

# The New York Post Gets Its Own Tabloid Scandal

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The New York *Post* was rocked Tuesday morning by a sexual-harassment lawsuit filed by Michelle Gottself, the former digital editor-in-chief who was quietly fired last week after more than two decades at the paper. For days, staff had been gossiping about why she got canned: Keith Poole, who runs the entire paper, didn't send a staffwide note announcing her departure until today, half an hour after the lawsuit stunned staff.

Gottself alleges that in 2015 she was “sexually propositioned” by Col Allan, the notoriously brash editor who ran the tabloid for many years. The suit says Gottself complained and that Allan was let go as a result, but the *Post* and owner Rupert Murdoch brought him back a few years later when he allegedly bullied her. The suit names Allan, the *Post*, its parent company News Corporation, and Poole as defendants. A News Corp. spokesperson said in a statement: “Any suggestion of wrongdoing related to the management changes announced today is meritless.” Allan, who is no longer with the paper, did not immediately return requests for comment.

Gottself's suit describes years of sexual harassment by Allan, such as hovering too close, asking her out to drinks, and asking about her sex life when the two were alone. It culminated one day at a bar with him allegedly telling her, “We should sleep together.” Gottself says she rejected him and then he got nasty: “On one occasion, he ripped up a list of stories that Mr. [sic] Gottself had prepared and screamed at her to ‘get the fuck out,’” according to the lawsuit. After she reported Allan to higher-ups, he was forced to resign, but the *Post*, and “especially Mr. Murdoch, did all they could to protect Mr. Allan's reputation,” saying he chose to retire.

In early 2019, Allan returned to the paper as a consultant, but acted as de facto editor. “When Col was brought back, most reporters were cringing because they thought his main mission was to make the *Post* Trumpier, almost to Foxify it,” said one longtime employee. According to the lawsuit, eventually Allan began telling Gottself what to do, such as directing her to “get rid of” a story about E. Jean Carroll, who had accused Donald Trump of sexual assault. When Allan initially returned, Gottself was told she wouldn't have to deal with him, according to sources familiar. But it wasn't so.

“If he had an issue with a story or wanted it to grow, he'd email Michelle, and Michelle would forward that email to the editors, and the editors would forward that email to reporters,” says one reporter at the *Post*, “so we always saw that Col was still talking to Michelle and directing her and giving her orders, after he came back when he was allegedly not supposed to be

directing things to her.” An editor at the *Post* said Gotthelf acted as a buffer between staffers and Allan, trying “to keep everybody on task.” “Meanwhile, there were a lot of things going on behind the scenes.”

There had long been rumors that Allan departed in 2016 because of sexual harassment. “When Col left suddenly, there was a suspicion, but I didn’t necessarily know it was about Michelle,” says the longtime Postie. Gotthelf had told a few people that Allan had propositioned her, but it was by no means an open secret.

A hard-charging Aussie and longtime Murdoch lieutenant, Allan has a rough reputation. Gotthelf’s suit claims he would use words about women such as “skanks” and called one reporter a “sneaky lesbian.” A former reporter at the *Post* isn’t surprised to hear such claims. “I’ve heard him make sexist remarks before,” she said of Allan. “He made a joke to one of the female editors that women can’t drive and I heard it. I saw her face and her reaction was not pleased. I remember hearing it and being disgusted.”

A current editor said before they started at the paper, they thought Allan sounded like “a cartoon that had been made up by media outlets like Gawker.com. And then in my brief experience with him, I was like, ‘Oh my God, this dude is real, and absolutely belligerent.’”

Luis Rendon, a senior designer who left the *Post* last week, remembers Allan yelling at him in 2019 while he took a private call in an adjacent office with glass doors. He says Allan came in, pointed at him, and said, “I’m right next door here and you’re yelling into the wall ... Is this your office?” (Rendon shared a recording with *New York*.) When Rendon later tried to apologize, he says Allan pointed at him and said: “Get the fuck out of here. I don’t want to see you again.” Rendon called him “pure evil and pure malice.”

Gotthelf was also a divisive figure, respected and loathed by current and former Posties. “The Eva Braun of city editors,” as one longtime employee referred to her, she was a central figure responsible for ramming many of the dodgy Hunter Biden stories into the paper, which made many reporters in the newsroom uncomfortable. Says one: “Just seeing the initials ‘MG’ pop up in a Gmail from your boss was enough to send shivers down your spine. She ruled the newsroom with an iron fist. It’s the classic tale of how bullies bully — she had been bullied by Col all those years, and then bullied her way to the top.”

But others were more sympathetic, calling her a decisive, direct boss who championed her staff while doing what was necessary to survive in a tough environment. “She came from a long line of yellers,” said one former manager. “I think she was happy to be a woman in charge and needed to put her balls on the table.”

One former reporter remembers how the walls in Gotthelf’s office were pink — a rare touch of femininity in a “male-centric, super-machismo” workplace. “She had to be terrifying,” the former reporter said. “As a woman, she was in an impossible position. Every man there was

ten times worse. I think she's really fucking brilliant." The former reporter added that Gotthelf kept young female reporters away from Allan.

The suit takes umbrage with how Poole, who was brought over from Murdoch's U.K. *Sun*, hopscotched over Gotthelf and then sent her packing. While the newsroom is shocked at the manner of her exit, most people at the Murdoch rag thought her days were numbered anyhow. "From the minute Keith Poole arrived, I always thought Michelle was the most vulnerable," says one of the longtime employees, "because she was the digital head, and he was being brought in for his digital expertise."

Cindy Adams, who jokes that she's been at the *Post* since Alexander Hamilton founded it, says the same: "One of the reasons — *one* of the many reasons — Keith was brought in is because of his knowledge of digital. That's what he wanted to improve."