

Starr Reporter Placed on Furlough

Newspaper Business So Bad Even a Fictional Character Loses Her Job

By **DAN HARRIS** and **JOEL SIEGEL**

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Brenda Starr has had more than her share of hair-raising adventures, but she has never been in a pickle quite like this.

The comic-strip heroine has parachuted out of planes and been hijacked on the high seas. Today, she met with a challenge of a different kind: The ace reporter was furloughed.

[Mary Schmich](#), a columnist for the [Chicago Tribune](#), has written the Brenda Starr comic strip for the last 25 years.

"There's no way that I could write a comic strip that's set in a newsroom and not pay attention to what's going on in newsrooms right now, the overarching reality is the economic crisis," Schmich said. "I've been a journalist for 30 years and I have never lived through anything like what we are living through now."

Real-life newspapers [have been slashing staff, freezing salaries and even closing](#) because of steep declines in advertising and circulation. The [New York Times recently announced it would cut 100 employees and institute 5 percent pay cuts](#) for most of its staff in exchange for 10 days of leave.

[New York Times](#) publisher [Arthur Sulzberger](#) and chief executive Janet Robinson noted "the global economic crisis" in a memo to employees on the layoffs and pay cuts.

"This was a very difficult decision to make," they said. "The environment we are in is the toughest we have seen in our years in business."

The newspaper business [may be headed south for good](#). But no character, real or imagined, embodied the glamour of the business in its heyday like Brenda Starr. She burst onto the comics pages in 1940, the work of artist Dale Messick.

Like Messick, who was one of the first women cartoonists, Brenda was a trailblazer, covering big stories at a time when few women worked as reporters and those who did were relegated to the society pages.

Brenda chased scoops around the globe for a big-city daily newspaper called the FLASH, racing from adventure to adventure, getting the story and usually the man. She was a career woman who

had it all, becoming a role model for a generation of women, especially women journalists long before Mary Richards and Murphy Brown.

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Flags wave in the wind as the Tribune Co., in this file photo./Inset: An image "Brenda Starr, Reporter," a comic strip heroine, is shown in this file photo.
(Getty Images/AP Photo)

Will Brenda Starr Return to Her Beat?

Today's furlough has been building for some time, but Brenda was not prepared for the bad news. Brenda Starr has always solved her own problems, and gotten herself out of so many jams. So will the red-headed heroine be back on the beat soon? Will the cliffhanger have a happy ending?

[Mary Schmich](#) gave a hint about Brenda's next move. "Brenda is going to do what a lot of young journalists are doing now, I can't say anything more than that," she said.