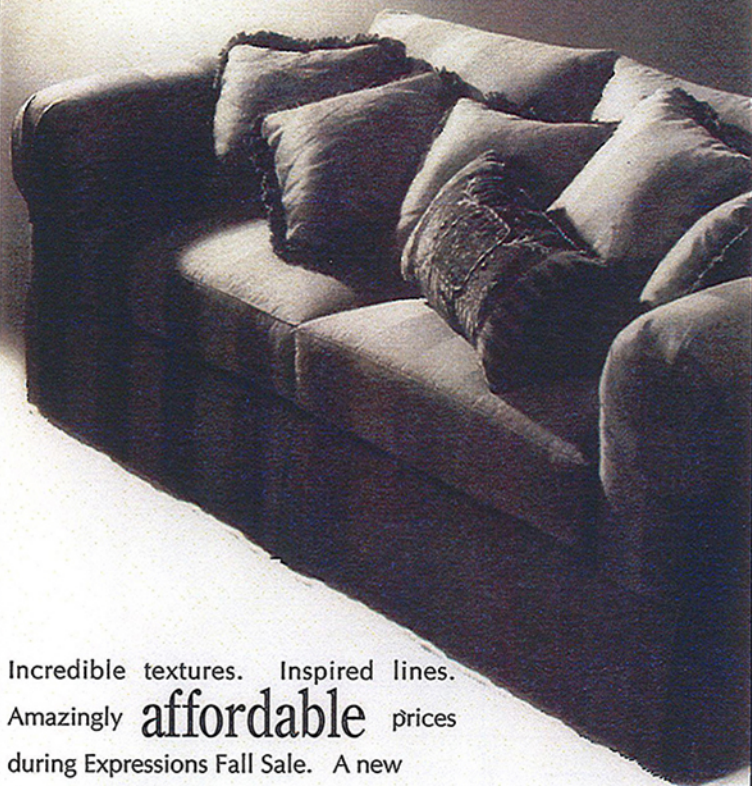
Yes, Long tells you, he spent 15½ years picking up fire hose, putting down pencil, or vice versa, dashing from his drawing table to the fire pole just down the hall in the firehouse in Lincoln Park, Mich., a "not blue, not green, a no-collar" suburb of roughly 45,000 citizens south of Detroit. And, as the first emergency medical technician on the Lincoln Park squad, he slid down that pole for plenty more than

grease fires and cats up in trees.

When the fire bell rang, Long leaped into the theater of life that is the firefighter's 24-hour shift: When a little girl in church doubled over from the cramps of her first menstrual period, Long calmly laid out for her enough of the facts of life to calm her. When a schizophrenic man wouldn't come out from under the table at a Burger King, Long coaxed him sure and steady. When a "big fat naked lady with her hair in curlers" ran screaming from her house and slipped in the snow, it was Long who scooped her up. And when a man dived out a second-floor window and through the power lines, it was Long who disentangled him.

Worse was doing CPR on a guy in a bar who'd taken a bullet to the chest, and every time Long pumped his heart, blood gushed out. But the very worst, every time, was crib death: "You've

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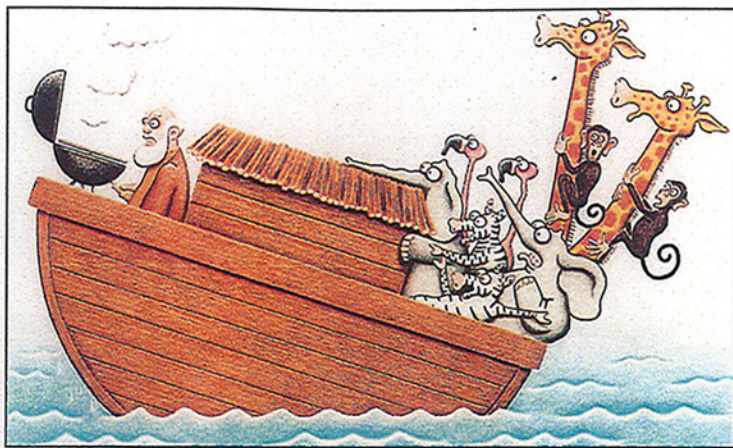
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If Noah had not been a vegetarian.

got these young parents standing there and you have to tell them their baby is no more. Then you go home and draw a really funny picture," says Long, 45, the scene rushing back to him as if he hadn't hung up his boots and helmet seven years ago.

"You're real quiet. You kind of use the shower to wash it away, then you kick away the baby toys to clear a path to your drawing table." For Long, who has two children now in their early 20s from a previous marriage, the pencil and the pad were "almost a healing process," to push away the dark side of life on the fire squad.

Long, who's been doodling ever since he could hold a pencil—and has reprimanding notes from teachers all through grade school to prove it—grew up wanting to be an artist but took a job in the firehouse where his father was a career firefighter because, in 1972, he couldn't find a job teaching high school art. His stint at the fire station, he says, was painful, and not just because of the fire calls.

"I was the wrong person in the wrong place," he says of being an artist in the macho world of the firehouse. Long wore flared pants to work and carried a black bag. It didn't matter to the men of the Lincoln Park Fire Department that it was filled with sketch pads, pencils and erasers. It was a bag nonetheless and for that he was razed without mercy. Negotiating the ropes of firehouse life, he says, earned him a master's degree in understanding human nature.

And it's that dead-honest, eye-opening truth about the world around us that Long is trying to get at. That's what makes us laugh, he says. And that's why he's a workaholic artist these days, putting in 12-hour days, seven days a week at the drawing table in his Ann Arbor studio.

He shares the studio with his wife of 10 years, Janet, a fiber artist and the final judge of his work. If she laughs, and she usually does, it's a go.

But more than being funny—and he aspires to being one of the great humorists of our time—he wants his work to be art. "Art-toons" are what he's aiming for, he says.

"That big giant gray area between cartoons and art, that's what I'm investigating." A lot of cartooning is just "cutesy pie, sillv. roofv." he says. "I'm trying to take

cartooning to the next level," with all the elements of first-rate drawing, and subjects that are "a little more lofty."

Funny thing about Long is he never tried to be funny until shortly after he started dating Janet, whom he met in the late 1970s at an art fair. She told him he was a wonderful guy—but he had no sense of humor, she said. He did too, he said. Prove it, she said. So he did.

He sketched two or three humorous but small drawings and hung them with his photographs and "serious art" in his booth at one of the art fairs that have been his artistic mainstay since 1976. They sold one, two, three. That was 1983. Within two years, he was selling cartoons almost exclusively, and making a darn good living. He left the fire department in 1988, and with an empty sketch pad always staring him in the face, he's never looked back.

For a kid who kept being told—even at the firehouse—he'd never amount to much and might as well throw away that sketch pad, the big stick-it-to-'em came late last year.

In December, Long's hometown paper, the Detroit News, picked the former fireman and his sketchpad to replace "The Far Side," the absurdist cartoon that went on permanent leave when its creator, Gary Larson, retired at the end of the year. Every day except Sunday you can find him on the comics page of the Detroit News, in the exact chunk of space that once belonged to Larson. And now, on Sundays, you can find him in these pages, too.

Despite his newspaper gigs, Long still treks the art show circuit, peddling his wares 25 weekends a year. Summers he's up north, winters he's in Florida, where a double-wide mobile home in Naples, "the last exit on I-75 south," is his roost. That's where the inveterate people-watcher does his best brainstorming, he says, aboard a bright yellow foam raft anchored about 100 feet from shore, "close enough so I can keep an eye on the whole beach scene."

He hasn't yet concocted a waterproof pad, so he paddles to shore every time he's got three ideas. On a good day, he's paddling like mad. He likes it that way, slapping at the Gulf, all in the name of high humor. ■