

'Bon Appétit' founder started from scratch

'BON APPÉTIT'
Continued from FD1

and he served stateside throughout the war.

He smiles. "Looking back, it was probably the luckiest thing that ever happened to me," he says.

Jones had become engaged before enlisting and married in 1943. By the time he was discharged, he was also a father.

Journalism would have been his logical career path.

"I'm a writer, basically," he says. "That's my trade."

Wisely, he recognized that he couldn't support a family on a reporter's salary, so he became an advertising copywriter. He also did technical writing, authoring a "hostess" manual for TWA stewardesses.

Jones founded two ad companies, one of which eventually merged with another Kansas City agency. His clients were the heart and soul of Midwestern farm country — working in poultry, livestock feed, farm machinery.

"Eventually, I burned out," he says. That was 1965.

Just in time, he met a trade publisher who had secured rights to the name *Bon Appétit* but had no magazine to put it on. The words had become a familiar catchphrase in America. Julia Child, who had recently debuted a cooking show, signed off with a cheery "Bon appétit." Jones knew the time was right to launch a magazine that would rival the established *Gourmet* magazine.

In those days, one man could start up a magazine.

"Everything was different back then," Jones says. "The world has moved so fast in every way."

By 1966, Jones' *Bon Appétit* was showing housewives how to bring upscale cooking into their Chef Boyardee kitchens without having to master the art of French cooking. Jones was not a cook, but his wife, Mary Jane, was. They traveled extensively throughout Europe and Scandinavia and knew what good food tasted like.

Starting a magazine from scratch was not easy. They had no archives, no files, no back issues to use for reference. The first issue got out, Jones says, "but it was puny."

Using *Gourmet* as a standard, Jones worked to grow his circulation and establish his magazine while making gourmet cooking more accessible

to the public. The staff, including longtime workhorse senior editor JoAnn Thompson, spent the first year and a half trying to improve its product and get the magazine's name in front of the cooking public. Jones sold copies in bulk to wine dealers for free distribution.

"Five years later," Jones says, "we were beginning to be noticed nationally as a good magazine."

The mark of success was an offer from Pillsbury in 1969 to buy the magazine. Jones turned it down, but company executives from middle management to the chairman of the board came courting. At the same time, a similar offer came from the Meredith Corp., publishers of *Better Homes & Gardens*. But when Meredith made its offer in cash, which would have burdened Jones with sizable capital gains taxes, he sold to Pillsbury in a stock trade.

With a new influx of financial support, Jones beefed up *Bon Appétit* and launched a travel magazine, *Bon Voyage*.

"I was better at that than cooking," he says.

Jones wrote for both magazines, specializing in wine columns. He's most proud of persuading wine experts Alexis Lichine, Frank Schoonmaker and Harry Waugh to write for *Bon Appétit*.

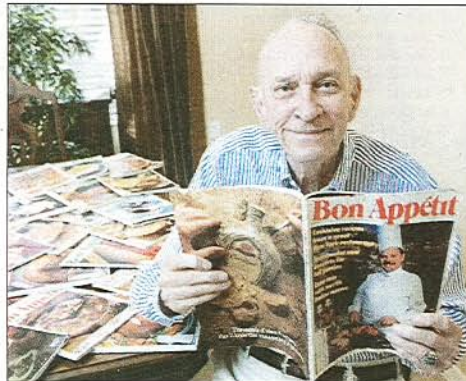
In the mid-1970s, at age 55, Jones considered buying back his magazine when Pillsbury decided to get out of the publishing business. Instead, Bud Knapp, owner of *Architectural Digest*, who "wanted it so bad he could taste it," Jones says, agreed to buy the magazine and keep Jones as publisher.

Eventually, the company's operations moved to Los Angeles and Knapp sold both magazines to Condé Nast for a reported \$175 million, a sum that amazed Jones.

Jones retired in 1980. His wife died six years ago, and now he and Berol are living an active life in a retirement community, with no desire to travel overseas again. Arizona and the West Coast are about as far as they want to voyage.

Other men his age ran businesses that made more money, Jones says, "but every month I turned something out that made people happy."

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DAVID WALLACE/THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC
M. Frank Jones relishes the years he devoted to *Bon Appétit* magazine, which he founded and wrote for until 1980.