

# Guiding

Lauren Folino and Tracy Peterson look back on the extraordinary lives of the three newest members of the Medical Advertising Hall of Fame

## Jane Townsend



### CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

**1960s** Studied journalism in college and began her career as a newspaper reporter

**1970s** Named a Top 10 Reporter in the USA in 1971 by the National Press Women's Association. Her work as a journalist paved the way for her first job in the medical advertising industry, as a copywriter at ER Squibb & Sons. Co-founded Gross

Townsend Frank Hoffman in 1978

**1980s** Pioneered one of the first CRM programs. Sold Gross Townsend Frank Hoffman to Grey Advertising in 1986, but stayed actively involved with the agency until her retirement in 1993

**1990s** Named the very first Healthcare Businesswomen Association's Woman of the Year in 1991

This year marks the induction of one of the first female partners in a major medical agency, Jane Townsend, and—with the induction of her husband, Alan Gross—the first time that a husband and wife are being inducted at that same time.

Townsend has enjoyed great successes in her lengthy career in medical advertising, although her early life presented her with some misfortune. At age 16 she was involved in a near-fatal car accident, in which she lost one of her legs. It was this event, Townsend says, that fueled her lifelong fearlessness—a characteristic that she believes sets her apart from other people in the industry.

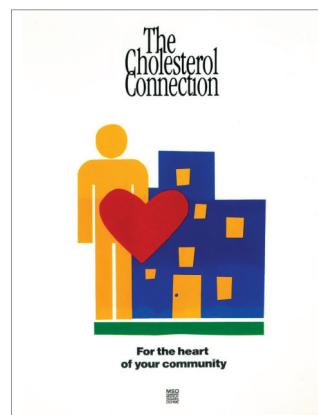
“I think I was lucky to have a life-threatening event when I was a teenager,” she says. “After you have been through something like that, and survived, your perspective changes. It gives you a confidence that you can survive anything... If you're not afraid of failing, you can push harder toward great ideas or products.”

The first job she took in pharma was a copywriter position at ER Squibb & Sons—which is subsequently where she met her future husband—which led to her taking the leap to the “agency side” in the mid-70s, as an account executive with Kallir Phillips Ross. It

was at this time that Townsend became fascinated with the role of patients in making their own healthcare decisions.

In 1978, she co-founded GTFH, after deciding with her husband and other partners, David Frank and Ronnie Hoffman, that they wanted to create an agency of big thinking, new directions and working with clients who were looking to break the same molds they were.

Looking back on her vibrant career in healthcare, Townsend



At Gross Townsend Frank Hoffman (GTFH), Townsend collaborated in pioneering one of the first computer-driven CRM marketing programs, with the Cholesterol Connection campaign, transforming how the industry used multi-channel communications

says it was the people she worked with and pushing the envelope in business that remain at the heart of her favorite memories. “A big part of the fun we [had] was always trying to invent something new,” she explains. “Of course, it was not always easy to sell the idea of ‘new’ or ‘different,’ because not everyone can appreciate new and different. I admire those clients who let us push the envelope... with their money.”

Notable business achievements include collaborating closely with husband Gross on the launch of the very first statin—Merck's Mevacor—by successfully conditioning the market around the clinical consequences of high cholesterol. Townsend also fondly recalls working on the Today Contraceptive Sponge in 1983, which she calls a “very rewarding challenge.”

“Working closely with the [marketing team] we developed a regional rollout launch using public relations and the news media to reach consumers, doctors and pharmacists,” she recalls. “Coverage included front-page stories in *The New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, as well as coverage in TV and radio news programs around the country. An entire episode of *Seinfeld* featured the Sponge, so that helped created some serious buzz and Geraldo

# Lights

Rivera positively reviewed it on his program *20/20*.”

In addition to her agency work, Townsend also gave a lot of herself as a mentor, says Risa Bernstein, managing partner and co-president of Flashpoint Medica. “She was among the earliest female partners of a major healthcare agency, and yet, she never made it seem as if being a woman impacted, or impeded her success in any way whatsoever,” Bernstein insists. “Because she never thought of her ‘femaleness’ as any impediment to her advancement in a male-dominated industry, none of the young women she mentored did either.”

After selling GTFH to Grey Advertising in 1986, Townsend remained actively involved with the agency, and even began efforts to digitalize the company’s offerings, until her retirement from the industry in 1993.

Considering how the industry has changed since she left 18 years ago, Townsend says, “I think of all the great things we could have done or could have invented if we had had the technology of today... As a consumer, it’s great to have access to all sorts of information on the internet.”

## Joe Torre



### CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

**1960s** Went to school to become a pharmacist and worked for two years dispensing medicine in both the retail and hospital sectors

**1970s** Took on sales and marketing positions at Roche. He made the leap into pharma advertising in 1977 when he joined Healthmark Communications. At the end of the decade, founded Salthouse

Torre Ferrante (now known as Torre Lazur Healthcare Group)

**1980s** Launched breakthrough brands Habitrol, Havrix, Paxil and Kytril

**1990s** Sold to McCann Worldgroup to give TLHG a worldwide reach, becoming one of the first companies to establish full-service healthcare communications companies in major markets worldwide

**W**ith more than four decades of experience under his belt, Joe Torre has seen the industry change dramatically. Some of these changes are for the better he says, such as consumers being more involved in their healthcare choices. Others, he asserts, have tunned him off from ever rejoining the fray. “When I retired, several people were pushing me to start another agency, but the agencies are so changed now,” he explains. “It’s not like it was. Now, the government

is so involved with legislation and what you can and can’t say.”

Things were different when Torre decided to abandon his pharmacy career for work with Hoffman LaRoche in 1970. After seven years there, he made the transition to the “other side,” joining Healthmark Communications as an account supervisor. Always the risk taker, Torre founded Salthouse Torre Ferrante (now the Torre Lazur Healthcare Group) in 1979 after only two years of agency experience.

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**Torre worked on the Zantac launch, one of the original blockbusters**

For over a quarter of a century Torre helped the agency grow into the position of being respected in the industry and deemed “The Launch Agency,” according to TLHG’s CEO Marci Piasecki.

One of TLHG’s biggest launches was for Zantac. The brand was one of the original “blockbusters” and it helped catapult TLHG into a leading agency. “We found hooks to hang our hat on that were very unique,” he says of the launch. “It was one of the most successful launches in history.”

Eventually losing the account, and taking on its rival Tagamet, Torre was presented with a new dilemma. “A lot of clients were asking us to take a big drug in a category where we already had a drug,” he recalls. “It killed us to say: ‘I’m sorry. I can’t touch it.’ We had to turn it down. It killed me to be turning down that much work when I was responsible for growing the business.”

So, to solve the problem, Torre literally separated the agency in half. “Each [agency] had the same quality services and programs that the clients wanted,” he says. “When it was done before, most agencies set up a satellite or conflict agency. Clients don’t want to go

to a little pipsqueak conflict shop. They want a parent company.”

This idea of splitting the agency in half was expanded further after McCann purchased TLHG in 1996. “[McCann] said it wanted me to build a global network,” he says. “I basically took a big risk and started a dual global agency. We had two agencies in each country... So, we were able to handle conflicts around the world.”

Torre experienced a notable conflict in his personal life when he was diagnosed with leukemia in 1991. He beat the disease into remission after only seven months of treatment, including a bone marrow transplant. During his hospital stay, he became aware of how essential funding was for cancer patients and supporting cancer research. In 1992, he planned what would become an annual golf outing to raise money for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. He enlisted the financial support of pharma giants SmithKline Beecham and Ciba Geigy.

Says Piasecki: “One of the qualities that makes Joe Torre unique, is that every time he is faced with a setback—even his own mortality—he manages to turn it into something positive and good.”

Having officially retired in 2010, Torre’s legacy still remains fresh in the minds of his colleagues. “Joe Torre is not just another accomplished leader in our industry,” explains Piasecki, “he is a brand. A brand that makes an impact, garners loyalty—from clients, colleagues and peers—and endures forever. Joe Torre is a brand folks remember...that’s what sets him apart from his peers.”

## Alan Gross



### CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

**1960s** Began his pharma career as a full-line sales rep for ER Squibb & Sons, and quickly shot up the ranks to hospital sales rep for the company

**1970s** Created Alan Gross Communications, which later became Gross Townsend Frank Hoffman with partners Jane Townsend, David Frank and Ronnie Hoffman. Collaborated with colleagues

to form Phase V Communications

**1980s** Grew a global network earlier and more substantially than many other agencies. Sold Gross Townsend Frank Hoffman to Grey in 1986

**1990s** Retired to Bonaire with partner in work and life Jane Townsend

**T**hough confidence and charisma played major roles in the success of Alan Gross’s nearly 30-year career in medical advertising, his unflinching pursuit for the next scientifically driven, healthcare-altering idea is really what set him apart from his peers.

According to Lori Spielberger, EVP, executive creative director at Euro RSCG Life MetaMax and a protégé of Gross’s GTFH: “Alan’s career has always been marked by a willful dedication to ideas that were meaningful and relevant, not just attractive and easy to sell. It had to change minds, move brands. And so it was with his industry contributions.”

In fact, it was his passion for science that ultimately fueled his career beginnings, which formed their roots during his collegiate studies in the field of microbiology. Coupled with his amiable, inquisitive nature, Gross went on to learn a lot about his client audience when in 1967 he embarked on his first pharma job carrying the bag for ER Squibb & Sons. He worked his way up the ranks, holding various sales and advertising jobs at the company until he made the jump to creative director for Squibb in 1972.

The following years would take Gross through senior account positions at various agencies, where he would ultimately achieve two things: an understanding of what he did not enjoy about working at agencies; and meeting Jane Townsend, who would later become his wife and business partner.



Gross’s avid passion for science sparked the slogan for Nuprin

In 1978, Gross had one of the most crucial years of his young life, when he was diagnosed with lymphoma. But, as luck, good doctors and fortitude would have it, he emerged both triumphant and, of course, a changed man. That same year, with a new outlook on life and a mere \$15,000 in the bank, Gross formed his own agency, Alan Gross Communications, on which he collaborated with Townsend. Shortly thereafter, the agency’s name was changed to Gross Townsend Frank Hoffman, with the addition of partners David Frank and Ronnie Hoffman, and they opened the doors to their first office in Union Square.

Recalling the benefits of working with his spouse, Gross says, “Being married and working together provided a synergy to our efforts. Our instincts are so similar that we could finish each other’s sentences and, when making presentations, if one of us would stumble or forget a key point, the other would just come right in and it all looked seamless to the clients.”

His years at GTFH were marked by numerous accomplishments and contributions, including early DTC work with NicoDerm, Mevacor and National Cancer Survivors Day, all before the phrase had become a household name. Another of Gross’s major contributions was Phase V Communications—the first managed care services unit back in the 80s—through which GTFH pioneered the early days of computer-driven CRM marketing (like the Cholesterol Connection program), transforming how the industry used multi-channel communications. Gross was also a believer in doing everything possible to uncover a brand’s advantage, and going beyond market and clinical data to find the scientific rationale for a product that would be meaningful to the customer; for instance he once ventured to a research lab at Bristol-Myers Squibb to conduct a dissolution test of all the ibuprofens to find that Nuprin dissolved faster than Advil—hence the drug’s slogan: “Little. Yellow. Different. Better.”

Though he sold GTFH in 1986 to Grey, he stayed actively involved with the agency until his retirement in 1993. At that time, Gross and his wife moved to the island Bonaire, where they have become heavily involved with the island’s philanthropic efforts. ■