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Nieman Reports

TO PROMOTE AND ELEVATE THE STANDARDS OF JOURNALISM

Journalism is storytelling with a purpose. That purpose is to provide people with information they need to understand the world.

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connect the
classroom to the
newsroom?



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Medill journalism students put their multimedia skills to work covering the 2012 presidential election

Cover text from the 2001 (top) and 2014 (bottom) editions of "The Elements of Journalism." An excerpt from the new edition, page 48

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Journalism education has come to the same ominous inflection point that journalism itself has reached—and the stakes are just as high. Yet there are hopeful signs as educators and editors are joining forces to accomplish what neither can do so easily on their own—give students real-world reporting experiences and provide daily and in-depth news coverage.

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Missing the Story

What Nigeria's kidnapping crisis says about awareness versus understanding

Even from a country generating waves of extreme news—accounts of Africa's highest GDP alongside stories of terrorism—the reports of the schoolhouse kidnappings were shocking. About 300 Nigerian schoolgirls had been abducted from their dormitories by violent extremists and were being held in a remote forest, seemingly beyond rescue.

It took international media some days before focusing on the story of the abductions, but when a Nigerian's plaintive Twitter hashtag—#BringBackOurGirls—went viral, the tragic news was everywhere. The phrase was tweeted millions of times. One photo of a forlorn-looking first lady Michelle Obama holding a sign of the hashtag was retweeted more than 58,000 times.

But the story of how an explosive social media effort redirected the world's attention to a corner of the globe is also the story of how awareness is a slim substitute for understanding. What began as a Nigerian campaign aimed at local government incompetence was stretched to enfold all manner of worthy agendas, including fundraising efforts to secure books or uniforms for Nigerian schoolgirls—just one of the targets of Boko Haram, the kidnapers who seek to establish an Islamic state and end Western education in Nigeria.

Fairly quickly, the international discussion was directed by a hashtag activism that successfully overtook more modest journalistic efforts.

In trying to parse the events, I e-mailed Ethan Zuckerman, director of the MIT Center for Civic Media and author of "Rewire," an examination of the challenges of harnessing the Internet to build international engagement. He wrote back from Nairobi, where he was doing fieldwork, and said that what began as a local Nigerian effort to draw attention to the incompetence of President Goodluck Jonathan's government became "a more complicated dialogue" when #BringBackOurGirls began trending



AFP PHOTO/BOKO HARAM

The kidnapping of Nigerian schoolgirls brought a global response, yet little nuance

Journalists should not settle for the facile when deeper stories are waiting to be reported

on Twitter in the U.S. and Europe.

"Africa is usually a problem for American readers to fix, to donate to, to support," Zuckerman wrote me. "In a Nigerian context, Bring Back Our Girls is a political demand, asking for a higher degree of competence and engagement from an often inept government. The Nigerian campaign wanted international attention but perhaps not the international input later offered."

On Mother's Day morning, I biked to Cambridge Common where a concerned Harvard graduate student had organized a "Bring Back Our Girls" rally. A bright sun and free coffee warmed the small crowd.

Many of those who gathered were wearing red, the color that had come to symbolize the gathering international protests. "We need to do something and be part of that larger conversation that is happening globally," an organizer explained. She introduced the first speaker, a lawyer from Nigeria who said it was important to remember that there were places where a library was a "luxury."

I spotted Ameto Akpe, a 2014 Nieman Fellow and gifted Nigerian journalist who has written about systemic corruption in her country. I waved to her and we sat next to each other on a stone bench. "Nothing in Nigeria is as it seems, absolutely nothing," she said. "But this overly simplified story seems to suit a Western audience."

As the speeches continued, Ameto patiently told the nuanced history of Boko Haram's radical, violent turn. She described an unlikely galvanizing moment: In 2009, when police stopped Boko Haram members riding in a funeral procession for defying

a motorcycle helmet law, the mourners interpreted it as a provocation. Weeks of armed clashes between Boko Haram and the Nigerian military followed, with each side claiming the other side fired the first shot. The clashes ended when Boko Haram's founder, in police custody, was fatally shot.

Ameto was dismayed by the “misinformation through oversimplification” she felt characterized much of the news coverage and, consequently, world reaction. Corruption, political ineptitude, and incompetent leadership loom large in Nigeria and these problems need to be addressed locally. Even the international discussion of Boko Haram as “foreign Islamic terrorists,” she said, fit a fearful Western narrative and had the unwelcome effect of absolving the local Nigerian government of its primary role in this evolving tragedy.

“Call them what they are,” Ameto said of the captors: “Thugs.” She said she worried that the story had become “hijacked” by people of good intent who, in a rush to raise awareness, had redirected the focus to well-meaning but ultimately ineffective actions, while the underlying problems of poverty, corruption and an impotent government were sidelined. “Buying books has nothing to do with this,” she said.

The emotional pull of the kidnapping story was undeniable and the #BringBackOurGirls social media movement understandably appealed to distant observers aching to respond—with rallies, donations, tweets. But journalists should not settle for the facile when deeper and more complex stories about political and economic alienation are waiting to be reported.

“We have criticized Western journalists for not reporting on us properly but we are not doing the job of telling our own stories,” Ameto continued. “Every Nigerian knows what is happening, and I blame both individual journalists and the media houses for political coverage that is character based and not deep enough.”

At the rally that morning, a new speaker talked about efforts to buy clothing for Nigerian schoolgirls. Ameto shook her head. “We don’t need an emotional response,” she said. “We need an intelligent response.”



Ameto

Questions of Care

Three awards, administered by the Nieman Foundation, went to work that exposed practices at hospitals in Nevada, Louisiana, Wisconsin and across the country that affected their most vulnerable patients.

2013 WORTH BINGHAM PRIZE FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

The Sacramento Bee

“Nevada Patient Busing”



Hubert

Lead reporters Cynthia Hubert and Phillip Reese, photographer Renee Byer, graphic artist Nathaniel Levine, researcher Pete Basofin, presentation editor Robert Casey, and editor Deborah Anderluh. Over the course of five years, Rawson-Neal Psychiatric Hospital in Las Vegas transported more than 1,500 mentally ill patients out of Nevada—a third of them to California and at least one to each of the lower



Reese

48 states—often without treatment plans or housing in place. The series led to a \$30 million increase in funding for mental health care in Nevada.

2013 TAYLOR FAMILY AWARD FOR FAIRNESS IN NEWSPAPERS

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

“Deadly Delays”



Johnson

Reporters Mark Johnson, Ellen Gabler, and John Fauber, news applications developer Allan James Vestal, photojournalist Kristyna Wentz-Graff, copy editors Jennifer Steele and Karen Samelson, graphics artist Lou Saldivar, designer Nick Lujero and interactive designer Emily Yount. Thousands of hospitals across the U.S. delayed testing newborn blood samples, causing doctors to miss easily treatable but dangerous



Gabler

conditions in infants. The series led to changes in federal law and the establishment of new safeguards at hospitals.

Finalists: Tampa Bay Times and the Center for Investigative Reporting, “America’s Worst Charities”; The Wall Street Journal, “Trials: A Desperate Fight to Save Kids and Change Science”

2014 J. ANTHONY LUKAS PRIZE PROJECT

J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize

Sheri Fink, “Five Days at Memorial: Life and Death in a Storm-Ravaged Hospital” (Crown)



Fink

Decisions made at a New Orleans hospital in the days after Hurricane Katrina are explored. Finalist: Jonathan M. Katz, “The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster” (Palgrave MacMillan)

Mark Lynton History Prize

Jill Lepore, “Book of Ages: The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin” (Alfred A. Knopf)



Lepore

This biography of the youngest sister of Benjamin Franklin provides a fresh perspective on the lives of women in early America. Finalist: Christopher Clark, “The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914” (HarperCollins)

J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award

Adrienne Berard, “When Yellow was Black: The Untold Story of the First Fight for Desegregation in Southern Schools” (Beacon Press)



Berard

Thirty years before Brown v. Board of Education, a Chinese family and their two young daughters fought to break through the color line at a Mississippi school. Finalist: Yochi J. Dreazen, “The Invisible Front: Love and Loss in an Era of Endless War” (Crown)

On July 15, Little, Brown will publish last year’s Work-in-Progress Award winner, “Factory Man: How One Furniture Maker Battled Offshoring, Stayed Local—and Helped Save an American Town,” by Beth Macy, a 2010 Nieman Fellow.

PHOTOS BY LISA ABITBOL AND LEISE JONES

The Joy of Scrolling

BuzzFeed editor in chief Ben Smith on the challenge of competing with every other piece of content on the Web

omg

When Ben Smith joined BuzzFeed as editor in chief in 2012, the site was better known for cute cat videos and fun lists than for serious journalism. Over the past two years, he's hired more than 150 reporters and editors; the site now covers politics and business and has an investigative reporting team. It now attracts 130 million monthly unique visitors.

Before arriving at BuzzFeed, Smith was a well-established political reporter. He was an early hire at Politico and creator of some of the earliest New York City politics blogs, including the *Politicker*, which he started for the *New York Observer* in 2004. He began his career at *The Indianapolis Star* before moving to Latvia and reporting for the European edition of *The Wall Street Journal*.

Smith was interviewed by 2014 Nieman Fellow Susie Banikarim during a visit to Lippmann House earlier this year. Edited excerpts:

On attracting readers

Our view is that the bar is very high to do something that's compelling enough to have someone actively decide to share it, not just to have somebody wander past page A7 and glance at it because that's the newspaper that landed on their door. A lot of editors in the last decade learned that, "Oh, the Internet is this trick." You can get the tech guys to SEO [search engine optimize] your stuff. Then you can get traffic. That's exactly the wrong lesson for what turned out to be the next era, which was social, where you really can't trick people into sharing things. They have to really like it and be proud to share it. Whether it's a more traditional form of a story or a totally new one like a quiz, that basic principle holds.



"Most things on the Web are too long," BuzzFeed's Ben Smith tells Susie Banikarim

JONATHAN SEITZ

On Twitter followers

Somebody at a big newspaper told me that he sees his Twitter account as his helicopter on the roof. If management ever gets in his face too much, it's this piece of leverage, essentially, that he can always threaten to leave, and take it with him.

I do think there's clearly been this shift in power from news organizations to reporters and to individual reporters. I don't love the word "brand." I'm not sure what it means. Brands can rise and fall very fast for individuals or companies. The incredibly stressful fact that you're only as good as your last story is as true as ever, even if you have a lot of Twitter followers.

On the wire story

One challenge is figuring out what replaces the wire story as the way breaking news gets communicated because no one reads

wire stories, no one shares wire stories. The form was created for this very specific reason that has to do with newspapers, and cutting from the bottom. It's this very wooden form. You put nine things in the first sentence, you summarize the story in the second sentence, then you have a random quote that restates, not as eloquently, the thing you just said. Then you have a paragraph that tells you things you already knew, and then you just have everything else in order of importance. That's a weird way to tell a story. One thing we think about a lot is what replaces that. I think it's something more visual, more emotionally driven, maybe funny sometimes, when it's possible to be funny about the subject. Certainly something that pulls in all the media that you're talking about—images, videos, and, increasingly, tweets and status updates that are part of the story.

fail

On fluff vs. news

I think mostly everybody, except sociopaths, cares about cute animals and most people want to know what's going on in the world. I think you don't get stupider when you go pat the animal as it walks by. We don't view it as we want to bake some spinach into the brownies. We feel like most of our readers want to know what's going on in the world, but also more people are going to read about Beyoncé than about advances in transgender rights anywhere.

On finding the right audience

The way we look at analytics is that each story has a potential audience, and if it's a story about Ukraine, or a story about lobbying in D.C., there may be tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people who, in an ideal world, will share and read that story. If it's a feature about rebuilding a house in Detroit, there may be millions. If it's a list of cute animals, there might be tens of millions.

It's an unscientific sense of "what's the possible audience for this piece, and let's try to hit that whole audience."

It's a success if Chris Geidner gets a scoop on what the House is doing on the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, if 5,000 people read it and share it. That's a success, whereas if 50 people read it, it's probably not.

On new beats

One advantage of starting from scratch is you can rethink beat structures. Gay rights is this huge story of the last 10 years, but it's covered as a B-list beat in a lot of publications, just because it always has been. For us, it's very much a frontline beat and we're able to hire the best reporters who really own that beat because you want to be in a place that's taking it seriously, not in a place where it's a secondary beat.

For international coverage, there are these traditional, regional beats that don't always make sense.

Partly because of the way communication has changed, there are thematic beats.

Newspapers, like The Wall Street Journal in particular, have always had great thematic beats. We have a global gay rights beat and a global women's rights beat that play on a conversation and a universe of sourcing in a way that makes a lot of sense.

On story length

I think things should be as short as they can possibly be. I think that's always been true.

Most things on the Web are too long. It's a really great crutch for editors that you can say this four-paragraph digression about your grandmother is beautiful, but we just got an ad, and it doesn't fit in the column so we have to cut it.

It's harder for the editor to say, "This is really self-indulgent and lame." Long, narrative features on the Web got a bad name, in part, because the places

"We definitely see a lot of readers for deeply reported, emotionally compelling, narrative stuff"

that traditionally do them wonderfully, like The New Yorker, did a horrible job putting them online with these weird page breaks.

The experience of scrolling is really nice. I like reading long things on my phone. You don't have to turn pages. We see people actually spend a little more time on those stories on mobile than on desktop.

On the flip side, you often had people putting things online that had been spiked or that good writers hadn't been able to sell to a magazine so, basically, they're not as good.

Editing is really important for stories like that, and cutting is important. The term "long-form" gets attached to self-indulgent, unedited stuff that often could be 6,000 words rather than 9,000 words.

I think the thing there's maybe not room for is the 900-word daily story, but we definitely see a lot of readers for deeply reported, emotionally compelling, great narrative stuff.

LOL

wtf

trashy

On video

I've never been a big fan of video for news. I think text is a great way to communicate information. A guy talking at a screen is not as good. Our video guy Ze Frank is a celebrity if you're an Internet geek of a certain era. He was a very early digital video guy who invented the vlog, the camera pointed right at your face, and the quick cuts, and the voice. A little pre-YouTube. He had this show in '06, '07 called "The Show."

He was getting 40,000, 50,000 views a day, which was a huge number particularly then but also now. He's been experimenting ever since. Having a background in TV doesn't tell you that much about what people want to watch and share online.

One thing is Ze's videos are often very short. Three, four minutes is long-form. He's done these series of true facts videos about various animals. They're really weird and funny and get hundreds of thousands of views. It's totally unrecognizable. It's not a descendent of TV.

On guilty pleasures

When The New York Times launched its Styles section in the '70s, people were horrified. It was done for advertising reasons and was a huge commercial success. I think different generations have different kinds of leisure content, and maybe people who read The New York Times want to read questionable trend pieces in the Styles section, or features in the Real Estate section about \$9 million mansions in Venice that you might want to buy.

People of my generation, maybe, are more interested in Instagrams of cats. It's actually really hard to make a great list of Instagrams of cats. You'd be surprised. Go ahead and try to do one that gets a million views. It's a very competitive space.



The full video and transcript of Ben Smith's talk are online at nieman.harvard.edu/bsmith



ABC PHOTO ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Barnabas Collins, in the 1960s soap opera “Dark Shadows,” may have been the first conflicted vampire in popular culture

Heart of Darkness

Margot Adler, NF '82, ponders the connections among vampires, Wall Street, and moral complicity

Right about the time that my late husband was diagnosed with terminal stomach cancer, I started obsessing on vampire novels. There I was, sitting by my husband’s bedside, pondering mortality, and reading these novels—270 by the end.

A couple of months into this, I started asking larger questions: Why have vampires had such traction in our culture? Why had Hollywood spent \$7 billion over a couple of years on vampire films and television shows? My exploration resulted in my book: “Vampires Are Us: Understanding Our Love Affair with the Immortal Dark Side,” published by Weiser in February. What I now understand is that underneath the sexual glamour of modern vampires is an exploration of morality, power and its abuses.

While I was looking into this, I noticed

Marx and Engels used “vampire” to describe the capitalist class

how often vampires were used as images in the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations I was reporting on. I also noticed that journalists writing about the economic crisis often used vampire imagery. The Huffington Post described a piece of new data as “like a single ray of sunlight—it’s already enough to make the vampires scream.” I saw a cartoon of someone putting a stake in the heart of a Wall Street trader. Voltaire wrote that vampires were not real, but there were men of business “who sucked the blood of the people in broad daylight.”

And Marx and Engels both used the word “vampire” to describe the capitalist class.

Modern vampire novels are often about power and strategy. One day, I came across a professor who said, “You know, almost every good vampire film and novel asks this question: Now that we are at the top of the food chain, do we treat humans as cattle, or, since we were once human, do we treat them with respect?” How different is that, she said, than the questions we face every day. How do we treat someone with less money, power and status? Does might make right?

By the end of my four-year obsession, I decided that vampires simply reflect the fears and concerns of any age. And today’s vampires, from the Cullens in “Twilight” to Angel and Spike in “Buffy,” are struggling to be moral despite being predators. As are we. Our struggle is over our complicity in sucking the lifeblood out of the planet. The first truly conflicted vampire was Barnabas in “Dark Shadows,” who appeared right before we first saw the earth from space. We saw, for the first time, our vulnerability, responsibility and moral complicity.

From Chile, With Thanks

*Paula Molina, NF '13,
on finding local stories
of global interest*

My Nieman year gave me a strong sense of the truly globalized conversation in which we can all take part. When I returned to Chile, as the host of a radio program in Santiago and a correspondent for the BBC, I wanted to bridge divides, to turn radio stories into online narratives, and to turn local news into stories of universal interest. In *The Herald* in Glasgow, Scotland, I found a tale that connected Santiago to East Kilbride.

In that Scottish town, workers at the Rolls Royce factory risked their livelihoods to stand in solidarity with Chile after the military coup in 1973. For religious reasons,



FELIPE BUSTOS SIERRA, FROM THE FILM "NAE PASARAN"

A story in a Scottish paper about Bob Fulton resonated with Chilean citizens

Bob Fulton refused to repair the engines of Chilean warplanes that had bombed the presidential palace. The union followed his lead, extending Fulton's refusal throughout the factory. Few, if any, Chileans knew about this show of solidarity.

Four decades later, Fulton, now 90, took my Skype call. In a halting voice, he told me what had inspired him to help a country he

had never visited: "Workers like me, human beings like me, were being killed. That drove me to say no." My story was published in Spanish on the BBC Mundo website, and I broadcast it on my radio program. It was widely shared, and many Chileans thanked Bob and his fellow workers. "Paint your village and you'll paint the whole world." It's an old saying and still true.

Covering the Home Front

In a speech to the U.S. delegation to the U.N., Sangar Rahimi, NF '14, laid out the challenges facing Afghan journalists as the U.S. prepares to leave

I started working in the media with the hope of bringing change. My main hope was to help my people understand their rights and obligations as citizens, to monitor the government's performance, and hold accountable the wrongdoers.

I've been trained in a newsroom with brilliant New York Times foreign correspondents, and I've had the Times's support. Despite these privileges, I've often received serious threats from the Taliban, and a few times I have been subjected to interrogation and intimidation. At times, the government has threatened to prosecute me for allegedly defaming senior officials. We often had to withhold our names from the byline of a story if the topic concerned the crimes of the

*Journalists reporting
from the provinces need
steadfast support*

Taliban, warlords or narcotic smugglers. Sometimes, after a controversial story is published, we turn off our phones and go underground for a few days to avoid being targeted for reprisal.

As the U.S. government and its Western allies draw down their military commitment in Afghanistan, those efforts are in doubt. The Afghan government is not strong enough to protect the achievements of the past decade of free media

in Afghanistan. Personally, it would be almost impossible to work as a journalist in Afghanistan if I had to work under the pressure and conditions my fellow Afghan journalists face. In particular, journalists reporting from the provinces or working with Western media outlets, still need the international community's support. To do our jobs, we need the continuing support of the Committee to Protect Journalists and other journalists' rights agencies. The Western journalists currently based in Afghanistan will eventually leave the country as the transition process continues, and it is the responsibility of Afghan journalists to provide the world with quality news from Afghanistan.

Form follows function.

*The epic free-verse poem
as a vehicle for
narrative nonfiction*

By Russ Rymer

Just what that axiom means, applied to journalism, was revealed to me by a man named Carl Newton, city editor of The Atlanta Journal when I arrived for my first newspaper job in 1971. Newton was a chain-smoking former ball-turret gunner, who, perhaps as a consequence of his World War II service, was adept at both offense and defense.

His top desk drawer held a .38 caliber revolver, which he signed out to reporters heading into unpredictable interviews. In the newsroom, he was militant protector of the stylebook against any intrusion of ostentatious erudition. I witnessed him shame a reporter for trying to slip the word “apotheosis” into a family newspaper, and (another time) hurl across the room a Faulkner novel he was reading between deadlines when he encountered the abomination of a sentence longer than a page. He introduced me to the divided soul of journalists.

As invasive as we are in our reporting, as much as we live by the ethic of incursion and trespass, the bursting



Stockholm was the scene of a murder that became a national (and writer's) obsession

of conventions and shibboleths, in our writing we are by tradition hidebound conservatives, guardians of the temple of fact. Our marauding and defending sides are integral: Breaking down walls requires an unbreakable hammer, and the reporter's hammer of choice is the rigor of literal accounting, uncorrupted by emotion, bias, assumption or fancy language. Our liberties on the field are redeemed by our restraint on the page.

All this begs the question, in my own current project, "Between Lilac and Witch Hazel," of why I feel compelled to tell a reported news story in the form of an epic free-verse poem. I have little doubt Carl Newton, did he know, would toss me out a window.

The story I'm composing is a staple of traditional news journalism, a murder mixed with a scandal. I stumbled on the tale in the fall of 1993 at a reception in an upstairs room in Den Gyldene Freden, a restaurant in the old city of Stockholm, where a woman described to me an event that had blossomed from a crime into a national identity crisis. A prostitute had been killed, and her dismembered body discovered in trash bags dispersed around the city. Such a murder would disturb any society hoping to call itself healthy, and Sweden, where such gruesome events are not daily fare, was troubled all the more, especially after two prominent physicians were arrested for the crime.

In Sweden's national mythology, doctors exemplify the scientific caring the virtuous state might offer to its citizens. That these paragons of rationality could be the culprits rocked the foundations of society. They were acquitted of the murder, but then a graduate student (as it turns out, the woman I met in Den Gyldene Freden) doing research among Stockholm's prostitutes produced more evidence, and the doctors were arrested again. They couldn't be retried for murder, but they were charged with the dismemberment, and, this time, convicted.

So, a good story: Sordid crime that shakes a society, mystery solved by a crusading outsider. And more: Since the society in question was committed to the

idea that a well-run country could eradicate evil in its midst and offer to an imperiled world the model of a virtuous state, the case became a referendum on the fate of nations. A line of implication could be drawn from sexual violence to nuclear Armageddon; that is, if I were smart enough to draw it.

I wasn't. I did my reporting, interviewed prosecutors, police, and other major players, and then went home and sat. I picked up the project, put it down, wrote some, tore my writing up. The story was a good one; it just wouldn't find its form. The causal links I felt to be so strong, between a woman's murder and the wounded soul of a nation, between private evil and the sweep of history, crumbled on the page like cookie dough when you forget to put the butter in.

Form follows function, and every story has its rightful shape. I knew a few shapes by that point in my writing career, which had evolved from news reporting to long-form magazine writing to longer-form nonfiction books and, finally, a novel. When it came to the Sweden story, though, even fiction's liberties didn't avail me. Mysteriously, the usual expository buttressing—argument, background and explanation—only made the story sound less plausible. The task required a different logic than any I'd ever employed. I wished I could push through my constraints, wished that some editor could arm me with a pistol of appropriate caliber to embolden me in an unpredictable writing situation. But there was no such protection, and I put the project down, until two decades later when I realized I might tell the tale in an entirely different way.

I generally know that a story is taking shape when it starts to speak, and dissociated (even nonsense) words and phrases begin compiling themselves in my



*If it took me
a while to
accept the
invitation,
I had
reason.
Poetry is
no place
to enter
undefended*

mind. With “Between Lilac and Witch Hazel,” the early phrases floating past were not just words, but rhythms, cadences. The clue to an approach was there from the start. If it took me a while to accept the invitation, I had reason. Poetry is no place to enter undefended.

Some years ago, I was inspired to pen a thank-you note to a friend of mine in rhyming tercets. My exertions earned plaudits from my friend, but a caution from his wife, a nationally prominent poet. “Don’t think this is easy,” she growled, a warning reinforced by all the poetry critics and reviewers I’ve ever read. Some of those critics reserve particular opprobrium for free verse, the style of poetry I picked to tell my story, especially when (as often) it’s done wrong. Actor (and confessed private poet) Stephen Fry nicely called the combination of amateur zeal and undisciplined verse “worthless arse drivel.”

Free verse was suggested to me partly by those early half-heard cadences, and partly, I confess, by pride: It may not be the easiest poetical form, but at least it’s not as easy to critique as more formal, codified styles. There’s no place to hide in a villanelle. Free verse also allowed me the rhetorical leeway to keep my poem enslaved to brute facts. I wanted a reported piece, with quotes and attributions. In this I didn’t have models, exactly, but I have found enablers, empyrean examples of the form I wish to attempt. W.G. Sebald’s “After Nature,” James McMichael’s “Four Good Things,” Tomas Tranströmer’s “Baltics”—not reported, not quote heavy, but long, beautiful, profound re-livings of actual events. With their encouragement, I set to work at the beginning, and quickly began to comprehend the benefits of the genre.

For one thing, the beginning didn’t begin where I thought it would, in Sweden in 1990, but 20 years earlier and half a world away, during a violence-plagued season in my own life, when I resided in the U.S. Virgin Islands. It’s a commonplace of writing that, in some observed stories, the facts are incomplete without the fact of the observer. I’d been aware, in past projects, that I hadn’t cracked the assignment until I’d confronted my own investment in the tale. Even when the lives of my earlier books’ protagonists (a wealthy black patriarch in the Jim Crow South, a girl raised without language imprisoned in a suburban Los Angeles bedroom) seemed distant

from my own, I’d always found the empathetic bridge.

The Sweden story frustrated me not because the connection between story and storyteller was too obscure, but because it was, on the surface, so obvious. My experience—being assaulted and robbed on St. Croix, having friends murdered, trying to care for a friend who’d just been raped by an intruder into our house—was the story’s missing, cohesive ingredient. But equating my own travails, however horrendous, with the violent death of a young Swedish woman edged beyond self-awareness into egoism. That is, when the equation was expressed through expository argument and explanation. A poetic

A Short History of Long Poems

Early epic poems, which typically focused on the exploits of great warriors, were intended to be read or sung aloud. More recently, writers have adapted the form for memoir, verse novels, and narrative nonfiction.

2000 B.C.

700-800 B.C.

200 B.C.-200

The Epic of Gilgamesh

(Babylon) The king of Uruk searches for immortality

Homer’s *The Iliad*

(Greece) Greeks sack Troy by means of a wooden horse



The Mahabharata

(India) Factions of an Indian clan go to war, with divine help

approach let me mine those connections less literally, allowed my experience to enter the story as metaphor, instead of monstrosity. By decoupling “literal” from “objective” (by, in fact, making literalness the enemy of objectivity) the poetic form freed me to engage a layer of story my careful prose obscured.

With that permission, the tale grew. Elements too far apart (or too tenuously connected) to be linked in a standard narrative suffered no impediment here. There was nothing to keep me from zinging, in the space of a line, from 2014 to 1970 to 1993, from Stockholm to Massachusetts to the Caribbean shore where I once lived in an abode that would become a stage for terror.

*Set on an outcrop,
cantilevered over a jagged reach of coral. As though
in mid-dive from a loom of jungle the white house leapt
at the sea. Nothing neighbored it. The road
threaded slim and careful along the empty coast
to town. For miles, the road. Town the crumble of
Frederiksted, with only the ghost of a dirt track
branching off along the way for intersection,
along the road that
limned the land like beach wrack.*

But together with the liberty to speak like that, to repeat my “along”s and throw in a “limn” (a word I distrust) with my “wrack”s, come new taboos. Connections must remain allusive or disjunctive, not spelled out. While I can jump from era to era as abruptly as I want, I find it hard to view one era from the vantage point of another, as I do so easily in prose. Foreshadowing works not well at all, and flashback little better.

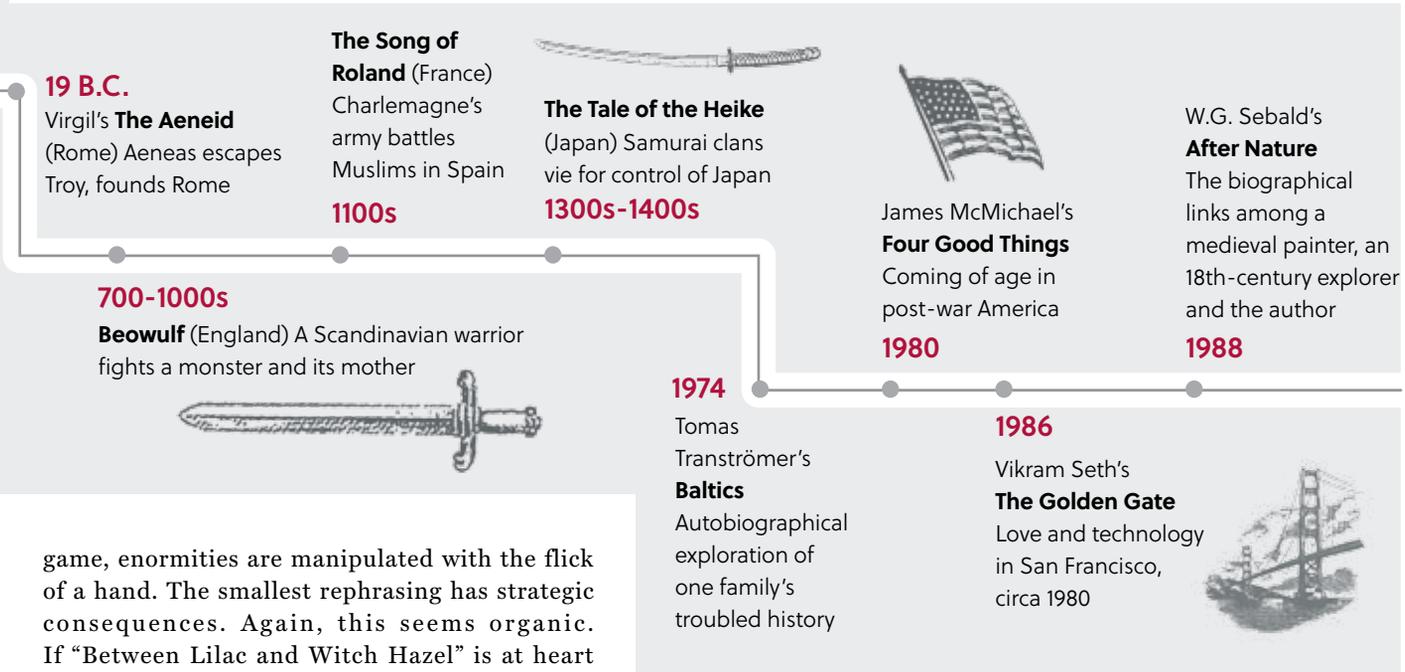
The poetic ground is by design too unstable to make a firm foundation for narrative devices that lean so far out over time. Word choice, too, has its limits. On the one hand, I can mangle or manhandle my vocabulary without incurring the comic toll such play would inflict on my prose, but the poetic requirement that one be inventive in expression is balanced by a moratorium on flashiness, a moratorium on visible exertion. Ostentatious erudition is all the more uncool.

Especially, I’m finding, because each word takes on so much extra force. Like a battle on a board

The sea he'd seen lie gentle only, that had at first seemed empty. Until with Mickey late on that initial afternoon they'd burrowed down into it and met with their almost no longer teenaged bodies still clean as augurs its iridescent schools and swarms, and sinking to where the shallows strangely heavied and a blade cold drew him downward first by the feet, he'd felt through the snorkel the sonar ping of submarines.

Thanks to this precision, the new mode, for all its strangeness, feels like a homecoming. Not because I’m a poet at heart, but a journalist. This form is as direct a telling, as the inverted pyramid structure was to the news in *The Atlanta Journal*.

However lush and runaway it might appear, the poem is spare. This may have been the cause of my long inability: Telling such a far-flung tale as standard nonfiction always involved too much verbiage, its ideas over-padded in the excelsior of explanation. The poem



game, enormities are manipulated with the flick of a hand. The smallest rephrasing has strategic consequences. Again, this seems organic. If “Between Lilac and Witch Hazel” is at heart about the connections between a local event and the great world, the equation (so impossible to state explicitly in prose) is implicit in the poem’s very structure, wherein each small word holds sway over the entirety.

In phrasing, too (in another scene from the Caribbean section of the tale, involving a group of adolescent boys), the tie between personal impression and imperial power can make a gentle appearance.

can stick to the necessities. For that reason, writing it feels not like a license, but an adherence, faithful to the form the story’s function called for. It’s just that, for the form to stay true, the writer needed to stray.



Russ Rymer has contributed to The New Yorker, Harper's, and other magazines and has authored two nonfiction books and a novel

The Core of Story

How comics can enhance reader engagement and bring new audiences to narrative nonfiction

By Erin Polgreen

Shortly after I co-founded Symbolia, a digital publication that merges comic books and journalism, I got an intriguing pitch. Reporter Sarah Mirk wanted to tell the stories of the veterans who had served at the Guantánamo Bay detention camp to help reframe the public understanding of the base and make the “image of Guantánamo become very clear and personal.”

Mirk took on this story because “media about Guantánamo focuses almost exclusively on policy discussions and the opinions of high-ranking decision-makers.” As a result, human impacts as well as the experiences of those working at the facility are “overshadowed.”

I immediately green-lit the story. Mirk instinctively understood what comic book formats can do for journalism. The form makes heady topics intimate and relevant. Issues that are far away become more personal to the reader. In a world of information overload, beautifully crafted, hand-illustrated comics provide clarity and emotional resonance.

Mirk worked with artist Lucy Bellwood to merge subtle audio, looped animations, and sequential visual narratives in a profile of two Navy veterans. The resulting piece, “Declassified,” is one of the most successful stories from our first year of publishing.

“Declassified” has been syndicated at human-interest journalism outlet Narratively, excerpted at political newsblog Think Progress, distributed as a print minicomic, and translated into French for a forthcoming issue of Swiss start-up Sept.

The work is a powerful case study in how comic books can be successfully used to

bring new readers into complex issues. As journalism organizations try to connect with new audiences and innovate online, comic book narratives can work across platforms, engage younger, more visually oriented readers, and transcend cultural borders.

Comics are certainly popular. Graphic novels—the popular term for book-length comics—are one of the fastest growing offerings in contemporary publishing and have been growing in popularity since at least 2008. Amazon recently scooped up digital comics publisher Comixology.

Looking at the print spectrum, BookScan’s 2013 report, which covers about 85 percent of book store sales (not including libraries or comic book stores and few big box stores), shows a nearly 4 percent growth in the number of comic books sold in 2013 and close to 7 percent growth in total revenue. Print sales overall have been shrinking since 2008, according to the 2013 annual report from PriceWaterhouseCoopers.

But why do comics work so well? The secret is in how users consume the content. Comic books make it possible to understand more—and do it faster. Comics theorist and cartoonist Scott McCloud calls it “amplification through simplification,” in which the simplified drawing pares down an image to its “essential meaning.”

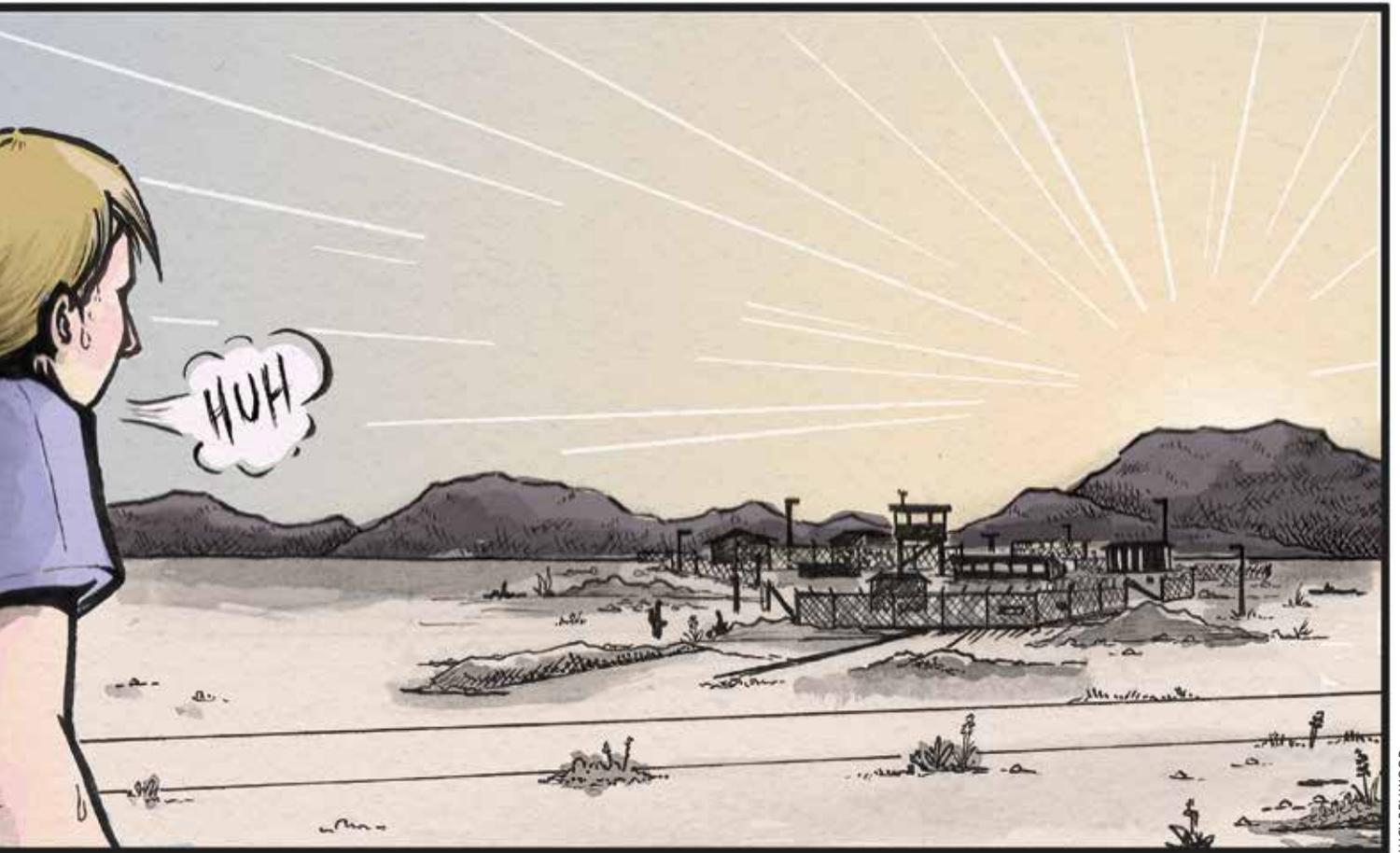
This kind of iconic illustration focuses attention on specific ideas and emotions in a process of highly disciplined editorial decision-making. Each stroke of the pen imparts instant meaning because the images are essential and also universal. A few furrows on a character’s brow convey worry. A comic about a veteran’s experiences in Guantánamo Bay becomes a story about a woman that we relate to on an emotional level because we infer



Comics like Symbolia’s “Declassified” give readers a personal understanding of a story that may feel remote from daily life

complex meaning quickly from the artist’s rendering.

Neuroscientific research supports what narrative nonfiction storytellers instinctively know: Stories with clear, emotionally evocative dramatic arcs are most effective at keeping readers engaged. These stories cause the body to produce chemicals including cortisol, which focuses attention, as well as oxytocin, which is associated with empathy. They also light up areas of the brain linked to understanding others. Neil Cohn of the University of California



San Diego, who has been studying comics for more than 10 years, argues that comics can increase overall comprehension as well. “Studies for several decades now have shown that using works written in these visual languages in educational contexts can be helpful for learning,” Cohn says. “The evidence is fairly clear that sequential images (usually plus text) are an effective teaching tool.”

Comics are “great for condensing and coloring stories,” says Roxanne Palmer, who created the story about Ukraine’s YanukovychLeaks investigative reporting project on the following pages. (For the animated version, visit nieman.harvard.edu/comic.) “You can combine the visu-

al eye candy of a chart with the spine of narrative. You can highlight the humanity of a subject by making their words come out of a face rather than just attached to a name on the page.”

Though comics use simple lines and sparse prose to tell a story, they are anything but simplistic. The best-selling works of Joe Sacco, Marjane Satrapi, Art Spiegelman, and Alison Bechdel contain numerous examples of the successful integration of nonfiction and comics.

As readers increasingly move toward digital content delivered to multiple screens, theories like McCloud’s and findings like Cohn’s are critical in developing new ways to present journalistic content. To create

highly engaging content that works well on multiple platforms, don’t rely too heavily on bells and whistles. If the interactive takes away from the core narrative, you don’t need it. Don’t automate a story’s progression like a timed slideshow. Let the reader control the speed and length of time that they spend in the story. Know the core of the story you’d like to convey, and animate that core—in images and words—in ways that evoke empathy and resonate with diverse user groups.



Erin Polgreen is co-founder of Symbolia and has helped many media outlets tell visual stories

Last November, Ukrainians began occupying Kiev's Maidan square, demanding closer ties to the European Union and an end to government corruption. In February, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich hastily abandoned his mansion and fled to Russia in the wake of the Euromaidan protests. But he left an extensive paper trail behind, including 200 folders of documents tossed into a lake - waterlogged, but still salvageable.



\$2.3 million to furnish two rooms?

Vlad Lavrov, a Kyiv Post reporter, was one of the first journalists to get a look at the documents.

We saw documents that openly talked about bribes and cash deals, plus evidence that activists were being spied on.

We knew this stuff needed to be rescued.

As quickly as they could, reporters and activists dried the documents, scanned or photographed them, then posted them online, eventually publishing more than 20,000 different items.

CHASING PAPER WITH YANUKOVYCH LEAKS
by Roxanne Palmer

Lavrov and his colleagues found dossiers full of personal details on activists they knew, including phone numbers, e-mails, even information on cars they owned.

The documents provided glimpses of Yanukovich's lavish lifestyle. Journalists and others had long criticized the president's expensive tastes - and now they had the receipts.

Candelabras and chandeliers: \$42 million

Boar statue: \$115,000

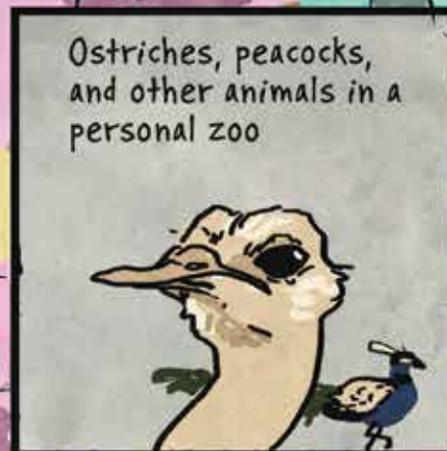
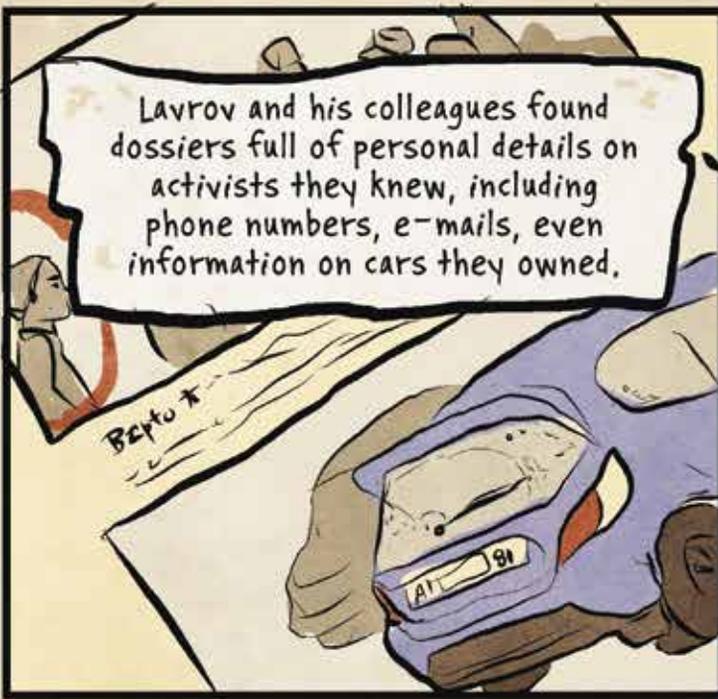
Alcohol for one August 2011 hunting party: \$22,000

Other signs of excess were all over the property:

A private golf course and gold-plated golf clubs

Ostriches, peacocks, and other animals in a personal zoo

A full-size replica of a Spanish galleon





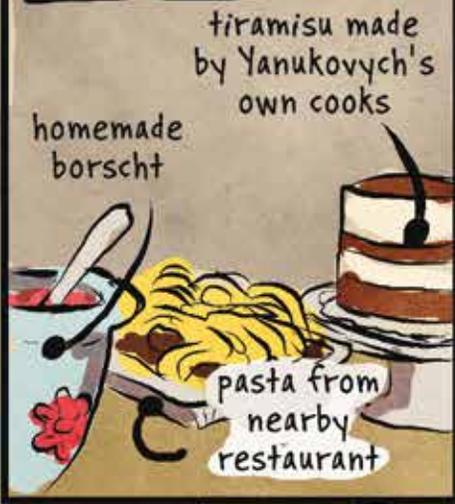
Our first thought was to rent some office space for about a week and investigate everything as quickly as we can. But since there was this huge public pressure, we decided first to publish the documents, then investigate them along with everyone else.

The reporters also had some outside help from volunteers who sorted documents...

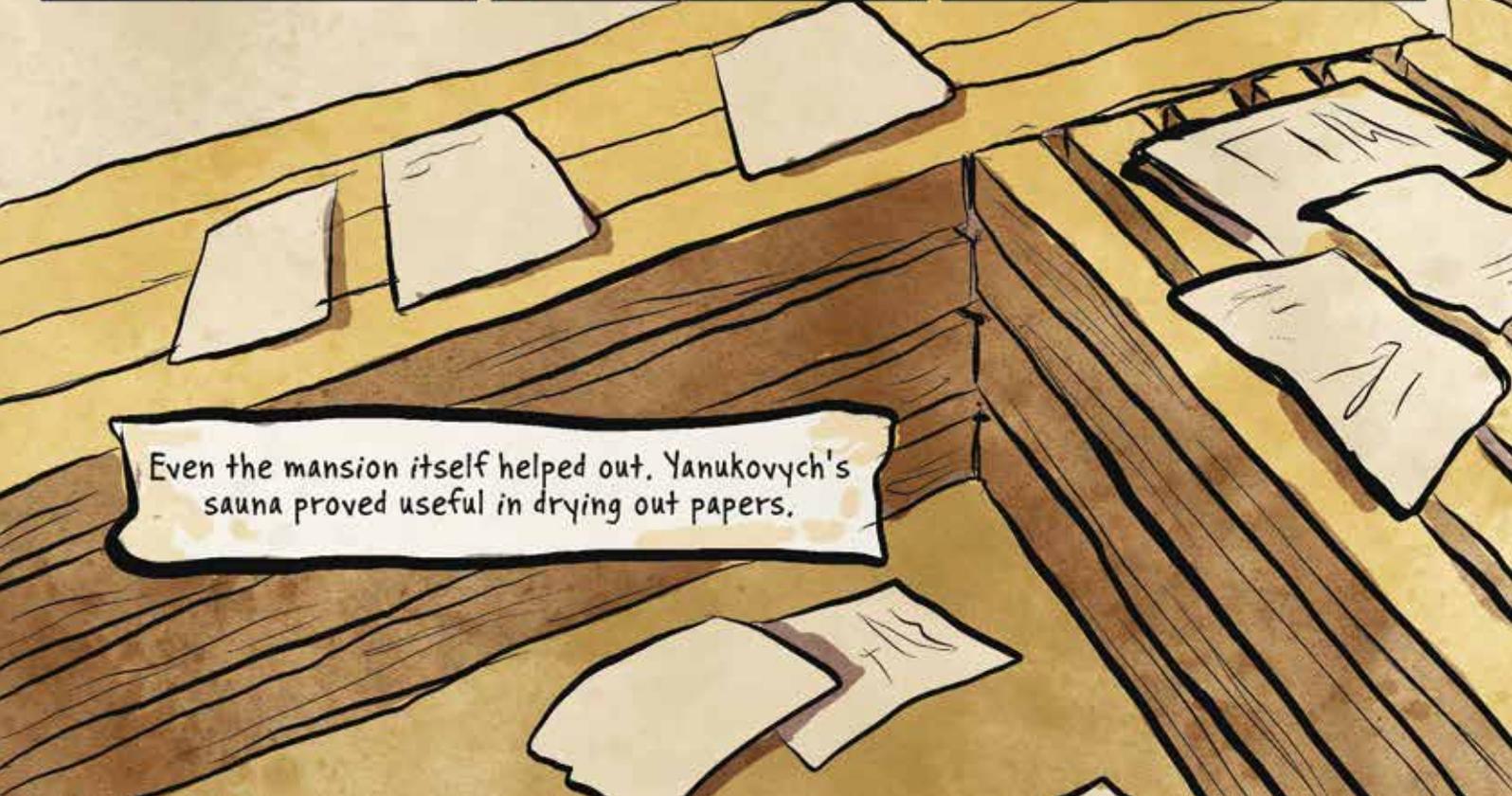
divers who retrieved papers from the lake...



...everyday citizens who donated food...



...and librarians and archivists who brought over special heat guns to dry out the sodden documents.



Even the mansion itself helped out. Yanukovich's sauna proved useful in drying out papers.

YanukovychLeaks, the name Ukrainian journalists gave to this project, is also remarkable because competing news outlets worked together on it.

The project is part of an evolving model of collaborative investigative journalism.



Natalie Sedletskaya,
Radio Free Europe



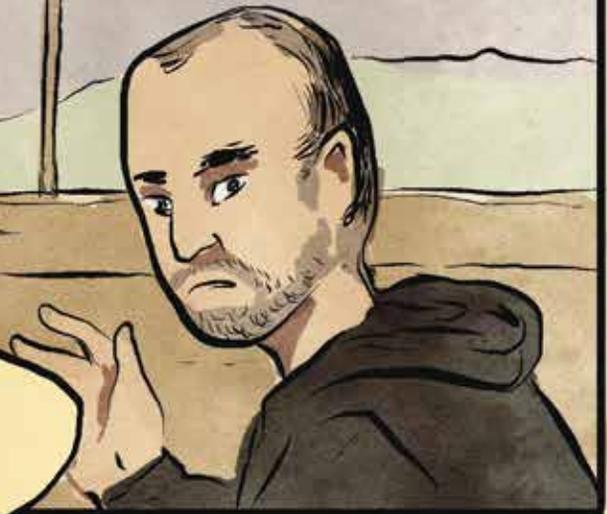
Drew Sullivan, Organized Crime
and Corruption Reporting Project



Oksana Kovalenko,
Ukrainska Pravda

We as investigative reporters have to redefine what we consider an investigative story. We are not always the gatekeepers, and things are not always strict narratives. We are in a bold new world, and we need to change and deal with it.

YanukovychLeaks is still finishing up the first big part of the job: posting everything online. Once all the papers are up, the real work begins - reporting and writing the stories that emerge from the documents.



The next several months will be crucial. We have a chance to make it so officials are accountable to the public.

Roxanne Palmer is an illustrator and science journalist based in New York. She's worked with Symbolia to explore Medicaid in Maine and chart the event horizons of black holes.
www.symboliamag.com





**"A Sense of Exhilaration
and Possibility"**



The co-founder of Turkey's 140journos on building a citizen-sustained news agency from scratch

MURAD SEZER/REUTERS

By Engin Onder

In December of 2011, Turkish military jets bombed the village of Uludere, about five miles from the border with Iraq, killing 34. Was the attack a tragic mistake or a planned strike on suspected Kurdish separatists? Were the casualties terrorists, smugglers, or innocent citizens? It was impossible for anyone in Turkey to find out because the media did not report the deaths.

Serdar Akinan, a journalist with the Turkish mainstream daily *Aksam*, traveled to Uludere on his own to cover what's now known as the Roboski massacre. There, he interviewed eyewitnesses and relatives of

the dead. He covered the funerals and offered his perspective on what happened. He took pictures of the grieving relatives and the massive funeral procession that brought the corpses, wrapped in blankets, from the site of the massacre, and he circulated the images via Twitter and Instagram.

Akinan did what journalists throughout Turkey all too often refuse to do: report a story that might cast the government in a bad light. Sometimes, the prime minister tells the media not to cover certain stories. Sometimes, the media censors itself. Nine months after he took to social media to tell the story of Uludere, Akinan was fired from *Aksam*. He has said he believes

Coverage of last spring's Gezi Park protests brought 140journos a much larger audience



Few media outlets covered the protests in 2013 aimed at stopping plans to develop Gezi Park in Istanbul

he was fired because Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan complained about his columns criticizing the Turkish government's policies regarding treatment of the country's Kurdish ethnic minority, among other issues.

A couple of weeks after the massacre, two friends and I were sitting in an Istanbul bar talking about what Akinan had done and about the sorry state of our nation. Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002 promising to reduce the military's influence on politics, reverse the exclusion of Islam from public life, protect the rights of the Kurds, and enhance civil liberties. But since then the AKP has increasingly imposed a kind of one-party rule. The government uses its power under antiterrorism and criminal defamation

laws to punish dissent. A series of high-profile journalists have lost their jobs after public reprimands from Erdogan, and most of the mainstream Turkish press stay well away from

for the character limit in a tweet, and "journos" as the slang reference for what we had no training to be: journalists.

We started covering the news in earnest in January of 2012. We skipped our college classes to attend trials and protests, and we shared via social media photographs, audio and video recordings, and reports of what we witnessed. We covered leftist factions supporting arrested journalists, radical Islamic groups protesting abortion, and a trial involving game-fixing by one of the nation's favorite football clubs. We were so new to all this that when a Turkish media critic told us we were engaged in "citizen journalism," we had to look up the term on Wikipedia. Months later, Zeynep Tufekci, a Turkish-born professor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill who studies the intersection of technology and society, told me, "This is not 'citizen journalism.' This is 'journalistic citizenship.'" Journalistic citizenship is an important model, not just for my country but for other countries where people aren't getting the news they need.

Do we need mics with a TV station's name to let people know what's happening?

stories, like the Uludere attack, that might harm the government's image.

We felt deeply frustrated by what the Turkish media was—and wasn't—delivering. All three of us were in our 20s, and we wanted to consume news in real time. We all used Twitter, and we asked ourselves: Do we really need microphones emblazoned with the name of a TV station to let people know what's happening? So we created a Twitter account, calling it 140journos—"140"

In February, audio appeared on YouTube and was circulated via Twitter purporting to record Erdogan, whose government faces a corruption investigation, ordering his son to get rid of large sums of cash from a safe in his house. Erdogan said the tapes were fabricated to discredit his government. He fired key officials involved in the corruption probe and tightened control over the judiciary. In March, Erdogan banned



UMIT BEKTAS/REUTERS

Concerned that the government might manipulate the March 30 election results, citizens conducted their own vote counts

Twitter; the nation's highest court overturned the ban two weeks later. The move made little difference to Turks, including my mother, who used anonymous virtual private networks and alternative domain name systems to get around it.

According to a recent report by Freedom House, a Washington-based nonprofit that promotes civil liberties, the Turkish government is increasingly resorting to "a variety of strong-arm tactics to suppress the media's proper role as a check on power," such as publicly railing against critical journalists and launching tax investigations into media outlets that question it. Turkey is also the world's most aggressive jailer of journalists, with the Committee to Protect Journalists reporting that 40 journalists are currently imprisoned as a result of their work, putting the country ahead of China and Iran. This is the social and political backdrop against which we created 140journos.

The spring 2013 protests in Istanbul's Gezi Park marked a turning point for us. The demonstrations began when a small group of environmental activists gathered to block government plans to replace Gezi Park with a commercial development. News of the occupation spread via social media and thousands converged on the park. Police routed them with tear gas and water cannons, which drew tens of thousands of protesters to Taksim Square, where Gezi is located. Over the next two weeks, occupations took place across the country, with some 3.5 million people participating, according to the government's own estimates.

Early on, the mainstream press largely ignored the protests. Not even Haberturk, a TV station right around the corner from Gezi, broadcast live from the scene. CNN Turk, one of the largest television stations, aired a documentary about penguins during a violent clash between police and protesters. If the mainstream media wasn't going to document the protests, we decided, then the protesters themselves would.

We reported the tear gas attacks and other injustices that took place during the Gezi Park protests. But we also debunked misinformation. At one point, accusations circulated on social media that Turkish police had attacked citizens with Agent Orange, which was used during the Vietnam War to defoliate the jungle. Members of 140journos conferred with chemical engineers and determined the canisters in question contained nothing more than colored smoke. Before Gezi, 140journos produced about 400 tweets a month. But during June 2013, we shared more than 2,200 tweets, videos, and audio recordings, and our Twitter followers increased from roughly 8,000 to about 45,000.

Turkey has about 12 million active Twitter users, roughly a third of the online population. We have more than 300 volunteer content producers all across the

The Turkish government is suppressing the media with "strong-arm tactics"



THANASSIS STAVRAKIS/ASSOCIATED PRESS; (PHOTO BELOW) ASSOCIATED PRESS

Broadcast media ignored last summer's protests in Istanbul against the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, below

country, including a survivor of the Uludere attack. As the number of Turkish citizens feeding information to 140journos grew, we shifted gears. Instead of doing all the reporting ourselves, we focused on collecting, categorizing, validating and Storifying the news content sent to us. To verify news reports, we use free tools like Yandex Panorama (Russia's version of Google StreetView) and TinEye, a search service to help determine if images are new or pulled from websites.



To monitor the flow of news tips, 140journos uses

With 300 volunteer reporters, 140journos has become a clearinghouse for news

also keep lists organized by individual events, such as protests against executions in Egypt, and lists organized by factions, such as ultra-nationalists and conservatives.

In addition to Twitter, we collect newsworthy information via a dedicated phone number—our content support line—and via messages sent through WhatsApp. When

we get word that something is happening, we use the Twitter search tool Topsy to look for tweets with photos.

If, for example, I receive a tweet about a protest in Ankara from a source I don't know and I can't get in touch with the person, I search for tweets in Turkish accompanied by photos sent around the time of the tweet reporting the protest. If I find a tweet with a photo and it is from someone who already follows 140journos, I send the tweeter a direct message seeking more information. If the tweet is from a source not known to 140journos, I start following the tweeter to see what else they tweet. If I have a location for the protest, I access public street cameras online to try to verify the information.

If we have any doubt about the veracity of a tweet, we do not retweet it. New members of 140journos are encouraged to consult with a group of experienced editors via WhatsApp or Facebook. Sometimes a newbie fails to exercise caution and sends a tweet with incorrect information. We own up to mistakes and apologize as soon as they are discovered. That happened recently when a new editor failed to authenticate a photo of a protest; a 140journos follower presented us with proof that the photo was from a previously reported protest.

If I see a tweet with a picture or intelligence from a trusted person in our network, I dig deeper. Early one

afternoon in April, I saw a tweet from a city in south-eastern Turkey alleging that police made excessive use of tear gas and some primary school students were affected. Attached to the tweet was a picture of two girls lying on a bed in what looked like a hospital. An adult was with them.

On Topsy, I typed in the name of the city and the name of the district, a frequent location for protests, and saw a similar photo from another user. A second tweet with a very similar photo came from the city's parliamentarian, who follows 140journos. He is a trusted source so we tweeted the news, sticking to the confirmed facts.

As 140journos has gained a wider following, we've attracted "pirates"—members of major news channels like NTV, CNN Turk, Haberturk, and Skyturk 360 frustrated by the self-censorship of their own stations—who feed the news they gather to us. The contributions of professional photojournalists have helped us a lot. During the Gezi Park protests, we distributed compelling images from a pirate photojournalist.

More recently, a pirate from a TV station confirmed a tip we had received about an alleged Istanbul protest against controversial spiritual leader Fethullah Gülen, whom Erdogan has accused of working to undermine his administration. Mainstream news outlets reported that Gülen had cursed Erdogan, though not by name, and his supporters during a weekly podcast. The pirate provided us with photos showing anti-Gülen protesters carrying signs saying "Pray Don't Curse."

Currently, 140journos receives thousands of tweets a day on everything from protests to local politics. We also host a 30-minute show once a week on Acik Radyo. Now 140journos is moving into an era in which the goal is not only to become a standalone news agency sustained by a network of citizen journalists but a force for creating a civil society, one in which citizens holding divergent views can talk to each other and in which every vote is properly counted.

Plans to build the nation's first nuclear power plant have sharply divided public opinion, so in 2012 we invited citizens to debate the issue, using the hashtags #YesToNuclearEnergyBecause and #NoToNuclearEnergyBecause. As a host from CNN Turk moderated a public debate at the foot of Galata Tower, we projected the Twitter stream onto the Istanbul landmark.

It was a new experience for many, because our country doesn't have a long tradition of civil public discussions. We delivered 40,000 pro- and anti-nuclear energy tweets—93 percent against nuclear energy, 7 percent for—to the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The government has not changed its stance on nuclear power, and protests against the plant continue even as construction is stalled due to legal problems.

When local elections took place in March, we enlisted citizen volunteers to tally votes to check against fraud. In the 24 hours following the elections, we collected photos of more than 6,000 pages of official vote tallies, noting inconsistencies between the local tallies and the official results, most of which favored the prime minister's AKP. The opposition Republican People's Party filed formal complaints of election fraud. Meanwhile, we continue to analyze vote tallies and refine our crowdsourced system of vote counting as we prepare for the presidential election in August.

When a disaster killed some 300 miners in May, 140journos sent tweets, photos, videos and audio recordings from the mining town of Soma. We interviewed activists, lawyers, rescue team members, and the relatives of miners. In addition, we distributed reports from protests there and across Turkey as mourners demanded accountability from the government.

Soon we will launch the beta version of Journos, a mobile app that we hope will encourage more citizens to report the news. With Journos, every piece of visual evidence is digitally watermarked with date, source and location information to ensure the integrity

A better informed citizenry now has a bigger stake in what's going on in Turkey

of our citizen-reporting network. We ask 140journos contributors to use Vine for video because the app bars users from uploading footage other than clips taken with their phones; the smartphone's GPS provides the location information. We only publish audio of public figures whose voices we know or recordings from trusted sources. With the new app, 140journos editors and trusted sources can create pages for news about specific subjects, which places a premium on live reporting. Users who try to fool the system will be blacklisted.

For journalists in the mainstream media, Turkey is a tough place to work. But it's a great place for journalism start-ups because citizens are so hungry for news—and many are willing to help report it.

We started 140journos, first of all, to inform ourselves. But as more citizens join the effort, they are developing a bigger stake in what's going on. Citizens are willing to put themselves at risk to record what's happening. There's a sense of exhilaration and possibility. If that is a byproduct of journalistic citizenship, then it's something countries well beyond Turkey should welcome.



Engin Onder is a co-founder of 140journos and president and co-founder of the Institute of Creative Minds, an Istanbul-based network of creative professionals

Rewrite

How journalism schools are trying to connect



ASU CRONKITE SCHOOL

A nightly newscast produced by Arizona State University's j-school

The sweet spot for innovation is the convergence point
where technology is viewed as a way

By Jon Marcus

When a handful of students show up this fall for the new media innovation graduate program at Northeastern University, they'll learn coding, information visualization, videography, database management—even game design. The Tow-Knight Center for Entrepreneurial Journalism at the City University of New York (CUNY) is

classrooms to newsrooms

incubating journalism entrepreneurs who can earn master's degrees and advanced certificates in innovative approaches to the media business. Uptown, at Columbia University, the journalism school and computer science department are in the first year of teaming up to deliver a certificate program for journalists and others in data technology and using data.

Journalism education has come to the same ominous inflection point that journalism itself has reached—and the stakes are just as high. Universities are shutting down or proposing to shut down journalism schools, or merging them with other departments. Enrollment is falling—dramatically, for graduate programs—while it's rising at newer institutions and those with an emphasis on digital media. New forms of teaching online and new credentials menace all of higher education's monopoly on academic credit.

As technology advances, professionals want more training, like they'll get at programs such as Northeastern's. And foundations that have filled the void left when media companies stopped lavishing their wealth on journalism schools are aggressively pressing for reform.

In response, some journalism schools are abruptly transforming themselves to teach new forms of media and new methods of delivering the news. "We are trying to blow up everything," says Jeff Howe, head of the new, three-semester program at Northeastern. Supported by a \$250,000 grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the program will revolve around an "innovation seminar" in which teams of students will apply their newfound skills to real-world projects in news delivery or reporting techniques.

"Like journalism, education is ripe for disruptive innovation," says Howard Finberg, director of partnerships and alliances at the Poynter Institute. If j-schools fail to



to fulfill the public interest mission that has always animated our best journalism.



JOHN SMOCK/CUNY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

Online media advocate Jeff Jarvis teaches entrepreneurial journalism at City University of New York

respond, Finberg says, they are “at risk of being bypassed or overshadowed.”

A recent Poynter survey—which some argue demonstrates that educators are outpacing editors in their approaches to digital innovation—underlines the divide between j-schools and newsrooms. Educators are more likely than professional journalists to believe it’s important for journalism graduates to have multimedia skills, for instance, according to the survey Poynter released in April. They are more likely to think it’s crucial for j-school grads to understand HTML and other computer languages, and how to shoot and edit video and photos, record audio, tell stories with visuals, and write for different platforms.

More educators than editors put an emphasis on such newly important skills as the ability to use computers to analyze large amounts of information. More educators think knowledge of other cultures is important as the diversity of their subjects and audiences deepens. And as the industry searches for new revenue models, almost twice as many educators as editors think journalism students need to learn about the business side of media, as they do at CUNY and Northeastern.

In that same Poynter survey, many editors said the most important thing they need in new employees is a foundation of critical thinking and problem-solving

fundamentals, and knowledge of teamwork and collaboration they say comes from the broader liberal-arts education many of them got—not strictly vocational skills, which fast-changing technology can quickly make obsolete, and which can be learned on the job. More than 40 percent don’t even think it’s important for prospective journalists to major in journalism.

“I don’t think journalists need to go to journalism school,” says Mizell Stewart, vice president of content for the newspaper division at E.W. Scripps. He argues a combination of the liberal arts and experience in campus media are the best learning labs for future journalists: “I do think journalists need to have some professional or campus experience as a journalist ... Campus media is really the opportunity for students to learn, in what is for the most part a fairly safe environment, how to interact with folks, how to deal with people in power, how to access records. Those experiences provide students with that extra layer of skills in terms of leadership, in terms of time management, in terms of what it means to manage up, across, and around, what it means to be a good colleague. ... Those are things we look for.”

But even as journalism schools transform themselves, and as the latest crop of newly minted graduates heads into the job market, educators and editors are joining

forces to accomplish what neither can do so easily on their own—give students real-world reporting experience and provide daily and in-depth news coverage.

Journalism schools “have a luxury I’m sure is not always available to editors in newsrooms, which is to stand aside from the pace of demand that media organizations have been dealing with,” says Steve Coll, a Pulitzer Prize-winning former newspaper and magazine reporter and the new dean of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. “In those newsrooms it’s very hard to step back and think about five or 10 years out. It’s supposed to be an advantage of a university to do that, and I do feel that happening.”

Other things have changed, too. More journalists like Coll, rather than career academics, are being named to head up journalism schools. There are more collaborations in which students produce content for real-world print and online media. “Without the pressure of having to grow revenue or meet budgets, we have some freedom to experiment and try new things,” says Lorraine Branham, a former journalist at The Philadelphia Inquirer and Baltimore Sun and dean of the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, which has established a center for digital media entrepreneurship and an endowed chair in journalism innovation.

People on all sides of the question over what students ought to learn acknowledge that news organizations have moved from needing specialist reporters to relying on generalists who not only report and write, but take pictures and videos and record sound. That means newly minted journalists need to arrive with broader skills. Yet 40 percent of 2012 journalism graduates said their educations included too little technical training, a survey by the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia found.

“There isn’t any possible way the school could teach you everything because things are changing so quickly,” says Taylor Goldenstein, who graduated in December with a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and is now interning at the Chicago Tribune. “But I do think that the schools are a little bit behind,” especially in teaching such things as coding.

Newspapers have also bought out veterans with institutional experience, or given them so much more to do that rookies no longer get the mentoring they once did under the informal newsroom apprenticeship model. “Especially in such a competitive news environment where budgets are shrinking, news organizations expect you to hit the ground running from day one,” says Mauro Whiteman, a new graduate of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University. “You’re expected to be a producing person in the newsroom.”

While online media command only a fraction of the



BROOKS CANADAY/NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

Jeff Howe is rethinking j-school at Northeastern University in Boston

advertising revenue that traditional print newspapers did—and still don’t pay much—they are also growing exponentially. BuzzFeed now has 170-plus full-time editorial staffers, the vast majority of whom were hired last year. Gawker’s staff has nearly tripled, to 132, in the last seven years, and Ezra Klein’s Vox, Nate Silver’s FiveThirtyEight and Pierre Omidyar’s First Look Media are all hiring. Pew estimates that around 500 digital news organizations have collectively produced about 5,000 jobs in the last 10 years—nowhere near the roughly 16,000 the American Society of News Editors says have been cut by newspapers alone, but a beachhead. (While the mainstream media continue to shed jobs, some are hiring. The Washington Post has added 50 journalists this year alone, and Time Inc. has hired 30, mostly to work at Time.com.)

Students seem acutely aware that the way to stake a claim to one of the diminishing number of journalism jobs is to master not only writing and reporting, but videography, social media, and other increasingly complex platforms. In the Poynter survey, more students than educators said knowing HTML, for example, is important.

“I’m learning how to code and make graphics that

Even as journalism schools continue to transform themselves, there remains a deep division over what skills future journalists actually need to learn

Even executives who hire for new media, like BuzzFeed's Shani Hilton, caution against overemphasizing the importance of technical skills



RAY WHITEHOUSE/MEDILL

Students from Northwestern University's Medill school of journalism cover the 2012 election

distill information in a completely different way, and using video to tell more creative stories and learning cool editing techniques,” says Caitlin Cruz, a graduate of Arizona State’s journalism program now on a 10-week investigative reporting internship at The Seattle Times. “And I really think it goes back to learning how to tell the story in the medium that you want.”

But even executives who hire for new media caution that too much specialization can be a bad thing. “There can be a problem when people think almost too pragmatically about, ‘These are the new media companies that are hiring, so I need to tick those boxes and be a data reporter who can use social media,’ ” says Jason Mojica, editor in chief at Vice News, who was invited to lecture at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. (“That Columbia brought me in says that they are looking beyond core curriculum and textbooks,” he says.) “Some of that old-school traditional j-school stuff can be incredibly valuable. Can you write a script? Can you fact-check your own stories? What you want is the best of both worlds.” He won’t get any argument from Coll, at Columbia, who says technology will change, but learning

journalism basics is essential: “At this school, there’s a high degree of confidence that the values can adapt and survive.”

BuzzFeed deputy editor in chief Shani Hilton agrees that what she wants to see in new employees isn’t necessarily specific technical skills, but “agnosticism about format. Some of our news stories are very typical, and some are just big captions with the relevant information, and some involve quizzes. We need people who remember that what makes a news story isn’t necessarily the format, but the information.”

The answer is to teach both basic writing and reporting and technology, says Eric Newton, former managing editor of the Oakland Tribune and senior adviser to the president at the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, a leading advocate for reforming journalism education: “To teach journalism in the digital age you have to teach both journalism *and* the digital age—and use modern tools to do it. That’s why the schools that are serious about this are getting bigger, not smaller.” Newton advocates mimicking medical schools’ so-called teaching-hospital model, in which students learn

Nurturing the Next Generation of Watchdogs



By Rick Tulsky

On my way into work at Medill Watchdog for the first time, I stopped at Hanig's Shoe Store. It was February 1, 2011, part of a three-day storm in which more than 20 inches of snow fell on the Chicago area.

I had returned to Evanston, Illinois after more than four decades away—working

on staff for, among other outlets, The Philadelphia Inquirer, the Los Angeles Times, and the San Jose Mercury News—and I needed a pair of snow boots. I also needed a good plan for how Medill Watchdog, which I was hired to create, could accomplish its goals. The initiative is part of the small but growing number of programs intended to reshape traditional journalism school. Medill Watchdog is not a class at all; each quarter, we hire interns from the talented undergraduates, grad students and recent graduates who apply.

The idea is to partner on big, ambitious journalism projects—the kind news organizations used to do on their own—and let students learn by working alongside great journalists from both print and broadcast. The work, at least we hope, helps provide the community the kind of in-depth journalism, using data sets that we create, that is harder to accomplish in the world of downsizing. And, potentially, the initiative provides a model of how this journalism can continue to flourish, as we help train and motivate the next generation.

But the snow wasn't the only obstacle when I arrived in 2011; the issue was how to be distinctive in Chicago's crowded journalistic landscape. Before long, I heard a story that became a model of what we could bring to Chicago journalism. The state legislators in Illinois, like many local officials, are elected into

part-time jobs and hold other jobs while not doing the people's business. So a powerful state senator, in his off-hours, was a registered lobbyist in Cook County. It seemed bizarre. How could public officials simultaneously be lobbyists? And how common was this?

It proved a defining project for Medill Watchdog. Teams of interns worked with me and assistant director John Sullivan, building a list of all the elected officials from Cook County units of government; seeing which were lobbyists; identifying who their clients were, and which of them pushed legislation that seemed to benefit their paying clients. Before long, the interns expanded the search to include lobbyists who were close relatives of legislators.

The project ended up running over two days in the Chicago pages of The New York Times. And a sign of how we've progressed: Some of the very best journalists at the Chicago Tribune and WGN-TV now come to us with ideas for big projects that, alas, they used to comfortably do on their own. The program continues to cement its place in the journalism constellation, as the need for data-driven journalism to expose problems hasn't vanished from Illinois. Nor, alas, has the snow.



Rick Tulsky, a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter, is director of Medill Watchdog

by doing—and which combines the emphasis editors and many educators want to see placed on the liberal arts with some of what students get out of working for campus media, as others advocate.

Just as medical students, under doctors' guidance, learn how to do everything from draw blood to deliver babies, prospective journalists working under experienced professionals can use new tools and techniques to produce real-world journalism. And just as teaching hospitals also are centers for innovation,

journalism schools would become laboratories for new ways to cover and produce the news. While the idea is not new, its pace has been accelerating. The Cronkite School has a wire service, a nightly newscast, and student-staffed bureaus in Washington and Phoenix that have created content for 30 Arizona news outlets and The Associated Press. University of Maryland j-school students staff bureaus in Washington and in the state capital of Annapolis that produce stories for Maryland newspapers. Students at Northwestern University's Medill j-school work in newsrooms in inner-city Chicago.



ALAN MITTELSTAEDT/USC ANNEBERG

Students at the University of Southern California produce Neon Tommy, a local site covering news, sports and culture

Students at New York University and at CUNY run neighborhood news blogs. Columbia's journalism school produces The New York World news website, which covers city and state government. University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism has created the digital news site Neon Tommy. Florida International University students report for the South Florida News Service, a collaboration with The Miami Herald, The Palm Beach Post, and South Florida Sun Sentinel. And in January the journalism school at the University of Kansas became the latest to add a statehouse bureau, covering the legislature for newspapers statewide.

"You're working so closely with a professional editor and you're covering things The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Arizona Republic, the AP are covering," says Connor Radnovich, a recent graduate of the Cronkite School who worked in its Phoenix and Washington bureaus. "In Washington, there were events where I was the only reporter there. That doesn't really happen to journalism students."

But the closest thing so far to a pure hospital model is News21, says Newton, under which journalism school students spend months on investigative projects. They are supervised by faculty including former Washington Post executive editor Leonard Downie Jr. and Pulitzer Prize-winning computer-assisted reporting expert Steve Doig, among others.

Headquartered at the Cronkite School and supported by \$10 million from Knight and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, News21 has covered such topics as voter fraud, finding only a tiny number of cases and

raising questions about the motives behind voter ID laws in many states. News21 student journalists have traveled to Guatemala to write about the safety of imported food, and investigated the struggles of veterans. This year, they'll report on gun-control and gun-rights efforts. The future of the project seems assured, even if its foundation funding dries up, since the Cronkite School has gradually assumed 80 percent of its cost.

News21 stories have been published in The Washington Post and elsewhere, and widely cited. In addition to serving students and readers, they put time and manpower behind long-term investigative projects conventional news organizations can no longer afford to do and test new ways of delivering content. The principal cost is faculty, who would be teaching anyway, and the benefit to students is hands-on, real-world experience.

Newton has said the teaching-hospital idea is moving journalism schools into the vanguard of innovation, while the partnerships with news organizations provide another route through which editors and educators talk to one another, a positive development, according to people on both sides of that divide. "We don't mean that newsrooms should serve classrooms and that classrooms should serve newsrooms, but just that they should collaborate and learn to speak a common language," Newton says.

Journalism schools have long found little in common with their many critics or their academic host institutions. Higher-education scholar Abraham Flexner likened them in 1930 to "university faculties of cookery and clothing." University of Chicago president



DAVID GOLDMAN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Planned cuts in journalism and other programs at Emory University in Atlanta drew protests from students, faculty and staff

Robert Maynard Hutchins said in 1938 that journalism had been added to universities out of the “passing whims of the public.”

For most of their histories, j-schools have had to look not forward to the industry for which they were preparing students, but over their shoulders at parent universities that considered them pre-professional and outside the traditional liberal arts, and didn’t entirely want them, according to a 77-page report, “Educating Journalists: A New Plea for the University Tradition,” issued last year by former journalism deans Nicholas Lemann of Columbia, Jean Folkerts of the University of North Carolina, and John Maxwell Hamilton of Louisiana State. Focusing on graduate education, the report urged that journalism continue to be taught in freestanding professional schools in which practicing journalists collaborate with educators. But against the backdrop of disarray in the industry, many universities have moved to merge their journalism programs into other majors or eliminate them altogether.

The provost of Indiana University is proceeding with a contentious plan to move the journalism school out of Ernie Pyle Hall and combine it with the schools of communication, telecommunications, and film. Emory

Many universities have moved to merge their journalism programs into other majors or eliminate them altogether

University is phasing out its journalism program as part of a broad reorganization that will focus on “emerging growth areas,” such as contemporary China studies. And the University of Colorado at Boulder eliminated its school of journalism in 2011 and demoted journalism to a minor, though it’s since decided to open a new College of Media, Communication and Information that would include advertising, public relations, media design, communication, information science, journalism and media studies.

The number of programs in journalism and mass communication is down from 491 in 2011 to 485 in 2012 and the number of graduate programs has fallen from 222 to 217 during the same period, the University of Georgia survey found. It also reported that more than 8 percent of journalism deans say their universities are considering merging their schools with other departments.



GUS RUELAS/USC ANNEBERG

At the University of Southern California, Annenberg Radio News broadcasts provide students with hands-on learning opportunities

The journalism deans surveyed said their obstacles to change include limited resources for new hires and technology courses, and pushback from senior faculty and the campus bureaucracy. Merging journalism schools into larger departments layers on even more of these kinds of barriers, and further bogs down the process at the very time it needs to speed up. Newton calls this the “symphony of slowness.”

Existential threats are not the j-schools’ only problem. Institutions that could once expect lavish support from cash-flush media organizations no longer can. Two in 10 have hiring freezes in place, according to the University of Georgia survey. Undergraduate journalism enrollments have started to drop, falling 2.9 percent in 2012, the last year for which the figure is available. That was the second consecutive decline, and the first time in two decades student numbers have gone down for two years in a row. Master’s degree programs are seeing their enrollments decrease even faster, down by 9.4 percent in 2011 and another nearly 3 percent in 2012.

As in all of higher education, private foundations are stepping in to fill financial gaps at journalism schools. Foundations poured \$146 million into journalism education and training between 2009 and 2011, the last period for which the figure is available, according to the Foundation Center. The Knight Foundation alone has poured about \$200 million into it during the last 15 years. (The Knight Foundation is a funder of projects at the Nieman Foundation for Journalism.)

The foundations are using their considerable clout to push for change. Top executives from six of them—Knight, Scripps Howard, the McCormick Foundation, the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation,



ASU CRONKITE SCHOOL

ASU covered the 2012 Democratic National Convention

the Brett Family Foundation, and the Wyncote Foundation—urged nearly 500 university presidents in 2012 to speed up the pace of change of journalism education. “We believe journalism and communications schools must be willing to re-create themselves if they are to succeed in playing their vital roles as news creators and innovators,” the letter said. “Schools that do not update their curriculum and upgrade their faculties to reflect the profoundly different digital age of communication will find it difficult to raise money from foundations interested in the future of news.”

While university-level grants have been most common, Knight Foundation president Alberto Iburgüen recently announced a \$250,000 program aimed directly at graduates. Speaking at the Cronkite School in May, Iburgüen said Knight would offer Cronkite graduates up to \$15,000 to develop innovative digital storytelling and reporting techniques in their newsrooms.

Meanwhile, like every other part of higher education, journalism schools are being pressed to justify their return on families' investments, especially considering the soft job market. One third of journalism graduates in the class of 2012 were still unemployed six months after graduation, another University of Georgia survey found; of those who had jobs, 40 percent were working outside of journalism. Salaries were about flat. A quarter of bachelor's degree recipients said they regretted having studied journalism. To keep j-school relevant, "the whole thing needs to be blown up," says Amy Webb, head of digital strategy agency Webbmmedia Group, who spoke about the future of journalism education at the University of Maryland's recent Journalism Interactive conference. "Little incremental changes don't amount to the kind of changes that are necessary to prepare j-school students to face the real world when they get out of school."

Universities also now have to contend with much cheaper competing delivery systems such as massive open online courses (MOOCs), short-duration professional certificate programs that take the place of conventional degrees, and other new kinds of credentials. "We are locked in a model that presumes that our students are physically present and dependent on coming into the classroom, and I'm not so sure that's going to persist," says Lee Becker, director of the James M. Cox Jr. Center for International Mass Communication Training and Research at the University of Georgia's journalism school.

The new certificate course at Columbia in coding, databases, and other skills, called the Lede Program, costs \$13,456, not including living expenses. A daylong data journalism workshop hosted by Poynter News University, by comparison, goes for an early bird rate of \$95. Professional associations such as Investigative Reporters and Editors offer cheap roving data seminars, and the Online News Association runs free full-day start-up, entrepreneurship, and multimedia training.

Poynter has already tested a 16-week online Journalism 101 course and compared the results to an identical course taught at Missouri State University. The students in the online course did as well as, or better than, the classroom group, based on their grades and how many stuck around to finish it.

Even the people providing these new models say a \$95 data workshop, for example, isn't yet a substitute for a summer-long program in a brick-and-mortar classroom. "The serious student that wants to have a professional journalism career will still want the instruction, the networking, and to work side by side with professionals," says Allissa Richardson, who teaches journalism at Bowie State University and is head of MoJo Mediaworks—"MoJo" stands for "mobile journalists." She is developing a MOOC in journalism scheduled to launch this fall. "That's where the MOOC actually falls short. The in-person experience is still superior to the online experience."

Mentoring was crucial for Thomas Huang, Sunday and enterprise editor with The Dallas Morning News, who didn't go to j-school but got bachelor's and master's degrees in computer science and engineering from MIT. For journalism to survive, that kind of mentorship has to survive, says Huang. "What I'm worried about is, I am seeing across many different newsrooms a lot of really bright and talented and aggressive young people wanting to get into the business but finding a gap in getting guidance and mentoring."

Still, says Richardson, crowdsourced opinion can substitute for the mentoring of a wise veteran editor with institutional experience, and students can put their work on YouTube and other channels to get the kinds of feedback many people in newsrooms no longer have the time to give them. Richardson says she plans to make her MOOC available to journalism schools. J-schools "can no longer rest on their laurels or reputations," she says. "They do have to consistently update how and what they teach to stay relevant."

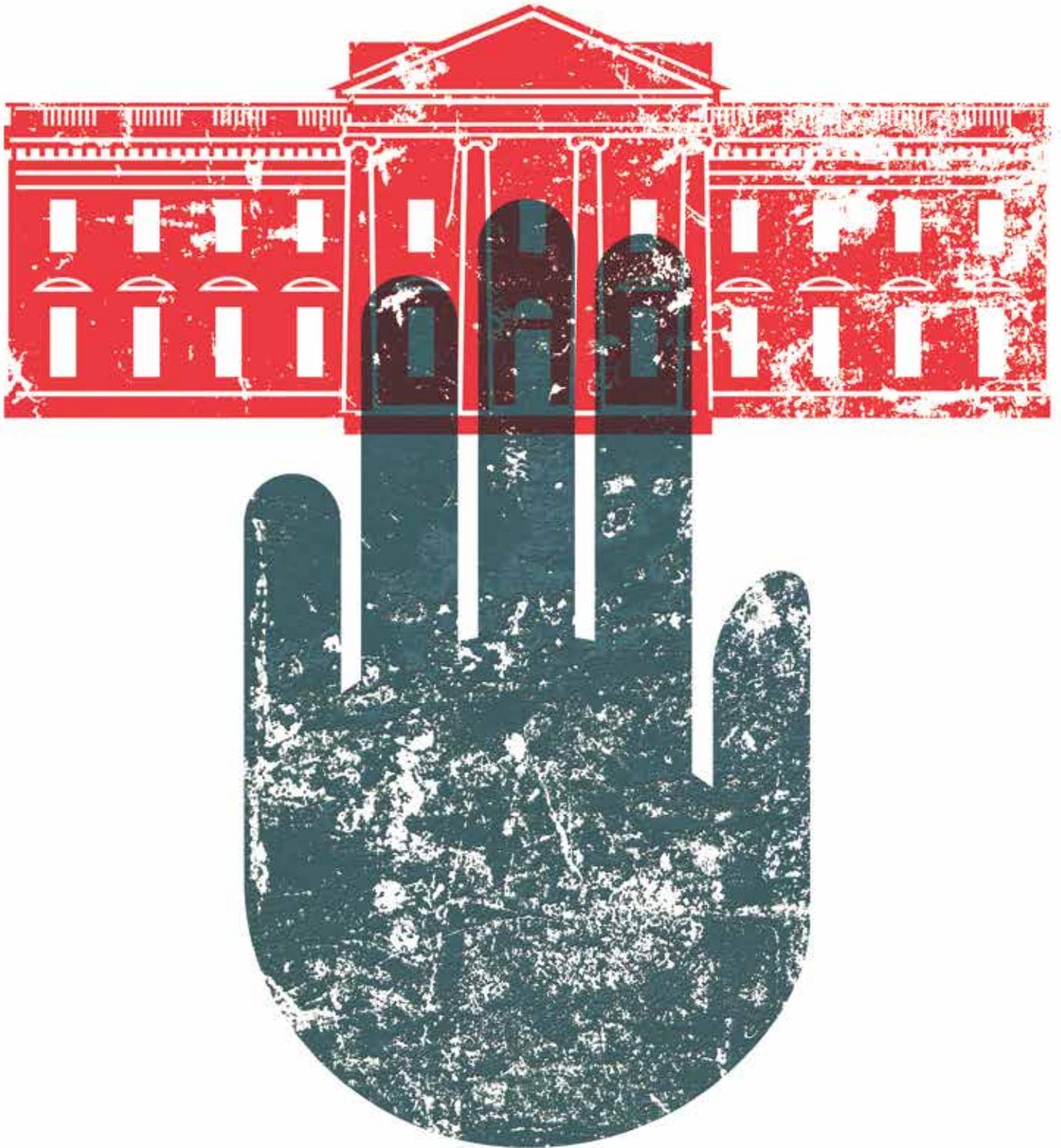
Journalism schools are being pressed to justify their return on families' investments, especially considering the soft job market

Some of the journalism schools that are the most innovative are the newest. Housed in its own six-story, \$71 million building in downtown Phoenix with 14 digital newsrooms and computer labs, two television studios, and 280 digital student workstations more cutting edge than those of some of the media companies where its graduates go on to work, the Cronkite School was spun off as an independent unit only in 2005. And while other schools' enrollments are going down, its numbers have been going up. So have those at the City University of New York, which opened its Graduate School of Journalism from scratch in 2006 and had a record class this year. "We don't have a lot of the legacy issues that some of my colleagues have," says Sarah Bartlett, dean of the CUNY journalism school.

There's one thing many journalism educators do not share, however: motivation born of a sense of urgency, and the example of what has happened to the field they serve. Connor Radnovich, the Cronkite School grad, sees it as an opportunity: "If you want to be in journalism for the jobs that existed 10 or 15 years ago, you're not going to get those. It's changing, but there are so many more opportunities."



Jon Marcus is higher-education editor at The Hechinger Report, a foundation-supported nonprofit news organization based at Columbia University



TALK TO THE HAND

Public health reporters say federal agencies are restricting access and information, limiting their ability to cover crucial health issues

By Jenni Bergal

When a chemical spill contaminated the drinking water of hundreds of thousands of people in West Virginia in January, Charleston Gazette reporters Ken Ward and David Gutman repeatedly asked the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) how it calculated the acceptable toxicity levels.

For nearly a week, the federal agency ignored their requests for interviews. In the meantime, state officials, citing the CDC standards, lifted a “Do Not Use” water order for residents in some areas. Finally, when the CDC advised that pregnant women should not drink the water, a frustrated Gutman called the agency director at home. The CDC chief told him to contact the press office and hung up.

While much of the media criticism about the lack of government transparency has focused on the White House and national security, many journalists who cover federal health care agencies say they, too, have experienced an unprecedented amount of secrecy during the Obama administration, an administration that describes itself as the most transparent in history. Medical writers and investigative journalists complain that they’ve been stonewalled, barred from talking to health agency staffers and experts, or required to submit questions in writing, only to get “talking point” responses. One reporter was unable to get permission to speak to a scientist about a massive tuberculosis outbreak. Another couldn’t get anyone to comment on a federal investigation

One reporter was unable to get permission from the CDC to speak to a scientist about a massive tuberculosis outbreak in Florida. Another reporter couldn’t get the FDA to comment on a federal investigation into Rhode Island doctors who illegally bought contraceptive devices from outside the U.S.

into doctors who illegally bought contraceptive devices from outside the U.S.

“You ask to interview somebody and they send you a canned e-mail. They won’t let you interview the scientist who worked on it,” says Ward, a reporter at the Gazette for more than two decades. “They’ve shown a complete lack of respect for the public in the way they operate these agencies.”

And it’s not just reporters who are protesting. Some scientists and consumer groups are extremely concerned about federal agencies preventing information from being released or impeding experts from talking to the media. “The best way for a reporter to get to the truth is to be able to talk to a scientist closest to the problem or the issue,” says Celia Wexler, a lobbyist for the Union of Concerned Scientists, a nonprofit science advocacy group. “What we want from public information officers at these federal agencies is to make it easier to get ahold of the right people, not to be the gatekeepers or to make it more difficult.”

Journalists have a long tradition of sounding the alarm about public health issues, such as the dangers of thalidomide, the Tuskegee syphilis study, and the Reagan administration’s lack of attention to AIDS. Reporters worry that when government agencies restrict their access to information, it limits the public’s ability to get an unvarnished perspective on health care policy and public health dangers. Some of these issues came to light last year with the botched start-up of the federal health care insurance website and the administration’s reluctance

to disclose details about what was going on. But health care journalists say they've been running into roadblocks with the Obama administration long before the Affordable Care Act's inauguration.

In 2011, for example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) blocked access to an online public database of physician discipline and malpractice payments that had been used by reporters to expose flaws with the oversight of troubled doctors. The data had been available online for years. HHS removed the file from its public website after a doctor complained that information about him had been used improperly. Following protests from journalism groups and consumer advocates, the administration restored the file but put restrictions on how the data could be used.

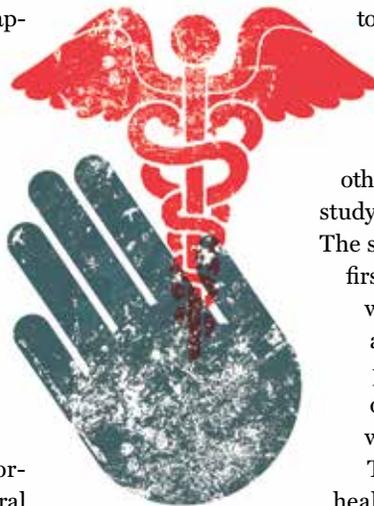
That same year, the Argus Leader in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, sued the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) after it rejected a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for data about food stamp payments to individual retailers. The Association of Health Care Journalists (AHCJ) and other journalism groups wrote to the USDA, urging it to end the secrecy surrounding the multi-billion-dollar program. The health care journalists also called for Congress to authorize the USDA to collect and make public information about which products are purchased with food stamp dollars, saying it was important to the public policy debate about childhood obesity. In January, a federal appeals court rejected the USDA's argument that it was prohibited by law from disclosing the food stamp payment information, and sent the case back to the lower court.

"Having a posture of antagonism toward the media is tantamount to being antagonistic to the general public," says Irene M. Wielawski, a former Los Angeles Times reporter who chairs the AHCJ's right-to-know committee. "One thing lost in all of this tension and this combative stance against the media is that they are really cutting off information that's vital to their mission."

The AHCJ has protested restrictions on information and sent reporters' complaints to federal health care agencies. Its leaders have met with agency officials and it has quarterly phone calls with the HHS public information chief.

Federal health officials insist that they are committed to openness in government. HHS, the nation's top health care department, would not agree to an interview with Nieman Reports, but spokeswoman Joanne Peters issued a statement: "We seek to be as transparent as possible, strive to make subject-matter experts available and provide information in a timely manner ... Public affairs staff respond to

A South Dakota newspaper's legal battle for data about food stamp payments made to individual retailers is still alive, following a federal appeals court ruling that rejected the government's reasoning for keeping the payments secret



many inquiries throughout the day, working hard to accommodate deadlines. These examples [cited by Nieman Reports] represent a very limited number of circumstances that the public affairs leadership addresses when they arise and are not reflective of what is overall dedicated and prolific work being done by public affairs staff at HHS and its agencies."

Reporters say they understand that there has been a proliferation of websites and blogs and that the volume of requests for comment about health care issues has ballooned. But that doesn't mean press officers should routinely require them to submit questions in writing, and then respond with "talking point" answers or "not for attribution," if they respond at all. Felice Freyer, vice chairwoman of the AHCJ's right-to-know committee and a medical writer at The Providence (R.I.) Journal, says that while some members have had positive experiences dealing with press officers, many others haven't. They've faced long delays or been ignored. They've been prevented from talking to experts, and even when they do, there's often a press staffer present or on the phone, which can impede discussion.

In 2012, Stacey Singer, a health reporter at The Palm Beach Post, spent months digging through public records and uncovered information revealing that Florida officials had concealed the worst tuberculosis outbreak investigated by the CDC in 20 years. When she sought the CDC's permission to talk to an epidemiologist who had written the outbreak investigation report, an agency press staffer told her to get in touch with her state health department. The previous month, Singer had contacted another CDC scientist who had authored a published study describing a 2009 TB outbreak in Florida. The scientist was willing to chat, but said Singer first needed to go through the CDC press office, which nixed the interview. "In the past, I have always been able to talk to the authors of these papers," Singer says. "To have the CDC press office prevent me from speaking to scholars was unprecedented and disturbing."

These actions had several impacts on public health, according to Singer. The public wasn't aware that many of the TB patients were homeless and for at least two years, the state had placed them in a cheap motel in Jacksonville. If the CDC had informed the public about what was going on, Singer said, it might have prevented major cuts in the state health department's budget and led to a public outcry for more resources to contain the outbreak.

The Charleston Gazette's Ward said he, too, was shocked at the CDC's lack of response during the West Virginia chemical spill in January. It was

only after his colleague called the CDC director at home that a press officer responded and set up an interview with a top medical official. The CDC also held a press conference by phone, and public affairs director Barbara Reynolds apologized to Ward. Reynolds said there was a breakdown in communication on her office's end, and she has taken steps to improve the "triage system," especially when reporters call about an emergency.

"It's just utter nonsense when they talk about being so transparent," Ward says. "I have not found any journalist who thinks federal agencies are more open now than they were under the Bush administration."

In early March, the agency denied Ward's petition for an expedited review of a FOIA request about the chemicals' effects on pregnant women. CDC officials wrote that there was no "urgent need" to inform the public about the issue. That month, David Cuillier, president of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) board of directors, cited Ward's case when he testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee in Washington about the lack of transparency in the Obama administration.

The SPJ is especially concerned about transparency because "huge cuts" in the industry have weakened journalism, Cuillier says. "Newspaper companies are less willing to sue over secrecy. Without the watchdogs barking and biting as hard as they did in the past, I think we're seeing government taking advantage of that."

The Providence Journal's Freyer cites her own experience in 2010, when she tried to get information about a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) investigation into more than two dozen Rhode Island doctors who had illegally obtained hundreds of intrauterine devices (IUDs) from outside the U.S. After Freyer sought comment for a week, a FDA press officer said only that the agency was "continuing to look into these cases." Four days after Freyer's story was published, the FDA website mentioned the Rhode Island controversy and warned consumers not to use unapproved IUDs.

Erica V. Jefferson, the FDA's acting assistant commissioner for media affairs, says her agency is not allowed to disclose confidential information during an investigation, which can be frustrating to reporters. She says that in Freyer's case, her office also may not have been able to quickly get information from technical experts.

The FDA press office does allow experts to speak directly to reporters who call them, but asks that they at least notify the press office, according to Jefferson. However, she said, many experts have "discomfort and suspicion" dealing with the media and prefer to have reporters go through her office.

Journalists who've been covering federal health care agencies for decades remember when things

were different. Trudy Lieberman, a health reporter at Consumer Reports, recalled when she used to "waltz into" the FDA general counsel's office to get information: "Now, at FDA, you are lucky if you get somebody to return your call. They tell you to go to the website."

Kathryn Foxhall, a freelance health reporter who has been writing about federal agencies for nearly 40 years, became so outraged that she and two other journalists formed an organization called Stop the New American Censorship, which is trying to raise awareness about the issue. "When reporters are blocked and blocked and blocked, there's this huge amount of information and perspective that the public is not getting," Foxhall argues.

Foxhall says the transparency controversy is getting some attention in Washington. In August, the National Press Club sponsored a heated debate between reporters and press officers that was covered on CSPAN-2. Foxhall says Congress also needs to "step up" and take a more active role supporting government transparency because "they write the money bills and the powers-that-be have to come before them."

In the meantime, journalists offer some tips for colleagues facing government roadblocks:

- Find out who you want to talk to within an agency and try to contact them directly.
- Refuse to submit questions ahead of time or let a press officer moderate an interview or dictate who to interview.
- Write about it whenever an agency thwarts or manages an interview.
- Document every incident of stonewalling or denial and keep a running list.
- When calling or e-mailing the press office, be clear about the information you're seeking and your deadline. If someone promises to get back, ask when that will be; follow up every call with an e-mail.
- If a press officer is unresponsive, contact his or her superior and work your way up the chain of command.
- Complain to members of Congress or top agency officials.
- Contact the FOIA ombudsman at the Office of Government Information Service.

"The problem isn't going to go away, and our efforts are absolutely not going to go away," says Freyer. "We're going to continue to fight."



Ken Ward, a reporter for The Charleston Gazette in West Virginia, was shocked by the CDC's lack of response during a major chemical spill in January. He said, "I have not found any journalist who thinks federal agencies are more open now than they were under the Bush administration"



Jenni Bergal, a freelancer in the Washington, D.C. area, has been a reporter at the Sun-Sentinel in Florida, and an editor at NPR

The Mobile Majority

Smartphones present the next big challenge: engaging mobile users

By Joshua Benton

It almost seems unfair—a case of double jeopardy.

Traditional news organizations have spent the past decade responding to an enormously disruptive piece of technology: the Web browser. Their old monopolies, their old claims on the audience's attention, were broken by a platform that let anyone publish—no printing press or broadcast tower required. The impact on their business models, particularly at newspapers ... well, you know all about that.

But just when news organizations were starting to feel more at home on the Web—just when, in many newsrooms, digital was no longer being treated as a sad sister to print—along comes another blow-up-the-model moment: mobile.

It would be an exaggeration to say that the rise of the smartphone is a shift on par with the rise of the Web. But it wouldn't be that much of one. Seven years after the iPhone, smartphones have moved from a tool of the tech elite to a handheld computer in everyone's pocket. They're radically changing how people are getting their news. And I fear that many news outlets still haven't wrestled with how big a change they represent.

New data from eMarketer estimates that, in the United States, about 23 percent of Americans' total media consumption in 2014 will come on mobile devices. That's counting all media formats, including television, radio and print. Mobile's already ahead of the total for laptops and desktops, 18 percent. And its share will keep growing as networks get faster and devices get cheaper.

It's not uncommon for major news organizations to see 40 percent of their online audience on mobile devices, most of them smartphones. And at peak mobile times—mornings before work, weekends, evenings—their digital audience is often

News outlets are watching their audiences move rapidly to a new platform—one where they have a number of competitive disadvantages and where they have a hard time making money. Sound familiar?

a mobile majority.

But those numbers hide the fact that traditional news outlets are being out-competed for mobile users' attention. Data from comScore show that while consuming newspaper content takes up a mere 0.9 percent of total connected time on desktops and laptops, the total's even worse on phones—just 0.2 percent.

Aren't phones just Web browsers with smaller screens? Not really. Smartphones are personal, social machines, optimized for communication and entertainment. Offered the choice, there are lots of people who'd rather spend time with Flappy Bird than The Fresno Bee. The tap-and-scroll interface works beautifully with social networks like Facebook and Twitter—less so with old-fashioned news presentation. And an interface built around apps and icons can make it a challenge for any single news source to earn a prominent spot on someone's home screen.

The other big challenge is—surprise, surprise—money. Online advertising has long been dominated by a few big players, but their market power is even stronger on mobile. Just two companies—Google and Facebook—will earn 68.5 percent of

all the mobile advertising revenue worldwide in 2014. They can do so because they have the best data about individual users: Google knows what you're searching for, Facebook knows who and what you like. That advantage is almost impossible for a small news outlet to beat. The Newspaper Association of America estimates that mobile ads contributed less than 1 percent of all newspaper revenue in 2013.

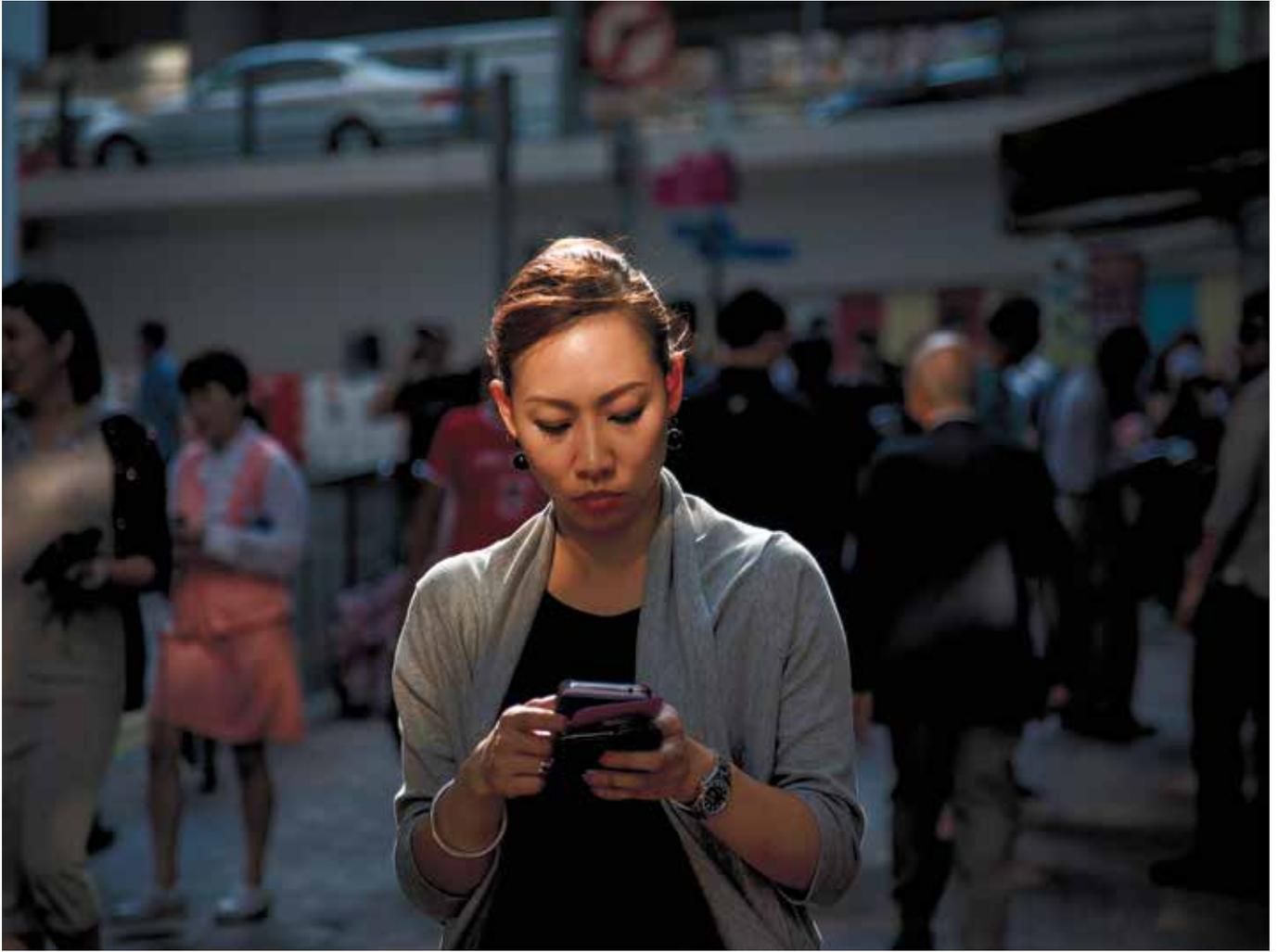
So: News outlets are watching their audiences move rapidly to a new platform—one where they have a number of competitive disadvantages and where they have a hard time making money. Sound familiar? You can be excused for thinking 2014 sounds a lot like 2004.

Part of the problem is that many news organizations, seeing this new generation of devices, made a bad bet. They decided that tablets, not smartphones, were the place to invest. Magazines, in particular, spent many millions building interactive iPad apps that promised to transfer the magazine-reading experience to a flat piece of glass about the same size.

These apps were often lovely. They were also often slow to download, clunky to use, and papered over with only the thinnest layer of interactivity.

Publishers thought tablets would be a chance to retake control of the publishing channel. Anyone can publish on the Web, they thought, but not everyone can create an experience like this; it'll be a recreation of the old evening newspaper, a lean-back read that they're uniquely able to provide.

That tablet boom never came. Most of those fancy magazine apps sunk into disuse, never attracting the kind of subscription numbers publishers hoped. Sales of the iPad, the most popular tablet and the one most publishers targeted, fell this spring, year-over-year. Cheaper Android tablets keep selling, but there's little evidence people are paying for news on them en masse. Research from Ball State Univer-



JOACHIM LABEFOGED/VII

Phone-first start-ups and tablet emigrants are serving up news in ways that engage mobile users

sity found that, among college students, the percentage owning a tablet actually declined between 2012 and 2014.

Meanwhile, social networks took over the phone. Journalists spend a lot of time on Twitter, and everyone knows about Facebook. But other platforms—YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Vine, Snapchat—are also huge competitors for readers' attention, and increasingly important for news discovery on mobile. The interconnection between mobile devices and social media has been a powerful one, fueling the rise of new outlets like BuzzFeed. New phone-first start-ups like Circa and Inside, products like Facebook Paper and Yahoo News Digest, and tablet emigrants like Flipboard are all presenting news in mobile-friendly ways. It's hard for the old guard to compete.

But hard doesn't mean impossible.

Breaking News, the app-centric outfit run as an in-house start-up by NBC News, has done creative work to take advantage of push notifications and to increase customization. Atlantic Media, home to a 157-year-old magazine, has found early success with Quartz, a business site built around social content and designed with mobile devices in mind. (Quartz was originally targeted primarily at tablets, but it's found smartphone users are three times as common.)

And The New York Times's new iPhone app, NYT Now, rethinks the news app paradigm in interesting ways—including a scroll-friendly presentation, smart aggregation, and twice-a-day summaries of the day's most interesting and important news. Even though it only includes a fraction of the Times's stories, I'm not the only person to think NYT

Now offers a far better news experience than the Times' regular iPhone app or mobile site.

It's not hopeless; the smartest news companies will adapt. Bright journalists will figure out how to shape their work for a mobile audience; smart developers will build new experiences to delight readers; entrepreneurial businesspeople will come up with new ways to make money on it all. But for traditional news companies, the rise of smartphones is as big a challenge as they've seen since the early days of the Web. It'll be up to them to see if the story plays out any differently this time.



Joshua Benton, a 2008 Nieman Fellow, is founding director of the Nieman Journalism Lab



Quiet Human Moments Amidst Great Strife

*Photographs by Anja Niedringhaus, NF '07,
killed in Afghanistan while covering
election preparations*



Guarding the home in Mingora, Pakistan of Kainat Riaz, 16, who was shot alongside Malala Yousafzai by the same Taliban gunman, 2012



Listening to music from a German soldier's iPod in Yaftal e Sofla, Afghanistan, 2009



Afghan Shiite ahead of the Ashure holiday in Kabul, 2013

By Kathleen Carroll

Many years ago, I asked Anja to show me her favorite picture, the one she liked the most. The photo she sent showed an elegant older man sitting on the wreckage of a large destroyed vehicle as if it was a park bench, his legs crossed, one hand resting on the curved handle of an umbrella, the other holding a cigar at his lips.

It was a very Anja kind of picture. She was focused on calm while all around was chaos. And I believe that is why her pictures from terrible places resonated with so many people around the world.

She found their dignity. She found the quiet human moments that connected people in great strife with all the rest of us: A father tenderly kissing a baby. Children playing ball on a dusty street. A young girl reaching way up to help her brother down from a high place.

Many who have written and talked about Anja in the sad days since she left us have mentioned her great laugh and her great joy for life. She may have been the only



Serena Williams after winning her fifth Wimbledon singles title, 2012

completely happy journalist in the world; she certainly was a truly happy person. And she did infect all of us with her boundless joy, even, and perhaps especially, when things were difficult.

The work she did required enormous preparation. Not just work in conflict, but in the sporting events that she covered.

Many hours were spent preparing her cameras, the wiring, the angle, making sure that she, above all others, was going to get the very best shot. And she so often did.

Anja was also known among us all as a great teacher. Many of us have heard her say “Nein! Nein! Nein! Don’t do it that way. Try harder. You can be better.”

Then, encouragement. “I believe in you.”

And, sometimes, the words that were very precious when they came from Anja: “I’m very proud of you.”

Several years ago she and I had lunch while she was on her way to look for a young soldier. She had photographed him in a helicopter ambulance, gravely wounded.

As he lay on the ambulance floor being treated, she reached out and held his hand and he gripped it very

tightly. And she gripped it tightly back. And with her other hand, she picked up her camera and made a picture. And several more. And eventually, he passed into unconsciousness and he let go of her hand.

She made more pictures and noticed a little piece of wheat caught in his uniform. And she plucked it off of him and put it in her vest. And when I saw her, she was looking for him.

After six months, she found him. He looked at her pictures and they talked for many hours. They hugged. And they cried. And she gave him back the piece of wheat.

Anja, dear Anja. The days since you left us have been so sad. But we are grateful for all that you have given us. And we will always hear your voice in our ears.

“Nein! Nein! Nein! You can do better ...”

“I am proud of you.”

This is a lightly edited version of remarks made by Kathleen Carroll, Associated Press senior vice president and executive editor, at the funeral of Anja Niedringhaus, NF '07, in Hoexter, Germany on April 12, 2014



A U.S. Marine's good luck charm in Fallujah, Iraq, 2004



Injured Afghan girl in a U.S. Army medevac helicopter, 2011



Afghan boy on a hill overlooking Kabul, Afghanistan, 2013





Afghan boy holds a toy gun on a merry-go-round in Kabul, Afghanistan, 2009



U.S. Marines on Christmas Eve in Kuwait, 2002



Anja Niedringhaus in Rome, 2005

PETER DEJONG/ASSOCIATED PRESS



A bus, once used as an anti-sniper barricade, in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1995

In Praise of Digital

An excerpt from the new edition of “The Elements of Journalism”

Since its publication in 2001, *“The Elements of Journalism”* has been the industry-standard text on the ethics and practice of journalism. In this edited excerpt from the third edition, published this past April, co-authors Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel explore ways that journalists can harness some of these new tools in service of the book’s seventh principle: *Journalism must make the significant interesting and relevant.*

Engagement requires that journalists understand a new, deeper structural reality: In the old order, audiences had to adapt their behavior to fit the rhythms of the news media. They had to be home at 6:30 to see the newscast, or be sure to read the morning paper to be current with the news others had seen. Now the news media must adapt to fit the behavior and curiosity of the community that new technology has created. Now that

Turning news into data opens up profound new potential for creating a deeply informed and engaged audience

audiences can go elsewhere with ease, they will increasingly demand that journalists make the best choices about how much and what kind of information to provide and not provide, given that arbitrary space limits are not an issue.

Rethinking is required in part because some of the conventional wisdom about shortened attention spans was misguided and has hurt journalism. A multiyear study of local television news we designed at the Project for Excellence in Journalism, for instance, found that stations that ran more short stories—under 45 seconds—tended to lose audiences. Stations that did more stories over two minutes, on the other hand, tend to gain viewership.

Similarly, many early studies suggested that people would never read long-form material on digital screens. The average time people spent on Web pages tended toward about 30 seconds, according to studies by the Poynter Institute. The advent of the smartphone, tablet and e-reader began to dispel this illusion. The short attention span had less to do with anything inherent about the screens than it did with the fact that the people in the studies were using desktop computers, and often in their offices.

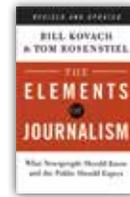
The good news is that the same technology that devastated the economic foundation of commercial news in the beginning of the new century has also unleashed a profound new wave of creativity. The tools include new ways of using data, graphics and technology, involving the community, and more. The level of experimentation is probably unprecedented in at least a century, and while dizzying to many older hands, it

offers the potential to make journalism more engaging, more relevant, and more empowering than in generations. Here are [two] conceptual approaches to doing so:

News as structured data

The rich new wealth of data made possible by the Web can be rendered in ways that go beyond narratives about data or even the largely visual representations of numbers. One of these alternatives is to structure the information into new constructed data points that tell the story. This is data that is organized and analyzed into points of meaning beyond raw data.

PolitiFact, a website run by the Tampa [Bay] Times, the focus of which is political “fact checking,” is an example. Rather than write stories, the site rates the veracity of statements by political figures on a meter, from true to utterly false. Each rating, in



“The Elements of Journalism”

By Bill Kovach & Tom Rosenstiel

Three Rivers Press

effect, is a data point. These data points, in turn, can be combined to tell other stories over time, like charting the overall truthfulness of Barack Obama’s statements and comparing his to other officials’.

Homicide Watch, a website that tracks crime in cities at the street level, does something similar. Information is logged as data points, not just narrative, and that data can be sorted, mapped, filtered and analyzed in a comprehensive way over time.

The potential here is far greater than most news organizations realize. When print publications went digital, every story necessarily transformed from words on a page into a data record in a CMS database. Generally, however, few of these stories were treated as data that could be related to one another and analyzed programmatically. As an example, when newspapers posted to the Web real estate transactions that were printed in the paper, the different data points about location, price and buyer could have been entered into different data fields, such as school districts, tax assessments, access to public transportation. If they had been, the potential for understanding and analyzing that data would have grown exponentially. The paper would no longer just have stories archived. It would have knowledge about the community that could be used in different ways.

Turning news into data opens up profound new potential for creating a more deeply informed and engaged audience. Even news operations with fairly limited resources can analyze the data to do more insightful, efficient reporting. The data can be made sortable and interactive, for users to manipulate. News organizations can build



JACOB HARRIS/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Audiences used to have to adapt to the media's publication cycles; today, media must find ways to adapt to readers' schedules

news apps and mobile apps that leverage the data, and news coded and treated as data can be leveraged into new revenue. Both PolitiFact and Homicide Watch, for example, are making money by licensing their technology platform to other news organizations.

Multimedia that's multi-media

A growing number of places are experimenting with Web-native storytelling forms that blend video, audio, images, text, animations and interactive graphics into one integrated narrative.

In this new form of storytelling, each piece of content involves multimedia dimensions. It's not a text story with a video embedded, or slide shows with text. Rather, these are new kinds of narratives that can't be clearly defined by their components, or even, admittedly, described here with words.

Zeega.com, for instance, is a website that enables anyone to easily combine animated GIFs, audio, images, text and video from across the Web. Cowbird is another site that does something similar. Explore them and you will find video of the space race, narrated by astronaut Frank Borman, which users control by clicking, and collages of images with written text in different fonts, and animations with audio narration. There are no set norms, and most visitors will find some stories stimulating and others flat. Whether it's work by professionals such as Alexis Madrigal of *The Atlantic* or work by amateurs of all ages, there is only a single common denominator on Cowbird: creativity.

The *New York Times* received wide praise for its 2013 blending of elements in telling the story of the avalanche at Tunnel Creek in Washington State's Cascade Mountain

range. The rich and skilled rendering of the incident that trapped and killed experienced skiers indicates the promise of multimedia, but it is hardly alone. *Prison Valley* is the interactive Web story of a town in the middle of Colorado with 13,000 people—and 13 prisons—that is almost the meeting of television documentary and video game. NPR's *Picture Show*, a daily curation of photos from around the Web, produced a special report called "Lost and Found" that blended rare color photographs shot by amateur photographer Charles Cushman in 1938 with audio narration and the story of how his lost photos were discovered.

As we discuss technique, it is vital to take care to remember that form never determines substance. Technique should never alter the facts—the journalist's use of narrative forms must always be governed by the principles of accuracy and truthfulness. Regardless of the form of presentation, the most engaging thing of all must be kept in mind: The story is true.

Reprinted from "The Elements of Journalism," Revised and Updated 3rd Edition, by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel. Copyright © 2014 by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel

Introducing the 77th Class of Nieman Fellows

Twenty-four journalists, including the first from Cuba, have been selected for a 2014-15 Nieman Fellowship. In recent years, as journalism has changed, the fellowship has encouraged innovation, experimentation with digital and

social media, and other collaborative ventures designed to transform and strengthen the news industry. Since its founding in 1938, the Nieman Foundation has supported and mentored more than 1,400 journalists from 93 countries.

U.S. Fellows

Melissa Bailey



Managing editor of the New Haven Independent, a pioneering, nonprofit community news website in New Haven, Connecticut,

will study how online learning is redefining higher education, with a particular interest in competency-based programs and the impact on the nation's class divide.

Gabe Bullard



Director of news and editorial strategy at radio station WFPL News in Louisville, Kentucky,

will study the changing perceptions of American history in politics and culture.

Henry Chu



London bureau chief for the Los Angeles Times, will study the rise of a global middle class and why, in major developing

countries such as China and India, the group has not become the engine of significant political change that it has been elsewhere.

Kitty Eisele



Supervising senior editor at NPR's "Morning Edition," will examine the ways in which both journalists and citizens use a visual

vocabulary and what they mean for radio.

Farnaz Fassihi



Senior Middle East correspondent, based in Beirut, for The Wall Street Journal, will study the rise of Iran's Revolutionary

Guard Corps, focusing on how they and other Islamic militants on both sides of the sectarian Sunni-Shiite divide are utilizing modern technology to organize, recruit, spread their influence, and crush opponents.

Jason Grotto



Investigative reporter for the Chicago Tribune, will study finance, accounting and economics to sharpen his investigative reporting skills.

Maggie Koerth-Baker



Columnist for The New York Times Magazine and science editor at BoingBoing.net whose work has appeared in

Discover and Popular Science, will study the process, history and ethics of medical development and human testing, with a focus on the flu vaccine.

Celeste LeCompte



Co-founder of Climate Confidential, who writes about innovation, and entrepreneurs, will study motivations for news

media consumption, with an eye toward developing media business models.

Ann Marimow



Reporter at The Washington Post who covers legal affairs and the criminal justice system, will study the law and its intersection

with politics and journalism, looking at conflicts between U.S. national security interests, privacy protections, and press freedoms.

Denise-Marie Ordway



Senior reporter focusing on higher education at the Orlando Sentinel, will study performance-based funding models

for state universities to understand their effect on instructional quality, tuition rates, and degree completion and how these models affect universities with large minority enrollments, including historically black institutions.

Alicia Stewart



Editor at CNN.com, will study entrepreneurial and editorial models for nuanced reporting on under-covered

communities, with a focus on women and people of color.

Dawn Turner Trice



Columnist and specialist reporter with the Chicago Tribune, will study creative nonfiction writing and screenwriting for

documentary films.

International Fellows

Abeer Allam

EGYPT



Gulf correspondent for the Financial Times, will study the impact of social media on accelerating reforms in closed societies and how the 2011 uprisings in Arab countries influenced Saudi Arabia. She will also study the role of religion in Western democracies.

Wahyu Dhyatmika

INDONESIA



Investigative reporter for Tempo magazine in Jakarta, will study how digital media can provide the platform for a collaborative network of independent investigative local and national media, supported by crowdsourcing.

Irina Gordienko

RUSSIA



Correspondent for the Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta, will study the role of jihadist ideas in armed conflict in Dagestan and assess their potential for either dramatic radicalization and marginalization or moderation.

Luo Jieqi

CHINA



Senior legal reporter for the Caixin Media Company, will study how investigative journalism in the Chinese media can contribute to the public decision-making process.

David Jiménez

SPAIN



Asia bureau chief for El Mundo, will study the role of foreign correspondents in the digital era and the development of online platforms to extend the reach of freelancers' work, especially in developing countries and authoritarian regimes.

Seung Ryun Kim

SOUTH KOREA



Editor at Channel A in Seoul, will study national security with a focus on U.S. policy in China, Japan and Korea, and news industry transformation, including media management and marketing.

Miguel Paz

CHILE



Journalist, former Knight International Center for Journalists Fellow, and president of Poderomedia Foundation, which promotes transparency and digital innovation, will study new data visualization models, innovative news start-ups, and civic media approaches to building sustainable journalism models.

Laurie Penny

U.K.



Contributing editor at The New Statesman, editor at large for The New Inquiry, and a contributor to The Guardian and The Nation, will study the economic history and theory of social movements.

Vladimir Radomirovic

SERBIA



Editor in chief of Pitaljka, an online investigative journalism outlet, will study business models of nonprofit organizations, the use of online and video tools for human rights activism, and how whistleblowing organizations and media outlets can interact.

Elaine Díaz Rodríguez

CUBA



Journalist, blogger and professor at the University of Havana, will study Internet-based models of journalism that could serve a plurality of voices in Cuban civil society, with a focus on political consensus-building and national reconciliation.

Johanna van Eeden

SOUTH AFRICA



Senior newsroom executive with the Volksblad Group in South Africa, will study leadership in a digital economy, with a focus on the importance of commercial skills in editorial management roles.

Nabil Wakim

FRANCE



Digital editor in chief of Le Monde, will study how legacy media can adapt their business models and internal organizations to benefit from the digital revolution, with a focus on political journalism.

In selecting the Nieman class of 2015, Nieman Foundation curator **Ann Marie Lipinski**, a 1990 Nieman Fellow, was joined by Rohit Deshpandé, Sebastian S. Kresge Professor of Marketing at Harvard Business School; **David Skok**, digital adviser to the editor at The Boston Globe and a 2012 Nieman Fellow; **Jane Spencer**, editor for digital projects and innovation at The Wall

Street Journal and a 2013 Nieman Fellow; Robert Faris, research director at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet & Society; Rebecca Tabasky, Berkman's manager of community programs; **James Geary**, Nieman's deputy curator and a 2012 Nieman Fellow; and **Joshua Benton**, director of the Nieman Journalism Lab and a 2008 Nieman Fellow.

1962

John Hughes's memoir "Paper Boy to Pulitzer" will be released by Nebbadoon Press this summer. Hughes has been editor of The Christian Science Monitor and the Deseret Morning News in Salt Lake City, Utah, as well as director of Voice of America and a U.S. State Department spokesman. In 1967, he won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of an attempted coup in Indonesia and the purge that followed. He is a professor of international communications at Brigham Young University.

1966

James F. Montgomery died August 15, 2012 in Atlanta, Georgia. He was 84. Montgomery was a reporter, then business editor during his 16-year tenure at The Atlanta Constitution. Subsequently, he was a correspondent for The Wall Street Journal's Atlanta bureau for 16 years. Whether writing about economic or social issues, Montgomery was fair-minded and supportive of the underdog, recalls Nieman classmate **Wayne Woodlief**. Montgomery retired in 1985. He is survived by his wife, Florence C. Montgomery, two daughters, and two granddaughters.

1969

John J. Zakarian, longtime editorial page editor for The Hartford Courant, died of Lou Gehrig's disease on March 28 in Hartford, Connecticut. He was 76. Born in the Armenian quarter of Jerusalem, Zakarian

had scholarships from San Francisco State University and Southern Illinois University when he arrived in the U.S. in 1957. He chose Illinois because it was a shorter trip from New York. Beginning in 1977, he was editorial page editor of the Courant for 27 years. During his tenure, he hired the paper's first full-time editorial cartoonist, expanded the range of views expressed on the editorial page, and increased the size of the Sunday opinion section. In 1981, he led a delegation of editorial page editors on a trip to the Middle East where they interviewed Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Six years later, Zakarian received an award from the Overseas Press Club for a series of editorials he wrote about the Middle East. He retired in 2004. Zakarian is survived by his wife, Kay, two sons, and five grandchildren.

1972

R. Gregory Nokes is the author of "Breaking Chains: Slavery on Trial in the Oregon Territory," a 2014 Oregon Book Award finalist. Published in 2013 by Oregon State University Press, the book examines a landmark Oregon court case in which an illiterate ex-slave sued his former master and won freedom in 1853 for his three children.

1973

Ed Williams's new book "Liberating Dixie: An Editor's Life, from Ole Miss to Obama," a selection of his work from a half-century career in journalism, was published by Lorimer Press in March. He started out as a reporter at the Delta

Our Man in China

The late William Worthy, NF '57, on his reporting trip that angered U.S. officials

William Worthy, NF '57, a foreign correspondent who fought with the U.S. government over reporting trips to China, Cuba and Iran, died at a nursing home in Massachusetts on May 4. He was 92. It was during his Nieman Fellowship in 1956-1957 that Worthy, a reporter for the Baltimore Afro-American and correspondent for CBS News, defied the State Department's travel restrictions by flying to China during winter break to report for CBS. He and two other American reporters on the trip became the first to enter China since 1949. In this excerpt from the Summer 1957 issue of Nieman Reports, Worthy discusses some of the story ideas he found there.

The question often asked me is how much news could be gathered by permanent U. S. correspondents in China. Most news, as of now, would have to be feature and background material. Much of it would be speculative and based on the "feel" of things which, in the present total absence of any Chinese censorship, could readily be communicated. During my six-week stay hardly a day passed without some little story or insight or inkling of a story coming my way. Hurrying one Sunday morning to tape record a church service, my interpreter and I listened to five or 10 minutes of song and prayer before an usher informed us that we had stum-

Democrat Times in Greenville, Mississippi and was editor of The Charlotte (N.C.) Observer's editorial page for 25 years.

1974

Patricia O'Brien's new historical novel "The Daring Ladies of Lowell" draws on the murder of a millworker in 1832 and the trial that followed. The book tells the story of a 22-year-old woman, working in a Lowell, Massachusetts textile mill in the 1830s, who becomes an advocate for workers' rights. The novel, published in February by Doubleday, is O'Brien's second written under the pseudonym of Kate Alcott.

1976

Raymond J. White, a Washington-based journalist for much of his career, died of leukemia on February 14 in Bethesda, Maryland. He was 79. After serving in the Marine Corps, White worked as a print and broadcast journalist in Syracuse; New York City; Scranton, Pennsylvania; and Baltimore. In 1973, he moved to Washington to work for Post-Newsweek Stations, formerly owned by The Washington Post. He was later a producer of the PBS program "Wall Street Week." In 1979, White was named editor of the Washington Journalism Review, now the American



William Worthy

bled into the wrong building. This was a decrepit Salvation Army structure with just a handful of worshippers rather than the well-attended carefully maintained church around the corner to which visitors are steered ...

Inside the Shanghai Drug Store I could not help but notice the continuous crowds around the counter which features the birth-control literature and unblushingly sells to men and women the unpackaged,

unwrapped contraceptive devices. The literature was also for sale, but the display copies were chained to the counter in the way of our post office pens.

Across the street from the drugstore at Wing On Department Store I sensed the undiminished admiration for American products when I was shown consumer goods, from “Singers” to “Florsheims” to “Parker 51s,” which retain their private capitalistic names although manufactured now in state-owned factories of the People’s Republic of China ...

A visiting correspondent under the whiplash of a limited visa has no choice but to soak in and later try to check a mass of secondhand reports during interviews and dinner parties at the various embassies. A permanent correspondent could do his own strolling and follow leads that come his way from diplomats and others. Needless to add, any reporter in China who planned to rely on leaks of secret information would be singularly unproductive of copy.

Journalism Review. From 1984 to 1986, White served as Washington bureau chief for Fox News and he was an adjunct professor at American University from 1985 to 1995. He is survived by his wife, Barbara Dubyak, two daughters, and three grandchildren.

1978

Danny Schechter is the author of “Madiba A to Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela,” published by Seven Stories Press in November 2013. Informed by Schechter’s many documentaries about Nelson Mandela, the book comprises short reflective essays that include personal

remembrances by Nadine Gordimer and **Pippa Green**, NF ‘99, who covered Mandela’s release from prison.

1982

Steve Oney, a contributor to many publications including Esquire, Playboy, Los Angeles Magazine, and The New York Times Magazine, was a Shorenstein Fellow at Harvard’s Kennedy School for the spring semester. He is working on a book about NPR for Simon & Schuster.

Edward Walsh, a reporter for The Washington Post for more than 30 years, died of lung cancer in his Portland,

Oregon home on February 14. He was 71. At the Post, Walsh covered Maryland politics and the Carter administration before working as the Jerusalem bureau chief from 1982 to 1985. In 2004, he left the Post and moved to Portland, his wife’s hometown, where he covered politics for The Oregonian until retiring in 2009. His colleagues admired him as an old-fashioned reporter in the best sense of the word. “He wanted people to be straight with him and he would report straight,” said Dan Balz, who worked with Walsh at the Post. “His work was fast, thorough, accurate and cleanly written.” Walsh is survived by his wife, Michelle, two children, and one grandchild.

1985

Philip Hiltz, director of the Knight Science Journalism Program at MIT since 2008, will retire in June. Under his leadership, the number of science reporters applying for the year-long Knight Science Journalism fellowships, modeled on the Nieman program, grew from about 80 a year to about 150 a year. A former science reporter for The New York Times and The Washington Post, Hiltz is writing a book about new approaches to solar energy.

1987

Songpol Kaopatuntip has launched a website, insideasean.com, that covers political, economic, social and education issues affecting the 10 member nations in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Based in Bang-

kok, Thailand, he worked for the Bangkok Post from 1976 until 2012.

1990

Ann Marie Lipinski, curator of the Nieman Foundation, has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, an honorary society and research center based in Cambridge. She was among 204 new members, including 16 from Harvard, elected this year.

1992

Stan Grossfeld, an associate editor and photographer at The Boston Globe, won the 2013 Sigma Delta Chi Award for best sports photography in a newspaper with circulation above 100,000. His photo—showing the legs of a Detroit Tigers ballplayer in the air mirroring the upraised arms of a Boston police officer—drew accolades from several media outlets as “the photo of the year.”

1995

Lorie Hearn, along with two colleagues at InewsSource, won a 2013 Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. award for “Money, Power and Transit.” The judges commented: “InewsSource filed 40 open records requests and produced 30 stories making the most of video, audio and the written word to reveal layer upon layer of bureaucratic arrogance, corruption and ineptitude at the [San Diego] transit system.” Hearn is founder, editor and executive director of the nonprofit InewsSource.

1996

Tim Golden is managing editor for investigations and news at The Marshall Project, an online nonprofit news organization that will cover the U.S. criminal justice system. It is expected to launch in the second half of 2014. Golden joins former New York Times colleague Bill Keller, who is editor in chief of the site.

1997

Paige Williams, who writes for The New Yorker, has been named an associate professor at the Missouri School of Journalism, where she'll teach longform narrative. For the past four years, she has taught narrative writing at the Nieman Foundation, and for the past three she has been the editor of Nieman Storyboard. She'll begin her new posting in the fall.

2004

Masha Gessen is co-editor of "Gay Propaganda: Russian Love Stories," published by OR Books in February. A response to government efforts to demonize homosexuality, the book is a collection of personal accounts of gays and lesbians coping with political and social discrimination in Russia. The stories appear in English and Russian in the same volume.

2007

Eliza Griswold's book "I am the Beggar of the World: Landays from Contemporary Afghanistan" was published in

April by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Photographs by Seamus Murphy accompany the two-line poems called landays that Griswold collected and translated. For Afghan women, many of them illiterate and rural, landays have been a powerful means of expression and communication for more than 1,000 years.

Craig Welch received the Overseas Press Club of America's Whitman Bassow Award for his Seattle Times series "Sea Change: The Pacific's Perilous Turn." In collaboration with a photographer, Welch exposed the widespread consequences of ocean acidification, which is caused by the absorption of carbon dioxide produced by the burning of fossil fuels.

2008

Raúl Peñaranda received the LASA Media Award at the end of May. Given annually by the Latin American Studies Association, the award honors reporters covering the region who "have accuracy and reliability in their reporting, and have produced one or more exceptional stories in the course of the year." His new book about government interference in media in Bolivia, "Remote Control: How Evo Morales' Government Created a Network of Para-Governmental Media and a Plan to Harass the Independent Press," was released in April.

Walter Ray Watson is the producer for "The Race Card Project" which won a 2014 Peabody Award. The project was created in 2010 to start

Boston Strong

David Abel, NF '13, on the year that followed the Boston Marathon bombings

A year ago, I was lapping up all Harvard had to offer, from poetry criticism with Helen Vendler to economic policy with Larry Summers. Even more compelling were my fellow fellows.

Last April, with the daffodils and tulips in bloom at Lippmann House, I didn't know how abruptly my fellowship would end. On April 15, I was up before dawn to meet Juli Windsor, who at 3-foot-9 hoped to become the first dwarf to run the Boston Marathon. Making a documentary about her was the final project for my film class. After following Juli along the marathon course, I set up my camera at the finish line. She was due to cross at any moment.

Then I felt it. The street shuddered. I saw a flash of light and a cloud of smoke erupt fewer than 20 steps from me. I smelled sulfur and the shock wave pushed me back several steps.

Twelve seconds later, as I struggled to make sense of the growing pandemonium, I heard the second blast. Instantly, I knew what had happened.

In those fraught moments, my respite in academia ended. My hands shook as I filmed the horror and called in the first story about the attack to my colleagues at The Boston Globe, who posted my words, sentence by sentence, editing out my anger. Afterward, between calls from the BBC, CNN, and networks from New Zealand to Chile, I wrote a first-person account for the paper. My footage was viewed by tens of millions of people around the world.

Sleep wasn't easy over the coming weeks, especially as I edited my film.

Over the following year, I told stories of the profound impact of that day. For six months I followed one family who suffered the worst of it. Their 8-year-old son died and their 7-year-old daughter lost

a public conversation about race. Members of the public have submitted tens of thousands of six-word statements related to race and identity. The judges lauded the project, which has been featured on NPR's "Morning Edition," for "encouraging public discussion about diversity in ways that cut through obvious differences to present unique and individual lived experiences."

2010

Janet Heard has been appointed parliamentary editor at Media 24, which includes a range of daily and weekend English and Afrikaans news titles. Her appointment coincides with the establishment of the fifth parliament in post-apartheid South Africa. She previously worked at the Cape Times.



Juli Windsor and David Abel, behind her

a leg. The husband had severe ringing in his ears and the wife was blind in one eye. My two-part narrative about the Richard family, among the longest ever published in the paper, ran the Sunday before the anniversary and triggered thousands of messages, a response unlike any other story I've written.

The following day, my colleagues and I won the Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News, which felt more like a Purple Heart and sparked more sadness than celebration. The next day, on the anniversary of the attack, I interviewed spectators, runners and others who had come back to stand where they had been the year before. That night, "25.7: In Twice the Steps," the film I made as a fellow, was broadcast to a national audience on cable.

For the Marathon, the next Monday, I was up at dawn to meet Juli. This time I accompanied her every step of the way. Our hearts raced as we passed where the bombs had detonated and we crossed the finish line together, holding hands.

The next morning, despite the throbbing in my legs, there was one place I wanted to be more than anywhere else. Back at Lippmann House, the daffodils and tulips were in their full glory and I felt at peace as I limped inside.

*The staff of The Boston Globe, including reporter **David Abel, NF '13**; columnist **Kevin Cullen, NF '03**; managing editor for news **Christine Chinlund, NF '98**; and city editor **Stephen Smith, NF '00**; was recognized with a 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News.*

2011

Stefan Canda was assistant project manager for "Secrecy for Sale: Inside the Global Offshore Money Maze," a multiplatform project of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. "Secrecy for Sale" won an award from Independent Reporters and Editors, Inc. The judges called the investigation, which has led to

high-profile resignations and legal investigations on four continents, "awe-inspiring by every measure."

2012

Carlotta Gall's book "The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan, 2001-2014" was published in April by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Gall covered Afghanistan for The New York Times, living in the

country for longer than any other Western correspondent. The book offers evidence that Pakistani military and intelligence forces had a much greater role in supporting the Taliban insurgency than the Afghans. Gall, now based in Tunisia, is the Times's North Africa correspondent.

2013

Ludovic Blecher, Borja Echevarría de la Gándara, Alexandra Garcia, Paula Molina, and **Hong Qu** received funding from the Knight Prototype Fund to develop innovative media projects. Qu's project, Keepr, is designed to connect journalists with credible information and sources as they follow breaking news on Twitter. Blecher, Echevarría de la Gándara, Garcia and Molina created Instant, a mobile app that verifies and contextualizes news stories as they are reported on social media. Each of the two projects received \$35,000.

Borja Echevarría de la Gándara has been appointed vice president of digital at Univision News. In this newly created role based in Miami, Florida, he will direct strategy for Univision News's digital platforms. In addition, he is charged with creating a state-of-the-art data journalism unit for Univision News. Echevarría de la Gándara was most recently deputy managing editor of El País, Spain's largest daily newspaper.

Daniel Eilemberg is now chief digital officer and senior vice president of Fusion, a joint cable and digital venture of ABC and Univision.

Blair Kamin's e-book "The Gates of Harvard Yard" inspired the Harvard Club of Chicago to raise money to fund the planting of trees and other landscaping improvements around Johnston Gate. The gate is named for Chicago native Samuel Johnston, who funded it.

Souad Mekhennet is co-author with Nicholas Kulish of "The Eternal Nazi: From Mauthausen to Cairo, the Relentless Pursuit of SS Doctor Aribert Heim." Published in March by Doubleday, the book chronicles how a concentration camp doctor escaped justice for his war crimes. Mekhennet was one of 214 people from 66 countries honored by the World Economic Forum in 2014 as a Young Global Leader.

Betsy O'Donovan is the new social media strategist for the Association of Independents in Radio, a Boston-based global social and professional network of producers.

2014

Anna Fifield will be The Washington Post's Tokyo bureau chief, starting in July. Fifield previously worked for the Financial Times, most recently as U.S. political correspondent, and before that as a correspondent covering the Middle East and North and South Korea.

Tim Rogers will join Fusion as homepage editor in June. He will be based at its headquarters near Miami, Florida.

Mosaics and Marginalia

In search of a narrative arc, from the Caucasus to Cairo

I have lived most of my adult life out of a single suitcase, zigzagging a career through the Caucasus and the Middle East. But I had never plumbed for inspiration or reason. In the introduction to my first book I wrote: “In any case I got on a plane.” Whenever autobiography came up, I reused this neat little formula, self-plagiarizing, with a shrug.

I started to write my story from the beginning: I was born in ... Regular narrative footfalls: And then and then ... Until the Berlin Wall came down and I flew, alone and 19, to Czechoslovakia. Here the paragraphs slowed and thickened with details, and I realized that this very first lone voyage had set a template for my whole life.

I had a single phone number in my pocket. A business associate of my father’s had left Czecho in ‘68, and his family still lived in Moravia. With some misgivings and a knot in my stomach, I boarded a train to the provincial capital, Olomouc. The light in the carriage blinked and buzzed, the window was jammed open to a bracing draft and I sat very stiffly, not daring to find another seat.

I stepped off the train and saw a man holding up a sign, V-E-N-D-I. I was warmly ushered into a bashed-up red Skoda with the carcass of a wild boar in the boot and ferried into the bosom of the family, where I was fed schnitzel and strudel and plum brandy and introduced to everyone in town. One of the brothers, Ales, was a dentist and he and his friends were in Obcanske Forum, Vaclav Havel’s party, and they had taken over the municipal administration in Olomouc with a borrowed basement room and a single typewriter. He took me to see it, various people coming and going, handshakes, another bottle of plum brandy opened in defiance of the snow falling outside. An Englishman arrived, a baldy itchy mousey man, a correspondent for The Daily Telegraph. Someone gave him some quotes and they politely sent him on his way.

When I got back to Cambridge University I wrote an article that was published in the only issue of the student newspaper ever produced during my time there. I realized—and this was my first sense of self as a writer—that my story was much better than the dull copy the Telegraph man had printed.

In Czecho I had time to walk and think and read and the happy happenstance intrusions of strangers



WENDELL STEAVENSON

*We are all
a bunch of
contradictions,
and it turns out
that dictators
and presidents
and revolutions
and civil wars
are no different*

to tell me stories. I discovered the magicalness of discovery: the station down the line, the Jewish cemetery in Prague I came across by chance. Olomouc taught me a method of reporting: immersion, friendship, engagement, conversation, hanging out.

Sometimes I say that I have been moving East ever since. I have lived in many places: London, Georgia (no, the other one), Nagorno-Karabakh, Tehran, Baghdad, Beirut, Jerusalem ... Find apartment, unpack books. I don’t mind the glitchy things that don’t work. Two Tbilisi winters and no heat cured me of that. I never miss something that is somewhere else. Wherever I am, I am.

Along the way I veered between stringing and magazine features, books and a screenplay and mustered the courage to call myself a writer. My books, including the one about the Egyptian revolution I have just finished, have all been collections of stories that hover between short story, travelogue, reportage and memoir. Chapters are friends and characters, incidents and anecdotes, conversations and musings, juxtaposed in a structure I can best describe as mosaic. We are all a bunch of contradictions, and it turns out that dictators and presidents and revolutions and civil wars are no different. Reporting for The New Yorker on the Egyptian revolution taught me this lesson well.

My current working theory is that all theories are wrong. Cause does not lead in a straight line to effect. History does not know what it is doing. Sometimes I have the sense that the fragmented structure of my books mirrors the hopscotch of my own progress—life as a series of scenes, not as a narrative arc. For a long time I had the idea that at some point I would come to a fixed point, like a summit maybe. But now I understand that life is really only one uphill footfall after another.

Life and us and them and every country I have seen are infinitely more beautiful and complex, more brilliantly absurd and ironically twisted and jaw-drop hilarious than even Tolstoy could write it.

And yet, in any case, I try to write it. I am the girl sitting by the side of the road scribbling marginalia in history’s notebook.

Wendell Steavenson, a 2014 Nieman Fellow, is a staff writer for The New Yorker

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