

IrkedMagazine.com

MEDIA KIT





IrkedMagazine.com

Make way for the determined...

Dear Journalist:

First of all, thank you so much for taking an active interest in Irked Magazine. The *only* way we will be able to spread the word about our project is with your help, so we're really grateful you're here!

We have put together this media kit for you, to help you understand exactly what we are hoping to accomplish.

If there's anything else you need, please don't hesitate to get in touch (contact info found throughout this package).

Thank you for caring, and thank you for helping us tell *our* story.

We promise to do our very best to pay it forward.

Sincerely,
The Irked Team



For: Irked Magazine

Contacts:

Sacha Vais, Founder and Editor-in-Chief
Phone: 902.405.7662
Email: sacha@irkedmagazine.com

Paul Aflalo, Technological Potentate
Phone: 514.947.5827
Email: paul@irkedmagazine.com

Judy Kovalski, In-House Counselor
Phone: 514.830.8446
Email: inhousecounselor@irkedmagazine.com

Date issued: September 12, 2006

F O R I M M E D I A T E R E L E A S E

Attention: Lifestyle Editor, Media Editor, Arts Editor, Health/Disabilities Editor, Education Editor

***IrkedMagazine.com* launches long-awaited first issue**

New website offers people a chance to tell their own story

"Disability Culture will never be the same again," vows Editor-in-Chief...

Montreal, Québec / Halifax, Nova Scotia (PRWEB) September 12, 2006 — On September 12, 2006, at exactly midnight, three highly determined Canadians launched what they call "the resource we never had." Dedicated to the very basic idea that "people improve when they know someone is paying attention," Irked Magazine is committed to helping people tell their own story (their slogan is "Make way for the determined...").

"Some of our contributors will absolutely blow your mind," promises Sacha Vais, Irked's founder and managing editor. "Take our music critic as a prime example. Joci's thirteen years old, and deaf, and just about the coolest kid of all time. She listens to music on her iPod, which she plugs directly into her Cochlear Implant, and she's set to take the music scene by storm."

"No kidding," continues Vais with a mischievous smile on his face. "Disability culture is about to bring the house down. Mark my words, Joci will be running Rolling Stone Magazine by the time she's sixteen!"

Since launching a coming soon page in May of 2005, Irked's readership has increased dramatically and steadily, and has already attracted some major media attention. In fact, in addition to the thousands of Canadians who have frequented Irked's site over the past few months, they've also had regular hits from over 30 countries (and counting!).

In addition to the wide array of multimedia content that appears in Irked's first issue—including articles, comic strips, photo essays, slideshows, audio clips, and videos—Irked Magazine is also testing out a number of unique media initiatives, including their Borrow a Press Pass program (a pilot project, based on the honour-system, that will allow passionate, well-prepared people a chance to "play journalist" for a day) and their Interv...you? program (a growing database that will eventually match wannabe journalists with people who wanna be interviewed).

The spirit of Irked can perhaps best be summed up by the Winston Churchill quote that appears in big bold letters on Irked's Crisis Hotlines page: **"If you're going through hell, keep going."**

Find out what all the fuss is about at www.irkedmagazine.com.

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If you would like more information about Irked, or to schedule an interview with Sacha Vais, Paul Aflalo, or Judith Kovalski, contact:

Sacha Vais: 1.902.405.7662 | Paul Aflalo: 1.514.947.5827 | Judy Kovalski: 1.514.830.8446

Send all mail to: **Irked Magazine, P.O. Box 9224, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3K 5M8, Canada**

<http://www.irkedmagazine.com>



Mission Statement - Raison d'Être - A Calling

Lurking in the shadows of our psyches is often a feeling of being dissatisfied, unheard, and invalidated for our beliefs and values, for our realities, for who we are. Whether we are the “elite” of society, or the “downtrodden,” we often feel, shall we say, *irked* by the silent emotions to which we wish to give voice. Through our telling, we become as real as we can hope to be and through our speaking we become as powerful—a voice with which to be reckoned.

Irked Magazine is committed to the concept that people improve when they know someone is paying attention. We believe that people everywhere can become less sad, or worried, or angry, or violent, or self-destructive simply by being given a forum to publish their work, and the dignity that comes with that sort of thing. We aim to provide a non-judgemental space in which people can explore matters of the heart.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contacts: Sacha Vais

Email: sacha@irkedmagazine.com

Paul Aflalo

(514) 947-5827

Email: paul@irkedmagazine.com

Web for info: www.irkedmagazine.com

“Wandering agoraphobe” to launch *Irked Magazine*

New website offers people a chance to tell their story

MONTREAL – Two years ago, Sacha Vais was suffering from major depression, having regular panic attacks, almost completely housebound, and struggling to find a purpose in life. Today he is in love, happy, healthy, and, with a newly-acquired degree from Concordia University (in Communications and Cultural Studies), he is set to launch *Irked Magazine*. “I’ve always wanted to be some sort of journalist, ever since I was a little boy,” says Vais, “and my mental illness forced me to face the prospect that that might never happen.”

Irked Magazine is committed to the basic concept that people improve when they know someone is paying attention.

“There was no resource available for people like me,” explains Vais. “I’m practically housebound, and have horrible insomnia, and am not at all punctual. I’m totally ‘unemployable,’ by society’s standards.” And then he smiles. “So I gathered some brilliant people I knew, and we went out and *created* that resource, for me, and for people like me.” And then he smiles even wider. “Actually, I suppose we *stayed in* and created that resource!”

Nothing like a little agoraphobia humour.

“If you can’t laugh at yourself, what’s left?” asks Vais not at all rhetorically. “I’m a practical kinda guy, and when your brain’s trying to convince you that the world is a terrifying and malevolent place, I ask you: if you can’t laugh at yourself, what’s left?”

Ha.

Irked Magazine is accepting **all kinds** of submissions now.

Check it out at: www.irkedmagazine.com

Also...

Sacha Vais recently wrote a book. It’s called:

**a boy named sach:
notes from an agoraphobic front**

...and it’s for sale on Irked’s website!

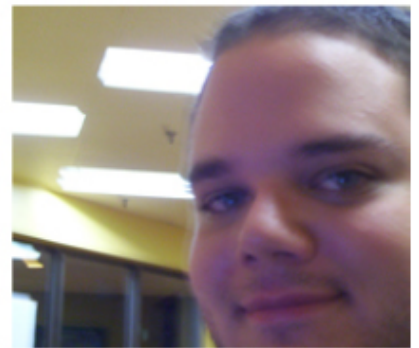
Staff @ Irked



Sacha Vais
Editor-in-Chief

SACHA VAIS is the award-winning director of the ground-breaking documentary *Home Movie of Us Going to the SPCA to Adopt a Puppy*, which his mother recently had transferred to DVD. His other films include *Evidence That Someone Hit my Front Bumper* (winner of the Small Claims Court Award for Excellence), the short film *Holy Shit, Look, That Guy's Got No Pants On!*, and his most recent documentary *If We Bring a Video Camera With Us and Pretend We're From One of Those Decorating Shows, Maybe We'll Get a Better Deal on Our Couch?* He toyed with the idea of becoming a journalist or a teacher or a librarian, but went with agoraphobia instead because the hours are better. He uses humour as a defence mechanism, but also because apparently you live longer that way. He holds a Communications & Cultural Studies degree from Concordia University, and his most recent effort (for real this time) is a book called *a boy named sach: notes from an agoraphobic front*. It's for sale through this website, by [clicking here](#).

Filmmaker, writer, web designer, teacher, photographer, computer technician, video gamesman, mentor to the weak-minded, and long-term student are all titles that PAUL AFLALO has had in pursuit of his long-sought career, yet undetermined. While he remains troubled and confused as to what that might be, you will likely find him doing something random or completely illogical to that of the "normal" person. Not to say that he doesn't like "normal" people, it's just that being normal isn't right for him. At the tender age of ten he tried speaking only in iambic pentameter, when he was sixteen he decided speech was useless and communicated solely through hieroglyphics, and when he was nineteen he briefly took up the accordion. His therapist says that when he can't think of anything to write he has a tendency to make things up. His most recent film, *Garbage Girl*, was screened at the Montreal World Film Festival. No, that one's actually true, I swear... check it out at www.paulologic.com/garbagegirl. Oh yeah, and Oprah's his cousin.



Paul Aflalo
Name it, I do it.



Judith Kovalski
In-House Counselor

JUDITH KOVALSKI was the first *Irked* staff member who didn't have to make up accomplishments for her bio. She has more university degrees than most people have old issues of National Geographic. Her "religious work" stage, at Concordia University, landed her a BA in Religious Studies, an MA in History and Philosophy of Religious Studies, and part of a PhD in Religious Studies/Ethics. Her "social work" phase, at McGill University, snagged her a BSW, and then an MSW. She has been working as a social worker/crisis counselor ever since – for CLSCs, teen shelters, hospitals, community organizations, and in private practice. She has guest lectured on Death and Dying, and taught elementary and high school ESL. The most amazing thing about Judy, though, is that she's an incredibly nice person who really cares about the people she's trying to help. Also, she has been known to sign her emails: Love and knishes, Joodles.

W E L C O M E . . .

Welcome Note

Art Spiegelman once said, "If there can't be great art about the Holocaust, at least let there be comics."

We might rephrase that to say: If there can't be great art about entirely unfunny things, at least let there be Irked Magazine.

Great minds think alike. And so do ours.

We are honoured and delighted to present Irked's long-awaited first issue.

"Disability culture" is about to bring the house down.

Make way for the determined...

[take me home](#)

THIS IS REALITY, an agoraphobe says: 'I began to associate more and more places with uncontrollable anxiety, and avoid them, and eventually those places were everywhere'

When fear takes control

DONNA NEBENZAHL THE GAZETTE



Sacha Vais, who is agoraphobic, says he hopes his online magazine, *Irked*, will give a voice to people coping with conditions like his.

In one of his emails, Sacha Vais referred to an Austrian writer who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2004. Elfriede Jelinek declined to attend the ceremony in Stockholm because she suffered from agoraphobia and social phobia and couldn't handle being out in public.

"I'm not saying I'll ever win a Nobel Prize or Pulitzer or anything," wrote Vais, 26, who is agoraphobic and was willing to converse with a reporter only via email because he felt too anxious to speak in person. "But maybe, just maybe, someday I'll be able to eke out a living wage doing something I'm good at."

For Vais, for now, that something is *Irked*, an online magazine dedicated to people who have no way to talk about their agoraphobia, attention deficit disorders, depression, physical handicaps, insomnia and other problems.

He wants to find a place for people like himself.

Vais saw his first psychiatrist when he was 8 or 9 because of lingering anxiety and chronic headaches. He has battled crippling panic attacks and struggled with chronic insomnia since high school.

"But then again, I was taking full course loads well into CEGEP," he wrote, "and holding down out-of-the-house jobs until a few years ago."

Things got worse, Vais wrote, because his brain chemicals became more unbalanced as life got more demanding. "Consequently, I started having more panic attacks, and then became scared to go out, terrified of having an attack in public. I... was so scared to be scared that I was almost paralyzed."

"Needless to say, that meant that working outside of my home, or going to three-hour classes, became incredibly difficult."

He declined a meeting or even a phone interview because the pressure of being "on the record" and the anxiety and insomnia that would precede it would be "too much to handle," he wrote. "Plus my shrink's on vacation."

This is reality for an agoraphobe, Vais wrote.

"Over time I began to associate more and more places with uncontrollable anxiety, and avoid them, and eventually those places were everywhere."

Agoraphobia often starts with panic disorder

Before developing agoraphobia, people often suffer from panic disorder, the most commonly diagnosed psychiatric disorder in North America.

According to the U.S. Mental Illness Research Association, 1.7 per cent of people between the ages of 18 and 54 develop a panic disorder, which typically begins between the middle teens and early adulthood. Panic disorder is marked by repeated attacks of panic that occur unexpectedly and for no obvious cause.

About one in three people with panic disorder develop agoraphobia, an abnormal fear of public places. And there's every indication that the incidence is on the rise, possibly because people are better able today to identify panic and more likely to seek help for emotional distress.

"In any one year we know that approximately 30 per cent of the population will have had at least one panic attack," says Michael Spevack, a clinical psychologist who teaches at McGill University. Hypervigilance

about panic attacks can lead to full-blown panic disorders.

"The majority who develop agoraphobia have had panic attacks, so they won't visit places because they're associated with panics or wouldn't want to be there if they had a panic attack, such as in an airplane," he said.

Most panic attacks are cued, Spevack said, meaning that they happen in situations the sufferer can understand. For instance if someone has to make a speech, they might feel like

passing out, but they recognize that the situation is responsible.

However, he said, about two per cent of panic attacks are uncued, and appear to happen just out of the blue. "This is where they get scary and the risk of developing agoraphobia is the highest," he said, "because people become worried that they never know where it can happen. Or they begin to associate with certain situations, like at the shopping centres."

(Cont...)

VAIS An agoraphobe often doesn't feel safe anywhere

CONTINUED FROM D1

"And at that exact moment, when everywhere becomes a scary place, at that precise instant when time itself overwhelms you, that is when you become an agoraphobe."

Vais can't pinpoint the onset of the phobia, but he does recall having frequent headaches and trouble sleeping when he was young. As a child, he stopped staying at friends' houses; when he was older, he stopped taking classes or jobs that required him to be at work before noon.

One clear memory was the waking nightmares he had after he was told the story, at age 10, of a woman who had been given a date rape drug at a bar and escaped being raped by passing out in the bathroom stall. The young Vais couldn't imagine anything more horrible, and from that point kept his life under strict control, distancing himself from drinking and going to bars or parties.

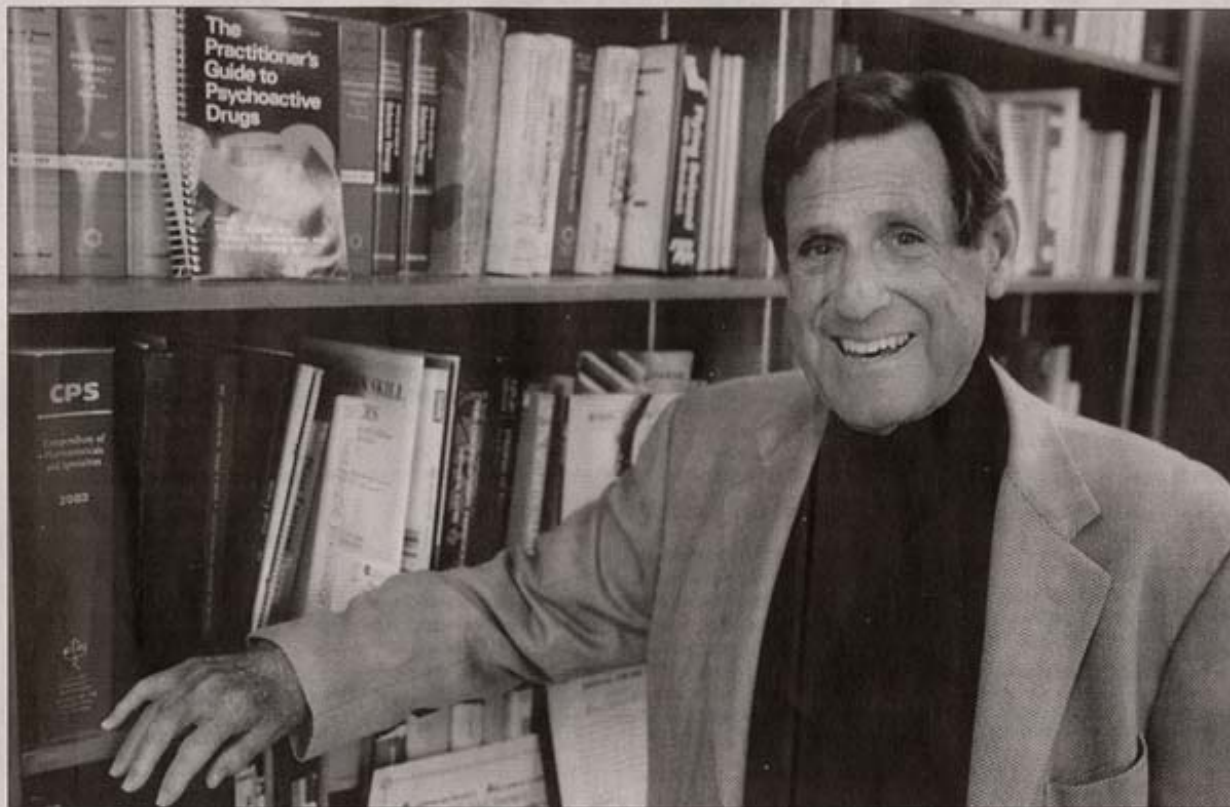
If he went to the movies with friends, as soon as the lights went out he would become anxious about how he would get out to reach the bathroom or his car. "Even if I didn't need to leave or use the bathroom, the fact that I couldn't made me petrified."

So he began to stay home, and although he was a high-achieving, clever adolescent, by the time he was ready for university, the phobia was permeating every part of his life.

"What happened with Sacha is what happens to a number of young people who are incredibly bright, going to school, being successful," said Judith Kovalski, a social worker at the Jewish General Hospital who is the in-house counsellor for Irked.

"Then a slow spiral starts. Anxiety about one thing like 'Can I drive to class?' turns into 'Will I have a panic attack and have a stomach ache?' It starts to develop a spiral built on fear and more fear."

Fear is the operative term when describing agoraphobia, says clinical psychologist Michael Spevack, director of the cognitive behaviour therapy clinic at the Queen Elizabeth



RICHARD ARLESS JR., THE GAZETTE

Knowing there is a panic threshold and looking for ways to avoid stressors are important in understanding how to treat panic attacks, says Michael Spevack, a clinical psychologist.

Health Complex. "Agoraphobia is a pattern of avoidance," he said, "fear of having a panic attack in any place that you don't feel safe."

The problem is, an agoraphobe often doesn't feel safe anywhere. "These are places outside of familiar circumstances, or with someone they don't trust, or where they might have had a panic attack in the past," he said.

"More often than not, people will tell you 'it's not the place that I'm afraid of, it's that I associate a higher probability with the place,'" Spevack said. "It's the panic attack they're afraid of."

So in the case of Vais, according to Kovalski, "you have a brilliant young man, well read, but who's paralyzed by his own mind."

What Vais finally managed to

do was find a therapist he could trust, someone he could break down in front of, someone who could disagree with him and not hurt his feelings. He began to take anti-depressants, though he was terrified they would make him numb to the world around him.

He felt great pride, he wrote in his email, when he managed to write some irate letters to a magazine that had criticized the use of anti-depressants.

"I remember feeling relieved I still had the urge and the drive to fight for things I believe in."

Because of extreme anxiety, he gave up university in 2003 with just seven courses remaining in Communications and Cultural Studies. After a year off, and with therapy and anti-depressants, plus the support of a new love and help from Concordia's Office for Students with

Disabilities, he got through.

"I'm so glad that I got my degree, though at the time I thought it would kill me. I was waking up feeling sad, and panicky, and exhausted, and hopeless, and inadequate, and then I was going to class and pretending to be 'normal.'"

Now, with Irked, he is bringing that fight, that sense of camaraderie of the broken spirit, to others. It started on his last day of classes, when he managed to ask some impressive questions of a guest speaker and followed up with a group email to his classmates launching the idea of a magazine.

A few weeks later, with Kovalski and Paul Aflalo, a filmmaker and Web page designer on board, Irked was born. As usual, Vais has agonized over all the elements, like the implications of thrusting his medical history

into cyberspace.

"I was, and am, absolutely terrified that my confessions will render me unemployable," he wrote, "but then I remind myself, 'Hey, I was unemployable before!'"

What matters with Irked, Vais wrote, is that he gets to test his theory – and the mission statement of the magazine – that people improve when they know someone is paying attention.

"I also get to provide people with a safe place to tell their stories, in whatever way, shape or form they need."

You can check out Irked magazine at www.irkedmagazine.com. For more information, email sacha@irkedmagazine.com or call (514) 594-6136.

dnebenzahl@
thegazette.canwest.com

PANIC Anticipating an attack can raise the level of anxiety

CONTINUED FROM D1

The anticipation of an attack only serves to raise the level of anxiety.

Research shows that, like other anxiety disorders, 80 per cent of agoraphobes are women, said Spevack, who is director of the Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Clinic at the Queen Elizabeth Health Complex.

There are several ways panic manifests in people, Spevack said. First, there are those who believe the panic attack either is, or could cause, a serious medical problem or even death.

"When they feel their hearts pounding, they worry about heart attacks. When their lips become numb from hyperventilating, they think they're having a stroke."

This is the type of person who

most often goes to the hospital emergency department complaining of chest pain.

The second group is psychological, people who feel being out of control is an indication that they're losing their sanity. "They're as terrified as the first group, but behave differently," Spevack said. "They don't want to go to hospital; they're silent but terrified."

People in the third category experience panic as a sign of social catastrophe, fearing it will cause them to appear to others in the supermarket, she begins to feel odd; her face is flushed, her legs feel weak, she starts to feel woozy.

"We understand that panic is a threshold phenomenon," he said, "meaning, if you can imagine, there is a line that your

stress level will have to cross. When you cross that line, if you're genetically predisposed, then you'll have a panic attack."

The line can be something like this: A woman with a new colicky baby and losing sleep because of it, has been dealing with an intrusive and judgmental mother-in-law who has come to stay.

Then her husband says there's some talk about cut-backs at work and even though she thinks she's coping well, one day waiting at the checkout in the supermarket, she begins to feel odd; her face is flushed, her legs feel weak, she starts to feel woozy.

"She was terrified, but it didn't occur to her that this was a physical manifestation of a psychological phenomenon," Spevack said. "She had been coping,

ing, but even a stray thought when she was rushed or tired, was just enough to push her over that threshold."

Sometimes, the stress of worrying about the next panic attack can be the cause of one, he said. "Hypervigilance, lack of confidence, patterns of avoidance can be enormously stressful."

Knowing there is a panic threshold and looking for ways to avoid stressors are important in understanding how to treat attacks and, ultimately, the burden of agoraphobia, Spevack said. In the new mother's case, when the baby slept better, the mother-in-law had gone and the work situation was settled, her panic attacks ended.

"One can learn not to be afraid of the feelings associated with panic," he said. They learn to tell themselves that the feel-

ings of panic are just symptoms, and to relax and breathe deeply.

With the proper relaxation exercise, Spevack says, 40 per cent of people are able to lower their threshold enough that they will never have another panic attack.

When control is learned, then it's possible for the person who once experienced panic attacks or even agoraphobia to seek out the sources of anxiety and learn that they can be handled.

Anti-depressants can be used to block the progression of panic, he says, although psychological intervention is needed to ensure the attacks don't return.

National Mental Health Week runs until Sunday. For more information, visit www.cmha.ca

DONNA NEBENZAHL

Testimonials

“Congrats on Irked! Thanks for providing a creative waterless brain sani-cleaner for pent-up anger.”

— Hal Newman, Managing Editor of www.bigmedicine.ca

“I checked out your site. I really like what you do.”

— Ilona Dougherty, Executive Director of www.apathyisboring.com

“I think [Irked is] a magazine that will be something far, far more than you could have dreamed. There is unseen hunger in others, like me, for something real. In what I have read so far, perhaps Irked will help satisfy that hunger.”

— Debbie RedWine, Founder and Editor of www.reachingupforair.com

“I teach an undergrad class at McGill called Media, Technology & Education. I just found out about your terrific website and would like to invite you to guest speak this Friday morning, if you are free. We are discussing body image in the media and I think we could do something very cool.”

— Anita Nowak, Media Studies Professor at Mcgill University

THANKS FOR YOUR INTEREST!

GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR STORY!

For more visit: www.IrkedMagazine.com

or contact: sacha@irkedmagazine.com