

# NIEMAN REPORTS

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Five Dollars

## Nieman Narrative Journalism Conference

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arc of the narrative patience time  
curiosity  
thinking cinematically structure  
immersion read out loud authenticity  
sensory reporting metaphor facts  
what happens next ?  
seductive un folding wing walking  
revealing moment butter of detail  
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mountain of information

Women and Journalism: A United States Perspective

“...to promote and elevate the standards of journalism”

—Agnes Wahl Nieman, the benefactor of the Nieman Foundation.

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# Threats to Press Freedom in Russia

At a first-of-its-kind conference in Moscow, problems are exposed.

By Bob Giles

**I**n Vladimir Putin's Russia, a fear unknown since Soviet rule collapsed a decade ago has cast a chill over the federation's news media.

It represents a stark reversal of the freedoms that began with the reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev and the radical changes in the early years of Boris Yeltsin's presidency, when a liberated press represented the brightest aspirations of the Russian people.

Evidence of Putin's desire to control the ownership of Russian media and the content of its independent news organizations echoed through a two-day conference in Moscow in early February. High on the agenda was the decision of state authorities to shut down TV6, an independent network, and a move by a state-owned gas monopoly to take over the board of an independent radio station, Echo of Moscow, that had given employment to the journalists who lost their jobs when TV6 was closed.

These were coalescing influences that brought more than 300 newspaper editors, state television directors, independent journalists, representatives of the regional Russian press, and U.S. experts on Russia together in Moscow for a candid discussion of the threats to media freedom. It was the first time people in journalism from across the broad reaches of this huge country had come together to discuss the hard nature of their work and the growing recognition that the regional press is now facing the same coercive powers of the state as the media in Moscow.

The sponsors of the conference included the Davis Center for Russian Studies at Harvard, the Nieman Foundation, the journalism faculty at Moscow State University, and a small, liberal Russian political party, the Union of Right Forces (SPS). The core partners were unsure about collaborating with SPS because of its overtly political nature, explained Timothy Colton, director of the Davis Center, but "we came to feel it was our best bet because the party truly cared about the issue, and they were willing to open the event to all."

Several villains of contemporary Russian journalism showed up, including Minister of Mass Media, Mikhail Lesin; Boris Jordan, director general of the independent network NTV, and television commentators who exposed themselves to criticism from the podium and the audience for distorted reporting.

Boris Nemtsov, head of SPS, a deputy prime minister under Yeltsin and a man thought to have his own presidential ambitions, said the state of the regional press in Russia is "acute" because the majority of publications are con-

trolled by politicians. His point was reinforced by stories from regional representatives. One editor told how four of his staffers were assassinated for stories critical of local governments or the business community. A television executive described a local campaign by the mayor of Yekaterinburg, a city of 1.4 million, to take control of delivery of local newspapers as a tactic to ensure sympathetic coverage.

Businessmen who possess wealth and power, and are known as "oligarchs," arrange publication of commissioned articles or "black PR." An under-the-table fee goes to the journalist—and is sometimes shared with editor/owners—for an article praising a candidate for office or smearing a public figure. These stories typically are based on compromising material that is obtained illegally and provided to journalists.

President Putin's assurances that he favors freedom of the press are increasingly discounted by evidence that an intolerance of criticism is driving his steely resolve to control the media. This emerging reality had a powerful effect on the participants, prompting Vladimir Posner, a popular figure in Russian television, to remark that the system may be democratic but "the brains are still Soviet." And the respected television anchor, Yevgeni Kiselyov, said, "Fear has returned."

The conference attracted extensive news coverage inside Russia and in the outside world, suggesting that the message will get through to Putin. The presence of U.S. Ambassador Alexander Vershbow on the program raised hopes that the issue of a free press in Russia will be on the agenda when Putin meets with President Bush in May.

Marshall Goldman, associate director of the Davis Center and an inspirational force behind the conference, had been unsure what the meeting would yield. In its closing moments he was enthusiastic. "Quite remarkable," he said. "We have never experienced this in Russia before. At least people came together to talk about the issues. We heard how difficult it is to be a journalist in the regions. This discussion may not generate a free press but at least it will move us in that direction."

Goldman left the audience with two ideas he thought might provide something positive for the press. He urged the journalism department at Moscow State University to set up "substantial prizes to award and encourage good journalism in Russia, and to establish a national journal of commentary and criticism of the press."

"Russia needs something to reward the press rather than punish it," he said. ■

# Nieman Narrative Journalism Conference

On a late fall weekend in 2001, the Nieman Program on Narrative Journalism convened its first conference. More than 800 journalists traveled to Cambridge, Massachusetts to take part in three days of interactive seminars, lectures and readings with many of the nation's leading practitioners. By the end of the conference, there had been 26 seminars, four plenary sessions, and three group readings, and it is from words spoken at these sessions that Nieman Reports compiled the report that follows.

To replicate on our pages the verbal experience of the conference is impossible. Many journalists who spoke about their work and offered their advice peppered their remarks with vivid anecdotes. Some of these made us laugh, while others left us hushed with the sadness of their stories. Such emotional experiences aren't easily reproduced. So instead of trying to walk readers through the entire narrative conference, we have constructed a wholly new document of what was said. Though we use participants' words, we have excerpted and edited them in a way that we hope will enlighten, inform and inspire those who weren't there. And for those who were, this written journey offers a different view and the chance to hear from those whose sessions you could not attend.

Our journey begins with a panel of accomplished narrative practitioners whose job it is to reflect on what it takes to do fine narrative writing. Author **Gay Talese** then engages our curiosity with a discussion about his own. Curiosity, he said, "is seeing nonfiction as a creative form of telling the story of your time." And the stories he prefers to tell are those of ordinary people "whose lives represent a larger significance." Nieman narrative journalism director **Mark Kramer** shares some of his secrets for how to fill a notebook with the ingredients necessary to do good narrative journalism. Among his hints: "The function of setting a scene is to foster the reader's sense of immediacy."

New York Times writer **Isabel Wilkerson**, in her discussion about sources, peels away the layers of the onion to reveal what the goal of a well-done interview ought to be. Like the onion's center, an idea expressed well by a source, in her words, "requires little slicing because it's already small, and it's compact, and it's highly concentrated." And author **Stewart O'Nan** helps those of us who struggle to find time to write to find time to do just that. "Use your time, steal the time, manage the time somehow," he says.

Seattle Times Assistant Managing Editor/Sunday **Jacqui Banaszynski** acknowledges the familiar newsroom tug of war between editors and reporters, but reminds us that if narrative journalism is going to work well, then, "quite frankly, we need each other." What follows her remarks is a series of Tips for Reporters, led off by New York Times editor **Steven A. Holmes**, who uses his reporting experience for the paper's Pulitzer Prize-winning series on race relations as a way of passing along advice. "Observe everything," he says, "take everything in, don't let anything pass, not a thing. But then don't regurgitate everything you see in your story. Be very selective." Former Yankee editor **Jim Collins** passes along 10 lessons he's learned from his best writers, including

that “the confidence in a piece is directly related to the depth of reporting behind it.” And Poynter Institute faculty member **Chip Scanlan** reminds writers that words must be written before they can—and must—be rewritten. **Jacqui Banaszynski** shares the lessons she learned when she was writing narrative accounts, one of which won a Pulitzer. “Stories are oral,” she says, so if you are writing a narrative, it must “be able to be read aloud.” Compendiums of additional tips follow for both reporters and editors.

At the conference, several award-winning journalists joined book authors in reading from their collections of narrative work. On our pages appear some of the readings that have been published in newspapers, written by **Steven A. Holmes, Isabel Wilkerson, Tom French, Stan Grossfeld, and Rick Bragg.**

When three journalists—**Bruce DeSilva, Chip Scanlan, and Jon Franklin**—playfully argue about which element of narrative journalism is most essential to its success, their audience learns that voice, theme and story *all* matter. Writer and visual artist **Emily Hiestand** challenges journalists to develop a personal voice to layer onto their reporting. “News voice and personal voice do different things,” she says, “and we really need them both.” **Jacqui Banaszynski** calls upon friends and colleagues to remind us why we need stories, and one reporter replies, “I need stories to tell me I’m not alone. That is reason enough.” Journalism professor and narrative expert **Jon Franklin** urges journalists to seek out ways to insert meaning into storytelling. “Meaning is something we’re not supposed to put in stories,” Franklin says. “For one thing, we mistake meaning with opinion. But by meaning, I really mean the shape of the story and what the shape of the story says.”

Former journalist and author **Adam Hochschild** delves into the melding of scene, suspense and character, and urges each writer to “think as if I were a filmmaker.” Pick compelling characters, he advises. Think in scenes and create suspense. **Bruce DeSilva**, who directs The Associated Press enterprise department, walks us toward endings by reminding us that “if you want to write narrative, your stories must have resolutions.” And St. Petersburg Times staff writer **Tom French**, who specializes in serial narratives, explains how and why “that delicious sense of enforced waiting” works so well as a way of drawing readers’ attention to the story. Historian and author **Jill Lepore** compares ways in which the writing paths of those who write history and those who report news converge. “The revival of narrative and historical writing parallels the emergence of narrative journalism,” she says, even though crucial differences still separate these two genres.

The words of other participants—**Nora Ephron, Nan Talese, Jack Hart, Richard Read, Ilan Stavans, and David Fanning**—can be found in accompanying boxes or in our final section of commentary called Conference Diary. In our diary section reside an array of comments and observations whose home is in the world of ideas.

All photographs of conference participants were taken by **Herb Swanson**. ■

# Nieman Narrative Journalism Conference

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Narrative journalism is in transition to a second phase. The first continues—the individual, dramatic phase in which lonely reporters get fascinated by the possibilities of a story and bring it in, tussling with fellow staffers and editors as they haul it aboard. Editors call it fluff at first, then take it seriously because they see great copy, acknowledge the substance and the warmth of it, hear from pleased readers, hear good things from advertisers, see circulation lift while serials are running, and see how well it's doing in the big papers such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and *The (Baltimore) Sun* and exemplary papers such as the *St. Petersburg Times* and *The Oregonian*.

The second stage involves finding useful and comfortable ways in-house of adjusting to the uneven scheduling of narrative writers' time, finding space, finding and assigning flexibly the attention of those editors who can best handle this special copy. And beyond those organizational changes, the second stage also involves coming to more sophisticated realizations of what narrative is *for*. The first pieces are often about sensational topics—air crashes, dying children, lives shattered by misfortune. Later serials take on less lurid but more complex subjects—education, business, the environment, for example—and they require greater technical proficiency in narrative writing in order to sustain reader interest. This sort of competency is growing, and I see the increased interest in the conference as another good omen for narrative journalism. ■

—Mark Kramer



# Sharing the Secrets of Fine Narrative Journalism

Those who do it well explain what it is they do.

*Near the midpoint of the Nieman Narrative Journalism Conference, eight accomplished practitioners of various narrative techniques and styles convened to share their experiences and insights. Curator Bob Giles opened the session by asking, "What does it take to do fine narrative writing?" Excerpts from participants' responses follow:*

**Chip Scanlan:** What it takes is immersion reporting. It's just being there, immersing yourself so that the writer inhabits the story and, by taking up residence in the story, it seems to affect everything, including choice of language and, most of all, the sense of authority that a good narrative has. Whether the attribution is clear or not, there is this sense that the writer is inside that story by dint of spending an enormous amount of time. Then it's also strategic writing, and it's writers making decisions that are governed by plans of action. And it's Rick Bragg using metaphorical language, what he calls the icing on the cake of narrative. It's Tom French using time lines to organize the lives of his characters and the lives of his plots. It's Bill Blundell of *The Wall Street Journal* who's always guided by six points: what's the scope, what's the story about; what's the history of this; what are the central reasons—political, economic, social; what's the impact; what are the contrary forces for and against, and what's the future, if this continues. Finally, it's writers who are using all their senses, using their heads and, most of all, roaming up the ladder of abstraction—a concept that all thought, language and experience could be grouped on a ladder from the concrete to the abstract—and it's using that, roaming up and down the ladder of abstraction, showing and telling, explaining and exemplifying, and juxtaposing abstractions.

**Jacqui Banaszynski:** When I think about what makes fine narrative, I see it as a series of moments. A mid-career reporter came to me a few months ago and said, "I want to learn how to write narrative, how do I do that?" And I said "Well, it's going to be a stretch for you. That's not your muscle. You tend to look at the world this way." She came back a few weeks later and said, "I want to learn how to write narrative, how do I do that?" I said, "Well, you've got a beat that really doesn't easily lend itself to that and we've got these other issues and so think about that a little more, read a few things." She came back the third time, third time is always a charm, and she said, "I want to learn how to write narrative, how do I do that?" And I said "Okay, I'll tell you but you won't like the answer." She says, "I really want to learn, how do I do it?" And I said, "One paragraph at a time."

There are five things that need to be in any piece of narrative, and I believe narrative can be a line, a paragraph,

or a whole long piece. You need to have character, there has to be something or someone for the reader to hold on to or for you to build the story around. The trick is character does not have to be a person. It can be a place. It can be a thing. It can be a moment, but you have to have a central character. You need some story or theme. You need some bigger universal sense that this character or story is representing or that it triggers in people's psyche. You need, quite frankly, a lot of discipline. You need to discipline your writing and your work so it's not a self-indulgent rant, so it really is honoring the story and the readers out there.

Narrative has to be able to be read aloud, and that's a functional, reader-focus kind of writing. You need enormous detail, specific, telling detail that illustrates the whole story and that takes me there. And mostly, you need as a reporter to get so close to your subject that you disappear and then, when you turn around and write this story, you disappear once more because you've now let your reader get as close as you were. So there's a transparency to good narrative even if you have a strong voice that comes through when people read it because then they feel they were there.

**Tom French:** I am a big fan of invisibility. When I immerse myself inside a story and hang out with people and they let me into their lives, I'm always blown away by how generous and brave these people are. There always comes a point where I literally start to lose track of where I end and they begin. It's kind of a frightening thing sometimes but it's really powerful and seductive, and I think it's really important to writing a narrative. I'm also a big fan of joy. You need to open yourself simply to the things around you that spark your attention or that penetrate you and hang with you and the things that make you smile or just make you gasp. Joy, I'm a very, very big fan of joy. Stubbornness really helps, being really, really stubborn. And you really need to have faith in the power and importance of tiny, tiny moments. Newspaper reporters are trained so that we are really good at big moments. But the longer I do this, the more I learn to have faith that in those times when it looks like nothing is happening in front of me something very important is happening. I just need to learn to pay better attention.

**Rick Bragg:** I think exactly the same way that you live life, you write narrative. It doesn't have to be a formulaic thing where you start with a formula. And it doesn't have to lead methodically through conflict to resolution and that kind of thing. To me, narrative has always been a pretty or telling passage, a strong, violent, tense three or four paragraphs, if it's done right, and it's not any more complicated than that. I remember in an intensive care ward for children in St. Petersburg I was writing about two Siamese twin babies and

how you would walk one day into the intensive care ward and you would see this incredible attention focused on these babies. But all around them were babies that you could hold in the palm of your hand and they were tiny. And I kept noticing, as I would walk in there, that one day there would be a baby in a crib, and the next day there would not be, and it occurred to me that those babies just disappeared without any fanfare, without any drama. And as I sat down to write about this I wanted to use language that would make people see the sadness, or at least see the consequence of their passion. And I thought of how, when I was a little kid, my mama would wear these dime-store pearls on her neck and I would invariably reach up and grab hold of the strand and, as babies do, pull on it and the pearls would go rolling across the floor in the kitchen. And you never find them all. Some of them roll under the refrigerator, some of them drop in the cracks in the floor, and it occurred to me that that is precisely how those babies disappeared, without any real consequence. That one day there were 18, and the next day there were 15. So I wrote that the babies disappeared from the intensive care ward like pearls off a broken string. And I thought that conveyed the sadness. And I think that one line was narrative. It painted a picture. It told somebody something that was stronger than a statistic. A few years later, I was reading some Faulkner, and Faulkner said that “beautiful women disappear from southern towns like beads off a broken strand.” And I thought to myself, “That son of a bitch has plagiarized me.” Three words can be narrative.

**Isabel Wilkerson:** Because we're journalists we're writing nonfiction and we can't make it up. We need people, ultimately. We need a sympathetic protagonist, who is flawed and hopefully recognizes it since that will make it easier in the end, who is caught up in the sweep of something bigger than him or herself. That's ultimately what I am always looking for in the work that I do. It's our responsibility to make the readers see the fullness of the character that we've come up with and to see themselves in him or her and to make them care about what happens to him or her whether we get to that in the end of the narrative or not. I prefer to write about ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. We need credible, plausible characters who will allow us into their lives and into their minds so that we can get the ingredients that we all want to have in our narratives, meaning the metaphors and the details that will make it come alive. We finally need patience, patience to find the right person through which to tell the story and faith that this person will emerge somehow out of all of the work that we do. We need the patience and the faith to find these individuals who will make these narratives come alive.

**Mark Kramer:** I issue my students on the first day of class a big carton of periods, and I hereby issue everybody here a big carton of periods. It's a lifetime supply, even if used lavishly. Beyond that, go for mostly short sentences and active verbs. Nearly eliminate “to be” and vague abstract

verbs and rich vocabulary so you can shed adjectives and adverbs. Almost ban “as” and “when.” Dump clichés. Simple as that. Narrative pieces want sentences strung banjo-taut then backed-off a bit to ease comprehension. These sentences are preconditioned to quality because readers open up to such clean, controlled, straight words for nuanced information about narrator's voice and any topic's layered meanings. Such sentences best transmit the human touch, human contact, writer-to-reader, and that's excellence.

**Character.** Journalism as a civic mission is about an address to citizens on bureaucratic forms. But beyond that, readers are people, and there's a world of real life people beyond newspapers. Reporters of narrative may now include the style of a subject, the flavor, motivation, longings, angers, loyalties, irrationalities. That's when you're in a position to do what the gods do, to breath life into the clay citizen. Give us the gift an artist does of making people come alive. That's excellence.

**Structure.** Installing in your text set scenes with spatial volume and sensory detail through which pass beguiling characters in the midst of apt, meaningful activity who inspire our concern, engagement, interest and discovery, and reaching a destination that serves a poised, sensible, civic, emotional and intellectual purpose. Apt structure enchants readers, and enchantment is a pre-condition of narrative excellence.

**Context.** For narrative, key moments in the story, the ones worth portraying, are best identified or selected by reporters steeped in context through immersion and study. The writer gets us into the midst of action and then can swoop away, digress, mentioning just the right background information at the right time during which readers deepen concern and comprehension, then back to the story. This back and forth by-play between incident and context leads toward centrality, relevance, proportion, all elements of excellence.

But beyond sentence, character, structure and context, quality narrative requires the writer or editor to understand and surmount a practical tension that is intrinsic to the news business. Narrative hugs and holds readers, which is just what is wanted in these times of dropping newspaper circulation and wandering audience attention. With well-developed craft skills, good narratives have kept readers glued to sagas about crucial education issues, electoral issues, race issues, and oil regulation and pollution deregulation issues. Narrative is remarkably well-suited to transforming tedious topics by offering revealing moments in the lives of people involved and affected.

But, so far, narrative has been mostly used at quarter strength. Editors have brought it in from the cold to grip readers of the sagas of endangered babies, the frightened football coach's bout with cancer, adoptees' searches for mothers, alcoholics and addicts tumbling then climbing back to redemption, good topics all, but not the highest use of narrative. A good tale always has merit, but the potential for luridness, for mawkishness, for absorbing readers' inter-

est without informing them as citizens, is what has kept the old guard of journalist suspicious of narrative. Narrative can easily titillate without reporting. Titillating narrative is the easiest to write.

Gripping narrative—that portrays the subtleties, the life-corresponding quick of social issues, of poverty, political anger, the bureaucratic class, sectarian, regional, race and gender-related fences inside which we dwell—takes high-level craft skills, and then it’s exciting narrative journalism. Much is revealed, only as actors walk about among the facts. And that’s also why we’re here. Narrative journalism has grown up, it’s no longer a feature lead, it’s no longer even an experiment to try in your paper. Its magic is that it can grip readers all at the same time, fulfilling and broadening the essential work of journalism.

*Questions from audience members elicited additional comments from the panel members. Czerina Patel, a radio producer in New York, wanted to know, “How do you merge creativity and accuracy so that the audience, as well, can be accepting your work as truth and seeing that even though the style is the style of fiction, the work that you are producing is still nonfiction and as true as the he-said, she-said boring style of newspaper journalism?”*

**Gay Talese:** There should never be any distinction made between narrative journalism and the kind of he-said, she-said boring stuff that you seem to be comparing it to. There is no excuse for any inaccuracy that is the result of someone wishing to make the story a little bit more readable. We are fact gatherers. If we can do something with the facts that make them as a story more easily understood, more interesting, that’s great. But there’s no, no deviation from the hard, old-fashioned belief that the newspaper must be telling you the truth. No composite characters, no changing names.

**Jacqui Banaszynski:** In investigative journalism they do line-by-line editing where you have to go through each line and say where you got this information. How do you know it? How many sources do you have? The same thing should be true of any good narrative piece or any really good piece of journalism. You go through it line-by-line and you ask yourself, “How do you know, how well sourced is it, and could you defend it?” If somebody called you and said, “How do you know?” could you answer the question? And if you can’t do that with a narrative piece, if it’s not that well reported, then you better not write it. There is an internal integrity that shows in stories, that shines through whether or not you’re doing direct attribution, that the reader can usually tell is there and that is built by detail.

*Curtis Krueger, a staff writer with the St. Petersburg Times, asked if the panelists would talk about narrative stories that are reported in one day “when you don’t have time to go out and search the best example and everything.” He wondered what techniques work best.*

**Isabel Wilkerson:** You basically compress everything that you would do if you had more time. You get there early and you stay as long as you can in the field. I end up often taking time away from the time I have for writing. I also have techniques in which I basically give people whom I am interviewing very little time to prove themselves as potential sources. I have no sentimentality about cutting a person off, because I don’t have the time to waste if a person is pontificating and that’s not going to be giving me the narrative detail I need. It’s not easy, but it’s exhilarating at the same time, because when you do that you know that you basically can write any kind of story in a very limited amount of time.

**Tom French:** When you’re doing this in a daily context, I think it really helps for you to move as quickly as possible toward where you think the story is going to be, then to slow down, and then to hold still. On September 14, after the attacks, I was assigned to go to a labor and delivery unit, and I was profiling a Muslim woman who answered the phones at this front desk in this labor and delivery unit in a little county hospital. And I was asking her a lot of questions. But the best stuff came during the day when I just shut my mouth and watched and listened. I needed to be quiet and hold still and let it happen and recognize what’s happening in front of me and then put it down on a page.

**Jacqui Banaszynski:** If you have two hours and you’ve got the phone, then you have to learn how to be a really good interviewer and ask the person on the other end to give you information and details that may sound silly, but you have to turn them into a storyteller. So instead of just asking them what happened, you ask them, “What were you wearing?” “What did the sky look like?” “What did it smell like?” “What did you have for breakfast?” “What was going on around you?” And you turn them into your narrator and you pull all that out of them. And you do that on the phone in 20 minutes of peeling that onion. You just stay with it.

**Mark Kramer:** Even one setting, even one piece of behavior, changes the whole aspect of it. Instead of saying “A new mall was approved after years of difficult legal struggle,” if you write something as mundane as “The gavel banged down, the crowd murmured, Attorney Jane Smith smiled, Attorney Harry Jackson frowned,” it doesn’t take any longer to report.

*Daniel Wood, a staff writer at The Christian Science Monitor, wanted to know the signs that tell them they’ve gotten themselves into a really bad narrative.*

**Rick Bragg:** The first sign is your good editor will tell you, “This doesn’t quite get it.” A good editor will tell you when you’ve written a bad narrative. Pay attention to what the editor says. If he says, “It stinks,” it probably stinks a little. ■

## Conference Participants Whose Words Appear in This Issue

**Jacqui Banaszynski** is the assistant managing editor/Sunday at The Seattle Times and holds the Knight chair in journalism at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. Her series, “AIDS in the Heartland,” covering the life and death of a gay farm couple with AIDS, won the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for feature writing.

**Rick Bragg**, a 1992 Nieman Fellow and a 1996 Pulitzer Prize-winner for feature writing, is a national correspondent for The New York Times. Bragg is the author of three books—most recently, “Ava’s Man,” a memoir of his mother’s father, who died just before the author was born.

**Jim Collins** has written for The Sun literary journal, Outside, Glamour, The Old Farmer’s Almanac, and Reader’s Digest. He was most recently editor for Yankee magazine and, for 15 years, an editor of Yankee Homes. Collins is the author of the book “Mentors” and is now at work on a narrative book about a minor-league baseball team.

**Bruce DeSilva** launched and now directs The Associated Press enterprise department, which produces in-depth national and international stories with an emphasis on narrative. Before joining The A.P. in 1995, DeSilva was associate editor for writing and editing at The Hartford Courant.

**Nora Ephron** co-wrote several screenplays, including “Sleepless in Seattle,” “When Harry Met Sally,” “You’ve Got Mail,” “Silkwood” and “Heartburn.” Prior to her work in cinema, Ephron was a reporter for the New York Post and an editor and columnist for Esquire and New York magazine. She is the author of “Crazy Salad” and “Scribble, Scribble.”

**David Fanning**, creator and senior executive producer of “Frontline,” is executive producer at WGBH/Boston. In 1983, he began the weekly documentary series that became “Frontline.” Since that time, “Frontline” has won Emmy Awards, Peabody Awards, and numerous other prizes.

**Jon Franklin**, as a reporter for The (Baltimore) Sun, won the first Pulitzer Prizes ever awarded in the categories of feature writing (1979) and explanatory journalism (1985). He is the Philip Merrill Professor of Journalism at the University of Maryland’s Philip Merrill College of Journalism and the founder and moderator of WriterL, a subscription-only Listserv for writers. His books include “The Molecules of the Mind” and “Writing for Story.”

**Tom French** is a staff writer at the St. Petersburg Times. For the past decade he has worked as project reporter specializing in serial narratives. For his serial work, “Angels & Demons,” he received the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for feature writing. Other projects have included “A Cry in the Night” and “South Heaven,” later published as books.

**Bob Giles**, a 1966 Nieman Fellow, is curator of the Nieman Foundation and formerly a senior vice president of The Freedom Forum. Giles served as managing editor of the Akron Beacon Journal and editor of The Detroit News when each paper won a Pulitzer Prize.

**Stan Grossfeld**, a 1992 Nieman Fellow, is a photographer and associate editor of The Boston Globe. He received Pulitzer prizes in 1984 and 1985 for his work in Ethiopia, at the U.S.-Mexican border, and in Lebanon, and won two consecutive Overseas Press Club awards, first for best photographic reporting from abroad, then for “human compassion” for his work in Ethiopia. His books include “Lost Futures: Our Forgotten Children” and “Nantucket: The Other Season.”

**Jack Hart** is a managing editor at The Oregonian, where he also has worked as a reporter, arts editor, Sunday magazine editor, training editor, and writing coach. He has edited two Pulitzer Prize-winning articles (and contributed to a third), and his work has also won many national journalism awards.

**Emily Hiestand** is a writer and visual artist. For her writing she has received several major awards, including the National Poetry Series award, the Whiting Award, and the Pushcart Prize. She is the author of three books—“Green the Witch Hazel Wood,” “The Very Rich Hours,” and “Angela the Upside-Down Girl”—and co-founder of Communicators for Nuclear Disarmament.

**Adam Hochschild** is a teacher, author, former newspaper reporter, and co-founder of Mother Jones magazine. He has written five books, including “Half the Way Home: A Memoir of Father and Son” and “King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa,” which was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Awards and won a J. Anthony Lukas Prize and other awards in the United States and abroad.

**Steven A. Holmes** is an editor in the Washington bureau of The New York Times. He wrote some of the articles and helped edit many others in the Times’ 15-part series “How Race Is Lived In America,” which won the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for national reporting.

**Mark Kramer** is writer in residence at the Nieman Foundation and director of the Nieman Narrative Journalism Program. From 1991-2001, he was writer in residence and professor of journalism at Boston University. His books include “Three Farms: Making Milk, Meat and Money from the American Soil,” “Invasive Procedures: A Year in the World of Two Surgeons,” and “Travels With a Hungry Bear: A Journey to the Russian Heartland,” and an anthology that he co-edited, “Literary Journalism.”

**Jill Lepore** is associate professor of history at Boston University and the author of two books, “The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity,” which won the Bancroft Prize and the Ralph Waldo Emerson Award, and “A is for American: Letters and Other Characters in the Newly United States.”

**Stewart O’Nan** has written many novels, including “A Prayer for the Dying,” “Everyday People,” “The Speed Queen,” “A World Away,” “The Names of the Dead,” and “Snow Angels.”

**Richard Read**, a 1997 Nieman Fellow, is The Oregonian’s senior writer for international affairs and special projects. He reported and wrote “The French Fry Connection,” which won the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for explanatory reporting. His coverage with three other reporters of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service won The Oregonian the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service.

**Christopher “Chip” Scanlan** is reporting, writing and editing group leader at The Poynter Institute. He has been a reporter for the Providence Journal, feature writer for the St. Petersburg Times, and national correspondent for Knight Ridder newspapers. Scanlan is author of “Reporting and Writing: Basics for the 21st Century” and numerous pub-

lished articles, essays and short stories. He edited “Best Newspaper Writing 2000.”

**Ilan Stavans** teaches Spanish at Amherst College. His books include “On Borrowed Words,” “The Hispanic Condition,” “The One-Handed Pianist and Other Stories,” and “Tropical Synagogues.” He edited “The Oxford Book of Latin American Essays” and “The Oxford Book of Jewish Stories.”

**Gay Talese**, credited by Tom Wolfe for creating “the new journalism,” is the author of several nonfiction books, including “Unto the Sons,” “The Kingdom and the Power,” “Honor Thy Father,” and “The Bridge.”

**Nan Talese** is a senior vice president at Doubleday and the publisher and editorial director of her own literary imprint—Nan A. Talese/Doubleday. She has edited and published many well-known works of fiction and nonfiction.

**Isabel Wilkerson** is currently on leave from The New York Times to work on a book about the migration of African Americans from the South to the North as seen through the stories of several generations of families. While she was Chicago bureau chief for the Times, she won, among other awards, a Pulitzer Prize. ■

## Writing About Ordinary Lives

‘I wanted to move the realm of curiosity into the lives of people who had been ignored. . . .’

### Gay Talese

I believe that the role of the nonfiction writer should be more with non-newsworthy people—insignificant people perhaps, but whose lives represent a larger significance than their own lives are allowed to be represented in the public print.

The fiction writer, the short-story writer, the playwright, the novelist, deal with private life. They deal with ordinary people and they elevate these people into our consciousness and give them names and give them a place in life because of the power of the writer, the power of the word, the power of the stage writer. The world of nonfiction—journalism, contemporary events, biography—primarily deals with the lives of people who are known to us, names that were known, and they are embellished or they are brought to a larger consciousness into our own lives by the work of the writer, by the biographer.

The private life that I wanted, as a young journalist on The New York Times, to delve into was the life of the person who would not be worthy of news coverage. But I thought that person had a sense of what was going on and, if we could bring them into the larger consciousness of readership,

they’d be representative of trends. I wanted to write about people that others weren’t writing about. I wanted to move the realm of curiosity into the lives of people who had been ignored, because I thought they had something to say and their lives had something to represent in terms of higher reality.



Gay Talese

That has been part of the style that I have followed, in terms of nonfiction, indulging my curiosity. The first stage is curiosity and looking at the world in a different way. It is seeing nonfiction as a creative form of telling the story of your time. Creative. Not falsified. Not making up names. Insisting on real names. Not composite characters. No taking

liberties with factual information, but getting to know your characters through research and building trust, building relationships, so you know them so well they are part of your private life. They are your spouse. They are your love affair. Your sources become known to you and you have this trusting relationship which you do not take advantage of.

Curiosity is the beginning. We have a way of looking at the world. I never had bookshelves in my home. I didn't have people who went to college. I didn't have anyone reading the great nonfiction, but I had a father who was a tailor who was interested in a life beyond his own—moving out—but always relating it to himself. So this curiosity I always related to myself. I bring respect to some of the people I'm interested in talking to. And when I write about them, I write with respect. I don't make allowances, necessarily, for their dalliances or their deviations, but I find a way to write it that gets it in there, slides it in there, but is not hard, is not insulting.

This is where careful writing can allow you to do enormous things, in telling the truth, that sloppy writing will not allow you to do. Taking care with the language. I get this from reading the fine fiction writers. I was of an age when there wasn't much in nonfiction that I looked up to. But I did look up to the great writers of fiction: [F. Scott] Fitzgerald, John O'Hara, Irwin Shaw—these were fine short-story writers. I would read them in *The New Yorker* and they would write about private life, would write about girls in their summer dresses, the 80-yard run with a football player and his relationship with a woman. And Carson McCullers wrote a little piece in *The New Yorker* called "The Jockey." In her short story, she described the trainer by saying that every time this guy eats a lamb chop you can see its formation on the side of his ribs. And I thought, that's interesting. And I was interested in sports writing, and I said, "If I ever do a sports book, I want that kind of detail." Now, I can't make it up, but I want that kind of little detail that would have the reader remember something. To develop a special eye.

But it was fiction. I wasn't reading some sports writer from *The Saturday Evening Post*. It was fiction. And the fiction writers were my idols. But I wanted to bring in nonfiction, and truly nonfiction, the sense of reality and the story sense of people's lives. I wanted to write about people as people. Even when I was a daily journalist and I was stuck with hard news, I wanted to tell the hard news through people. I wanted to write about people looking outside the windows of the fire when the fire was in these neighborhood tenement buildings on both sides of the street. But people who never talk to one another were talking across the street about the fire below, and there was a kind of unity to the neighborhood because they focused on a fire.

This was not a major fire, but I wrote about the fire through the dialogue of the people talking to one another. And the firemen were down there and the dog was barking and the hoses were all over the street and traffic was blocked. It was a scene. So this one- or two-bell fire became a feature story. It was just a way of looking at the fire. ■



Talese and Michel Marriott

## Indulging Curiosity

*New York Times* reporter and 2002 Nieman Fellow Michel Marriott introduced Gay Talese at the Nieman Narrative Journalism Conference. Excerpts of their comments follow:

**Michel Marriott:** As a young reporter at *The New York Times*, I wanted to write sort of a counter-intuitive story around Father's Day. I wanted to find a welfare father who had children, abandoned them, then rediscovered them and was trying to reattach. After the story was published, I got this most amazing message. It was from Gay Talese. He was so generous in his comments and said he really liked what I'd written and thought we should have dinner. So began our long friendship, and he continues to inspire me. I've watched him in action, his technique. He's an incredible reporter, getting people to reveal things I don't think they've even revealed to themselves.

**Gay Talese:** I told Michel I liked his story and wanted to meet him. But, as always, there was an ulterior motive. I didn't know if *The New York Times* would let him to do a second story, but I thought we might collaborate. I wanted to know what it was like to be very poor, as this young man [in Michel's story] from the ghetto of East Baltimore was, and yet to somehow have the language of seduction be so compelling that he could find himself in bed with four women, producing their children.

So after wining and dining Michel, we went to East Baltimore and talked with this guy and some of the women. With a story like this, there's another way of looking at it, another way of thinking about things, like how do you get laid when you're poor? What was his line? It's so hard to get laid. How did this guy do it? This is interesting to me. It's curiosity. With many of these stories involving people who are not in the news, you let the story live, the characters go on and live their lives, and you keep in touch. That has been part of the style I've followed, in terms of nonfiction—indulging my curiosity. ■

# Reporting Differently

How to come back with a notebook full of narrative.

Mark Kramer

**W**hat you're doing when you write narrative is creating a sequential intellectual/emotional experience for the reader. You may be doing coverage. You may be creating a record. You may be imparting information. You may be doing what my high school teachers called "showing your work," as in, "Solve this problem. Show your work." You may be sourcing. You may be doing all of the civically responsible things that reporters do. But the fact remains your readers will be having, whether you like it or not, a sequential intellectual/emotional experience when they read your work.

Once you write narrative, a dilemma comes right away, which is that you run into a war in the test between topicality and chronology. Somebody going through an experience will be crossing the topical categories of any outline of the subject, one after another. And when you do narrative, you want to have people acting through time. That's the very definition of narrative. But when you're presenting an orderly account of something, you want to cover it topic by topic by topic. The structure that we're all so accustomed to reading, that is invisible to us, is the digression that we see actors acting—we wait while our friend the narrator explains stuff we need. Then we go back to action. It's as simple as that.

My talk today is about how to come back with a notebook full of material that's good for constructing a narrative piece. The implication is that there is a different style of reporting necessary than you would use in your daily business.

**Select a good topic.** How much you can do with a story depends very much on the strategy of how you conceive it. First of all, I want to discriminate between high emotional and low emotional valence stories. A high emotional valence story is a story to which readers bring a lot of emotionality. The most common high emotional valence story in the news is endangered babies.

It takes almost no work to energize reader's concern for that sequential emotional experience. Once you have the reader engaged and concerned, you have them in the palm of your hand. You can digress; you can do whatever you want to do. They will forgive you anything. Endangered children—because they concern us, as a species—take no characterization, no contextualization.

There are some fools in the field who have tried to write narrative books about low emotional valence topics. Can



Mark Kramer

you imagine a book about Russian agriculture? It's really a good book. To make it a good book, a writer trying to do that kind of work has to marshal other tools than the species concerned with endangered babies.

Pace is the ultimate mystery for the writer. I define pace as the reader's sense of urgency to continue to head somewhere. The cleaner your sentences, the less rattling around inside of a sentence to find out what refers to what, the easier the problem of keeping the reader's sense of urgency intact. The more active your verbs, the more muscular, the more delightful your perceptions, the more lovely your metaphors, the easier the sense of pace. Whatever goes into good writing, think of it as a tributary in the river of pace, and that's what you're after.

When you do these low emotional valence subjects, you have to write in a more accomplished and self-aware way. These are the interesting topics for developing the promise of excellent narrative in media. The slowest topic is the flow of rocks, and John McPhee wrote four books about it.

If you're looking for his secrets of pace, then in the margin of "Basin and Range," his book about geology, keep a running tab of the answer to this: "What question am I wishing for the answer to right now?" And you will find that request changes almost by the paragraph, almost by the page, certainly by the chapter. They are tiny operant questions, and they are cunningly inserted to go along with the clean sense, the sharp-image characterizations of people, and anecdotal treatment of the material.

**Secure good access.** The Kramer “Rule of Travel” is if you want to go to Paris, Brussels or Toledo, Ohio, and you don’t know anybody in Paris, and you don’t know anybody in Brussels, and you have fascinating friends in Toledo, go to Toledo. Access is all. Your best idea is a lousy idea if you can’t see people living their lives, and I’m going to use a Henry James phrase, a “felt life” level. And I will define “felt life” as the level of informal comprehension that you show about the world at the end of your reporting day when you’re sitting at the edge of your bed, and you’re dog tired, and your significant other says, “What did you do today?” And you start saying “That road commissioner was a real asshole. He’s so pompous and vulgar and vain. He wears tacky clothing. Yet there is something sweet about him,” and so on.

For narrative, you want “felt life” level access. But felt life level access is extremely difficult to come by. It’s certainly possible to get good access, uncontaminated, intimate access. And when you do, it will raise a basic ethical question, *the* basic ethical question that Janet Malcolm deals with eloquently in “The Journalist and the Murderer”: You are being a professional, gathering in material that violates people’s sense of privacy sometimes in some ways. So the norms of friendship govern your source’s actions towards you and the norms of professional activity govern yours. And there is a moral crisis that you will have to resolve.

My blunt and frank contention is that we live on the slippery slope, we do not live on the edge of it, and prissily stay off it. We live there. You may not think so. And where one lives on the slope is almost a matter of personality, of personal choice. There are no two ways about it. Don’t do stories you don’t feel comfortable doing is the best advice I can give you.

Good access takes charm and guts and aplomb, and you will be taken at the level of sophistication that you bring to the subject. If you’re completely naive and gawky, you will be treated to the PR version of the subject. The more you know, the more you’ll be treated collegially. This will inspire more

guarded but also more frank discussion. So you want to do a fair amount of homework beforehand, and you want to place yourself situationally in a way that can serve your reporting purposes.

**Find good narrative runs.** Ask your subject what’s his or her schedule for the next week, or two, or three. Find something interesting. Think to yourself, “What is this story about beyond the nominal subject?” The topic or location is not the subject of a piece. The subject of the piece you can’t possibly know until you get onto the site and see things starting to happen.

The obvious nominal narrative of a piece starts at the beginning and goes to the end. You need to know the chronology, the nominal chronology of what went on. You’re looking for some event that could be unfolded as a foreground narrative. So you’re looking for a narrative run, like this concept of a two-tiered narrative that there is the start-to-finish chronology *and* that you can pull a shorter run—because you’re in charge. You can say to the reader that you can start on the last day of your reporting.

The order in which you gather your material is very good for the tale of how an ignorant person became slightly less ignorant, but that’s not going to be your narrative. Your narrative is going to concern activities in the life of your subject. You may not falsify the sequence of what happened.

**Find character hints in action.** The more world sense you can bring to your general reporting, the more awareness you have of how life works, and the more you feel free to record that in your text, the better people will be served by what you write.

**Find the right scene details.** Do sensory reporting—this is important. Sight, sound, smell, touch and taste will, if you record details of these things, allow you to set strong scenes. The biggest basic mistake that beginning narrative writers, and even fairly accomplished writers, make is setting scenes too casually. You have to set a scene so the reader gets a feeling of volume, space, dimension and has sensory experience there. You don’t need to report on measurements and details in the detail that would be required if you were writing for Scene Diorama magazine. Nobody is interested in building a diorama of the scenes, but everybody wants to know what it feels like to be there.

The function of setting a scene is to foster the reader’s sense of immediacy. It’s not hard to do. It’s not complicated. Everybody here can do it first time out. All they have to do is consent to doing it in their own minds. And you can do it. If you can show persons in action, so much the better, because then you get to use stronger verbs.

**Find emotionality for your subjects, not for you.** When I first watched surgery, I said “Yuck, blood. Oh, this is scary. This is brutal.” But none of the actors on the stage were saying “Yuck, blood, this is scary, this is tough.” They were all

## Filling a Notebook With Narrative

- Select a good topic.
- Secure good access.
- Find good narrative runs.
- Find character hints in action.
- Find the right scene details.
- Find emotionality for your subjects, not for you.
- Do some contextual research.
- Find or crystallize the point, the destination.
- Do a refined comparison of the difference between your views and your subject’s views.
- Cherish the structural ideas and metaphors that you have in the field.
- Create translated writer’s notes.
- Make a flow notation of scenes.
- Clean your prose.



socialized to that. My job was to record my own emotions because they would duplicate the reader's emotions, and I had to know the emotional valence that I was writing into. But it's much more interesting to notice that the surgeon was getting angry in his discussion about a political situation—who got which operating room and which set of workers for a certain procedure. Who was deferred to in the robing? Little things like that turned out to be important.

There is what I call a doctrine of strong-voiced writing. You are the host. You should have a pretty good idea of why you're showing a scene and some cunning about how you do it. You are allowed to do that. Your editors will love it if you do that. They don't know when you don't do that because they aren't accustomed to it. They probably won't even know when you do do it. But it will feel like a good story.

**Do some contextual research** in the beginning in order to not get the PR snow job. I always talk about trying to island-hop an archipelago of knowledge across a broad Pacific of ignorance. That's what you're doing when you're doing your background research. The reason you're doing your background research is because narrative exists inside of a social context and an economic context, inside of many shells of context. The structural feature of running narrative, of stopping, digressing to the necessary background information, moving back to the story, is a very powerful structural technique.

You're interested very deliberately in having digressive material to frame the story. That's where you can do a lot of good in sorting complex topics narratively. My first tip and comment is that it's frequently best to digress in the middle of the action, not between actions, because then we remember well and we're happier to come back. The higher the emotional valence, the longer the digression, I'd say.

**Find or crystallize the point, the destination.** Destination is my term for what my high school English teacher used to call "the theme." Destination is a reader's eye view of themes.

If we go back to our initial contention that what you're after is creating the right sequential intellectual/semotional experience for readers, then the readers should have very quickly installed (A) an emotional attitude towards the characters and towards the events, and (B) the sense that we're being told this for a worthy reason. We're being taken here and there and explained background and shown things because we're heading towards a destination that we will be delighted to learn about. We don't have to know the names of the important events, but we have to know that we're going somewhere good in the hands of a good friend, our narrator. At the end, there has to be that pay off. The readers have to feel that they've arrived somewhere.

I want you to notice how late in the process it is and you still don't know quite where you're heading. You're still interacting with your text, which bears 10,000 decisions that you've made.

**Do a refined comparison of the difference between your views and your subject's views**, just so you can know how to navigate. I'm not saying to put your views aside, but you need to follow the rules of balance for whatever publication you're doing it for. You also want to pay very careful attention to not being taken in by sophisticated public relations and congratulations on your understanding of the subject. You have to know what you don't know as well as how you feel about what you do know.

**Cherish the structural ideas and metaphors that you have in the field.** You'll suddenly say "Oh boy, I love this quote because it could be used to introduce this part of the topic or that part of the topic." Or "Boy, this is a great visual. I can't wait to be able to use this scene. It's a great bridge between this and this." You think that these are realizations that will stick to you like a piece of notepaper to a bulletin board. Your mind is not a bulletin board. The same goes for figures of speech, metaphors. They occur to you and you think "I can't wait to use that in the text." Nail them at the moment. Write notes to yourself on how to write. Record those metaphors on your note paper or in your computer. I use a laptop in the field. But cherish those metaphors. Metaphors transform, they make a magician out of you. It goes far beyond the expected role of you as a reporter.

When you're reporting with this richness, you don't want the job of transcribing. You can come back from a day's reporting with 40 or 50 pages of notes if you're doing your job right, and then you'll still find you want to put in the article something that you didn't even have the slightest idea was interesting at the time.

**Create translated writer's notes.** Your first draft when you come back with these rich notes is likely to be what I call translated writer's notes. You go through 50 pages of notes, turning them into a story. Once you've done a few of these, you can do that one in your mind. If you do it on paper, you can get your translucent magic marker and circle the hot parts, put them next to each other, and see what happens.

**Make a flow notation of scenes.** Decide on a rough chronological order. The trouble with outlining narrative is that it tends to shove you towards topicality and the war between chronology and topicality. So I make a sort of flow notation—frequently this scene, this scene, this scene, this scene, and then the purpose of each scene, and then start digressing for topicality and seeing where that stuff fits.

**Clean your prose.** You cannot have a nuanced relationship with readers unless your sentences are lean, because readers just won't be able to count on what you're saying. They won't be able to count on the nuanced language. You're making a time sculpture. You're making a sequential experience for readers that has a contour and a shape and means something. And it's your theater to create. ■

# Interviewing Sources

‘The center of the onion is what you want.’

Isabel Wilkerson

**W**e can’t really write these beautiful stories, these narratives that we all dream of, unless we can get something out of the mouths of the sources and get the elements that we need to write these stories. And you can’t get those elements—the color, the detail, the anecdotes—unless you can get them to feel comfortable enough to tell you anything.

So, because of that, I only really interview in the strict sense of the word when I have to. I try to do everything else that I can to make sources feel comfortable enough to talk with me. That doesn’t mean that I don’t ask questions. It means I ask lots of questions. But what I mainly try to do is to be a great audience. I egg them on; I nod; I look straight into their eyes; I laugh at their jokes, whether I think they’re funny or not; I get serious when they’re serious. I kind of echo whatever emotion they seem to be sending to me. I do whatever it takes to get them talking.

I call these more guided conversations than interviews. And it helps me to kind of relax as I go into the interview situation, because I realize that not everything is really on the line when it comes to the question. What’s much more important is that there is an interaction that gets me what I want. The formal interview is not really conducive to someone bearing their soul to you, and that’s what we want them to do.

I want to deconstruct what a lot of us talk about, which is the onion theory. It’s a cliché, yes, but we refer to it all the time, peeling away the layers of the onion. And I want you to picture the onion.

The outer layer of the onion is orange, it’s dry, it’s brittle. And when you peel an onion, you tear off the outer layer of the onion and you throw it away because it has no use to you. You don’t even think about using it because that’s not going to be what you want in whatever you’re making. The next layer is shiny and rubbery and limp, sometimes a tinge of

green. And you won’t use it either unless it’s really the only onion you have, and you have no choice but to use it. And believe me, this is relevant to the interview.

The center of the onion is what you want. It’s crisp and it’s pungent, and it has the sharpest, truest flavor for whatever you’re making. It’s the very best part of the onion. And it also requires very little slicing. This is very important, and I hope you remember this part because it comes out later when you really apply it to the interview. It requires little slicing because it’s already small, and it’s compact, and it’s highly concentrated. And it’s so perfect that you can just—the quality is perfect, the size is perfect. You can just toss it right into whatever you’re making.

The same goes for the interview process and the quotes and anecdotes that you’re trying to get. The first thing out of a source’s mouth is often of little use. Amazingly, sometimes it is, but most of the time it’s not. It’s usually quick. It’s snappy. It’s something that the person will often tell you to make you go away. And it’s the bone that they toss at you that they think will suddenly give you what you want. And often it’s really not. It’s that outer layer that’s brittle and brown on the onion.

What we want to do, whenever we sit down with a person, is to get to the center of the onion as fast as we can. And that’s why I call it accelerated intimacy. Basically, this is the reporter’s attempt, our attempt, to achieve in a few minutes the trust that could otherwise take years to build, so that the source will tell you virtually anything.

The very beginning of this whole process is basically the introduction.

The second phase is what I call the adjustment or the feeling-each-other-out phase. You’re getting words into your notebook, and it feels like you’re making progress because you’re getting answers from them. The source is just getting used to you taking notes.

The next phase is what I call the moment of connection. And this is where you may detect that you are not getting exactly what you want. And you begin to think about ways to break the ice that might sort of call up something that’s universal, whether it’s the weather or the traffic. We all have some way of sort of making a connection with this person that we hope will accelerate the process of getting to know them.

The fourth phase is what I call the settling-in phase. This is where, because the person has not shooed you away completely, you begin to gain a little confidence that this person is stuck with you.

The fifth phase or stage is revelation. That’s when the source is feeling really comfortable, comfortable enough to

## Peeling the Onion

### Seven Steps of Interviewing

- Introduction
- Adjustment, or feeling-each-other-out phase
- Moment of connection
- Settling-in phase
- Revelation
- Deceleration
- Reinvigoration

reveal something very candid or deep. And this is often the problem for us. The source often can't even believe they're saying this to you, which is a very good sign for us, but not in the way that you might expect. Because often whatever they say may be of importance to them but has no meaning for us at all. It has nothing to do with what we're writing about. But the reason why it's so important is because it suggests that it's a turning point in their sense of trust in us, and it's a sign that we may be able to now get what we really want.

The sixth stage is deceleration, where things begin to wind down. So you begin to decelerate. You try to bring closure. You put your notebook away as a sign that the interview is over. And then what happens? The source doesn't want it to end because, you know, you have a contract. The contract is—You're a reporter, you listen to me. I talk as long as I want to and you take notes.

I call the last phase of all of this reinvigoration. And that's where the source feels free to say almost anything, and they make a revelation or comment that could be the very best quote of the interview. Suddenly, the notebook is closed and they feel so comfortable because now it's not real anymore.

The reason why I want to emphasize this last stage of reinvigoration, where you have that source basically in the palm of your hand, [is that] you don't want to lose that magic, that moment. Because they don't even realize how close they've grown to you in this very short period of time. And for the sake of the story that you may be working on, you really want to make the most of that moment, because when you get back to the newsroom and you realize, oh, I should have asked them this, or why didn't I mention that, and you get them on the phone, it's not going to be the same. But that putting away the notebook phase where they are there and they trust you, that is a moment that you want to make sure you get whatever questions you can in because that's when you get that center of the onion that will make life so much

## Be a Reporter, Not a Guest

Interview time is not social time, and a mistake that younger narrative reporters frequently make is to be too nice and too obliging and to act too much like the guest and not enough like the reporter.

I tell my sources up front, don't tell me what you don't want me to know. Or tell me now if there is an area that you want to wall off, and I'll see if I can continue working with you.

If they start feeling more comfortable, it's a problem. You're liable to be putting yourself at risk of having contaminated access if you go too far. It is possible to be a poised professional friend and acknowledge that. If you go over a certain line, you may be in ethical trouble. I don't say anything goes. I say that there is a matter of honor and decency, and your readers will be your judges. —**Mark Kramer**

easier when you get back to the newsroom and start writing.

[If the source then says something you might want to publish], what you want to do is you want to bring the notebook back so that they see that—that's a signal that, remember, I'm still a reporter. I'm still doing my job. But in all of the many interviews that I've done, my general sense is I don't believe they think that this is not going to make it in per se. They're often not saying anything different than they've been saying all along. It just means that the pressure is off. The tape recorder is away. The camera is no longer on them, and they feel more comfortable. And then they can say it in a way—finally, they get it right. ■

## Finding Time to Write

Hold yourself accountable. Get your work on paper.

Stewart O'Nan

Joseph Conrad, a very prolific writer, said that there are only two difficult things about writing: starting and not stopping. And that's absolutely true. Because you're professional journalists, I imagine that you have already started some large project that you're doing on your own time that is not attached to your work, your everyday work.

Most writers have some other job besides just being a writer. They have to find the time, make the time, or steal the time. The first rule of not stopping and of getting work done is make yourself accountable. No one else is going to pick up on it. You've got to finish what you start, even if you don't like it. That's hard. Even if you've sort of fallen out of love

with your project, you have to go through to the end. Finish it. You can always fix it.

How do you do it? How do you keep the work rolling while you're working, say, at engineering? I was in test engineering, which is feast or famine, so I'd be working seven days a week, 12 hours a day. And I also commuted an hour to work. And had a family. And somehow I had to keep the work rolling.

Very simple things like keeping the manuscript with you at all times. Always keep it with you. That way you can always go back to it. Doesn't have to be the whole manuscript. Another way to do this is to bring only the very last sentence

that you worked on—where you left off, basically. Bring it with you on a sheet of paper or index card. Keep it on your person so that if you're running around the building where you're working, you take that five seconds to pull it out and look at it and say, "Okay, oh, maybe I'll do this with it. Maybe I'll do something else with it. Maybe I'll fix it there."

In keeping the work connected to me, somehow, even physically connected with me, it would stay there. Even if I was thinking about it just sort of subconsciously, it would be with me. I wouldn't be away from it completely. Some days I'd get a sentence. Some days I'd get two sentences. Some days I wouldn't get anything.

Use your time, steal the time, manage the time somehow.

A notebook? Yes, so you can always be taking notes. In fiction, what I do is I will often put on the mask of the character that I'm writing in the persona of. I go through the day in the point of view of my character. So put on the mask of the person that you're writing, even if that person is in a nonfiction book. Think about how would this particular person see the world and details will come up and jump into you and stick with you. And you can get them down if you have that notebook, if you have that pen and that piece of paper, no matter where you are.

If you don't write it down, it's gone. You may not use what you write down. I've got notebook after notebook filled with details that I will never, ever use. But in sharpening my eye to look at the world and to see the world through other people's eyes, now I'm gaining on the work.

If you got that notebook, take the notes, organize the notes. Sometimes when you can't write at all, when you're stuck and you don't know what to do, you feel like you're going nowhere, get out those notes. Go over them, highlight them, reorganize them. Take notes on the notes. Just get more organized so that when you will have time to write, you'll have everything laid out right in front of you. Especially if you're writing a narrative nonfiction. Sometimes those notes can help you write the book. It's just organizing them in the right order there.

After that first admonition—hold yourself accountable—the second very important thing is that the work is on paper. The work is on paper. You can research all you want, you can go and do your legwork all you want, but, ultimately, that work has got to be on the paper. You can say, "Oh, I've been thinking about this novel, I've got it all in my head." I can't do anything with that. You've got to get down and work on the paper. ■

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## Editors and Reporters

'Quite frankly, we need each other.'

Jacqui Banaszynski

**A** good reporter sees the world and questions. Everything they do is in the form of questions. Their lives are a major jeopardy game.

A really good editor sees the world in terms of problem solving, and they have all of these logistical minefields to negotiate through the day.

If the writers out there can see this world and what the editor is up against with the goal of taking all these wonderful ideas and questions and figuring out how to get them into this box, or into the magazine version of this box and, eventually, how to get them up here with the picture and art and not have any of them go away. Make those two worlds merge because, quite frankly, we need each other. Whether or not we think we're on opposite sides, we only do stories when we do them together.

One day I realized as a writer, I was blaming my editor. I had spent 15 years blaming my editor for not being perfect, for not understanding me, for not knowing when I was having a bad day, for not having a perfectly toned ear. So I walked into his office one day and I sat down and I handed him a document, and he said, "What's that?" And I said, "It's the owner's manual." And he said, "Well, what do you mean?" I said, "I've listed for you who I am. I've sat and thought about my process as a reporter and writer, who I am, what I do. And I've listed the things that if you do these

things, I will be loyal to you and follow you around forever and be your best advocate and guardian angel in the newsroom."

And he looked at it and said, "Well, what are we supposed to do with this?" I said, "I'm trying to give you a language to negotiate with me when we have problems. I'm trying to let you know where my motherboard of push buttons are because I don't want to battle with you, I want this to work. I want it to work for you, for me, and for the newspaper. And I realize it's time I take responsibility for that. Now, what do you need from me?"

And it occurred to me, very seldom do writers ask editors, "What do you need?" "What are you up against?" But by giving him that, I opened the door. Now, the reason that owner's manual was important was because it taught me some things. It forced me to assess myself, to take kind of a fearless and searching moral inventory of myself as a reporter/writer. It forced me to articulate what I need, what gets in the way, and what helps when I'm writing. It forced me to identify gaps in the process and then to take stock of who had responsibility for those gaps. Was it me? Was it the editor? Was it the system? Was it just the news of the day? So I could quit kind of being in this battle and wasting time.

Most importantly it created this contract between us. And I've used it ever since and with writers as an editor: "Here's

my contract. Where's yours?" Mostly what I like about it is you have to assess your process and your writer's process—or, if you're a writer, your process and your editor's process.

The relationship between the reporter and the editor is one-on-one. The relationship among the editor and writers/reporters is one-on-four, one-on-eight, one-on-50, one-on-300, depending on what level the editor is at. You need to let the writer know that, because as the writer, I lose sight of it. I'm only worried about my story. My editor occasionally has to let me know there's a bigger world out there, treat me like an adult and say, "Let's negotiate the rest of this context so you know what you're doing."

I have what I call the seven-out-of-10 rule in life, which is, if you can list 10 things you really want in life—out of a partner, out of an editor, out of a job, out of a house—if you're really lucky and really smart, you'll get seven.

For writers this rule is really important because they need to understand that no one editor can give them everything. Some editors are great at line editing, they're skilled with looking inside words and figuring out how to restructure them so it has just the right tone and pacing. Some are real good puzzle masters: They can look at a story and figure out which pieces go where and what's missing and which are just sort of out of sorts. Some are very good "heart" editors: They can hold writers' hands and make them feel like, yes, everything is possible, you can do this work. Some are very good political editors: They can maneuver through the

system to get stuff taken care of and elbow things out of the way.

Very few are good at everything. So if the writer learns that they can't expect the editor to be everything for them, then my challenge to editors is, you can't try to be everything for your writers. You can't try to own them entirely: You have to give them permission to go to other places where they're

going to get those needs met.

Part of the reason that I really believe in having this big discussion ahead of time about who are we and what do we want from each other is so we know what mutually we're committed to. Writers

are committed to their stories, but they also have a lot of other stuff going on—ego, competition in the newsroom, concern about where they stand in the pecking order, lack of knowledge about where they stand. There is no such thing as enough feedback for a reporter and writer. You can talk to them 12 hours a day and, you know what, they need 13.

And many editors are very good at telling writers what's wrong—that there's something wrong with their copy or their story. Very few are good at telling them what's wrong with it in a specific way, and extremely few are good at helping them come up with options for what might be better about it and at the same time leave the ownership in the writers' hands. It's a very rare quality. "Here's where I stumbled as a reader, and here were the speed bumps. Here's what got in my way, and let me suggest a few options. Here are some ways to think about making it better." That's very rare, and writers don't get much of that.

Start opening up and being honest, because your writers need that from you. I would encourage you to ask your reporters to open up their process so you can see what they need and how they work and how they think, so you can start working in it. Communication all along the line so the writer can get course-corrected or can vent or can panic and the editor knows when to course-correct, what needs to be addressed, and how to calm the panic. By the end, then, you're totally in sync and you can say things like, "Gee, Dan showed up in your story way too often, let's peel him back," because by then the writer's like, "Yeah, okay," because you're in it together, and it still feels like theirs. ■

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**'No good writer is as good alone as she can be with a really good editor. And the better writers get, the more they need good editors.' — J.B.**

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Participants at the Nieman Narrative Journalism Conference.

## Tips for Reporters

# ‘Reporting is the key to good journalism.’

Steven A. Holmes

**I**n daily journalism, you often don’t get a lot of time. But in trying to cover the lives of ordinary people and make it news, your best friend is time. Being able to spend a lot of time with people is really the key. The biggest piece of advice is get as much time to spend with your subject as possible. There is no substitute for it, just none, period.

And if you’re trying to do a story on somebody who’s not a star, not a politician, not a recognizable name, you’ve got to take a lot of time and be very careful in selecting your subject. It is true that everybody has a story, but some stories are just better than others. And you need to make sure that you take the time and be very selective in determining your subject. Don’t be afraid to walk away from a subject, to say this person’s story doesn’t fit what I’m trying to say, and go out and look for somebody else.

[As part of the Pulitzer Prize-winning series *The New York Times* did on race] I did a story on two drill sergeants at Fort Knox, Kentucky, one black, one white. And I spent a lot of time at Fort Knox before I found this particular company that I actually hung out with for a while. As is often the case in journalism, I got lucky. I found a company in which the captain was leaving the army and didn’t care about his career. So he gave me complete access, and I just got to talk to everybody and hang out, and that made all the difference in the world.

So take your time in finding your subject. And observe, observe everything, take everything in, don’t let anything pass, not a thing. But don’t then regurgitate everything you see in your story. Be very selective. You may even have a really interesting anecdote, a really great anecdote, but it might not fit your point. Discard it and go onto something else. People are interesting beings. You will come up with another one. Otherwise, your stories wander and ramble and they just don’t seem to make any particular points.

Now I’m going to say something that’s going to sound kind of contradictory: Don’t worry about contradictions. You might have an anecdote that completely contradicts the point you’re going to make. Don’t just say, “Okay, that’s just a contradiction, I’m not going to put that in because that would take people off the point.” Find out why your subject did it. If it doesn’t seem to fit, find out about it. And if you discard it later on, do so for good reasons. But just because it seems contradictory on its face, that’s no reason to forget about the anecdote.

Know the context of the people. By that I mean know what’s going on, not only in their lives but also in their communities, in their workplace, in the world, and try to connect them to it. That’s what makes a lot of these stories about ordinary people so powerful.

Also, don’t forget about your subject’s history: People



Steven A. Holmes

come from somewhere. Go back and report and find out where they come from. They have friends, they have parents, they have family, they have wives, they have schoolmates, they have lots of things. Find out as much as you can. That will inform, and even if this doesn’t end up in the story, that will help inform your observations and your views of them, and you’ll understand why they do things, and you’ll be able to report it and write about it in a much richer way.

Obviously, respect and understand your subjects.

Let me just break and read you from the story I did on these two drill sergeants. It’s about one field sergeant. His name is Earnest Williams. He is a young, black drill sergeant from Waco, Texas, who is, if you meet him, the first thing you notice about him is, this guy is built. He’s about 5’10,” he weighs about 205, 210 pounds, it’s all muscle. The guy works out every day, he takes bodybuilding pills, muscle enhancers, he’s almost obsessed with his physical prowess.

He also had a bright, boyish smile that went well with his impish sense of humor. But in an institution that puts a premium on physical fitness, it was important to Sergeant Williams to camouflage his charm with sternness and to impress the privates with prowess.

One evening they challenged him to do 50 pushups in a minute. He accepted but, not wanting to embarrass himself, first retreated to his office to see if he could pull off such a feat. There he dropped to the floor and did 50. Naturally the effort tired him. But he would not let himself show weakness, so he swaggered out into the sleeping bay, slapped a stopwatch into a private’s hand and knocked out another quick 50. The men were wide-eyed.

That’s not a bad little anecdote, right? It shows a little bit of observation and makes a point. Let me let you in on

another secret: I wasn't there. I didn't see it. I always stress being there, but you're human, you're not going to see everything. You're going to sometimes miss stuff that you hear about later. Don't worry about it. But that doesn't mean you make it up. It means you go back and report it.

I heard about this time when Williams did these 50 pushups in under a minute. I thought, hmm, that's kind of interesting, so I asked him about it. And he told me about this in one short conversation. Then the next night I asked him about it, and he told me a little bit more—he told me about going into the office and not wanting to be embarrassed. So the next night I went back to the barracks, and I talked to a couple of the recruits, who told me about it: "What did he do when he came out of there?" "Who asked him to do the pushups?" "Why?" "When he came out, did he just drop to the floor and knock out the pushups?" "How do you know he did it in under a minute?" Also, he had a stopwatch. "Who held the stopwatch?" Private so-and-so. I went to private so-and-so and asked him, "Did Williams give you the stopwatch?" "Yes" "Did he just hand it to you and say, 'Please take this stopwatch?'" "No, he slapped it into my hand."

So all I'm saying is that you can write vividly, in a true narrative style, about things that you don't necessarily witness with your own eyes but, even if you do, doesn't mean that you stop reporting. Even if I'd seen all of it, it still would have made a lot of sense for me to go back and report. Reporting is the key to good journalism, and it makes no difference what kind of journalism you're talking about. You can't just take something on the surface and put it in the paper. You've got to go back and just get at as many layers of it as possible.

And I think it's especially important when you're writing about ordinary people, because this is what brings ordinary people to life, these little things. And the only way you can understand them is reporting.

Again, we keep coming back to that word, time. Time begets time. And I guess one of the things that I know I did and a couple of other reporters did in their particular subjects [in reporting on this series] is that they didn't rush to take notes.

They knew that they were handling a very sensitive subject [race] about which people are very reluctant to talk, and you wanted to be able to blend in to gain people's trust. One of the reporters, Michael Winerip, who spent a lot of time with New York City narcotics detectives, tells this story about how when he first started hanging out with these folks he would not talk about race at all. He would just hang around and observe. They knew what he was working on, so they were a little bit wary of him. And towards the beginning, something would happen—it didn't have anything to do with race, and Mike wanted to remember it, so he would take out his notebook and immediately they would say, "Did I say something racist?"

It's very difficult to do anything except spend as much time, get to know them, speak to them about everything you can think of, whether or not it has anything to do with your subject—and, in fact, it might be better if you spoke with them about things that had nothing to do with the subject.

These guys started talking to me about race, at least the black guys started talking to me about race, fairly early on and then listened to what I had to say. But then I didn't come back to that until much later. I would sometimes get away from them, go someplace and write something down, not an exact quote but basically some of the things they were talking about, and say to myself, "I'm going to come back and talk to them about that in three weeks." At least at the beginning, I wanted to be seen just as a person, and I guess as a reporter because I felt it was ethically necessary to remind them periodically. I'd say, "Guys, don't forget who I am." ■

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## Tips for Reporters

'Very few writers understand that a story has an arc, not just a beginning, a middle, and an end.'

Jim Collins

**T**hese are things I have learned from my best writers, and now I pass them on to you in 10 lessons.

**Voice is important, seductive, subversive and can be crucial.** It entertains, infuses life, makes us comfortable, makes us uncomfortable, gives pleasure, and brings us along for rides we didn't even know we wanted to take. Voice is so important in just the way you get into material and want to stay with it or not. Voice is one of the very first things that subconsciously readers respond to. And if it's someone you

want to be with, you'll spend time with him, even if you're not sure where the point of the piece is or where the piece is going or what the subject is even about.

The seductive unfolding of an article could be a very quiet way that voice works on you. But it can also show up in a bare phrase or a single word or even a sentence. And one of the most efficient ways that I have come across the way the voice is used is in one of Mark Kramer's books, "Invasive Procedures," when he spent a year with a couple of surgeons in central Massachusetts. He was in the operating room when

they had somebody on the table opened up, and he just had this phrase where he said, “This smell, to my regret, reminded me of steak.” That “to my regret,” is just so, so wonderful and so powerful and kind of disturbing at the same time. There are just three words there and that gives so much voice, that little phrase right there.

Voice can be invisible. It can show some slyness or wryness even if the author’s voice isn’t present in the words. You can see that in the way quotes are sometimes used or facts are juxtaposed.

**Writing in the first person can infuse personality and voice, add credibility, depth and perspective, but only when it has something to say.**

Yankee [magazine] hired a journalist from the north country to write about the deaths on Mount Washington and talk about geography and weather and the logistics of search and rescue. We went after a guy who had actually worked search and rescue as a teenager up on the mountain. He writes in the very light first person, but he brings up [his background] right away in the piece just to establish that what you’re about to read in a reporter’s notebook or reporter’s sense of the world comes from a deeper history.

This is him reflecting back when he was 19.

Most of us had never seen death so close, and many had never seen death at all; we hadn’t learned that when lifeless flesh is pressed, it does not rebound, it does not press back. This man seemed extraordinarily large, too heavy to lift, and we learned the meaning of “dead weight,” a weight that doesn’t help you at all. We could barely keep our feet as we headed down over the headwall; we half-dropped our burden several times and we *did* drop it several times. Some laughed, saying we should just let him slide down the slope, he wouldn’t mind, and we’d catch up later. That, apparently, is what you do when you’re at the height of your powers and carrying a dead man you can hardly lift.

Being tall, I was at the downhill end of the load. One of his booted feet was flopping right beside my shoulder, just flopping there with an absolute limpness I’d never seen. The nurse who had stayed behind said she’d found a prescription for heart medicine in the man’s pocket, and I kept wondering what he was thinking when he passed the sign telling how the weather changes above timberline are sudden and severe. I kept looking at the boot laces on the foot flopping on my shoulder. They were tied with a double bow knot, and I kept thinking the same thing over and over, that when he tied that bow this morning, he was looking forward to the day.

My friend Chan Murdoch was level with the man’s arm, and he told me later that all the way down he could only think of how the man’s limp elbow kept nudging him as he struggled with the carry, just that persistent mindless nudge. When Chan said that, I realized that we’d both seen our first death in very small parts.

That image has haunted me ever since I read it, the idea of that foot just flopping. I’ve never been able to forget that.

**Humor almost always surprises and delights.** It cuts the sweet. It lightens what otherwise might be overwrought

and also lightens what might be too dark.

**Even ugly characters can be drawn with empathy.** I think that’s especially important if you’re a reporter and you are entering a situation where you really dislike the people you’re writing about, or there’s something truly either inhumane or cruel or mean. It’s so easy to just go right there in your writing and tell people that the character is cruel or mean. And it takes real discipline to stand back and just show a setting evolve or have an exchange happen in which you let the reader make their own judgment. As a writer, you know that judgment will be made if you’re being true to the facts of the scene or the facts of this person’s character. But in writing it you have to step back and be sympathetic at the same time.

**Writers can bring eloquence to plainspoken people and articulate meaning in ordinary lives.** That’s one of the things I like most about the potential of narrative journalism is not to write about the big event, the big spectacular news event that everyone is hearing about and talking about. Not to write about celebrity. Not to write about the rich and famous. Those people seem to articulate their own lives, or they’re in the public spotlight enough, or those events are in the public spotlight enough that people get them either subconsciously or through the writing or TV that surrounds those, no matter what.

I love the potential of narrative journalism to go into the corners and the subcultures and the neighborhoods and actually make some kind of meaning or articulate something about those lives that probably very few of those people could ever put into words themselves. And I’ve learned that over and over again through some of the good writing I’ve seen.

**Writing about place can be especially hard.** Writers succeed through the vividness of their descriptions and their crafty layering of meaning. Talking about physical place, landscape, light, temperature, the feel of the air, the way things smell. There’s a phrase that I’ve never forgotten from a piece written by a poet, Susan Mitchell, who did a piece for another magazine I was working on. She wrote about the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Preserve down near the Everglades in Florida, and she had some wonderful descriptions about the sultry, kind of moist air. But the phrase I’ll never forget is “The air was so soft and moist. It felt like your breath coming back at you.” That’s just a wonderful image. And you think about that, it’s very vivid, and it really does work.

**The confidence in a piece is directly related to the depth of the reporting behind it.** Susan Orlean last year at the conference said that she doesn’t believe there’s such a thing as writer’s block. When you’re having writer’s block it’s because you haven’t done enough work or reporting to have the thinking that you need to do the writing. So she goes back to the reporting as the cornerstone. And I think that the



pieces that just feel confident are full of what Mark [Kramer] calls “muscular movement,” as if the writer is in total command of the material. That comes in having reported the piece so well that you know the material, and you know how to work with it. And that comes through in even a single sentence. The reporting is so solid in a piece when you start not mistrusting the author. You start forgetting that it’s even being written, and you’re just lost in the story. I think that has a lot to do with the reporting and the confidence.

**The best writers can break the rules of grammar and sentence structure,** but somehow they convey that they know what the rules are to begin with.

**Writing for a knowing audience allows a piece to carry meaning that doesn’t literally appear in the text.** The audience can fill in the back-story, can make connections that aren’t explicit, and can understand the inside jokes.

**Topic selection for a writer is crucial and not crucial at all.** The not-crucial part is that in the end it is in the hands of the writer to make something come to life and make something feel relevant or moving or memorable. Some of the most interesting and surprising pieces have come from off-to-the-side topics or topics that on the surface don’t sound like they may be very good. So it really has to do a lot with the writer’s passion and what they bring to it and their knowledge, and just their sense of playfulness they see in something.

And this is the one single piece of advice I give young writers and beginning writers: If you’re trying to break into a place that is a reach for you, or you’re trying to go to the next level, think of a story that nobody else can write with your perspective. And that way, if the editors like the subject or they like the idea, they’ve got to take you with it. And it can be frustrating as an editor sometimes, but it’s almost like the subject is too good and we have to take the writer, even though we’re a little bit concerned that the writer might not be able to pull it off. So if you have any story ideas that you have been thinking in the back of your head that you’re uniquely suited to write, sell it as a package with the subject. I think that’s a really important thing to keep in mind.

In terms of narrative writing, very few writers understand that a story has an arc, not just a beginning, a middle, and an end, but a sequence of events that will keep a reader moving along. I read a lot of pieces that seem flat. So one thing happens, and then another happens, and another happens, and there’s no sense of movement in a piece. The movement can be in any direction, it can circle back on itself, it can stop and start again, and it can then flash back. But I think a lot of writers have trouble with structure. And voice is the hardest thing to teach as an editor or to get from a writer, but structure is one of the mechanical things that I see as a problem in a lot of the writers.

One of the important things to do is to read your writing



Jim Collins

out loud and hear if it sounds conversational to you. People have a speaking voice without even thinking about it. Every one of us here has a distinctive speaking voice that we don’t even give a second thought to. With writing it takes a lot more discipline to arrive at that kind of comfort and individuality in our voice and writing, but we all have that if we can hear it.

So one of the ways of getting at it is to read out loud what you’ve written, and if it sounds a little bit forced or you’re putting on airs, you’re being someone you’re not, then that voice may not be very strong in that piece. I do believe that people have distinctive voices in writing that are as inborn as their storytelling voices or conversational voices. I could listen to Ira Glass tell stories about anything. I just love the guy’s excitement and humor and his take on the world, and that comes through in his voice. Rick Bragg, same way. They are people who just seem to be born storytellers to me. And then you hear Ira Glass say that he was not a good storyteller growing up. It was something he had to learn and come to.

So maybe there is something in paying very close attention to how good storytellers approach their craft and learn about pacing and holding back from the punch line and waiting until people aren’t expecting and coming in. But I get the sense that a lot of storytelling is inborn, certainly in speaking. And it follows to me that it would appear in writing that way, too, but it just takes more discipline to recognize or to make it work. ■

## Tips for Reporters

‘Writing is all about rewriting, which means you’ve got to get something down.’

### Chip Scanlan

I find that what writers are asking for more than anything is permission—permission to do what we want. And so writers will say, “Could I do this?” And my reaction is usually “Sure. You may fail, but of course you can do it.” I keep a piece of paper over my desk, a quote from Samuel Beckett, the playwright. And it’s three lines: “Fail, fail again, fail better.”

Sigmund Freud once reflected on Friedrich Schiller’s observation that there is within us a watcher at the gates, and that is the critical voice. It is the voice that says, “You suck.” And it is probably one of the key reasons why you can answer the question, “If I manage my time, my stories, and myself better, I would be—” and you’re not those things right now. It’s because of doubt, of the critic’s voice. And it cheats you and me and all of us of the opportunity to experience writing for what it is: a journey, a process of discovery.

So many writers have said, “I don’t know what I think until I write it down.” So the question is how do you get past that? How do you get past the watcher at the gates? Gail Godwin wrote a wonderful essay called “The Watcher at the Gates” in the mid-1970’s in *The New York Times* in which she said, in essence, my job as a writer is to start writing really fast so I can sneak past that watcher of the gates before the watcher can say, “Hey wait a minute. You suck. You can’t write.” That’s the principle. The device is free writing.

Earlier, a woman looked at me and said, “What are you speaking about?” And I said, “Well, I guess what I’d say is my advice to writers is lower your standards.” She is a teacher, so she was horrified. But that’s what it’s all about. Lower



Audience members line up to ask questions.

### Steps for Managing Your Stories

- Lower your standards.
- Get something down.
- Swallow the bile that rises in your throat when you write a first draft.
- Print out early.
- Read aloud.
- Apply very critical standards.

your standards. And the way you do that is free writing.

So if there’s ever a day when you think, I can’t get anything done, just say, “Look. I’m going to write for two minutes.” I don’t just say to myself, “Lower your standards”—I say abandon them.

Writing is all about rewriting, which means you’ve got to get something down. But there is this paradox that I think all of us probably have experienced, those moments where we begin to write and we stop thinking, and we’re just writing. And it begins to flow. The best writing comes from the gut, from the heart, in the sense almost when the mind is shut off or it’s on automatic. And, of course, not everything’s going to be perfect. But if you could at least start every day with writing something, getting something down, you’ve planted a seed that you can nourish all day long.

To manage your stories, there are essentially six steps. One, lower your standards. Get something down. Swallow the bile that rises in your throat when you write a first draft. Because the fact of the matter is, as you learn, that it contains the promise of the final one. Print out early. One of the downsides of the computer is we don’t hit the print button. Print out early. Read aloud. People don’t read aloud. Better yet, have someone else read it to you. If they’re stumbling, it’s probably because it’s not clear enough. It took me a long time to accept the fact, “I’m bored reading this.” Think about all the stories that have been published that if you read them aloud, you’d say, “God, this is boring. Who the hell would read this? I’m only reading it because I’m being paid to.” You have to be honest.

I mean, it’s this paradox. I’m saying, “Wait a minute. I think you said lower your standards?” Sure, lower your standards at first. But then you have to apply very critical standards. ■

## Tips for Reporters

# 'Don't try to squeeze the dress of narrative over the wrong form.'

Jacqui Banaszynski

**L**earn the rules and the conventions of your craft so you can break them. That's how you wing walk. That's how you take risks. You take risks on the platform of security so you know where you are starting and where you have to land.

You do not pop fully formed from the womb ready to write a Pulitzer-quality piece. You have practiced writing long and hard, all of you, but the harder truth is you have to keep practicing and keep practicing again. You're never done—that's both the challenge and the beauty.

Don't assume that narrative or what we're talking about here is defined by length. Don't try to squeeze the dress of narrative over the wrong form. If there's a lesson to be learned here it's that narrative does come in one line, one moment in time.

The other thing I want to remind you of is you can't just say, "I want to do a narrative" and go out and find a story and then wrench a narrative on top of it. It's like dressing up a pig: Sometimes it doesn't work. You have to be open to the possibility of stories that come your way, especially if you work in the real world, and you've got to do assignments and you've got to do what your editors do, and then, when the right story comes along, you have to look for the opportunity to see the narrative in it.

The other lesson is that you have to stretch yourself, and you have to work with muscles that aren't as natural and comfortable to you. Just know you're going to have to be uncomfortable for a while.

The other thing you have to remember how to do is to get in close. You have to wipe the brow of the AIDS patient. You have to hold the baby in your arms in the moments before it dies. You have to be willing to immerse yourself in a story so much that, even if you can't live the story, you can soak it up for a little while.

Writing is personal. It is direct from me to you, one-on-one, and the more massive your circulation, the more massive your publication or audience, the more personal and direct it needs to be. I'm not talking about first person necessarily, or even very often, but I am talking about writing with a reader in mind, writing with the core conscious purpose of communicating very directly from you to a reader what happened, what you experienced, what you felt, what was going on, and what

you want them to understand and know.

I can't write for 500,000 people. I don't know who they are. I don't care how many readership surveys you take, I don't know who 500,000 people are. So when I wrote, I wrote for five. They had names and real lives and faces and their pictures were up on my computer terminal. I had to look at them as I wrote, and they kept me honest when I grew too invested in my sources or too infatuated with my own prose.

Another lesson: Stories are oral. If you want to do narrative, one of the truisms of narrative is that it really is a story that has to be able to be read aloud. People learned language by listening to stories and listening to language. We didn't grow up reading. We grew up hearing, and eventually we absorbed the written word. When people read, there is an inner oral ear that their mind hears with. And if you are going to tell a true narrative, you'd better be able to tell it orally. So read your things out loud. Have other people read them out loud, and see if they work for you. See if they truly are stories and they have rhythm and pace and cadence and flow and if they move along.

The final lesson from this is you need to take a risk, and what you are risking is yourself. You are the one on the scene, in the interview, at the core heat of the story. And you have to let your readers into that place or you are cheating them for the sake of your own comfort. ■



David Fanning talks about finding the story in TV documentary.

## A Bunch of Tips for Reporters

### **‘You can break the action at times and give us background.’**

Say you’re writing about the Little League team winning the Little League World Series and you’re doing a narrative. That’s a dramatic story, but it’s got a lot of players and a lot of people, kids and parents and coaches. You want background about who these people are, but you also want to tell the story of the action on the field. You can break that action at appropriate times, usually at dramatic ones, and stop and tell me something about the people involved. You’re in the last game against the favored Chinese team; you’re clinging to a one-run lead in the eighth inning, and the biggest kid on the Chinese team hits a ball over the head of the left fielder. He turns his back to the plate. He’s running. He leaps for the ball. And how did he get on this field? Who is this kid?

He’s from Australia. His father moved here because the international company he works for changed his job and moved him to Connecticut. It’s interesting. That stuff better not be dull. It needs to be interesting and important to be there. How many times can you do that in a story? It depends on how long the story is. If it’s a long enough serial narrative, you can do it for every starter on the team, but you might not want to if the piece is shorter or if some of the other kids’ stories aren’t as interesting.

You can break the action at times and give us background. And readers want to know that background. That kid who’s going to make that catch, you want to know who he is. So that’s something that works really well. —**Bruce DeSilva**

### **Get your editors ‘to see what you’re seeing.’**

I happen to work with just some wonderful editors, including Neville Green who does this really great thing that I would encourage all of you to encourage your editors to do, if you have to motivate your editor. He gets out of the newsroom and joins me at the story. If you find an editor like Neville, hang on to him. And if your editor is not quite as motivated, get him to see what you’re seeing. They are your first readers. Get them to see and believe and understand why you are doing what you’re doing and get them caught up in the lives of the people that you’re caught up in.

—**Tom French**

### **‘Inch your way there.’**

Editors need to put things in the paper they can count on, and they like to put things in the paper that make a difference. Narrative is a hard sell that way. That’s why I really encourage you to think about it as a paragraph, a line, a small story. Inch your way there. And the other thing you need to know about editors to get them on your side is if you come to an editor with an abstract concept and say “I want to write

a narrative piece,” what the editor hears is, “Oh my God, investment of time and pain and no sure delivery of product.” And this editor has this yawning, gaping hole that is the white space of the newspaper to think about. If you can learn to deliver up small pieces of narrative along the way while you cover the city council and you bring in a weekend piece which is a profile of one of the council members, or a small narrative of how a certain piece of legislation got passed, and you deliver that time and time again and your editor sees you can do that, pretty soon you buy yourself the right to go and say, “Now I’m going to do a narrative. I want to do a story on X.” But it has to be specific, it has to be tied to what’s going on in your community. —**Jacqui Banaszynski**

### **‘The more you do it and the better you get...’**

The more you do it and the better you get at it, I think the easier it is to convince your editors that this is a fine way to report a story. —**Isabel Wilkerson**

### **‘Just sit there and just keep going at it.’**

When you’re writing, sometimes you think, “Oh, this is terrible. This is the worst writing I’ve done on this book. Other parts of the book came easy, and this is coming hard.” And sometimes you’ll go back and look at those crappy days and you’ll keep more from the crappy days than you do from the good days and sometimes vice versa. You just have to sit there. It’ll even out. Sit there and work. Sit there and work, whether it comes or not. Whether it comes easy or whether it comes hard. Just sit there and just keep going at it.

If you get it done, you get it done. If you don’t, you don’t. Don’t worry about it too much. Forget about those sort of daily deadlines. I mean, it’s difficult if you’re coming from journalism because you’re so used to it there. The idea of sitting in front of a computer for two hours and not coming away with something usable is very foreign to a lot of journalists. But to fiction writers, it’s absolutely normal. You can work all day and end up with a page. You come back to it that night and you look at it and you say, “That’s wrong. I’ve gone off on the wrong direction. It’s got to go.” There. You can’t worry about it. You just cannot worry about it.

There’s a reason why you’re stuck there, and though you don’t know it, somehow your subconscious mind is telling you, “Stop. Wait. You haven’t figured this out.” That may be when you go back and look at that outline and say, “Gee, this is all backwards. I’ve got to fix this somehow.” Yes? But again, if you didn’t sit at your machine, you’d never find that out. Robert Frost said, “The art of writing is the art of applying the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair.” Absolutely right. It’s a lot easier if you’re tied to the chair. —**Stewart O’Nan** ■

## Tips for Editors

### **‘Pick three things and just keep working on them, keep reinforcing them.’**

Think of each of your reporter/writers as a one-year investment. Match the assignment to the writer, but stretch it each time. Give them things to work on. But the key is to identify what you want them to work on so they’re not working on everything at once or they’re not working on one thing this week and another the next and another the next. Sit down and assess where you think that writer can go and pick no more than three things, in any given year, to have them really work on. And keep finding assignments that reinforce those.

If your reporter really needs to learn how to interview, keep finding assignments that reinforce that. If she needs to learn how to do narrative description in little moments, teach that reporter that moment by moment, paragraph by paragraph, story by story. They’re becoming Rick Bragg because, guess what, he didn’t pop out of the womb able to do this stuff any more than I did. It was a story by story, brick by brick process.

Pick three things and just keep working on them, keep reinforcing them.

Second trick: Give them edit memos where you reinforce that. You say, “Here’s what you did well. Now, here’s three things I want you to work on when you do a rewrite.” Or “The next time you do a piece, I want you to pay attention to these three things.” Be very specific. Anywhere from the depth of your interviewing skills: “Ask five more questions after every interview.” Or things like, “You use too many intransitive verbs and here’s how it slows down your copy.”

Last little trick, I call this the Magic Marker trick. I love this. It really works. Every month, grab your reporter/writer, your “young baby,” and have them print out maybe five pieces of their work. Take a Magic Marker, pick one thing, one thing only—pick verbs, pick dependent clauses, pick “-ly” adverbs, pick metaphors, pick description, pick attribution, only one thing at a time, and go through their hard copy with that Magic Marker and in each of their pieces underline every time they do that. What they will get is a visual road map of their patterned strengths and their patterned weaknesses. And then when they sit down at the computer they’ll see that pink Magic Marker blinking in their face every time they write an intransitive verb or a weak transition. But do it piece by piece. Don’t take it on all at once. And very specific stuff.

Don’t forget the skills of a reporter, because we’re all storytellers. When I was a reporter out in the field, my job was to find people who were doing something, who were interesting, and it was to get them to tell me a story, to turn them into a storyteller—that’s what narrative journalism is. I turned people into storytellers when they didn’t know they were one, and I turned around and I wrote their story.

As an editor, your job is to interview writers and get the story out of them, turn them into storytellers. Writers get lost

in all of the mass of information they know, and it’s all equally important and every source they talk to is very important and they’re very committed to it all. Your job is not to say to them, “When’s your story going to be in? How long is it going to be? What’s the structure? Do you have pictures?” but to say, “Tell me a story. What happened? What was the most interesting thing? Did you like the person? Why did you like them?” Re-interview your writers and turn them back into storytellers and then give them overt permission to go write that story. Then write down what you did and stick it on your terminal. That’s very helpful.

—Jacqui Banaszynski

### **‘If the reporter feels like he stubbed his toe, then believe me the reader has, too.’**

The best tip I think in getting a reporter to better organize his story is just say, “Okay, you can use as much color and imagery and detail as you want as long as it’s going somewhere. What does it illustrate?” Hold them to this standard. “Write as much, as effectively, and as poignantly as you want, but it has to say something. It has to be leading me along.” If the reporter feels like he stubbed his toe, then believe me the reader has, too. —Rick Bragg

### **What is this story really about?**

I learned this lesson because of the way this editor taught me. A guy I worked with in Providence was forever asking, “What’s this thing about?” The instance that comes to mind is this story about a seven-year-old blind boy. “Go out to do a story about him. He’s in public school. He rides a bike. And, you know, he’s got a very normal life, which has been very calculated on the part of his parents.”

I turned in the story, and this editor came up to my desk and said, “Have you spent an entire day with this kid?” Of course I was very defensive and said, “Well, jeez, I mean, did you see the pictures? Where do you think I’ve been? School with him one day and I went to camp and I had dinner with his family and interviewed his parents.”

“No, no. Have you spent an entire day with him?” And I said “Well, no.” And he said, “Well, what is it about? What is it really about?” I didn’t know what to say. And he said, “You know, what is it like to be seven years old and blind? What does that mean? What is your life like?” And then he said, “What’s the first thing you do when you have a baby? What’s the first thing?”

And I didn’t have any children then, and I didn’t know, but it turns out he was right. He said, “We count the fingers and toes.” That’s the first thing you do when you see this newborn. Before the baby’s born, you’re begging, pleading, beseeching, “Make my baby healthy and happy and normal.” So for them, this is an incredible nightmare.

But, he says, “The question is, what do you do about it?” And then he said, “Now get your ass back there. Get there

before the kid wakes up and stay until he goes to bed, and let's do it again." And for me, that was a pivotal moment because I realized that I had to decide what the story was about, then support it with evidence.

There probably should be another person saying to all of us "It's about the reporting." Because that's what narrative comes from. It comes from being there and watching and being bored and waiting for something to happen. That reporting can be governed by critical thinking. You are almost roaming around your story like one of those auto-focus cameras, the lens going in and out. So that's the way an editor helped me, by forcing me to confront what the story was about. Then, in a sense, everything that story became grew out of that exercise in critical thinking. —**Chip Scanlan**

**'If it sounds bad when it's read out loud, it's bad. No exceptions.'**

Editors who have helped me with voice have done just a very simple thing. They've told me to read my stories out loud and hear what they sound like. That's all it is. If it sounds bad when it's read out loud, it's bad. No exceptions. Hear what it sounds like.

I do this all the time now to my writers. And writers who have a problem with voice, I get fairly aggressive about it. If they're not reading their stuff out loud, I'll read it to them or even have a conversation with them, try to talk to them in the voice of their story. Say something like, "Hey, Jack, did you hear about the midnight rampage that broke the stillness of our affluent neighborhood? I hear that club-wielding police rushed to the scene and subdued a roving band of youths."

If the writer has any chance at all of learning anything in this business, he goes, "Please, give me my story back and let me do something about that." It's very simple.

—**Bruce DeSilva**

**'You can't really build a story that just keeps rolling out in front of you without any interruption.'**

One of the tricks in terms of being an editor is that if there is a lot of material in the course of a big, sprawling documentary project, break it into chapters. Doesn't matter how long the chapter is—it can be six minutes long, it can be 15 minutes long. Break it into chapters or acts. Acts work wonderfully, by the way. Classic Shakespearean five acts works really well.

Give each chapter a title and know what that title means, and then cut that piece to make it work and then move on. Otherwise, you can't really build a story that just keeps rolling out in front of you without any interruption. It needs natural pauses and dramaturgy.

We think in terms of drama and we think in terms of acts all the time. When we're sitting around looking at the material you've brought back, we sit down and do the boxes. I have this habit of making boxes with little arrows that join them, and each box has to have its idea in it.

—**David Fanning** ■

## Tips for Editors

### A collaborative relationship at The Oregonian

It is important to establish a collaborative relationship between a writer and an editor to do this kind of work. It's not the kind of work you can do in a traditional newsroom structure where the reporter comes in in the morning and an assistant city editor assigns a story that is then turned in after that assistant city editor has gone home for the night, and it's then edited by another assistant city editor and kind of just shoved into the maw of the machine, the way we traditionally produce daily spot news.

Rich [Read] and I, on a regular basis, every week go over and sit at a neighborhood coffee shop and talk about narrative, in general, and what we've read and what we think of it. A big narrative has appeared in the Chicago Tribune. We both read it. We sit down, we talk about it. I do the same thing with James Holman and other writers in the newsroom.

Rich has been working on a story on the evolution of the Japanese economy for quite some time. For about a year and a half we have talked about the story, talked about its themes, and talked about the reporting and what the larger points are that we're trying to make. It's a very interesting part of those coffee shop conversations that we have. We track the subject of the story. If Rich sees something that he thinks is relevant to the larger points we're trying to make in that story he shifts it over to me to read.

It's all the front-end discussion and hard thinking about what's the universal theme, what's the context, what are the points we're trying to make. And then the reporting is focused on producing the telling details and finding the themes that will help make those points. You don't just go out and stumblebum around in the world, collecting in a willy-nilly way a bunch of details that is somehow going to enthrall and illuminate things for readers.

—**Jack Hart**

Jack's technique of editing is that you both sit down together at his computer. And he will read it out loud. And the second something sounds off or isn't going to work, then we either fix it there or we mark it and I go back and redo it. So I think it would be pretty tough to do without an editor you really trust. And you also need an advocate. You have to have somebody who's able to be in on those newsroom meetings and make the point that no, this really is worth the space that we need to give it.

—**Richard Read** ■

# Reporters Read From Their Narrative Articles

*During the conference, there would come a time each day when writers would share their narrative writings with participants who wanted to listen. And many did. The hundreds of chairs set up in the ballroom area, where these readings took place, were filled as people sat quietly to listen as stories were read aloud. Space allows us to publish only a few of these readings, so we selected narratives that were reported and written by those who work at newspapers.*

## Using Narrative to Report on Race in America

*In 1999 and 2000, I had the privilege to write and help edit The New York Times' series on how race is lived in America. When it came out, it got quite a bit of praise and won the Pulitzer Prize, and it also got a bit of criticism. And some of the criticism was that it didn't make solid points about the issue of racism, but I always argue that it did make very solid points about race and race in America, and one of those was the extent to which race divides people who ought to have so much in common. I have a couple of excerpts to read that I think illustrate this point. The first one is from an article I wrote called, "Which Man's Army?" I spent about six months at Fort Knox, Kentucky, hanging out with a company of soldiers mainly involved in basic training, and I got to know the drill sergeants, that sort of icon of American military. I focused in on two drill sergeants, Earnest Williams, who was black, from Waco, Texas, and his partner, Harry Feyer, who was white, from Sheboygan, Wisconsin. They were the same age. They had entered the Army within a month of each other and been in the Army about 12 years. They were both married and had children who were roughly the same age. They lived within 200 yards of each other, and they had never visited each other's house. —Steven A. Holmes*

Staff Sgt. Harry Feyer was parking cars and looking glum when the four platoons of Bravo Company, including his own, came marching toward him up a long grassy hill on their way to the winter graduation.

They stepped smartly, 214 strong, their brass buttons gleaming on dress greens, their black shoes buffed to a high sheen. They displayed all the discipline and dash that Sergeant Feyer, a leader of Fourth Platoon, had helped pound into them in nine weeks of basic training. Striding beside them were his fellow drill sergeants, shoulders back, chests out, their full-dress uniforms a deep green backdrop for clusters of glinting medals and rainbows of ribbons, their brown Smokey Bear hats cocked aggressively low on their foreheads. Sergeant Feyer, six feet tall and lanky, might have been among them.

Instead he stood apart in his mottled fatigues and dusty combat boots, directing traffic outside the dingy yellow gymnasium where the ceremony was to be held. It was a duty he had volunteered for. It was his one-man protest.

Sergeant Feyer was angry that he had been denied an award given to the top-performing drill sergeant at the end of each basic training cycle,

an award he felt he deserved. True, it didn't look like much—just a cheap bronze plated statue, a generic eight-inch-tall figure of a sergeant. But in the pressure cooker that is the United States Army, winning even a small award could help make the difference between promotion and stagnation, between a better life for his family and just scraping by.

And he knew why he had lost out, or believed he knew: because he is white. No white drill sergeant had won the award since the company was founded in April 1998. Of the five given out, three had gone to blacks and one to a Hispanic. The one time a white sergeant was selected, he gave the trophy back when a group of black sergeants kicked up a fuss, saying he didn't deserve it.

That Sergeant Feyer had lost out this time came as no surprise in Bravo Company, particularly to the white sergeants. Everyone knew that in Bravo, a clique of black sergeants ran things.

Sergeant Feyer said he didn't like to think that way. People make too much of race, he said. But there were times when it did matter to him. "When it's a matter of something that I deserve because of my position," he said, "if I outrank a person and he gets a job because of his color, then there's something wrong."

As Sergeant Feyer stewed in the parking lot, Staff Sgt. Earnest Williams stood erect in front of Fourth Platoon, his square, muscled frame pushing at the seams of his uniform. Sergeant Williams was part of that black coterie that ran the company and ran it smoothly. The white sergeants might grumble, but they acknowledged that the blacks got things done. Yet Sergeant Williams was not feeling particularly powerful this morning. This was his last day with the company. He was being transferred to another unit, away from his buddies, away from his position of influence.

It seemed unfair to him. He was a good soldier, a good leader. His superiors—his white superiors—had said there were too many drill sergeants in Bravo Company and not enough in others. He did not believe them. He was convinced he was being shipped out because he is black. As far as he could see, the powers that be didn't like it when the brothers were in control.

"We had it for a little while," said one of his black compatriots. "But then they said, 'Oh no, we can't let this be.'"

So on a chill December morning, two soldiers—one black, one white, both part of an institution portrayed as a model of race relations—stood only yards apart in the middle of this sprawling base, each believing himself the victim of racism.

Just then a gray Honda Accord glided into a parking space and out popped Sgt. First Class Henry Reed, resplendent in his dress greens. "Good morning!" he bellowed, a broad smile splitting his dark, soft-featured face. "It's a wonderful day!"

Sergeant Reed was going to receive the award that Sergeant Feyer saw as rightfully his; Sergeant Reed would get the glory even though it was

Sergeant Feyer who had worked the late nights, who had pitched in to help other platoons when they were short-handed, who had made sure the washers and dryers got fixed.

Sergeant Reed was limited by a back injury suffered in a car crash, and it had not escaped Sergeant Feyer's notice that Sergeant Reed had skipped the long days on the rifle range, that he hadn't humped a 40-pound rucksack up and down steep, chest-busting hills on 15-kilometer marches.

"We all know that Reed is broke," one white drill sergeant said. "He can't do the work anymore."

Sergeant Reed was also nearing retirement; at 39 he was the oldest drill sergeant in the company. This was probably his last chance to win the company's drill-sergeant award. So his fellow black sergeants had decided to select him, they said, on the basis of what he had done in the past.

As Sergeant Feyer watched his colleague stride jauntily into the field house, he had another reason to fume. Sergeant Reed had parked his car off by itself, leaving a devil-may-care gap in the row of vehicles that Sergeant Feyer—who finds satisfaction in rote, mechanical tasks—had meticulously arranged.

"He ruined my parking," Sergeant Feyer said. "Not only did he screw me out of my award, but he ruined my parking."

*The next excerpt is by Kevin Sack, who spent a lot of time in a church outside Atlanta. It was an unusual church in that it was about 55 percent white and 45 percent black. It was aggressively trying to remain integrated and was struggling with this. Kevin wrote about and focused on two families: the Pughs, a white family, and the Birches, a black family. He talks about them and how they fit into the church.*

Howard Pugh, head usher, is on patrol. May the good Lord have mercy on any child, or adult for that matter, who dares to tread across the lobby of the Assembly of God Tabernacle with so much as an open Coca-Cola in his hand. Because first he will get the look, the alert glare of a hunting dog catching its first scent of game. Then he will get the wag, the slightly palsied shake of the left index finger. And then the voice, serious as a heart attack and dripping with Pensacola pinesap: "Son, this is the Lord's house. And they just shampooed that carpet last week."

It goes without saying that Howard Pugh knows what is going on in his lobby. So when Mr. Pugh, a white man with a bulbous pink nose, spots 81-year-old Roy Denson slipping out of the sanctuary, he doesn't even have to ask. He just knows. He knows because he has seen Mr. Denson flee the 10:30 service time and again, and it is always when one of the choir's black soloists moves to center stage. This time it is Robert Lawson, a soulful tenor with a fondness for canary-yellow suits. As he begins to sing, the Pentecostal faithful gradually rise. First a few black members clap and sway. Then more join in. Finally, the white members are moved to stand, and before long the 2,000-seat sanctuary is washed over with harmony. Stretching their arms toward the heavens, the congregants weave a tapestry of pinks and tans and browns.

But to Mr. Denson's ears, Mr. Lawson's improvisational riffs sound like so much screeching and hollering. And so he sits there seething, thinking about how he joined this church 56 years ago, how he followed it from downtown Atlanta to the suburbs, how he hung the Sheetrock

with his own hands, and how the blacks are taking over and the whites are just letting it happen.

He gets angrier and angrier, listening to these boisterous black folks desecrate his music, until he simply cannot bear it. "I ain't sitting there and listening to that," he mutters on his way out. "They're not going to take over my church."

And there waiting for him is Mr. Pugh, at 65 another white man of his generation, always with the same smart-alecky question. Never mind that Mr. Pugh and his wife, Janice, have themselves become uneasy about the direction of their church, that they have been quietly contemplating a walk of their own. "Now, Roy," Mr. Pugh begins, stroking his seafarer's beard, "what are you going to do when you get to heaven? Walk out of there, too?"

## A Narrative Story Written on Deadline

*As a journalist who primarily has written for daily newspapers, I'm going to be reading from a story that was a Pulitzer finalist. "Cruel Flood: It Tore at Graves, and at Hearts" is a story that probably I treasure the most because it was written on deadline and adhered to the standards that we are striving for, which is trying to do narrative in whatever form or medium we happen to be working in.*

—Isabel Wilkerson

August 25, 1993. Harden, Missouri: When the Missouri River barreled through town like white-water rapids this summer, and grain bins and City Hall and the Assembly of God church and houses and barns gave way and there were no telephones or electricity or running water, people in this tiny farm town thought they knew all about the power of nature.

Then the unthinkable happened. The river washed away about two-thirds of the graves at the cemetery where just about anybody who ever lived and died here was buried. The river carved out a crater 50 feet deep where the cemetery used to be. It took cottonwood trees and the brick entryway and carried close to 900 caskets and burial vaults downstream toward St. Louis and the Mississippi. The remains of whole families floated away, their two-ton burial vaults coming to rest in tree limbs, on highways, along railroad tracks and in beanfields two and three towns away.

"You cannot accept the magnitude of it until you're standing in it," said Dean Snow, the Ray County coroner. He said it might take years to find all the remains.

Now people who lost everything else to the flood are left to weep for the parents they mourned decades ago, the stillborn children they never saw grow up, the husbands taken from them in farm accidents, the mothers who died in childbirth. It is as if the people have died all over again and the survivors must grieve anew.

Every day they show up at the county fairgrounds to get word of their lost loved ones, gathering at a bulletin board where the names of the dead who have been recovered and identified are posted. People have driven from Kansas City and St. Louis to check on half-brothers or second husbands. A man called from Sacramento, California, trying to find his parents. Another flew in from New Mexico to find his mother. She was missing, too.

"People are just heartsick," said Ed Wolfe, who had five generations of relatives in the cemetery. "It's a trying, a testing time to have to go



through this all over again.”

About 1,500 people were buried at the Hardin Cemetery, once a pristine landscape nine acres across and now a muddy lake where minnows and snapping turtles live alongside broken headstones and toppled graves. The disaster was all the more astonishing because Hardin is not even a river town. It is some five miles north of the Missouri.

Since it was founded in 1810, the cemetery had survived tornadoes, floods and the Civil War. No other cemetery in the country has been uprooted like this, officials of the American Cemetery Association say. Local people see the occurrence as near-biblical.

“It makes you think, ‘What is God saying to us?’” said Bess Meador, a retired nurse with two husbands in the cemetery. “What is it we’re doing that we shouldn’t be doing? You look at that cemetery and you feel so helpless.”

Whether a resident lost a direct relative or not, everybody lost someone. Just about everybody in the cemetery was kin.

So far, the remains of about 200 people have been found, stored in open barns and refrigerated trucks at the county fairgrounds and at a nearby farm. About 90 have been identified.

It is a slow, painful task, more common to a plane crash than to a flood, that has required survivors to come in and give disaster volunteers any identifying information they can remember about their relatives.

Two boxes of tissues sit on the counseling desk for the shower of tears as people dig deep for old memories. Mr. Wolfe had to call up painful details about his only son, Christopher, a stillborn, who would have been 18 years old this year and whose remains are among the missing.

“They wanted to know what kind of casket, what color casket,” Mr. Wolfe said. “What color his eyes were, what color his hair was, what he was wearing, if he had a little pillow in his casket.”

Some people were able to give only the barest description. Some could only remember that a relative had a gold tooth or a hip replacement. Others remembered everything. One man’s survivors remembered that he was buried in his Kansas State shorts, with a Timex watch, and had a slide rule in his shirt pocket. The relatives of another man said he had a tattoo on his right arm that said “Irene.”

The ordeal has forced Carrie Lee Young, 81, to relive the day she learned that her husband, Roy, had died when a tractor-mower fell on him five years ago. “He was out mowing by the road,” she said, her eyes welling with tears. “And he didn’t come in for supper. I couldn’t go out looking for him. He had the car. People went out looking for him. They found him late that night. We were getting ready for our 55th wedding anniversary. It would be our 60th this year.”

Every Memorial Day, she would carry peonies from her garden to place on the grave he had picked out for himself. Now she fears he is floating somewhere in the Missouri. “I don’t know where my husband is,” Mrs. Young said. “It is just pitiful.”

She searched in vain for his name on the list and asked a volunteer, Greg Carmichael, if he knew where her husband was. He checked the plot number and the map. “He’s pretty well gone,” Mr. Carmichael said.

“That’s what I was afraid of,” Mrs. Young said, looking away.

To this town of 598 people, the cemetery was more than a place to bury people. It was an archives, a genealogical museum, a family album without pictures. People could trace their family trees by just walking among the tombstones.

The other day, Mr. Wolfe stood on the jagged 10-foot cliff at the corner of the cemetery that the river had left alone. Vaults and caskets—

most lacking any identification marks—jutting from the cliffside, rusting in the sand steppes sculptured by the river. There were pink silk carnations on the remaining graves and broken obelisks and tombstones on their backs in the ravine below as gray-brown water lapped against the shores.

Mr. Wolfe soberly toured the cemetery, introducing people he knew as if he were at a reunion. “That’s grandma and grandpa Bandy,” he said of one set of tombstones.

“Those were neighbors of ours,” he said, pointing to the headstones of a mother, father and daughter.

Joined by Mr. Snow, he came upon the grave of a World War II veteran. “That’s Della’s husband,” he said.

“Yeah, Bob’s dad,” Mr. Snow said. “He was working on his car and it fell on him.”

This is the kind of town where husbands and wives buy burial plots together and engrave their names on tombstones long before they die.

“You see, that’s why grandmother wants a positive identification of grandfather,” Mr. Chamberlain, a funeral director volunteering here, said. “Because she wants to be placed next to him, not next to somebody else.”

As people here await word on the recovery effort, some are trying to figure out what to do with the cemetery. Some want to extend it into the adjacent cornfields and maybe put water lilies in the lake the river made as a memorial to those lost to the floods. Others want to move the entire cemetery, including the intact graves, to higher ground. Some want to have a new mass funeral service after more bodies are found.

Some people said they could not even think about that. “I can’t go through that again,” said Ethel Kincaid, whose parents’ remains are still missing. “I went through it once. It’s just too painful.”

County officials have been hauling in about eight caskets a day as farmers and other residents report sightings. Clara Heil, a farmer eight miles east of Hardin, awoke one morning to find 10 vaults in her yard.

The cemetery itself has attracted tourists from Illinois and Kansas and as far away as Vermont, who drive past police barricades and ignore the “keep out” signs to take pictures. “Is this where the caskets popped out?” a gawker from Vermont asked Mr. Snow, camera in hand.

But these are hallowed grounds to people like Mr. Wolfe. When Mr. Snow waved him onto the site, he anxiously paced the cemetery in search of his father and stillborn son. He got to the edge of the cliff and saw the earth carved out in the spot where they had been.

“My baby and my dad are gone,” Mr. Wolfe said, his eyes red and watery. “We’ve been hoping for five weeks they were safe. The way things are broken up down there, I don’t know if they’ll ever be recovered.”

He wiped his eyes and headed back to the road, walking over dead corn shucks and wheat stubble, to break the news to his wife.

To order conference tapes, visit  
[www.nieman.harvard.edu/narrative](http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/narrative)  
 and click on the Cambridge Transcripts logo.

## A Reporter Puts Himself in His Narrative Account

*This story appeared in the St. Petersburg Times in November. It's from Termez, Uzbekistan, a city on the southern border of Uzbekistan, across the Amu Darya from Afghanistan.* —Tom French

The windows of the old apartment building are alive with faces, shoved against the glass to see who has gotten out of the strange van in the alley below.

You nod hello, then look around to get your bearings. Above, strings heavy with laundry hang from the side of the building, curving in the Sunday morning light. At your feet, children play in puddles of brown water.

Up the stairs, to an entryway where five boys are already waiting. They stand formally, shoulders back, chins held high, like dignitaries in a reception line. One by one, as you move past, they solemnly shake your hand. Several adults stand behind them, nodding.

"Please, can you help me?" a woman says softly in English. She is holding a thin white veil across the lower half of her face.

You don't know what to say, and you are already being ushered forward. So you smile politely and keep your eyes away from hers and step into the apartment.

The front door is pasted over with a mosaic of photos of Madonna, Chuck Norris, Sylvester Stallone as Rambo, a couple of Russian soccer players. The room you have entered is dark and almost completely empty of furniture. The floor is covered with a faded red carpet. In one corner, on top of a mini-cabinet, there is a small TV and a boom box. On the floor, near another doorway, you see a worn deck of cards.

Your host, the man you came here hoping to meet, invites you to sit down across from him on the carpet. The others from the entryway—including the woman in the veil as well as the boys who greeted you—come in and crowd behind him and beside him. Too late, you notice they have all left their shoes at the door, while you are still wearing your hiking boots.

If your host is offended, his face does not show it. He kneels on the carpet and silently watches as you get settled and pull out your notebook and pen.

He is waiting until you are ready. He will wait as long as it takes.

His name, he says, is Hashmatullah Sharifzada. He prints it out, in your notebook, so you will get it right.

He explains that he was born on January 1, 1971—he puts the date down for you, too—in Kabul. He grew up there and lived in the city until two years ago, when he fled Afghanistan.

"Why did you leave?" you ask.

"The Taliban captured me," he says, not taking his eyes off yours. "They hit me in the head with a pistol. They broke my toes. They pulled out my toenails."

"Why?"

Sharifzada runs a hand over his bare cheeks. "I was not a military person," he says. "I was not a Taliban. They are Wahhabites and Pashtuns, but I am a Tajik, and I didn't wear a beard."

It takes time for these words to travel from his mouth to your notebook because they must be relayed across several continents.

Sharifzada speaks in Farsi. A boy at his side translates the Farsi into Uzbek. Another man in the room, an Uzbek guide you have brought with you, translates from Uzbek to Russian for another guide. This second guide then translates from Russian into English, so you, an American, can write down at least some version of what was originally said.

Still, the essence of Sharifzada's story comes through. It's written on his face. It's in the flatness of his voice.

He shows you what the Taliban did to him. Barefoot, he points to the toes that were broken and the nails that were pulled out. Two years later, they are still black.

"I was an ordinary person," he says, "and that's why they did this to me. They wanted me to become a Taliban, and I was running away. That's why they caught me and tortured me."

He is trying to explain what he did for a living before these things happened. It seems he was some kind of a low-level government official. But he can't find the exact word to describe his position; at least he can't find a word that survives the chain of translations. He turns to a Farsi-English dictionary and flips through the pages. As he searches, the woman in the veil uses the opening in the conversation to speak.

"Please help me," she says again in English. "We don't have any work here. Can you help us?"

Again, you don't know how to respond. You're not sure how she learned English, or even who she is. A relative? A neighbor? With the language barriers, you haven't figured out who any of these other people are. You understand that they are refugees from Afghanistan. But that's all.

Finally, Sharifzada finds the word he was looking for in the dictionary.

"Petty official," he says. Yes. He was a petty official in the Ministry of the Interior. He stamped papers that allowed consumer goods—cars, appliances, shipments of grain—to be distributed around the country.

For a moment, he pauses. Then he explains that he had a family in Kabul, a wife and a little boy, and that two years ago, just before he was captured and tortured, his wife was killed.

"Talibans were fighting, and they were shooting," he says. "My wife was at the bazaar, and the Talibans got into a shootout, and she was killed. I don't know if they did it on purpose or if it was an accident."

You try to find out more. You want to know his wife's name, how old she was, any other details he can share.

The woman with the veil—it turns out she is his sister—lowers her gaze.

Sharifzada shakes his head.

"Please don't ask me about this," he says, his eyes filling with tears. "Please don't ask me."

His son, Farshad, was 3 when his mother was killed. Now 5, he is the smallest of the boys who shook your hand at the door. He is gaunt and pale, with dark brown eyes that seem to never blink.

While you wait for questions and answers to wend their way through the languages, you watch Farshad. He is holding a bow made of a stick and a piece of string; he seems to have no arrow for the bow, but plays with it anyway, pulling on the string. He says nothing. He stands back, near the door, studying you while you study him. At last he comes forward and sits beside his father and lays his head on his lap.

Sharifzada talks about his parents and the rest of their family. There were nine children in all; three girls and six boys. He and his sister, the one sitting here now, don't know where their other siblings are. Nor do

they know what has happened to their parents. At last contact, their mother and father and at least two of the siblings were still living in Kabul.

He leafs through the Farsi-English dictionary again. He is looking through a section that translates phrases. He finds the one he wants and points to it for you to read.

I am thinking about my family. I haven't heard anything about them.

Behind him, his sister knows without looking what phrase he has chosen. "Thinking about my family," she says.

By this point she has taken off the veil. Her name is Fawziy Saedi. She's a year younger than her brother. She is married, with two sons of her own; her boys were also in the line that shook hands at the door. She and her husband and their sons live in this apartment with Sharifzada and Farshad.

"How do you know English?" you ask her.

Before the Taliban came to power, Saedi says, she was a school-teacher in Kabul. She taught English. Years have passed since then, and she has lost most of the language. Now she spends her days teaching her sons and her nephew. They can't go to school here in Uzbekistan, because they don't speak Uzbek. So she teaches them in Farsi and what she remembers of English.

To show what he has learned, her 8-year-old son gives a recital.

"A-B-C-D-E-F-G," he says, running quickly through all 26 letters.

Then he sings. "Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are. Up above the sky so bright. . ."

The interview unfolds in slow motion. It stops and starts and then stops again.

The boy who has been converting the words from Farsi to Uzbek has to leave. Another boy, slightly younger, takes his place. He was born with polio and walks with braces. You study this child, too. As he translates, you try not to stare at his withered left leg, but you can't help it and stare anyway.

Hours are going by, and your own legs, you are ashamed to admit, are aching from sitting so long on the floor. One of the other children sees your squirming and gets up and brings you a pillow. You try to tell him no thank you, because no one else has a pillow. The boy insists you take it.

Saedi's husband wanders in and out of the room. Others come and go as well. Through it all, Sharifzada keeps talking. He tells how he escaped the Taliban after bribing his guards, how he and his son and his sister and her family spent weeks trying to find a route out of Afghanistan.

Sometimes the six of them traveled in a car. Sometimes they walked through mountain passes covered in snow. First they went to Pakistan, where so many Afghan refugees have fled. But after two weeks they were sent back across the border. Then they tried Tajikistan. Then Iran. Then Tajikistan again; this time they were allowed to enter the country. They stayed two years. They were easy prey for profiteers; by the time they left, their savings were gone.

Finally, they obtained permission to come to Uzbekistan, arriving in Termez on May 15 of this year. Their papers are only good for a few more months; soon they will have to apply for an extension.

With no savings, they get by as best they can.

"We live here," says Sharifzada, looking around the room. "We are doing nothing. There is no work for us."

He has not been able to find a decent job. Instead he sells plastic bags down at the bazaar; he has learned enough Uzbek phrases to conduct the transactions. He makes 300 to 400 sum a day—roughly 20 to 30 cents,

not nearly enough to cover their rent and expenses. So they borrow the rest from other Afghan families in Termez who know they will pay them back eventually.

In Kabul, he says, they had a car, a house, furniture, beds. Here, they own nothing aside from a few clothes; the TV, which is blurry and only gets one channel, belongs to their landlord. The six members of the family stay in this room together, sleeping on the carpet.

"Do you have enough to eat?" you ask.

"Sometimes there is enough," he says. "Sometimes not."

"Do you have any photos of your wife?"

None here, he says. There were some at their house in Kabul. But he doesn't know if the pictures are still there or if they've been destroyed. He doesn't even know if the house is still standing.

From the boom box in the corner, he and the rest of the family listen to the BBC news broadcast in Farsi. They followed the events of September 11; they have also tracked the progress of the war across the river to the south of this city.

Sharifzada says he believes America has done the right thing, pursuing the Taliban. But he hopes that when the war is over, the bombs will be replaced by food and other supplies.

Another pause during the translation, another plea from his sister.

"Please help me," she is saying again. "Please help me. Please help me."

Sharifzada does not comment on what she is saying; since he does not speak English, it is not clear if he even knows what she is saying.

Instead he talks about his faith in Islam. About observing the fast of Ramadan. About how he kneels inside this room every day and prays.

"I ask Allah for peace to come to Afghanistan," he says, "and for peace to be in the whole world."

Now that the Taliban have been driven from Kabul, he and the others are talking about returning to their home. What they really want, though, is to be allowed to immigrate to America. That's why the children are working on their English. It's why Sharifzada has a book, written in Farsi, that describes what life in America would be like.

This book is in another room, the one where his sister teaches the children. You ask if you can see the book. He is reluctant to show it, but finally he allows you to glance through its pages for a few moments. There are pictures of doctors and nurses, police officers and teachers, parents and children smiling together.

"We want to go to America," he says. "We want to live in America."

One of his sister's sons—the boy who sang for you a little while ago—stands at your side, pulling on your sleeve.

"Please help me," he is saying now, echoing his mother. "Please help me. Please help me."

As you stand in this room, hearing his words and looking through the book on America and seeing its photos through the eyes of this family, Sharifzada's son wanders in, eating a chocolate Power Bar. He has another bar in his hand, a Dipped Harvest Energy Bar; one of the visitors has given them to him.

Farshad offers the uneaten bar to you, and your face burns.

Back down the stairs, to the alley where the van is waiting. Another look around, so you will remember.

Sharifzada shakes your hand. The boy with the withered leg, standing with his braces, actually winks at you.

You look up at the side of the apartment building and see the faces pressed against the windows once more. They watch you drive away.

## A Photographer's Eye for Detail

*About 10 years ago, as a Nieman Fellow, I got the idea to do the book, "Lost Futures: Our Forgotten Children." It's about children in worst-case scenarios around the world. Here are stories from it and The Boston Globe.*

—Stan Grossfeld

The baby is passed from one person to another in a rocking motion. But this is not a child in a cradle—it's a dead infant in a simple pine box being lowered into a mass grave. This could be Rwanda, except for the New York City skyline sitting eerily in the distance.

The men, prisoners from Rikers Island making thirty-five cents an hour, work quietly and respectfully. The infants' coffins are stacked seven deep in a pit, looking like so many wooden shoeboxes. When they number a thousand, or about a year's worth, the diggers cover the pit with carbon and dirt, place a simple white concrete tablet on the site, and move on. During the burial, the prison guard speaks only once: "Don't throw the dirt on the coffin, place it."

The potter's field on the 102-acre Hart Island has been used by the city to bury its poor since 1869. There are more than 750,000 bodies buried here, roughly half of those are children. For the prisoners, the burial detail is coveted. "It beats sitting in a cell, plus you're doing something good," says one. But at least one prisoner is upset. "It's sad to see so many kids before they even get a chance at life," says Curtis Iaison. "Man, we're burying crack babies and we should be burying drug dealers."

Why do we have mass graves of infants in the United States? "Unofficially," says one Department of Corrections official, "you say two words, crack and AIDS, and you got most of them."

The brass factories are all unmarked, down alleyways framed by streams of urine baking under windows covered by bars. This is the nineteenth century revisited. Furnaces belch molten lava, and acrid smoke attacks the eyes and throat. On the edge of the darkness, a ten-year-old boy, his brown body turned black with soot, is making a brass angel while living in hell.

For this, he is paid a pittance every week, thirty rupees or about a dollar. But for the ten million children who toil throughout India as virtual slaves, there is no compensation.

"I was kidnapped," says eight-year-old Laxmi Sada at a home for freed slaves. "Me and three more boys were playing outside the village, and some people came and gave us something to eat and said that they even had better things to eat. They took us on a bus. I didn't even know what a carpet factory was. I started crying. Many times I was beaten. It was the master who first hit me with the punja [a comb-like tool], and the blood came down...then they would put matchstick powder on the wound and

light it to stop the bleeding. I never saw the sun rise." Sometimes, Laxmi went to the bathroom in his pants. "If you got up, you'd get beaten."

Laxmi's father came to the factory to rescue him, but factory thugs intercepted him. "I saw my father being beaten. He could not recover. My father wanted to take me and put me on his lap. Why did he have to die? I was there one year. Now I say, long live the revolution, stop child slavery. I want to kill the master. Because of him I couldn't see my father."

Fifty thousand children toil six days a week for a few dollars a month in factories throughout Moradabad, four hours east of New Delhi. The children choke on noxious fumes that carry tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases. "Nobody lives to be forty," says Karen Singh, a human-rights worker.

Fida Sherafi looks at the world differently than other children do. She has big brown eyes and one of them follows you around the room; the other is glass.

No one has a normal childhood in Gaza, in Northern Ireland, or anywhere else where people preach hate in the name of God. Fida lost her childhood on June 6, 1988, in a marketplace in Jubalia Refugee Camp. She was nine months old.

Hours after a weeklong curfew had ended, Fida went with her mother to buy vegetables. Israeli soldiers entered the crowded marketplace. Words led to rocks which ignited a riot. Tear-gas canisters were fired and, as things got worse, rubber-coated bullets. Mrs. Sherafi ran, clutching Fida against her chest with one arm and carrying groceries with the other. She heard screams, but didn't stop running until she was safely home. Once inside she saw bloodstains on her shoulder. Then she looked at Fida. "The rubber bullet was stuck in her left eye socket," she says, "and her eyeball was partially dislodged." Hysterical, the mother ran out onto the streets screaming. An Israeli soldier came into the house and ripped the bullet out, gouging her eye.

Mrs. Sherafi pauses as the horror sinks in. She looks at her daughter all dressed up in a pink dress. "Someday," she says, "I'm going to kill him." Fida says nothing.

"She has to take the glass eye out and clean it every day. She doesn't go to school. We have to get it refitted every six months, and that's a \$100 cab ride to Haifa. It hurts her during the night."

Children are the biggest casualties of war. According to the "State of the World's Children 1995," a UNICEF report: "At one time, wars were fought between armies, but in the wars of the last decade far more children than soldiers have been killed."

The father, a tall, thin boy of 16, snips the umbilical cord, cradles the baby, proclaims that she looks like a conehead, and then goes to a store to rent the video game *Mortal Kombat 2*. The 14-year-old mother hugs the infant and then starts munching on M & M's. She says she wasn't thinking about anything during the delivery, that the needles didn't hurt, but that she wanted some Tylenol. There was one surprise, the young mother says: M & M's are not supposed to melt. "The



Infant coffins on Hart Island are stacked seven deep. Photo by Stan Grossfeld.

yellow ones are coming off in my hand.”

Kasondra Marie Orzechowski came into the world, without crying, at 1:08 p.m. on February 2, 1995—Groundhog Day. Follow the lives of her parents, Christina Nolan and Allan Orzechowski, and you will find that, in many ways, they are two typical teenagers. Like others their age in the small mill town of Sanford, Maine, they hustle in and out of the mall. They scuffle over the television remote control. They giggle their way through the car wash. They're just children, really, boyfriend and girlfriend, but they're also parents. It's a familiar refrain: Kids having kids. There's an unexpected twist here, however. Christina and Allan, like an increasing number of teenage parents, “are white kids in a nice town,” says Holly Mangum, the couple's midwife in Sanford. Although much attention has been paid to the alarmingly high rates of out-of-wedlock births among black inner-city teenagers, it is the birth rate among white unmarried teen-agers that has risen fastest in recent years.

Allan and Christina's life together began like a fairy tale. They were standing together, engulfed by sky and forest. “The first time he laid eyes on me,” recalls Christina, giggling, “it was out in the woods. I was 9, and he was 11.”

“I walked up to her, didn't say anything, and kissed her,” says Allan. Later, he had his stepsister ask Christina if she would go out with him. Then Christina moved with her family to New York State. When she returned three years later, the two became inseparable. Allan saved the first cherry-red jawbreaker she gave him. He kept it in a box with his valuables.

Christina and Allan first had sex in a tent behind a housing project in Sanford. She was 13 years old; he was 15. “Condoms?” says Allan. “I was too young. I didn't know what I was doing.”

And that's when the fairy tale took on some harsh reality. Although they now have a baby, and that baby is well loved, neither Christina nor Allan has a job. They don't have a car. They have little schooling and no money. They have been living on food stamps and the generosity of their families.

The story of Allan and Christina is the story of a changing America, a country that has become, in the words of the conservative political analyst Charles Murray, a “nation of bastards.” One million American teenagers get pregnant each year, giving the United States the highest teenage pregnancy rate in the developed world.

## Constructing a Worthy Beginning

*The Times sent me to Oklahoma City instead of to Denver [to cover Timothy McVeigh's trial]. We felt that was ground zero. And I sat in the hotel room. I don't believe in that blood popping out on your forehead stuff that people talk about when they talk about writing. What happens is you get the shakes and stand there and stare at it and wish blood would pop out on your forehead because at least that would relieve some of the pressure. And I sat and I sat and I sat. Then it finally occurred to me that what I had to do was start reading again. We had a stack of newspapers at least three feet high. I just went through them, and from every one of those stories in The Dallas Morning News, the Oklahoma City paper, our own paper, papers all over the country, I jotted down a piece of the agony that he'd caused. And this was our lead. —Rick Bragg*



Rick Bragg

After the explosion, people learned to write left-handed, to tie just one shoe. They learned to endure the pieces of metal and glass embedded in their flesh, to smile with faces that made them want to cry, to cry with glass eyes. They learned, in homes where children had played, to stand the quiet. They learned to sleep with pills, to sleep alone.

Today, with the conviction of Timothy J. McVeigh in a Denver Federal court, with cheers and sobs of relief at the lot where a building once stood in downtown Oklahoma City, the survivors and families of the victims of the most deadly attack of domestic terrorism in United States history learned what they had suspected all along: That justice in a far-away courtroom is not satisfaction. That healing might come only at Mr. McVeigh's grave.

## Evocative Glimpses Bring a Story to Life

*In 1994, a tornado destroyed a church that was near the hospital where New York Times writer Rick Bragg was born. This is the story he wrote about the damage.*

Piedmont, Alabama. This is a place where grandmothers hold babies on their laps under the stars and whisper in their ears that the lights in the sky are holes in the floor of heaven. This is a place where the song “Jesus Loves Me” has rocked generations to sleep, and heaven is not a concept, but a destination.

Yet in this place where many things, even storms, are viewed as God's will, people strong in their faith and their children have died in, of all places, a church. “We are trained from birth not to question God,” said 23-year-old Robyn Tucker King of Piedmont, where 20 people, including six children, were killed when a tornado tore through the Goshen United Methodist Church on Palm Sunday.

“But why?” she said. “Why a church? Why those little children? Why? Why? Why?”

The destruction of this little country church and the deaths, including the pastor's vivacious four-year-old daughter, have shaken the faith of many people who live in this deeply religious corner of Alabama, about 80 miles northeast of Birmingham.

It is not that it has turned them against God. But it has hurt them in a place usually safe from hurt, like a bruise on the soul. ■

# A Love Fest on Narrative Elements

It's the voice, you fool. No, it's the theme, dummy.  
No, it's the story, you buttonhead.

## Bruce DeSilva—The Voice

If the voice isn't appealing, the game's over before it starts. Every story that you write speaks to the reader in a voice. And readers hear the writer talking to them when they read.

Reading is something you think you do with your eyes, but really you're doing it with your ears. And how that voice sounds has everything to do with whether you're going to enjoy that story, whether you're going to read it to the end, whether you're going to want to ever read anything again by that same writer.

An appealing voice is going to draw you into and all the way through a story on a subject you didn't know you cared about. An unappealing voice can drive readers away from stories that they care about passionately, from subjects that are important to them.

It's voice more than anything else that also determines who you want to spend time with in conversation and who you want to spend time with on the page.

In news writing, you know what goes wrong with the voices in the stories because you read these stories all the time. There's a combination of unfamiliar word choices and word orders that at its worst becomes journalese, which I hope everybody's been warning you about over and over again throughout your career. It's painful—painful to read. And the very best stories, no matter how important the concept is, no matter how good the story line is, how great the tale is, it's going to be destroyed if the voice is boring and you just can't stand spending time with the storyteller. The worst voice is the newspapers, and there are so many of them. They're just unnatural to the ear of the reader. They're so unnatural, they sound like a foreign language.

We do a lot of strange things in newspapers with word order. For example: putting long, long prepositional phrases at the beginnings of sentences. You wouldn't write that way in a letter; you wouldn't do that in a good nonfiction magazine, but newspapers do it constantly. You are 23 words into the story and there's no subject and no verb yet, which means the sentence isn't about anything yet and nothing's happened in it. Don't do that. It's not English. Nobody writes or talks that way.

Does this mean you can't begin a sentence with a prepositional phrase? Of course not. They work just fine, usually when they're smart, when they're about time and place. An example of one that works really well: "In the beginning, God created Heaven and earth." That one's fine. You notice it does not say, "In a surprise move intended to bring creation into existence from the lifeless void, comma." If you do that, it doesn't matter how good the rest of the piece is,

the rest of its elements; nobody's going to read it.

We put the time elements in the wrong place all the time—the simple word order thing that we do. "Police yesterday arrested six men." If this sounds right, you've spent way too much time reading bad newspaper copy.

Sometimes we put modifying phrases in the wrong place. This is just the first part of a sentence from a news story, and it puts both a time element and a phrase in the wrong place: "President Bush today nominated as his drug czar John P. Walters." "I today ate for my breakfast bacon and eggs."

If you're going to write that way, don't bother writing. Do something else. A lot of strange words, too, in journalism, words that tend to be used over and over and over and over again in situations that normal people wouldn't use them at all. For example, if your verbs are always "fueled," "sparked" and "spawned," I don't want to read your story.

We tend to make these same strange word choices over and over again, so that every time a public official sends a note to another public official, the note is "fired off." Mayors never get angry or disturbed. They always "have their ire piqued." The mercury is always "plummeting" or "skyrocketing" in weather stories. Nobody talks this way. Don't do that.

You need to be creative. You need to be interesting. You must not drone on. You must find your own voice as a writer and sound like yourself in print. You must have the courage to get away from that horrible journalese voice that will destroy your story no matter how important and lofty the concept is. No matter how good the tale is, it's going to destroy it. You must find your own voice and have the courage to write in it.

## Chip Scanlan—The Theme

If you don't structure the story right, the reader's going to be lost. We spend a lot of time reporting. We spend a lot of time writing. We don't spend enough time thinking. I always used to think that I over-reported every story and that was the reason why I couldn't make deadlines, and that was the reason my story was 50 inches longer than it was supposed to be, and that's why I begged my editors for another hour, day, week, month.

I realize now that I didn't over-report. I under-thought. Nora Ephron says, "Who, what, where, why means nothing if you don't know what the point is."

To get a story that has a cohesive quality that draws you in, it is the product as much of the writer's mind as it is the writer's voice. What we see there or sense in the architecture

underneath the story is the writer's intellect.

What's the point? Why is this story being told? What does it say about life, about the world, about the times we live in? Newspaper writing, especially on deadline, is so hectic and complicated—the fact gathering, the phrase finding, the inconvenience, the pressure—that it's easy to forget the basics of storytelling; namely, what happened, and why does it matter?

Those four questions—Why does it matter? What's the point? Why is the story being told? What does it say about life, the world, the times we live in?—I really believe that those four questions should be in 72-point type above every terminal in a newsroom. They should be above your machine at home. Because those are the readers' questions. That's what readers ask when they start reading a story. My favorite of the four is the last one: What does it say about life, about the world, about the times we live in? I don't think the readers actually come to stories expecting it, because so rarely do they get it.

But if you actually impose that critical thinking upon your story before you write it, as you're writing it, as you're rewriting it, what you do is you give that story a rock-hard spine. And it's the spine of theme. And so instead of concept, I would say it's not the voice, it's not the story, it's the theme.

Every time you go out on assignment, ask yourself, what's the life truth at work here? What's really going on? Anne Hull of The Washington Post did a wonderful story about the rape of an Amish girl by “an Englander” in the Midwest. And I remember hearing her talk about this story and saying, “You know, I realized it was about forgiveness.” And that, I believe, is the kind of thinking that makes a story powerful.

When you think about the mountain of information you'll collect for a narrative—this huge pile—it's like going into the woods and harvesting maple sap. How many gallons of maple sap does it take to make a gallon of maple syrup? It sometimes approaches 60 gallons of maple sap to make a gallon of maple syrup. And it's critical thinking.

My favorite definition is that critical thinking is thinking about your thinking while you're thinking, in order to make your thinking better. Kind of sounds like working on deadline, doesn't it? It is that act of an active intellect confronting material and asking, “What the hell does this mean?”

We often say that we're in the news business. But we're in the meaning business. More than ever that's what we are selling people. We are trying to help them understand what the world is doing right now. And I would argue that to get yourself to the point where you can give voice to your story or decide what your story line is, your structure, that the first thing you do is figure out what it's about, what does it mean, and why does it matter.

## Jon Franklin—The Story

When we get to a point in the writing business where we want to make the next step into narrative, we run into a big problem right up front: The whole idea of what the story is

is very much up for grabs in a newsroom.

Because what's a story? Sometimes we talk about “the story.” And when you see a bunch of old guys sitting in a bar talking about the Watergate story, they're not talking about a story they did. They're talking about this whole Watergate narrative, and they're talking about what it meant.

And what it meant was not something very clear at the time. It wasn't clear at all. At the time, you know, all people could do was just quote whoever said what or did what on any given day, and the story just sort of unfolds, and we were all spectators, much like what's happening in Afghanistan now.

So you've got this reporter. Maybe he has some idea of what this story means, and he has 16 notebooks full of stuff. And what does he do with it? And the last thing he knows how to do is put it into some kind of a structure—a structure, a framework. I got so involved in it because as a child I was a pretty good storyteller. But after going to journalism school and spending a lot of time in journalism, I had no confidence, I had no story vision, I had none of that.

I actually had to go back to textbooks written about short stories in the 1920's and '30's and '40's in order to find that. Obviously, a story's no good without a meaning. And you have to have a voice to tell it. But you have to have the story. You know, a voice without a story is incredibly vacuous.

And I'm going to argue that the reason that the beginnings of stories are often so convoluted is that writers don't have the vaguest idea of where they are going. So they try to put half the story in front of it. They don't know what to put in their lead and what not to put in their lead. They don't have an ending.

If you actually have a story, if you have a structure—which is what story is—then there is a sense in the very first paragraph. There are no extra words, because the writer knows exactly where he is going. The reader doesn't know where he is going, but the reader senses that the writer knows. Notice that about some piece that you like. The front of it's clean and there is a sense that there's a current that starts to flow immediately. It's almost like there's this sort of black hole at the end of it—which is sucking the writer along. And that means you've got to have a structure. ■

### The 2002 Nieman Narrative Journalism Conference

The Narrative conference will feature talks by top practitioners on the craft of narrative, from topic selection to reporting, from editing to publication. There will be panels on editing and coaching, on integrating narrative into news copy, and on constructing longer stories that animate complex social issues. It will be held at the Hyatt Regency Cambridge, Massachusetts from November 8-10.

For information, go to [www.nieman.harvard.edu/narrative](http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/narrative). Or contact Lisa Birk at [nieman-narrative@harvard.edu](mailto:nieman-narrative@harvard.edu) for guidance about attending the conference or information about the Nieman Program on Narrative Journalism. ■

# Writing in a Personal Voice

‘Your training as journalists is a tremendous platform on which to layer or from which to develop a personal voice.’

## Emily Hiestand

**B**ecause of my background as a visual artist and a poet, my strengths really lie in the particularity of language. And as a magazine editor and a literary consultant, most of what I’m doing when I help other writers is giving them a hand with texture and color, with imagery and tone and rhythm and cadence, almost the molecular level of prose. These ingredients add up to prose style.

These are techniques and particularities that are the toolkit of poets. A lot of this can be imported directly into your prose and with very good results.

I’d like to start by paying homage to what Mark Kramer and maybe others here call “news voice,” the conventional, most typical voice in journalism. It’s crisp, lean, quirk-free, just the facts ma’am. And that, of course, is a style. In my view, it’s a great style. It is a thing of beauty. It’s a great accomplishment and of enormous importance in our civic life. It isn’t full of personality and color, but it’s a very elegant, stylistic achievement. News voice and personal voice do different things, and we really need them both.

I see dozens of essays every year written in personal voice, and many of them would benefit from your good reporting skills. Your training as journalists is a tremendous platform on which to layer or from which to develop a personal voice. And much of your journalistic ethic is completely germane to writing in a more personal voice.

When you write in a more personal voice, you have most, if not all, the main journalistic responsibility to be scrupulous, to get it right, to have as much intellectual humility as you can, to fact check, and to report thoroughly. And you add to those responsibilities some additional literary responsibilities. And the additional responsibilities come because the personal voice is, of course, quirkier and more idiosyncratic, and it reveals inevitably more of your own humanity.

In the personal voice, you are not only allowed to be, but you are expected to be, exploratory. The personal voice is the realm of why and how, and it almost always brings in more description and more interpretation. And it relies very, very strongly on sensory knowledge. Not just sensory data, but sensory knowledge rather than the sheer accounting of fact.

We have a multilayered intelligence, all of us. When we

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**‘Voice. You don’t have to have a strong voice to be a narrative journalist, but it is helpful and it’s nice. Narrative journalism is one of the places you can have a voice.’ — Nora Ephron**

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Rick Bragg, Emily Hiestand, and Jim Collins.



include a great deal of sensory materials in our writing, what we are doing is awakening in ourselves and in our readers not only the analytical intelligence but also our visual intelligence, our auditory intelligence, our emotional and kinesthetic intelligence. So in the personal voice, whether it's the lyrics, essay, or piece of narrative journalism, what we're doing is engaging in a much fuller spectrum of the reader's mind. That's why I think when the personal voice is good and authentic, it touches us on such a deep and lasting level. That's why this kind of writing can be so memorable and why it has legs. It's because it's working on so many levels.

**Embody the themes and ideas of your piece in the nature of the language itself.** This tip comes out of the idea that language is itself the idea. The particularities of your language, the tone, the color, the rhythm, the cadences, the elusive qualities, the alliteration, all those textural particularities can embody the idea of your piece. Whatever else your words are overtly expressing, the quality of the language itself is a source of information for your readers. And it's a source of information on a very deep and memorable level. So this is really a central point about style, that the language is itself the idea.

The title of my story, "Neon Effects," refers as much to the nature of the language as it does to the artifacts of the neon tubes. I wanted the language of that story to be sort of flashy, to have kind of a jazzy, glowing feel. And that feel was

## Tips About Style and Personal Voice

- Sensory material awakens a fuller spectrum of your reader's intelligence.
- Embody the themes/ideas of your piece in the quality of the language itself.
- Paint the picture.
- Sensory writing is similar to conversation.
- Allow yourself to enjoy a robust and rangy vocabulary.
- Experiment with form.
- Read your work out loud.
- Style can emerge at any point of the writing process.
- Treat yourself to a visual art class and/or a poetry workshop.
- Compose the pace.
- Have fun.
- Read the work of people you love.
- Rewrite.
- The personal voice does not necessarily mean "I."
- Find your own style.

"You don't just go out and pick a style off a tree one day. The tree is already inside you—it is growing naturally inside you." —Dexter Gordon, in "Round Midnight"

## 'Learn how to see the world through an artist's eyes.'

Emily Hiestand is a poet and a visual artist as well as a magical essayist. A lot of what she talked about can be summarized as thinking like an artist while writing about true things. One of her suggestions was to take a poetry workshop or an art class, not to become a poet or visual artist, but just to learn how to see the world through an artist's eyes.

One of the most valuable things I got from this session was to move that knowledge from the damp basement of my brain up closer to where the action is—the living room of my brain, maybe. The most valuable thing I learned, though, was how to bring the subject or feeling of your article into the language of your article.  
—**Madeline Bodin**, a freelance science writer.

juxtaposed in the piece.

By saying that you can embody the subject in your language, I'm not saying that the personal voice is a kind of chameleon, that it simply takes on the coloration of whatever the subject is. Your voice, your personal voice will, of course, have a signature, will have a steady and recognizable signature that is your own. And is identifiable from work to work. I think it represents an exploration and a kind of research that you are making in the piece. It's kind of an investigative strategy.

If you decide you want to try this, you want to try bringing the quality of the subject into your writing, into the language itself, let yourself feel and think, "What are the basic qualities of my subject? Is this subject fizzy or elegiac? Is it majestic or funny? Or is it some combination of all of these things?" Then simply create language that is itself that way.

**Paint the picture.** Readers feel really respected—and rightly so—when you give them the picture and the whole experiential surround and trust them to make the interpretations. So be like a painter. Be like a sound engineer. Give your reader the fullest possible sensory experience. All the colors, the sounds, the details, the impressions, that you yourself have experienced in a place.

I've seen this kind of attention to detail called immersion reporting. Here's where you as trained journalists are going to be so much more skillful than many other writers at noticing and getting down these important details. I don't remember every detail, so I encourage writing down even more than you think might be important in the moment.

I'm proposing that the sensory surround is the meat, the field of texture and observation out of which other kinds of insights can arise and arise with more power. Now, obviously there are different tones, and you may very well want to move more into setting out of fact or background or history. But that doesn't have to suddenly be in this other

voice, this dry voice. The same qualities, the same attention to cadences and rhythms and great word choice can be sustained through the whole piece.

**The way you talk.** This is closer to your conversational voice when you're talking with friends and family. The written version of your personal voice will, of course, be shapelier and more well wrought and more layered than conversation. It's very akin to good conversation in that it has this animated, intimate voice. And it's quirrier. It can shift. It can go from being very colloquial and familiar to being more formal. Just the way we do in conversation.

**Allow yourself to use a robust and rangy vocabulary.** One of the things that poets do, and great prose stylists, is to work with words that have been forgotten or that have been damaged from overuse or improper use, or words that have been sullied in some way. As prose stylists, you can restore these words, redeem them. This adds a great spectrum of words that may seem off limits.

Have fun with vocabulary. And listen for specialized ways of talking, for the lingo of subcultures. The way that neurologists talk, or auto mechanics, or urban teenagers. Much great new language is actually being generated by people in subcultures. So scope that out. That is a gold mine. I would really urge you to use in your writing and as much as you can in journalism as well this more personal writing you're doing, any words that intrigue your ear, even if they are unfamiliar to most people. If anything, a rich vocabulary keeps readers with you because you are a source of surprise.

**Experiment with form.** The form that a piece of nonfiction writing takes can be very elastic. Those of you who are really involved in creating this movement of narrative journalism are doing exactly this. You are in the midst of an experiment with form. You are redefining a genre and really part of an emerging form.

While I'm talking about form, I wanted to mention one reservation that I have about narrative form. I love narrative structure, partly because it comforts us, because it suggests an order in a world that seems to be lacking. And because I

think it can actually show us how to bring more shapeliness in our lived lives. But my reservation about narrative structure comes from knowing in truth we are always in the middle of things. The influences of the past are not always understood and the future is always uncertain.

So narrative is more like science. It offers a provisional truth. It's the best we can do right now, based on limited knowledge. While I think as much as anyone I enjoy that structure of a beginning, a middle, and an end, I'm also very fond of structures that are more experimental, that do not necessarily offer closure, that may be more cubistic.

A good thing to do in narrative, if you feel stuck or there isn't enough energy in your story or you feel it's too predictable the way it's proceeding, is just shift the lens. Stop there. You don't always have to just continue in a chronological sequence. You can just stop and come from another point of view or another time and let those layers accumulate.

**Read your work out loud.** Reading your work out loud is a minor miracle of the writing process. When we say the words out loud, we get a better sense of the rhythm and the meter, the pace, the flow, the way the sentences work or do not work with the breath.

**Style can emerge at any point of the writing process.** It can be an establishing tone, or it can be layered.

**Treat yourself to a visual art class or poetry class.** A lot of what artists are doing in art school is learning to see. Even if you never plan to practice as a visual artist, or never plan to practice as a poet, this can be a fabulous way to increase your ability to see.

**Compose the pace.** Readers are in your hands; they will go with you at any speed. You don't need to rush as long as you are giving them the sense of immersion in the story.

**Have fun.** Write about not only what you know, but also what you think it would be fun to find out about.

**Find your own style.** As Dexter Gordon wrote in "Round Midnight," "You don't just go out and pick a style off a tree one day. The tree is already inside you—it is growing naturally inside you." It's about mastering craft and then letting your own bone-deep, built-in, inimitable style emerge naturally. The style, your style, is in there. It's in you. It's like a tree growing inside you. It's your own unique, emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, spiritual, moral response to the world translated into words. Or it is sometimes discovered, often discovered, through the act of using words.

That's why style is so important. It's a tree inside you and it keeps evolving as you do. And that's why it's so important to readers. Great style tells them that some other human being is really alive and present to them on the page. They pick up that something human is going on, and they respond to that humanness and that imagination. ■

## 'The voice is you.'

"Whether it is fiction or nonfiction, the voice of the author is what keeps us going. If the voice does not capture the reader, the voice is silenced by the reader putting down the book. The authenticity of the voice carries the reader along. You feel the closeness. The writer has been there. The voice is you. It is your vocabulary. It's the way you talk to yourself. It is unique as a fingerprint unless you are copying someone else's voice, and that's not a good idea."

—Nan Talese

# Why We Need Stories

‘Without them, the stuff that happens would float around in some glob and none of it would mean anything.’

Jacqui Banaszynski

**I**n getting ready to spend the weekend with you, I called on some friends and asked them a single question: “Why do we need stories?” Their answers, dashed off quickly and straight from the heart, were both dazzling and instructive, and I want to pass them on to you.

The first is from Mary Lawrence. She teaches with me at the journalism school at the University of Missouri, and Mary started as a small community newspaper editor/writer. She wrote editorials for The Indianapolis Star for a while then went overseas and was on the copy desk of The Wall Street Journal. She came home and ended up editing her own hometown newspaper, and finally the pressures of chain journalism drove her out.

This is from Mary: “People have had their stories from the beginning, whether they’re fables or for teaching lessons great and small, or histories that tell us where we came from, or big stories that help us cope with the world. Look at how we crave stories about any event from how a team prepped for an event, to how people got out of the World Trade Center.

“We’re fooling ourselves if we think we communicate primarily by bursts of information. We live for stories—whether they’re movies or TV shows or plays or poems or even newspaper pieces. We want stories told to us over and over again. Why else would we want to watch movies multiple times, or insist on seeing ‘White Christmas’ and ‘Miracle on 34th Street’ every year? They comfort us, they arouse us, they excite us and educate us, and when they touch our hearts we embrace them and keep them with us.

“Why else would we need VCR’s? Why else would shows make money in syndication? We want our stories. They answer eternal questions like, ‘How could this happen?’ And they help us build theories about why this could happen. Those are the two questions people will always ask about the Garden of Eden, and those are the two questions that everybody had when the World Trade Center collapsed.”

Alex Tizon is a writer at The Seattle Times. And when I asked him the question, this is what he said: “Why do we need stories? Well, who would we be without them? And what would any of this mean? A reporter once asked Norman Maclean why he wrote his book, ‘Young Men and Fire,’ and he replied, ‘To find out what happened.’ If you haven’t read it, it’s about this catastrophic forest fire that killed a bunch of firefighters somewhere in Montana and, as in all such events, nobody really knew what was happening, and nobody knew afterwards, until somebody, somewhere, pulled

together all the nodules of scene and fact and put them into a story.

“Stories give shape to experience and allow us to go through life unblind. Without them, the stuff that happens would float around in some glob and none of it would mean anything. Once you have a version of what happened, all the other good stuff about being human can come into play. You can laugh, feel awe, commit a compassionate act, get pissed, and want to change things.”

The other lesson I want to leave you with comes from a friend of mine at The Oregonian, a big, rough-talking re-

‘Stories are for eternity, when memory is erased, when there is nothing to remember except the story.’

Tim O’Brien had the bad fortune to be caught up in the Vietnam War, and he’s written about it several times, and he wrote a book called “The Things They Carried.”

There’s a passage in his book where he’s talking about “what sticks to memory,” his varied memories of the war, not all of them violent, and wondering why he still finds himself writing the stories so many years later:

Forty-three years old, and the war occurred half a lifetime ago, and yet the remembering makes it now. And sometimes remembering will lead to a story, which makes it forever. That’s what stories are for. Stories are for joining the past to the future. Stories are for those late hours in the night when you can’t remember how you got from where you were to where you are. Stories are for eternity, when memory is erased, when there is nothing to remember except the story.

As our world gets more fractured and yet smaller, stories that connect us and teach us about how our differences are not so different or where those differences exist, matter more than ever.

So I don’t think the answer is to file more briefs or dump more data into the pages of our newspapers and magazines. I think the answer is to do more stories. And I think for us the answer is to learn how to do them all better—that’s our challenge. —J.B.

porter named Pete Sleeth, a business and an investigative reporter; he covered forestry. I inherited him, and we used to have battles in the newsroom because I'd try to get him to do storytelling. And one day he stood up in the newsroom and shouted, "You just want goddamn girl grafs." So Pete and I had this whole conversation about how girl grafs and boy grafs really have to kind of marry to birth a baby here.

Pete spent two years covering the forest service, and every time he'd come back on a news story he'd tell me that he wanted to write about the changing forest service policy and

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**'I need stories to know I'm not alone. That is reason enough. They tell me what we do and how we live and occasionally, if I'm lucky, they tell me why. There is a commonality to stories that makes us whole beings.'**

**—Pete Sleeth**

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budgets and that it was really important. And, of course, every time he said that my eyes would glaze over and I could imagine thousands of readers at home falling asleep in their breakfast cereal, "Oh, great, forest service policy." Finally one day we thought, wait a minute, we have this big forest and mountain right outside our backyard here in Portland called Mt. Hood. Why don't we do a profile of a mountain?

And Pete decided, okay, he would do that. I asked him to write me diary entries every week, because I wanted him to get past the usual convention. As he was reporting, I made him hike the mountain. One day he comes back and he's climbed Mt. Hood and he's sending me these diary entries every week. And at one point he looked at me and he said, "Don't you dare make me interview the mountain. You're not going to make me interview the mountain, are you?"

And I said, "Well, Pete, it is your main character, and I kind of have to know what it says." So Pete did this story, and I'll read you just a little passage of it, because this is an investigative-just-the-facts business reporter guy who wrote a 200-inch profile of a mountain that's got humor in it and soul and passion. And he interviewed the mountain

Mount Hood might speak in a couple of ways.

It might belch—a mighty roar of gas, molten rock and calamity shot like a pinball from 60 miles below. For the mountain is the child of the ocean, the progeny of an ages-old conveyor belt, delivered up as the ocean floor slowly slides under the North American continent. And as the Juan de Fuca plate dives beneath the Northwest, rock melts, and steam forms, bursting up through peepholes in the Earth's crust.

More likely, the voice would be softer, and the mountain would speak through a slight, brown-haired woman who lives and works in Gresham,

a booming city on the eastern edge of the suburban frontier that rolls towards toward the forest.

Roberta A. Moltzen, 46, holds the daunting job of supervisor of the Mount Hood National Forest. She is one of two women forest supervisors in Oregon and Washington and one of only 18 in the nation's 153 national forests. She dresses in Forest Service green when she wants to be official, drives federal vehicles with utmost care and speaks with even greater caution.

Moltzen has run the forest since mid-1995. It is her first stint as a forest supervisor, a post job with tremendous independence and burdened by overwhelming responsibility. She starts each day with this knowledge: More visitors flock to her forest each year; she has less money than ever to make them welcome.

I asked Pete last week to tell me why we need stories, and he sent me back a note which, he confessed, was wine-induced, and he said this: "I need stories to know I'm not alone. That is reason enough. They tell me what we do and how we live and occasionally, if I'm lucky, they tell me why. There is a commonality to stories that makes us whole beings. Walt Whitman knew that when he wrote 'Leaves of Grass': 'I celebrate myself,/And what I assume, you shall assume,/For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.'" This is an investigative reporter quoting Walt Whitman. I just think this is so hot. And he continues, "They unify us. 'The Old Man and the Sea' makes sense to us because it reaffirmed truths about perseverance and strength and fate. Stories, by the way, are just plain fun."

That's that last lesson: Don't forget to have fun. We're talking about wing walking after all, we're not talking about certified public accounting or factory work, despite the assembly line nature of producing the news. We get to soar up there, if we dare. Our publications provide the plane and a safe place to land. Our editors pilot us through those harrowing dips and turns, but it's the writers out there on the wings, alone and unfettered, opening their arms to the work and risking their selves in the process. My god, what could be more fun.

Stories are our prayers, so write and edit and tell them with due reverence, even when the stories themselves are irreverent. Stories are parables. Write and edit and tell yours with meaning so each tale stands in for a larger message, each moment is a lesson, each story a guidepost on our collective journey.

Stories are history; write and edit and tell yours with accuracy, understanding and context and with unwavering devotion to the truth. Stories are music; write, edit and tell yours with pace and rhythm and flow, throw in the dips and twirls that make them exciting, but stay true to the core beat. Remember that readers hear stories with their inner ear.

Stories are our conscience; write and edit and tell yours with a passion for the good they can do, the wrongs they can right, the truths they can teach, the unheard voice they can give sound to. And stories are memory; write and edit and tell yours with respect for the past they archive and for the future they enlighten.

Finally, stories are our soul; so write and edit and tell

yours with your whole selves. Tell them as if they are all that matters, for if that is what you do—tell our collective stories—it matters that you do it as if that is all there is. I've told many stories in my life. I've told my own as a reporter and I've midwived several more and more beautiful ones as an editor, and I feel I'm only just beginning to understand their power and purpose and how to do them justice.

The last person who I asked to send me a little thing about stories is a woman who was a long-time friend of mine from the Saint Paul Pioneer Press named Katherine Lanpher. She now does Minnesota Public Radio, a wonderful talk show there. And she sent me this:

I believe that stories are the connective tissue of the human race, that whether you are dissecting a school levy or the politics of South Korea, at the heart of every issue is a human element that leads to the three most beautiful words in any language: What happened next? And if you answer that question you are a storyteller.

They say language makes us human. That notion is being challenged as we discover that apes have language and whales have language. I welcome them into our fold. I'm not threatened by them, quite frankly, because I think what

makes us human are stories and only by telling them do we stay so.

An editor once said something that at the time startled me, but I've come to embrace it, and that's that the only good journalist is an improving journalist. Think about that. Think about the demands on us and the competition for readers' time and the pressure to tell stories with accuracy and significance and depth and speed and creativity. That means no matter how good you are, the only way to stay good is to improve.

Your presence here is a testament to your desire to do that. You've got wonderful inspiration and wonderful tricks and techniques from the masters. Now you go back to the real world—that's the hard part—and to the mundane frustrations and logistical realities of that world. So you need to commit to yourself and to the craft that you won't let those frustrations and realities stop your quest to improve. ■

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## Structuring Stories for Meaning

'Your character gets to the point where something changes.'

Jon Franklin

**W**e're going to talk about structure. Stories are like snowflakes in that they're all alike, but they're all different. They have certain elements in them that are universal, and they have certain elements in them that are particular.

We talk about narrative, and what narrative is is a little bit different than story. It's a little bit more primitive than story. This happens and that happens, and the other happens and the other happens and the other happens. And all of our lives are narratives. And those narratives are usually pretty confusing.

But story is something else. Story is when you take some of this narrative that you selected for some reason and separate it out from the rest of the narrative and put it together in such a way that it has meaning. So this whole idea of meaning is intrinsic, is central to storytelling, and that's one of the reasons why it's so cotton-picking difficult for those of us who get our early education in newsrooms to understand storytelling. Because meaning is something we're not supposed to put in stories. For one thing, we mistake meaning with opinion. But by meaning, I really mean the shape of the story and what the shape of the story says. It's



Jon Franklin, Stan Grossfeld, and Nora Ephron

not something that you bring to a story. It's something you find in the story and extract from the story.

The narrative itself is just a chronology; it doesn't have any shape. Put it in philosophical terms. It is "Shit happens."

In a newsroom, people use story to mean something totally different than we're talking about here. This is especially true in the last 20 years, when we're in an age of deconstruction and post-structuralism, where it's become cool to say that there is no meaning in life.

Let me put this in personal terms. I came into this business at just about the time structure was being abandoned. And so when I got to the point where I knew how to write hard news stories, and I could write a pretty good feature story just kind of by the seat of my pants, and I wanted to go beyond that, the whole idea of what's a story and how do you find it just loomed so large. And there simply wasn't an answer in the newsroom.

So there's a whole problem of how do I find out how a story works and how I can find stories predictably enough and often enough to where I can at least partly feed the dragon and keep editors off my back while doing the thing that I want to do, which is write stories that have emotional impact. Because I want to write for emotion.

Another way to think about this is journalism as we know it now is relentlessly cognitive. It has to do with proving

things, it has to do with factuality, and it has almost nothing to do with meaning, which is what actually we bring to it when we're able to do that.

If the story is without a plot, it's like an animal without a spine. So it becomes plodding. Structure becomes the first thing you really have to learn because that allows you to look at a story and say either "I've got it," or "I don't have it." And if I don't have it, then I better find it. And if I can't find it, I better go on to another story. So there's the idea that a story has an anatomy, that it's sort of a living creature. And while they're all different, they all have characteristic parts. Lots of variations, but they still have the characteristic parts.

The first guy to really come up with the anatomy of story was Anton Chekhov. And he came up with a craft definition of story meant to be very practical. And the reason that he did it was he got to the point of his career where suddenly he was very popular, and he was getting a lot of money for his stories, but they were taking him too long to do. So he was trying to figure out, okay, how can I formularize this in some way to where I can pump out more stories and make more money? It was that simple.

Chekhov defines it by those points of change. And that first point of change, which is the end of the beginning, is the complication. By that time, you have your character. Chekhov called it a character complication. It's a point where your character runs into something that complicates his or her life. And let me say here that the word is complication and not conflict. Because about two-thirds of the writers I talk to walk out the door thinking conflict. Conflict is a whole different thing. There's this concept of story as conflict—man against man, man against nature, that kind of thing.

The idea of a character complication is simply something that makes a character exert an effort. Now, this often is a conflict, especially in the literature of western cultures. But you can have a complication without a conflict. The complication is a point but it's also a section of the story that is from the beginning through the complication, where you get to know the character. All major characters have to be introduced there.

The end of the beginning, the beginning of the middle, and the middle to the beginning of the end, the end of the middle to the beginning of the end, is the largest part of the story. It's called the development, and that's when your plot develops, when your character struggles with the complications. Actually it's the easiest part to write. If you've done the other ends correctly, it's almost always just a matter of chronology. You set yourself up to do it.

I don't want to make it easier than it is. You've got to have the right things in it and not put the wrong things in it, which is not easy. But it is basically a chronology.

So this is the stuff that happens in the middle, in the development. And usually if you look close, you will find three pieces of the development. One, in which the person digs in deeper; the second, in which a person digs in deeper yet, and the third, in which the person has some kind of an insight. And the end of the middle and the beginning of the end is called the point of insight. Sometimes the character

## 'The idea of meaning is central to storytelling.'

Jon Franklin got me to sit up right away as he talked about things like "character" and "plot"—words I'd associated with novels and short fiction, not journalism. These, he said, were important elements to any good story, fiction or nonfiction.

The development of that story usually follows three parts, he said. First, the character digs in; then the character digs in deeper, and finally the character digs toward some kind of insight. That insight is that significant point of change in the story, which is usually followed soon after by some kind of resolution and the end of the story.

But beyond what happens, a writer must also consider elements such as how the story must follow some kind of rhythm and how what occurs in the story makes both the character and the reader feel. And beneath all this, he said, a writer must also address what the story means—the theme behind the story, such as love endures or war destroys. The idea of meaning is central to storytelling, Franklin said.

To wrap up his seminar, Franklin tied all these storytelling elements into psychology. He explained the brain has three parts: the part that speaks rhythm; the part that speaks emotion, and the part that speaks logic. They're the same parts that make up a good story. The brain has evolved to solve complications. So, he said, it is obvious why we like stories: That's where we get our meaning.

—Dan Mathers, associate editor for Offshore Magazine

never knows what happens to him, but the reader understands.

The point is, your character gets to the point where something changes. And this happens to all characters all the time. You may have trouble seeing it at first. People usually do. What you have to do is find that significant point of change. That's the snowflake part of it, where they're all the same. Where they're all different is that there are different ways that all these things play out. Endings tend to be short after this point of insight.

In all good stories, the character determines what happens to them. And journalists very usefully tell us what it is that drags people down. But what narrative journalists can do is give us the meaning of survival. The way we survive and the meaning of survival. So the story has meaning.

Journalism is so relentlessly cognitive, as in large part it must be, but at the same time, so much of our lives, the meaningful parts of our lives, have an emotional depth to them. And even a rhythmic depth. So stories are always in three layers. And the top layer is always what happens, and the next layer is always how that makes the character feel and how that makes the reader feel. And when you've achieved suspension of disbelief, where the reader is actually living in this person's head through this story; what the person feels and what the reader feels are going to be the same. And then underneath that, there's some kind of rhythm.

Reading happens very fast, that's why we can't be subtle.

What is subtle to the reader is not necessarily what is subtle to the writer. Because the reader's going so much faster over the same landscape than the writer. So a good story is an experience. That's why we like it. Our minds are made to draw information from experiences. Experiences are narrative. So we give the reader experiences that they actually don't have to live through.

Good stories are experiences. And if they have meaning, they're true. I mean, truth is a second-level concept, which is why people get into so much trouble saying there is no truth. Well, that's not true. Love endures, okay? There is evil in the world. Everyone's truth is not the same, but that doesn't make it less so. You know, it's internal. It's emotional. The thing that we're trying to touch. Once you start touching it and once you start saying it, you see these stories all around you. We don't impose these stories, we report on them and find them.

We think in stories. That's how we get our meaning. That if I read a story in a newspaper, a hard news story about something that interests me, the fact that I know what the context is, the fact that it interests me, means that I know what the narrative is. Or something about the narrative. I don't know what comes next, but that didn't happen first. So what the mind does is it looks at the evidence, it looks at the past. It tries to figure out these scenarios because it wants to know what it means. This is why structure is meaning, and why we like stories that are structured. ■

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## Scenes, Suspense and Character

'Everything really boils down to one or another of those three things.'

Adam Hochschild

Joseph Conrad once said, "My task...is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, above all, to make you see."

Well, how do you do this? I find that the more I write, the more I try to pay attention to why other people's writing moves and delights me. I do it when I'm reading, whether I'm reading a piece of fiction, a novel or short story; whether I'm reading a nonfiction book or an article; whether I'm watching a film that really succeeds in holding my attention. Always, after all these things, I try to take them apart, draw diagrams of them, figure out how did the writer of this novel, of this article, this magazine piece, this book, how did he or she manage to hold my attention? What can I learn from this?

I find almost always that what really succeeds in holding my attention is not the beauty or elegance or eloquence of language, even though I love good language as much as any of us do. It's rather the old-fashioned basics of narration, which for me come down to three basic things: scenes, suspense and character. Everything really boils down to one or another of those three things.

When I'm writing, I find it very helpful in thinking about trying to keep the idea of scenes in my mind all the time, to think as if I were a filmmaker and that I'm constantly making the decision about when I'm sort of panning the camera across the landscape in a very sweeping way and when I'm zeroing in for a close up on somebody or something or some episode.

Of course, it's also helpful if you can have some sense when you're actually doing the reporting as to whether the particular episode, encounter, conversation, visit that you're observing at a given point in time is going to be one of those close-up scenes. And if I sense that it is, I really, at that moment, turn into a kind of literary vacuum cleaner, where I'm just trying to gather up every scrap of information I can about the scene that I'm witnessing so that I'll have abundance of ammunition with which I can put it together on the printed page.

I'm deeply grateful for the invention of the pocket tape recorder. It was much harder before they came along. The reason I love working with the tape recorder is because you

**Pick compelling characters.  
Think in scenes.  
Create suspense.**

Adam Hochschild focused on the basics of writing narratives. Pick compelling characters and breathe life into them. Think in scenes, as if you were a filmmaker. Create suspense by strategically withholding information or by setting up and then delaying conflicts.

During the question and answer period, he offered some bit of advice to a young woman in the audience, but then added a cautionary note about sourcing: Details in the narrative must be checked for accuracy with the same care any journalist would use.

Listening to him tell stories about the footnotes and side mentions that led him to other great stories, he reminded me more than anything of a detective chasing down leads.

Hochschild's magic was no sleight of hand, just old-fashioned detective work followed through to extraordinary ends.

—**Ellen Sung**, an online reporter for Poynter.org.

can leave it on to record the conversation while you are frantically scribbling away in your notebook about all sorts of details other than the sound. What the person you're talking to is wearing, what are the books on his shelf, what are the paintings on her wall, what are the surroundings, what are the expressions on other people's faces as the person you're concentrating on is talking.

When I sense that I have stumbled on something that's

going to be a scene in an article or a book that I'm writing, I just try to become very greedy in terms of gathering all the information in every possible way I can about it. Even by calling up other people who were participants or observers there, asking them what they noticed. Just trying to get everything down.

On the second great ingredient, suspense, my latest tutor in suspense is the novelist Patrick O'Brian. He writes these wonderful, wonderful stories about British naval officers in the Napoleonic Wars. But they are not sea stories, they are literature, and they're some of the most suspenseful tales ever written. They are always about the three or four clocks ticking in the background having to do with suspense. And that's really what keeps you reading.

Now, how do you do this in nonfiction? Especially when it is harder because most of us don't have romance to work with. We don't have naval battles and storms at sea to work with, but you've got other techniques, and you have to find techniques of generating some sort of suspense in the story, whether it's a long article or whether it's a book, because if you don't, people are not going to read it.

I see a couple of different, familiar devices through which one can generate suspense effectively in nonfiction. One is by strategic withholding of information. I'm a great admirer of John McPhee, who I think is really one of the great reporters alive. [See accompanying box below.]

Sometimes another very useful, suspense-building device I think that is an ancient one, it goes back to the "Odyssey," is the device of a journey. When we follow a character or a set of characters on a journey, we always want to know how the journey is going to end. Are we going to get to the place where we think we're going to get to? And also with the journey, there's always the assumption, in a good piece of writing, that an external journey, a geographical journey, is in one way or another paralleling some kind of internal

## Deliberating Withholding Information to Create Suspense

McPhee's New Yorker article, "Travels in Georgia," is a joint profile of a man and a woman. McPhee is following them along through the state of Georgia, watching what they do. Doesn't tell us much about them. We know they're employees of the state of Georgia. More than that, we don't know. What do they do?

They find a dead snapping turtle beside the road. They pick it up; they dissect it; they carry some of the parts away. They collect frogs, they collect snakes. The people whom they encounter in small towns and so forth are quite puzzled why they're collecting frogs and snakes and other sorts of specimens like this. These two people never say anything about why.

We see their house; one of them has a very detailed diary about types of specimens being collected. Their jars with animal parts and so forth in them. Meanwhile

we, the reader, are wondering who the hell are these people? Why are we following them along? What are we doing this for? Who are they? And McPhee doesn't tell us until he's about half or two-thirds the way through the story and then he sort of gradually drops the information that they both work for a small, obscure Georgia state agency whose job it is to identify rural areas that are worth preserving and having some sort of state legal protection placed on them because they house endangered species of one sort or another.

If he had told us all that at the beginning of the story, it would have made it a much less riveting read. That's what I mean by the technique of sort of deliberating withholding information to create suspense. You can create suspense by setting up and delaying getting to a confrontation between two people. —**A. H.**



journey of discovery.

Characters are the stuff of good nonfiction just as much as they are the stuff of fiction. You need to bring characters alive. You need to make readers hear the sound of their voices. You need to listen to the distinctive phrases that they use and the distinctive ways of talking that they have. Without good, lively characters, very few people are going to read a book or even read a long magazine article. This is what makes people read. People want to read about people, and they want to read about people whose voices they can hear, who are alive, who live and breathe and practically walk off the page.

I want to say one word about problems that I think nonfiction writers get into when writing about characters, particularly at book length, although it can also happen in the length of a long article. One is having too many charac-

ters, and the other is forgetting that in writing, as in creating a play on the stage, you need to have major characters and minor characters. The major characters are the ones who you want your readers to remember and have fixed in their heads from near the beginning of the book or the article until near the end. The minor characters are the people that the reader doesn't have to remember. They can be lively and vivid; they should be lively and vivid, too. But they just come on stage briefly and then go off again.

Readers have only a limited capacity to hold a certain number of characters in their head. My rule of thumb is that in a long article, you should have really only one major character or perhaps two if there is some close relationship between them. Rivals having a feud, a husband and wife, a mother and daughter. Some kind of connection between them, and you can play them off against each other. ■

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## Endings

'The inverted pyramid makes endings impossible.'

Bruce DeSilva

**T**he ending is something special. The ending is the last word. It's the writer's final chance to nail his or her point home to the memory of the reader. It's the moment when you give the reader something to take away from the story and think about or when you fail to achieve that.

Every story has to arrive at a destination as well. That's the whole point of the story, to get to that destination. Yet in all the years I've been attending writer's conferences and speaking at them, I've never seen a workshop on endings. I'm not quite sure why that is.

Judging from the way most nonfiction reads, especially in newspapers, this is something we could use some help on, most of us. Most newspaper stories just dribble pitifully to an end. Often they really don't have endings at all. And newspaper people seem to be the only ones who have this fundamental problem with understanding that endings are important and figuring out how to make them work. Or if they get it, they don't seem to practice it. And the reason for this is pretty obvious: the inverted pyramid.

The inverted pyramid makes endings impossible. You simply can't have an ending in an inverted pyramid. You have to order your information most important and most interesting first. The story becomes progressively less interesting and less important as you go along. The theory is that we must do this because people don't read to the end. Well, of course they don't! It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. We teach readers not to read to the end of newspaper stories.

There are a number of things that the inverted pyramid makes impossible. One of them is drama and suspense. You can't have drama and suspense if you order your information in its order of importance. Drama and suspense have to do

with chronology. The inverted pyramid is one of the reasons why the world is so incredibly interesting until you read about it in the newspaper. It makes things boring. It makes things dull.

A good ending absolutely, positively, must do three things at a minimum. It must tell the reader the story is over. Must do that. It also needs to nail the central point of the story to the reader's mind. You have to be leaving him with the thought you want him to be taking away from the story. And it should resonate, it really should. You should hear it echoing in your head when you put the paper down, when you turn the page. It shouldn't just end and have a central point. It should stay with you and make you think a little bit.

The very best endings do something in addition to that. They surprise you a little. There's a kind of twist to them that's unexpected. And yet when you think about it for a second, you realize it's exactly right.

I want to talk about a couple of the special problems of ending pure narratives. Real stories. Pieces that are stories in the true sense of the word. Character, problem, struggle, resolution. Every true tale as opposed to an article has the same underlying structure whether it's written by Shakespeare or Tracy Kidder. It doesn't matter. It has the same basic underlying structure. Character. Character has a problem. He struggles with a problem. Most of the piece is about the struggle, and then you get a resolution in the end in which the character overcomes the problem or is defeated by it. Or sometimes is merely changed by it in some way, which gives us this necessary resolution at the end.

If you want to write narrative, your stories must have resolutions. You can't have your character struggle and struggle and struggle and struggle, struggle right off the

page. Doesn't work. It's very unsatisfying to the reader. If you find yourself doing that, you probably need to pick a different structure and maybe you need to write an article and not a narrative. You need a resolution in a narrative.

When you get to the resolution, the story is over. That's why people read stories, to find out how the problem will be resolved. So when you hit the resolution, and then you find yourself writing another 20 inches, we have got a problem. And this happens a lot. You see a lot of narratives published this way. The problem's resolved and there's 20 more inches of type. Don't do this. But what if you've got this additional 20 inches of stuff and it's really important? Maybe you picked the wrong resolution. Maybe the resolution truly exists in that extra stuff at the end.

Or maybe you've picked the wrong problem. And that's one of the most important things for people to understand about narrative storytelling. That is picking the problem. The writer picks the problem, not the situation in the world, not the source. At any situation that exists in life or any character's life, there are many possible problems.

The one last tip I want to offer you, it's counter-intuitive for most people. It has to do with what you write first. So many people write the lead first. They slave away at the lead and spend lots of time on it before they write the rest of the story. Don't do that. It's almost always a bad idea. It is rarely the thing you should write first.

When I write narratives, I always write the ending first. Try it. Try it. You usually know what your resolution is. You don't know yet if you even have a story, right? You really know what the resolution is. Write that resolution, probably as a scene, as a cinematic scene. When you write the ending first, then when you go back to the top of the story and start to write it, you know what your destination is. You know where you're going. Pieces in which you know what your destination is and you know what your point is are just easier for you to write. And they tend to end up being easier for readers to read, too. You feel that the writer truly is in control because he knows where he's going every step of the way. ■

## An Unexpected Ending

"What Price the News" was written a couple of years ago but certainly resonates today because of the subject matter. The writer is a young man named Ian Stewart. And at the beginning of the story, Ian is drifting in and out of consciousness. When he's conscious, he's in pain. Something terrible has happened to him. He doesn't know what it is. This first-person story follows Ian as he struggles to survive this terrible injury, to survive the surgeries and the medical treatment that is required and to understand what happened. He tries to get his life back.

Ian was shot in the head, and his best friend was shot dead, covering the war in Sierra Leone for The Associated Press a couple of years ago. The story has a great deal of talk in it, about the macho work of the foreign correspondent, about the importance of getting the news out to the public; all the great, heroic things that we'd like to think that we do as journalists. He ends the story like this:

Myles, David and I were naive to hope our reporting could make people care about a little war in Africa. In fact, Freetown might never have made your daily newspaper had it not been for the death of one Western journalist and wounding of another.

Will I continue to work as a journalist when I am well enough? Yes, and most likely I'll go back overseas.

Will I risk my life for a story again? No. Not even if the world cares the next time.

I think it works because you don't quite see it coming. You don't think this is what he's going to say. And yet, if you think about it for a second, of course this is how he feels after what he's been through. It also works because it's so honest. —B.D.

## Serial Narratives

Their power comes from 'that delicious sense of enforced waiting.'

Tom French

I have always loved stories. I was one of these kids who, when I was a boy, would stay up under my covers with a flashlight and read comic books. I especially loved, from the time I was young, serialized stories. To me, the three most beautiful words in the English language are not "I love you." They are "to be continued." I just love serialized stories. I love the feeling of them.

A lot of the most powerful and popular stories around us are serialized stories. The Bible is a serialized story. The "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" are serialized stories. "The Sopra-

nos" is a serialized narrative. "Harry Potter" is a fabulous serialized narrative. "Survivor," God help us, is a serialized narrative. The comic books, the comic strips in our newspapers, are all serialized narratives. To me, if it's a continuing story that you want to come back to for more than one day, that's a serial. And they're very popular.

They really have a wonderfully powerful pull on all of us. And I think that power for a serialized narrative has to do with that delicious sense of enforced waiting. You cannot find out what's going to happen next right away. You have to

wait. And I think it's powerful because we live in a world that seems to be accelerating all the time. Lots of people want to get to the bottom line right away. They want to know right away, and a lot of them are city editors.

And the faster and more insane everything else moves, the more powerful it is when the writer or the director or whoever says, "No, we're going to slow down. We're going to wait. We're going to make you wait." It becomes extra powerful. It's really helpful to learn how to speed up and slow down. The paradox is that when you're in the boring stuff, that's when you need to speed up and when you're in the best stuff where things are really moving rapidly, you slow down. The reason you slow down is so that the reader can really feel and process and really enter that scene. And the reason you speed up, usually, is because you have a lot of ground to cover, and it's not necessarily going to be that interesting to cover every inch of that ground in great detail. So at that point, your average distance per sentence really goes up.

And how do you slow down? You allow more space on the page. You allow more sentences. You literally write in shorter sentences. You get more paragraph breaks. You use space. You find pauses inside the scene that occur naturally that you would normally skip over. Pauses are really, really helpful.

We all long for completion of the cycle, which is what narrative is all about—wanting the cycle to be completed. And serial narratives force us to wait. And there's great, great pleasure in that unfolding.

I've been doing serials now for 15 years at the St. Petersburg Times, and when I started, there were only a couple of other people that I knew of who were doing them. Now a lot of papers are doing them, which I'm really excited about, and there's a lot of people who do them. At our newspaper alone, 10 to 15 people have done serials over the years. I'm not the only person who does them there. I just do them more obsessively than anyone else.

My first piece of advice would be to study the stories that are all around you. A lot of the newspaper writers I know, at night when they go home from the newsroom, they're carrying reports and books related to their beats, which I think is a terrible, terrible mistake. The best writers I know, when they go home, they read something else. They read fiction, they read a nonfiction book. They go watch a trashy movie, they go watch whatever. They really enjoy stories of all kinds.

I really encourage you all to read "Harry Potter." I read the four of them. But as I read them, I realized there was a lot to learn from J.K. Rowling. She really understands how to hold a reader by her side. And that's a skill, by the way, which with serials is absolutely essential. The first and most essential quality of a serial narrative is that it has to be immensely and intensely and inescapably readable. Other stories in the newspaper are not judged by their readability. But serials are judged almost entirely on whether they get read, and that is a very, very hard standard.

It's really instructive to watch people read what you write

## What Happens Next?

Tom French's talk was an argument for the power of the slowly unfolding story—the wait, the suspense (though I don't think he ever used the word cliffhanger). For him, the world in general, and the newsroom in particular, are like his father—"Let's get to the point. Cut to the chase. What's the bottom line?" But the faster life gets, French said, the more powerful it is when a writer or director makes you wait to see what happens next. We all long for completion, he said, and a writer can use that longing to advantage.

He offered a couple of interesting reasons why this may be true: one is that slowly unfolding narrative is closer to the rhythms of real life. Another (which I hope I'm not overstating here) is that when readers consume a story in discrete chunks, their sleep and dreams—their subconscious, I guess—come into play so they process it in a deeper way.

French offered a number of tips to writers to master the techniques of storytelling. Here's a partial list:

- Study the stories all around you.
- Find a simple frame for your story.
- Know your story's engine.
- Gain altitude.

—**Mike Lenehan**, executive editor of the Chicago Reader

and to see how hard it is to get someone to stick with you to the end. And in a narrative, it's absolutely essential. So it really helps to watch what works, to learn from what works.

One of the reasons for a serial's power is it unfolds gradually. You have to go to sleep at night with the story unresolved, and these characters in these situations seep into your dreams and into your waking hours and your sleeping hours. You live with them. Most of the things that are important to us do not begin and end in a single day. Serial narratives have more of the rhythms of life. So that gradual unfolding is helpful. And it really helps if there's somebody whom the reader cares about and wonders what's going to happen to them. Again, that sounds obvious but you'd be surprised how many times we ignore that.

It also helps if there's movement. If the story begins at point A, and you get to the end and you're really only at A, your readers are going to be really pissed off. I need some movement. I may not need things to blow up, but I need some movement. I need something to happen. And most readers, I think, feel the same way, at least for a newspaper serial.

It also helps if, at the end, there's a shred of hope, or if not hope at least some new understanding that the reader takes away from it so they do not feel it's a waste of their time. The worst thing, and readers get really, really pissed, is if at the end there's nothing they take away from it but bleakness. But they don't have time for days and days of that. And if you

write a story, a serial, and it ends like that, just be aware you're going to bother some people. I'm not trying to say that you have to have a happy ending, but there has to be something at the end that makes the reader feel it wasn't just a waste of their time.

This is important in all stories; it's especially important in a serial. Find a frame. You have to find a really good, simple frame. You need a simple frame to get at the complexity of your issue. Sometimes we think that for a complex story or for a complex theme, we have to have a very complex setup. And actually it's the opposite. The more complexity you're after, the simpler your frame needs to be. The more macroscopic your themes are, the more microscopic you need to go in your frame.

Every single story we write, every single story there is, has an engine inside of it. And it's a question, an unanswered question that the reader wants to know the answer to. And all these questions are very simple questions, and they're all a version of "What happens next?" Those three words are what make all narrative go. And it's really useful to look at the stories around you and understand, what are their engines?

Pay attention to what are the engines of the stories around you. Pay attention to what is the engine of your story. I want to say on this thing of engines, your engine is not what your story's about. Your engine is just what's under the hood making the story go. It's this raw power. Whatever road you turn onto with that engine and the destination that you choose is up to you. What it's going to be about, what are the themes you're going to describe? What are the things you're going to focus on? Those are up to you. But when you pick your story, there is an engine inside of it already, and you have to identify it and understand it so you can use it and harness it.

Think cinematically. Think in terms of very specific human detail. Think in terms of scene detail. Think in terms of anything that allows the reader to literally disappear inside whatever you're describing. And to do that, you need details. You need scenes and scene details. You need dialogue. You need people talking to each other and not to you. Newspaper journalists love to interview people and have people give them great quotes. But it's much more powerful if you can have people when they're screaming, whispering, cursing, flirting, whatever they do to each other. You want dialogue.

Emotion. Emotion's another part of thinking cinematically. Movies are a very emotional medium, and in newspapers, we're trained to distrust emotion. We're trained to think only about what the facts are. But the fact is that one of the reasons we care so much about certain facts is because there is a river of emotion beneath them. And it's worth understanding and paying attention to what are the emotions underneath what you're writing.

These are probably the three most important words I'm going to say: Let it unfold. Tape those to the top of your computer screen. Let it unfold. The conditioning in newspapers is so deep to not let anything unfold, to sum up, to get to the bottom line, to cut to the chase, to hurry to the end, to whatever. But unfolding is just absolutely subversive in

newsrooms, but it's absolutely at the heart of narrative. You have to let the scene unfold.

A year ago myself and two other reporters, Anne Hull and Sue Carlton, did a serial narrative live on a daily murder story. We were covering a murder trial. And we got to the next to the last day of the trial, and there was no action, according to newspaper standards. All day, the jury was out deliberating. The defendant, this 15-year-old girl who was accused of killing her mother, was sitting in a holding cell. And the only thing that happened in terms of official action was that around five o'clock the jury sent out a little note saying, "Can we go home for the night?" That's it. And the editors back in St. Pete said, "So today's story is going to be really short, right?"

No. No! All that waiting. That is power there. So we spent that day writing about what the families were doing and where they were and what they were saying to each other and what the lawyers were doing. Most importantly, what the defendant was doing. We found out she's in this little cell. She's not allowed to bring in there anything to read. It's cold in there. There's a metal toilet in there that has been used by dozens of inmates in recent weeks and has not been cleaned, so the place stinks. And all she has to do is to think and wait and look at the walls. And the walls, according to her lawyers, were covered with graffiti.

So we asked her lawyers, "When you go in to talk to her, please write down what some of the graffiti says for us." And they did. And that becomes this detail where we quoted, "Lonnie loves Laura. God bless you. Fuck you very much." And that unfolding of her waiting and everyone else waiting, that's powerful. Let it unfold.

This one I learned from Roy Peter Clark from The Poynter Institute. It's a term he uses. He says, "Scatter the gold coins." What he means by that is make sure that you reward the reader for going down the path with you. Especially if you're writing a long story, you want them to feel like it's worth their while. So make sure that as you go, you reward them. You give them really great details or really great moments, or a great quote or a surprise turn. Something funny and unexpected happens. Whatever. But there has to be something that says to the reader, "This is good. If I keep reading it's going to be worth my time, and I'm going to keep reading."

Create a recognizable world. We tend to write in this very sort of formal, detached, odd way where we really, really struggle to create a world that feels like the world we know. And you know when you get to a detail in a newspaper that feels right and is true, it almost jumps off the page at you. And I look for those details really hard. The ones that are going to make it clear: This one isn't just a name and a face, this person is real.

The last one is gain altitude. This is another one from Roy. Most of the time in a narrative, you're at ground level with your story. You're in the middle of it, in the thick of it. But it helps at certain points to rise up above the action, to be able to see it clearly and describe what's really happened with some authority. ■

# Historical Writing and the Revival of Narrative

‘...the line between scholarly and popular writing is now much more difficult to discern.’

Jill Lepore

**B**eginning in 1979, not coincidentally the year the first Pulitzer was awarded for feature writing, British historian Lawrence Stone heralded the revival of narrative in academic history writing. The story was back. Stone defined narrative as the organization of material in a chronologically sequential order and focusing the content into a single, coherent story. Now this represented a departure from common historical writing and should give you a sense of just how inhospitable to plot that genre had become.

Unlike structural or scientific history, which is analytical, narrative history, for Stone, is descriptive. From most historians' point of view, to call a piece of writing "descriptive" is the worst kind of damnation. But far from lamenting descriptive narratives, Stone celebrated them. Narrative history, he suggested, is by no means lacking in interpretation, so long as it's directed by what Stone called a "pregnant principle."

Stories with pregnant principles are hard to write and especially difficult to write artfully. Many narrative histories written by academics take readers on sea-sickening sails that endlessly tack back and forth between story and argument. How to tell a story that does more than describe what happened is not immediately obvious, at least to most academic historians.

In a perceptive essay written in 1992, Cambridge historian Peter Burke suggested that historians ought to borrow the anthropological notion of thick description—a tech-

nique that interprets an alien culture through the precise and concrete description of particular practices and events—and write thick narratives that seamlessly integrate story and context. The problem for historians, Burke suggested, is making a narrative thick enough to deal not only with the sequence of events and the conscious intentions of the actors in these events, but also with structures, institutions, modes of thought, whether these structures act as a break on the events or as an accelerator.

In practice, since the 1960's thick narratives with pregnant principles have often taken the form of what historians somewhat ambivalently call "micro-histories": stories about a single, usually very ordinary person, place or event, that seek to reveal the society's broader structures. This work rests on the central premise that ordinary lives, thickly described, illuminate culture best.

Telling small stories, writing micro-histories, does not inevitably produce important scholarship. Just the opposite, alas, is far likelier. As Peter Burke warned, "The reduction in scale does not thicken a narrative by itself." When micro-histories are good, they're breathtakingly brilliant. When they're bad, they're pretty much worthless.

Now consider the history of journalism. If 20th century academic historians turned their backs on storytelling in the early part of the century, only to return to it in the late 1970's, journalists trudged along a similar path. They scorn storytelling in favor of fact-finding, and then change their minds.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, according to journalist Jon Franklin, the best American writers, reporters included, began their careers and received their literary training writing short stories. The short story in its heyday was the universal school for writers, Franklin argues. The short story demanded the utmost of the writer, both technically and artistically. It served as the great eliminator of mediocre talent. When short story writers turned to reporting, they brought a desk drawer full of literary devices, an economy of prose, an eye for detail, an ear for dialogue, and a keen sense of plot and resolution.

In the 1950's and 1960's Franklin asserts, "The quality of journalistic writing was devastated by the demise of the short story apprenticeship. When journalism turned away from literature, newspaper and magazine writing lost its luster. Nonfiction wasn't as good a training ground as the short story had been because it emphasized subject over form and rewarded reporting skills at the expense of writing technique."

But when "In Cold Blood" was published in 1965, it

## The Immersion Experience In Historical Narrative

In terms of the narrative style, as a reporter and as a writer, your job is to immerse yourself in this world and then immerse your reader in it through your narrative in this almost transparent way. I would urge you to recognize that the world you're immersing yourself in when you immerse yourself in the past is less familiar to you and less familiar to your readers. Your job, in immersing yourself in that culture, is a more challenging one, and your job in immersing your reader is therefore a more challenging one. But it is the same job. I don't mean to suggest that there's something fundamentally different about writing history. I think it is the same process, but a more challenging one. —J. L.

melded the accuracy of nonfiction with the dramatic force of fiction and ushered in the new genre of nonfiction—a genre that today dwells in a foggy frontier between journalism and literature.

What's to be gained by comparing the history of history with the history of journalism? A few critical insights. The revival of narrative in historical writing parallels the emergence of narrative journalism. In narrative history's most celebrated invention, the micro-history, there is a passing resemblance to narrative journalism's favorite form, the nonfiction short story.

Micro-histories and nonfiction short stories have a good deal in common. Both genres emerged in the 1970's in response to professional trends, especially prevalent in the 1950's, that valued accuracy and analysis more than literary

flair. Micro-history and the much-vaunted revival of narrative in historical writing were responses to structural or quantitative history. Narrative journalism and the nonfiction short story were reactions against investigative journalism's emphasis on fact-finding over prose style.

Both micro-histories and nonfiction short stories tend to concern themselves with the everyday experiences of ordinary people; a means of offering broader cultural interpretations, moving from events to structures. Both genres self-consciously employ the techniques of dramatic fiction, including character development, plotting and conflict resolution. Most micro-historians and narrative journalists aspire to write narratives thickened with the butter of detail and the flour of implication.

Micro-histories and nonfiction short stories also fall prey

## Journalists and historians can learn from each other.

Roughly the first 20 years of my working life I spent almost entirely as a reporter for newspapers and magazines. The last six or seven years of it I have spent almost entirely writing books of history. So, what do journalists and historians have to learn from each other?

As a journalist, I feel there are a great many things that are going on right now in today's world that we think of as news that you simply cannot begin to comprehend without understanding the history behind it. Case in point is this war that's going on in Pakistan and Afghanistan. People's memory for historical grievances is longer, and it becomes very incumbent upon us, as journalists writing about all this, to try to understand these things.

You can very quickly tell who are the journalists who have a real sense of the history of the place that they're writing about. And to me, their reporting is always much deeper and much richer. I spent six months living in Russia in 1991 gathering material for a book and interviewing Russians about how they were beginning to try to comprehend the Stalin period—how were they grappling with the fact that their country had basically inflicted an absolutely colossal genocide on itself in the 1930's, when some 20 million Soviets met unnatural deaths.

Every once in a while, I would go look in a database of newspaper articles and see if anybody else had ever interviewed any of these people. And the only person whose name periodically popped up as having talked to the same people that I had, was the man who was then the Moscow correspondent of The Washington Post, David Remnick, who's now the editor of The New Yorker.

If you read his book that he wrote after coming back from that assignment, "Lenin's Tomb," which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1993, you can see that, in trying to write about Russia—about Gorbachev's Russia—he spent 100 pages of a 400-page book talking about the history and the heritage that had led up to this. He was somebody who really took that seriously, had immersed himself in the history of that country, and it showed.

One of the things that as a journalist I've learned from historians and from the process of trying to write history has to do with how you treat sources differently. If you're a reporter for a daily paper or for a magazine, the kind of thing an editor badgers you for is to have a named source for something. You have to attribute every important fact or every important number to a source.

For a historian, that's not quite good enough, because you can't just say, as Professor so-and-so says, this happened, because Professor so-and-so's going to have his enemies and they're going to write to you as soon as your book comes out and point out why you were in error for relying on this guy instead of on them.

The whole process of dealing with history has just made me realize how the business of sources is much more complicated than we journalists often tend to think that it is, and that one has to pay a lot of very careful attention to it.

What are the things that historians can learn from journalists? Storytelling: How do you frame a story so that people are going to read it? Probably the most widely read historian of the last three or four decades in the United States is Barbara Tuchman, who spent some seven years as a journalist before she started writing history and who did pay a great deal of attention to how she told the story, how she framed the story. And she succeeded in finding an audience, finding in fact a very important audience. President John F. Kennedy actually credited the fact that he did not declare war on the Soviet Union in 1962 over the Cuban missile crisis to the fact that he had just finished reading Barbara Tuchman's book, "The Guns of August," about the outbreak of World War I, and realized how easy it was to go down that slippery slope of great powers going to war when, in some sense, neither of them wanted it.

I guess I would end by making a plea for the combining of journalism and history. I hate to see barriers, artificial barriers, between different kinds of writing.

—Adam Hochschild

to the same dangers. Peter Burke considered small stories' greatest pitfall to be their tendency to focus attention on the sensational. Both academics writing micro-histories and journalists writing nonfiction short stories are drawn to the drama of murder trials, suicides, kidnapping, rapes and other miscellaneous crimes and disasters.

It's easy to push this parallel too far. Crucial differences separate these two genres. Micro-histories are not nonfiction short stories; they are micro in focus, not in length. Journalists sometimes write about the past, but most narrative journalism, of course, is not historical.

Still, the similarities are intriguing and they raise a key question. If narrative history and narrative journalism use similar devices, consider similar subjects, and are the consequence of related trends in the politics and the arts, why then are historians and journalists not on better terms? It must be said that a great deal of the animosity so commonly expressed by academic historians towards popular history boils down to this: History books are selling like hot cakes, but journalists are making all the money.

To be fair, most historians have few intellectual objections to a rattling good history, so long as the story is told in the service of an argument. Often it isn't. In 1992 Peter Burke warned that the revival of narrative might lead to a return to pure antiquarianism; to storytelling for its own sake. Part of what grates academic historians is that many popular histories are, from their point of view, actually miscarried micro-histories. That is, they tell a small story but fail to use that story to interpret larger historical structures. At their worst, popular histories are all headlines. They gesture at significance but fail to demonstrate it.

Far from thickly narrating a life, the worst popular histories also tend to rip people out of the past and stick them to the present. These people from different places and times, they're just like us, only dead. Bad popular history, like bad historical novels and films, manages at once to exoticize the past. Descriptions of clothes, hairstyles, houses and the minutia of daily life are always lovingly recreated while rendering familiar the people who lived in it. Fashions changed, but complicated, historically specific ideas like sovereignty or progress or childhood magically transcend history.

It's just this kind of writing that [Princeton University historian] Sean Wilentz condemns as passive nostalgic spectacle. But is narrative and are journalists to blame? Since both historians and journalists have embraced narrative, the line between scholarly and popular writing is now much more difficult to discern. Truman Capote is not responsible for David McCullough, but he's not irrelevant, either.

Much history today is written under the banner of narrative. Does it inevitably render its readers passive? No, but perhaps it should. One kind of passivity, or maybe we should call it enthrallment, is a measure of success. Readers can be nearly paralyzed by compelling stories confidently told. In the hands of a good narrator, readers can be lulled into alternating states of wonder and agreement.

Storytelling is not a necessary evil in the writing of history. It's a necessary good. Using stories to make historical arguments makes sense, because it gives a writer greater power over her reader. A writer who wants to can pummel his reader into passivity, but a writer who wants to challenge his reader betters his odds to success by telling a story. ■

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## Conference Diary

*Ideas and insights, opinions and suggestions—all of these surfaced again and again in the swirl of presentations. What follows are snippets from these sessions that didn't find a home on the previous pages but merit consideration.*

'So what is a narrative? It's a story, but someone's telling it.'

One of the things I was thinking about is where did this word "narrative" come into our lives from? It has really become the "mot du jour" and that is a little like the word pasta. For many years we had spaghetti and macaroni and linguini, and suddenly we have pasta, a fancy word for spaghetti, macaroni, and linguini. Narrative is sort of a fancy word for story. But that's not all it is. It's more interesting than just story, it's more powerful than story.

On some level the words "narrative journalism" are an oxymoron. It's a kind of unholy alliance, if you have a kind of pure view of journalism, not that I do. But I certainly did when I started out. I thought that I was writing the truth

when I wrote an article in the newspaper. And, of course, when you have something called "narrative journalism," both those things are being violated slightly by the other because the narrative, the story you're telling, would always be better if you didn't always have to think of what had actually happened. For a long time I thought, "Oh, God, I could never make things up better than this." But that's just because I hadn't learned how to make things up. Now I really do know that a lot of the time that you get to a certain point in a true story and think, oh, too bad we have to do this because this is really boring. How am I going to get through this? By the same token, whatever the truth is is going to be slightly violated if you're writing it as a narrative because it is going to have to bend somewhat to get into your story, whatever the story is you're telling.

So what is a narrative? It's a story, but someone's telling

it. You. So a narrative is imposed. You don't have to have a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end to write a piece of narrative journalism, but it helps. And where the beginning, the middle, and the end are is entirely up to you. The key to narrative is structure. The key to telling any story is where does it begin, where does the beginning start to end and the middle begin, and where does the middle start to end, and the end begin. I think the understanding of a three-act structure is absolutely instinctive with journalists.

—Nora Ephron

### 'We're rendering the scene in three dimensions.'

I want to give you one very quick example of thinking cinematically. It's from a story I did, "Angels and Demons." I was trying to describe a scene, a story, a serial about a mother and her two daughters, two teenage daughters who visited Florida and were murdered. And I was trying to write a scene where I describe their funeral. And I wasn't there. I wasn't covering the story yet. And even if I had been there, in Ohio, I wouldn't have been allowed inside the church, because reporters were barred.

So afterwards, I had to try to understand so I could help the reader and myself get inside that church and be there for the service. And I interviewed all these farmers and other people who were at the service. And I'm from the Midwest. Actually I grew up, part of the time, about 50 miles away from this church. So I'm going to feel okay in generalizing about Midwesterners, whom I love. Midwesterners tend to be, compared to, say, Southerners, not as good at producing the kinds of detail and emotion, at articulating the kinds of things to help bring a scene alive. We're trained as Midwesterners to sort of push everything down and keep going and be stolid, whereas in the south, you're trained to just let it all hang out and go for it.

And I wasn't getting anywhere with these farmers. I wasn't getting any details. I went to the church and I walked inside of it and I found out that the floorboards creaked. Good. That helps. Then I got a copy of the sermon the minister gave that day on audiotape. And I got very excited that I could hear this audiotape. I thought, "Oh, God, maybe there'll be something good there." And I listened to it, and Hal Rogers, the husband and father of the victims, had told me that the sermon was terrible. That there was nothing comforting or profound inside the sermon.

And I remember thinking, "Well, what can anyone say that's going to comfort you?" I was hoping that he was wrong, that it was a good sermon. And I'm listening to it at my desk in St. Petersburg and, by God, he was right. This is the worst damn sermon I've ever heard. The minister is saying nothing of any value whatsoever. It's the most empty-headed, dumb sermon I've ever heard. Well, not the most, but close.



Nora Ephron

And so I got it turned up really loud and I'm listening and I'm getting more and more frustrated. And all of a sudden, the minister pauses. And during the pause I hear this bird chirp, and I got very excited. And I called up the woman who lent me the tape up in Ohio, because I don't know birds. And I said, "Would you listen to that part of the tape and tell me what kind of a bird that is?" She says, "Sure." She takes her copy, she puts it on, she listens to it. She says, "Ah, that's a sparrow." A sparrow. I got very excited. A sparrow. I said, "Oh, that's a sparrow singing." She said, "Phht. Sparrows don't sing. They're rats with wings." She did not have a very poetic or lyrical notion about sparrows. I did.

The moment you say sparrow, it conjures up so many images, and I didn't have to say any of those images aloud. You just have to put the word sparrow on the page. And so I put it in there, the sparrows chirping. And what happens is that's just one little detail, but it really helped because in that moment, we're rendering the scene in three dimensions. In stereo, essentially. The reader is on the bench; the minister's up here talking. He or she is listening to the minister. And then from over here, or over here, comes this bird. It's in three dimensions now. They're there that much more vividly. So little tiny details can really make that difference. You don't have to have necessarily a lot of details. —Tom French

### 'I'm giving you sort of an equivalent in narrative to the five W's.'

What I'm doing is I'm creating an experience. I'm giving you an equivalent in narrative to the five W's. And it's five threads that at any point in a piece of narrative you know: time, place,



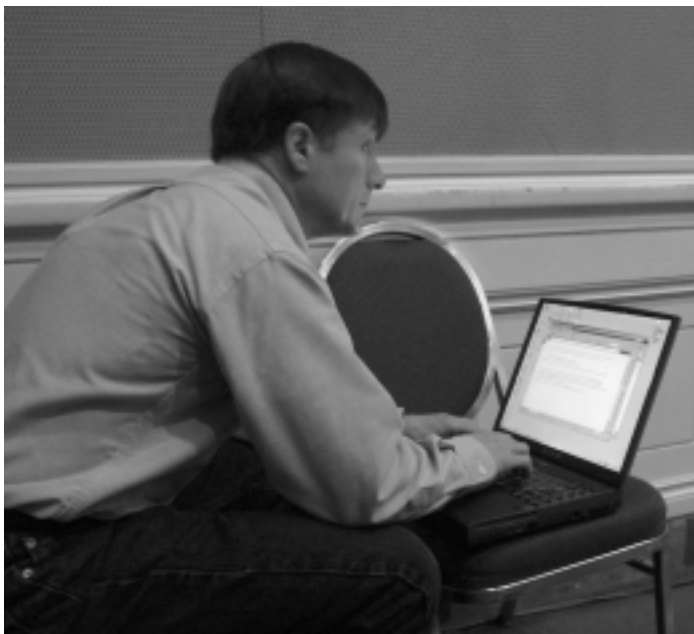
subject, character and mood. And as soon as you create those things in any kind of efficient way, that doesn't call attention to itself so it's too self-conscious, any time you create those things a reader will just get sucked in. —**Jon Franklin**

### 'What I espouse is patience in listening.'

I'm not interested in the technology of the time. I do not use a tape recorder, one thing I didn't get into because it's too technical and maybe boring. I believe that what I espouse is patience in listening and trying to capture what the other person is thinking and trying to see the world from their view. I don't necessarily want word for word from their mouth. Especially when you have a tape recorder working, you tend to get what I called first draft, sort of a talk radio on paper.

The tape recorder was not in popularity when I was at The New York Times, between the mid-50's and early 60's. But what I think has happened to journalism today, it's become too much Q & A. The damn machine is there, and important people are talking to some reporter, and they are getting that first-draft mentality out of the mind of the important person. It's all verifiable, yes it is, and the lawyers are happy about that because you don't have to worry about some lawsuit in this litigious time.

However, I do think that it took the interview out of the outdoors, where I was walking around exploring, hanging out, whether it's Frank Sinatra, whoever it was, and it brought the interview, too often because it's convenient and it gets to be easy, to an indoor situation, or a tape recorder on a desk, or a coffee table in a hotel suite. I hate to see Q & A magazine reporting. I'm talking about getting to know people, hanging out with them, listening to them, develop-



A conference participant

ing the art of hearing and understanding and trying to make them into characters that are verifiable characters, but they're like fictional characters. I'm always looking for scenes, I'm looking for scenes in reporting, because it's story. It's story. Story. Tell it through people. It has to be visual. You have to have a visual sense. —**Gay Talese**

### An Oregonian editor and writer talk about overcoming resistance to narrative.

**Jack Hart:** Overcoming resistance. My God, I well remember when Tom Hallman first wrote a narrative that we nominated for the front page, as opposed to some specialized feature section like the magazine. And the news editor said, "Well, for Christ's sakes, this isn't news! Why would you want to put this on the front page? Who's going to read that anyway? They expect news on the front page."

Now, two or three Sundays ago, 18 years later, a Pulitzer Prize, three-time Pulitzer finalist, he's got a 135-inch narrative that we're trying to get on the front page, and the same people are saying "135 inches? There's a war on. Don't you know there's no room for this kind of thing in the paper?"

So it's a constant battle to overcome that sort of resistance. If you are enthusiastic about promoting narrative in your newsroom, the reporters have to help educate the editors, and for a lot of us it's been a mutual learning experience all along. I don't know. How do you persuade an editor who might not be amenable to doing a narrative that it's a good idea?

**Richard Read:** The number one way to do it is just become an expert on what it is that you want to write the narrative about. And if it comes out of a beat, that means becoming an expert on your beat so that you're first rate at turning out the daily stories. So the editor, I mean, has trust in you when you come and you say, you know, "This is a wonderful way to tell a story that we couldn't do in the conventional daily format."

And they're going to be a lot more receptive and believe you than if you come in and say, "You know, I was riding the train. I got this great idea about something. I don't know anything about it, but..." It's just a harder sell.

And by the way, on Jack's point about this news editor who's a skeptic, I think some of that dialogue is really healthy. Because these narratives do have to carry their own weight, and you should be able to defend them, and they should be worth the 135 inches. And if they're not, then you know, please, let's just run the good stuff that we're generating every day in the newsroom.

**Jack Hart:** Yeah. And there are people in this business who have been successful at narrative who argue that everything in a newspaper ought to be narrative. And I don't think

either Rich or I would ever make that argument. I mean, the delivery of basic, essential information that people in the audience need to be good citizens of a democracy is the fundamental purpose of a newspaper. And if we can expand that franchise in a way that helps them understand their world a little better and be emotionally moved by it and care more about their fellow human beings and have some insights that will help them live more successful lives, more power to us. But that's not our basic mission in life.

**'Tell them a story and they will follow you anywhere.'**

You can bring sheer joy by telling a good story with imagery and detail and color. And it doesn't have to be sad, and it doesn't have to be serious. It can be just as effective to make you laugh as it does to make you cry, if you do it right. And the way I try to do it is just to paint a picture. Fill it up with metaphors and similes. Now, I don't know the difference between a metaphor and a simile. I'm not kidding, any more than I really know what narrative journalism is. But if you fill it up with color, if you tell them a story. That oldest cliché in the book: Tell them a story and they will follow you anywhere. —**Rick Bragg**

**'I'm the reason it's a story. I saw it. It's my vision. But you don't see me.'**

I work very hard as an invisible writer because I want my reader to live in the head of the person, live in the experience and the day and the space of the person that I'm writing about. And if you look at one of my stories, you're going to have a lot of trouble finding me, but I'm there. I'm all over that sucker. I'm the reason it's a story. I saw it. It's my vision. But you don't see me. That doesn't mean I don't have a voice, and it doesn't mean you don't have one either. —**Bruce DeSilva**

**'I would project myself, physically, into these other worlds.'**

When I was 10, I would climb the sycamore tree on the edge of our property and climb as high as I could to my favorite place near the top, and I would wedge myself at the top of the tree and I would look out over this subdivision that bordered this lane right behind our house. The back yards came right up to this lane. And I would watch these families.

I was watching people's outer lives. I was watching moms hanging up the clothes in the back yards, dads in the driveways working underneath the cars. And I would watch the kids tearing up and down the street on their bikes and

doing wheelies. And I can still hear girls on the sidewalk playing double dutch.

I would just be entranced with all these little details of other people's lives. I was 10 and wouldn't have been able to articulate it this way then, but I had this very definite sense that every house I looked at was an entire world unto itself, that it was the same as my house in some ways but was completely different, and that every house had its own language and its own maps with familiar safe territory and forbidden territory and its own rules, and its own laws, and its own secret history.

And I really wanted to understand what it would be like to be inside each of these other worlds, and I would do this thing that I think is very useful for reporters to learn how to do: I would project myself, physically, into these other worlds. I would be physically still in the tree, but I would literally just project myself in and try to understand what this world right here, in that house, was like, and what the one next door was like, and I would form my little impressions.

And when I was up in this tree it never ever occurred to me to turn around a little bit and look back at my own house and to think about my own family. It never occurred to me that my family might have a secret history of its own.

And I grew up and became a journalist working for a newspaper, writing these narratives about other people's lives, and I really loved exploring other people's lives. I really enjoy the ability to now go inside those other worlds and wander in them and explore them and map them and then try to share some of what you find with readers.

—**Tom French**

**'A big part of the writing life is taking the risk, getting in the game.'**

I think the hardest thing for newspaper journalists is we come from a first-draft culture. We come from a culture that basically has deluded us into thinking that the stuff we write on deadline can be published. And the only reason it can be published is because it has to be published. Newspaper writers who go to do magazine work quickly find out, hey, the first draft just isn't good enough.

There's two ways to do this. One is writing, writing a lot and then rewriting it and rewriting it. And then the thinking about it, getting it down, and it's pretty good at that stage. A big part of the writing life is taking the risk, getting in the game. And I would argue that when you're writing, you're not able to judge whether it's garbage or not. When you're writing, you are creating, and that is completely different than criticizing. —**Chip Scanlan**

‘There’s something here that goes beyond what we can convey in a one shot, daily spot news.’

Traditionally we defined journalism in the 1950’s and ’60’s, when us old-timers were coming into the business, as being very much oriented to the individual event—usually a very confined, cramped view of individual events, political conflict of various kinds.

And so this whole wealth of understanding of meaning about the world and how it operates that emerges only when you track action through a series of scenes and see how all of these things tie together in a complex and sophisticated way was beyond the view of newspaper journalists or any journalists, for that matter.

So when you see something happen and have developed a capacity in your newsroom for saying “This is story and there’s something here that goes beyond what we can convey in a one shot, daily spot news approach to the subject,” then it’s time to mobilize the resources and to jump on it and to organize a team to go after the pattern and try to find the larger picture. —**Jack Hart**

‘Where do ideas come from?’

We’re trained observers, and we can find stories anywhere. I’m coming out of the Barking Crab in Boston. It’s a restaurant down by the Fort Point Channel and it’s late at night and I’m going to my car and I hear Jimi Hendrix. We know he’s dead, but we hear this music coming, and I look around and there’s no cars, no people, no nothing. I go up on top of the bridge and I look. No people. I go under the bridge, no people. So where’s this Hendrix coming from? And I look and, inside the bridge, not visible to anyone, are some entrance holes that go inside the girders. And above the corrugated steel is a homeless guy living there, and he’s got an apartment in there, and I just waited for him.

I got to be friends with the guy, and he didn’t want anything to do with me. He said, “If you do a story about me, then I’ll get kicked out of here and that will be bad. I don’t want to go to a shelter, because they’re dangerous, people are violent in there, I have AIDS, they’ll look at me like a leper.” And I honored that, and I said, “Listen, I understand, and I’m not going to rat you out, I’m not going to do a story. Here’s my card. Someday you might need me, keep my card.”

So a year goes by, and I get a call from the guy on my cell phone and he says, “The people from the Big Dig are trying to kill me because I’m stealing electricity.” What is this, a \$20 billion program and he’s stealing like 12 cents of electricity. Some asshole from the Big Dig says they’re going to kill him, and he’d better get out of there. So he invites me in and he’s got pictures of Paul McCartney and Jimi Hendrix posters, he’s got carpeting, he’s got a color TV—he’s got almost as

nice a place as I’ve got, rent-free. So we do a story about him, and we called the construction company and, of course, the president’s posturing and says, “We don’t care if he lives here, it’s okay.” And poor guy lives there with AIDS and his dog.

And that’s why I love being in this business, but of course this doesn’t have a happy ending because I got about 20 or 30 calls after I did this story. Nobody wanted to help the guy with AIDS; they all wanted to adopt the dog.

So the main thing, I guess, is the idea, and where do ideas come from? Well, there’s no textbook answer to that. Sometimes they come from your friend, sometimes they come from what you see. So where the story comes from is important, but more important is how you meet the people and how you deal with the people. You have to show them respect. I look them in the eye, I don’t pull out my notebook. I leave my cameras in the car. —**Stan Grossfeld**

‘They’ve been living with these people until they absolutely accept them and accept them in their lives.’

David Sutherland set out to make a film with a farm family. He took almost three years, in the company of a couple. This is narrative journalism at its finest. We called it “an investigation of the human heart.” What makes his film work is Sutherland’s ability to use the mundane and to take the small events and to order them, without the narrator’s voice, but to add and to build a narrative using a kind of narrative on its own.

What’s so brilliant about this is that this is the hardest kind of filmmaking. Too many people go out and try to do it, especially with video cameras and small cameras. This is a highly wrought piece of work. I mean David Sutherland is hiding in a cabinet in their kitchen or there is a camera crew in there. They’ve been living with these people until they absolutely accept them and accept them in their lives.

He came back with these thousands of hours of material. And we watched him, over a year and a half of editing, meticulously placing this. The one technical thing above anything else was that the sound was brilliant. David had 24 tracks of sound when we were finally mixing it. But he was obsessed with the sound, because the sound is everything. And using the small details of their lives, then weaving through it the drama of a farm family, the whole story of what was happening to the family farm, and that was what was so brilliant about it.

David spent a lot of time in the FmHA [Farmers Home Administration] looking for families until he found this family. And he met them, and liked them, and they let him sleep on their couch that night, and he never left.

—**David Fanning**



Bob and Nancy Giles

### ‘Narrative makes ideas come alive.’

When I was a journalist, my duty was to talk about the movement of people, the domestic life. I found that challenge very constraining and almost suffocating. I always felt that others were able to do it better than I did and that often novelists were far more successful by inventing the patterns of this or that character in this or that community or nation.

And it was only after reading three or four former journalists—in the sense of writers that deal with mundane, earthly life but that have graduated into the other category—that I fell in love with what I would consider the journalist of dreams. I’m thinking particularly of somebody like Edmund Wilson, who would be after an idea and thus spend his months talking to people to see how that idea came to be and how it is transforming people and what the past, present and future of it is.

I am no longer a journalist, but perhaps I am that type of journalist that deals with the life of dreams or the life of ideas. As a journalist of dreams I’m interested not so much in what is happening at the level of how people are moving from one side to the other of the border, but what are they thinking and what are they speaking? And how are they communicating those dreams and those thoughts to one another? And I’m interested in how ideas in these people, in all of us, can become facts for journalists, facts that are about the life of the mind. If we could see the mind as a kind of territory that could be mapped, and the journalist is the surveyor of that map that will tell you where the caves are and where the rivers are, I think that other side of journalism would make us all richer.

If I understand what narrative journalism is, as it pertains to life of dreams and not to life of acts, of people, it has to have this Virgil of sorts that takes you into where ideas sit and live. I think an op-ed piece that will be quickly forgotten is a piece where the ideas are presented as a skeleton and they

don’t have life. Narrative makes ideas come alive through anecdotes, through storytelling. The object is to enliven those ideas by making them rooted in daily life, in my personal life, in yours. But it’s the ideas that will carry the piece. But ideas are housed in minds, and minds are what interests us, the minds of people and how those ideas are expressed by those people. The same idea could be expressed by five people in five different ways. And you will remember, of the five, the two or three that were able to bring passion to those ideas. —**Ilan Stevens**

### ‘You can’t just rush into this stuff without setting yourself on a course for learning it.’

Richard Preston, the McPhee student who wrote “First Light” and “The Hot Zone,” tells a story about a conversation with an editor. Preston said God was in the details. And the editor said, “No, God is in the structure.” When it comes to doing narrative, God is in the structure. And you have to learn an awful lot of very specific, highly applicable information about the complication/resolution form of storytelling, about the kinds of structures that have been worked out over hundreds of years by various kinds of writers.

One of the things we do worst in this business are the techniques of characterization—the whole technique of scenic construction and the difference between summary narrative and dramatic narrative. Newspaper people have a terrible time grasping that fundamental distinction that’s absolutely essential to succeeding with this kind of work.

Point of view: We are just absolute kindergartners when it comes to working with point of view and stance. Lots of big projects at big papers have just been screwed because people didn’t understand the importance of point of view and how it could be shifted successfully and how to avoid the pitfalls that you want to avoid.

Rhythm, pacing—all of these techniques that have been written about for 200 years by fiction writers and have been written about very specifically in a wonderfully illuminating way by people who are exploring the frontiers of nonfiction now. It’s out there. You can learn it. But you can’t just rush into this stuff without setting yourself on a course for learning it. —**Jack Hart**

### ‘Let’s face it. You’d never get Harvard to sponsor a seminar on feature writing.’

I’m not real sure what narrative writing is, which makes me very qualified to stand up here and talk to you all. We call it narrative writing because you would never get 800 people to come to a seminar on features. Let’s face it. You’d never get Harvard to sponsor a seminar on feature writing. But you call it narrative journalism and you can get people from all over the world. —**Rick Bragg** ■

# Women and Journalism

In our last issue of Nieman Reports, journalists from many countries wrote about the contemporary experiences of women journalists. They examined the circumstances women encounter in newsrooms and the impact they have on coverage of the news.

In this issue, women journalists in the United States write through the prism of their experiences. **Christy C. Bulkeley**, a former newspaper reporter, editor and publisher who is now part of a research group compiling and updating benchmark research about women in journalism, opens this section with an instructive roadmap for understanding what has happened and its meaning for women and the news organizations they work for.

**Susan Reed**, a former news producer for CBS News who writes frequently about women and work, reminds us that gender disparities in pay are still part of the news business, as they are in other professions. And she urges journalists to turn their investigative techniques on themselves. By doing so, she argues, “we could begin to challenge the assumptions that women have already ‘made it’ and little more needs to change.”

**Beth Harpaz** covered Hillary Rodham Clinton’s senatorial campaign for The Associated Press and then wrote a book, “The Girls in the Van,” about the experience. “We were no longer the boys on the bus,” she writes, “We were the girls in the van.” She brings us along to see how coverage and conversation change when the journalists are women.

**Jodi Enda**, White House correspondent for Knight Ridder newspapers and president of the Journalism & Women Symposium (JAWS), applauds the progress made since the 1970’s, when women journalists found relief in the courts for issues left unresolved in newsrooms. Though “we no longer sit in the balcony,” she writes, “neither do we have the best seats in the house.” More women editors are needed, she writes, for without them “it is tougher for women reporters to . . . get issues they see as important into print.”

**Florence George Graves**, a freelance journalist who broke the story about Senator Bob Packwood’s sexual misconduct, applies the knowledge gained from her reporting to help clarify why “some aspects of what for decades the press has defined as the ‘private lives’ of public officials, when reported responsibly, are not only of legitimate public interest but also important to pursue and publish.” She describes the role women journalists have played in redefining this difficult terrain.

**Rita Henley Jensen**, who is editor in chief of Women’s Enews, describes why this Web-based news service exists, how it operates, and whether it will survive. It is, she writes, “an exercise in optimism,” as each day it attempts to spark media interest in an aspect of news involving women’s lives that mainstream media will have ignored. The goal: “that tiny Women’s Enews could be an agent of change for other, larger media.”

**Jane Daugherty** was the founding editor of the Detroit Free Press’s ongoing Children First campaign, in which the paper focused “hard news” reporting on children and their families and made that coverage prominent. She writes about the instrumental role many women journalists played in the formation of the children and family beats. ■

# A Pioneering Generation Marked the Path For Women Journalists

Today, women's roles and numbers have increased but some key issues remain unresolved.

By Christy C. Bulkeley

**F**orty years ago, give or take a few years, women journalists set out to enter what was, for them, a strange land—the land of “hard news,” news beyond the women’s sections of newspapers, the kitchen-home-family programs of television and radio. Some extraordinarily talented and dedicated women already worked in news; a few always had, here and there, around the country and even overseas. Some others who worked in women’s and Sunday feature sections, and “soft news” public service television, who covered issues often ignored by city side, were also poised for moves into news reporting and management. But this was a time when the unusual would gradually start to become more usual.

In 1971, a landmark study of journalists found that an estimated 22 percent of daily newspaper journalists were women, and women comprised nearly 11 percent of television journalists. And, during the next decade, growth in news workforces was accompanied by an increase in the percentage of women journalists. By the next study in 1982, researchers David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit reported in the 1986 book, “The American Journalist,” that more than 34 percent of the staff in daily newspapers were women and 33 percent in television, due in part to government licensing incentives. These percentages remained nearly static for the next 20 years, even though by the late 1970’s—several years before the first Weaver-Wilhoit survey—women were the majority of journalism students and have been 60 percent or more of journalism students since the early 1980’s.

On the job, progress for women during the 1980’s and 1990’s was mea-

sured in their advancement into management positions at newspapers and television. The 2001 annual survey of daily newspapers by The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), made just before the softening economy, estimated that women were 37 percent of the news staffs (for the second year) and 34 percent of “newsroom supervisors.” The Radio-Television News Directors Association’s (RTNDA) annual survey for 2000 reports that women are 40 percent of the news staffs and nearly 35 percent of television news management.

Beyond the news departments, a study for the Newspaper Association of America, the trade association for daily newspaper management, reported that women were 20 percent of top newspaper executives in 1998 (publisher, general manager, president, etc.), up from nine percent in 1990. RTNDA found that women were 14 percent of TV general managers in 2000, with “no consistent pattern based on market size, staff size, affiliation or region.”

For more than 20 years, Vernon Stone, a journalism professor, has tracked the status of women in TV and radio. His analyses—available at [www.missouri.edu/~jourvs](http://www.missouri.edu/~jourvs)—show women progressing from management in small and independent stations to larger group and network-owned stations. No one has tracked the numbers and positioning of women in newspapers as long or as consistently as Stone and RTNDA (which supported Stone’s work and continued the annual surveys with other professors following his retirement). The newspaper story must be reconstructed from other sources including three comprehensive histories of women in the various

journalism professions and a number of other research projects, most of which reported only some findings in terms of gender.

## Women and Newspapers

The stories about women and newspaper journalism are more complex than a mere telling of the numbers suggests since they are, not surprisingly, connected to broad societal trends. The 1960’s and 1970’s were, in addition to the decades of increasing women’s presence in news staffs, years of stunning news coverage of civil rights, Vietnam, Watergate, assassinations, resignations and all the related and mostly unprecedented works of the democracy—in short and in journalism terms, great news years.

These decades witnessed the emergence of the pioneering generation of women promoted into all areas of newspaper management—nearly three percent overall and more than five percent in news supervision by the mid-1970’s. But other challenges increasingly occupied newspaper executives during the 1960’s and 1970’s: Television news was gaining acceptance by viewers and advertisers as the ratio of newspapers to households dropped. The potential of technologies to revolutionize production was becoming apparent, as were the great costs involved in both capital and in the loss of newspaper production crafts. Family owners sold newspapers to groups or chains and newspaper companies—whether family-owned or otherwise—sold stock to the public. Business practices considered standard in other businesses were adopted and adapted to the new operating environments.

As women gained in numbers and experience, some discovered they weren't getting the pay and promotions of male colleagues. Raising such issues with managers rarely brought change, so formal complaints to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and lawsuits followed. According to mythology, the women should have been satisfied simply to be allowed to work as hard news journalists. Their actions were, at first, just one more bother. (Indeed, a male executive with The Associated Press joked about differing raises for a recently promoted man and woman while the sex-discrimination lawsuit against The A.P. was still pending in the early 1980's.) Yet women working for AP, The New York Times, and The Washington Post, among others, eventually won cash and management changes in pre-trial settlements. From the beginning (the women at Newsweek filed the first EEOC complaint involving a major news organization in 1970), this action involving legal challenges forced many male newspaper executives to take diversity issues more seriously. By the mid-1970's, Gannett attached part of executive bonuses to how successful managers were in helping women and minorities to progress.

By 1978, the leaders of the American Society of Newspaper Editors were concerned enough about the lack of minority journalists that they vowed to focus on increasing staff diversity and started an annual survey to monitor progress. Gender was not mentioned explicitly. Informally, women's rise into editing roles was tracked by counting editing jobs in each annual edition of the Editor & Publisher Directory. The stagnation in professional staff wasn't yet apparent. The ASNE goal was to have minority staff equal to the minority population by the year 2000. By 1998, with minority news staff at barely 11 percent, ASNE pushed the target date for parity with population to 2025

and added gender questions to the survey. Among those who lobbied ASNE to add women to the annual survey was the Journalism & Women Symposium (JAWS), which recognized the need to know what was going on. (As it turns out, white women are the only major Census 2000 group whose news staff presence is close to the population's.)

The problem seems to be systemwide. Though women dominate journalism schools, newspapers are of career interest to a less than propor-

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**The stories about women and newspaper journalism are more complex than a mere telling of the numbers suggests since they are, not surprisingly, connected to broad societal trends.**

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tional group (perhaps reflecting lower newspaper readership by girls than by boys). Further, women generally have been no more than half of new graduates hired by newspapers. And they leave newspaper jobs at a higher rate than men do. The Newspaper Association of America (NAA) has been monitoring newspaper staff turnover for more than a decade with periodic management surveys of turnover and surveys of people who left newspaper jobs. [Findings from those surveys can be found at [www.naa.org](http://www.naa.org).]

The Media Management Center at Northwestern University, after a two-year study including a survey and interviews, concluded that "women are underrepresented in newspaper management" and they are "clustered in low- and mid-management positions." Its recent report, "Women in Newspapers," discusses the "quite different perceptions of the key barriers that are holding women back" and also cites ways newspapers could reduce the turnover of women, which remains higher than that of men, and increase the likelihood of their promotion. The study emerged out of the center's realization that in its programs for senior executives, in classes of 30 to 40 people from top jobs in the newspaper indus-

try, "there was only a handful of women."

A Freedom Forum research project surveyed journalists from newspapers of 25,000 or greater circulation in 1999 to explore job satisfaction and turnover of racial/ethnic minorities. The research sample of 853 included 351 white journalists, 452 journalists of racial/ethnic minorities because of the project's purpose. Reanalyzed by gender (463 men, 389 women), samples often are so small that they offer clues

more than conclusions, but they do show the importance of seeking information by gender *and* race/ethnicity *and* age. Sometimes the various subgroups agree almost completely along gender or racial/ethnic divisions; other times, each

group is quite different from the others.

Women more than the men who said they might leave newspaper journalism identify as major factors a cluster of negatives—stress, family considerations, burnout, "feeling isolated from colleagues," working conditions. The questions were asked only of those 400 respondents who said they might leave. In that group, white women and African-American men agreed most strongly that something "could be done" to keep them in newspaper journalism. The whole sample was asked about some of the more straightforward situations—immediate supervisor support for individual journalist's stories and interest in career development, for instance. Responses weren't reported separately for the more than 40 percent who said they might leave newspapers. As with other judgment questions, in some of these women as a whole were more positive than men. Similarly, only the minority journalists were asked some of the key questions. Clustering responses show that women journalists of color over 35 are the most distressed, echoing the NAA finding that among former employees, African-American women had the least satisfactory experience.

## The Impact of Women on News Coverage

The record also is mixed on whether increased numbers of women journalists in a news organization affect content. Beginning in 1989, M. Junior Bridge inventoried women's bylines and women in news photos and stories in a 20-newspaper sample for Women, Men and Media. Her eight annual reports show female front-page bylines rising from 27 percent (in the first-year sample of 10 newspapers) to a range from 33 to 35 percent for the last five years (close to the staff percentage). Women were named in only 11 percent of the stories in 1989, to a high of 25 percent in 1993, and dropped back to 15 percent by 1996. The pattern for women in photos was similar but higher: 27 percent in 1989, 39 percent in 1993, and 33 percent in 1996.

Northwestern's Media Management Center, as part of an ambitious readership project, analyzed all stories for a week in 2000 from 100 newspapers. Men were quoted in 93 percent of the 3,500 front-page stories, women in 50 percent, and women were only about 20 percent of the sources overall. The broad-stroke results also show themes of all stories with only men as sources (more than 60 percent about science and environment, nearly 60 percent about parenting and religion) and those with at least one woman source (68 percent in education stories; health, home, food, fashion and travel more than 67 percent). Given the depth of the project and the care to capture all imaginable data that could be analyzed, the project might yet provide the elusive connections between newspaper staff diversity and compelling connection with its audience.

Anecdotally, women journalists (and journalists of color, male and female) have unlimited stories of ways they have made differences in news content—topics covered, sources consulted and quoted, storytelling approach, how stories are covered and illustrated—and how newspapers are managed. Presence of women as sources doesn't guarantee, of course, differing points of view from those

expressed by men or determine what's news any more than absence of women negates these possibilities. But, arguably, presence increases possibilities as Bridge found in two projects.

- One study, done for a consulting group in Oregon, examined the portrayal of leaders/leadership in selected newspapers and other publications in 1994 and 1996. Essentially, she found that white men are labeled leaders while women and men of color, described with the same attributes as the white men, weren't labeled as leaders.
- Bridge's second study looked at whether and how nurses were involved in health coverage in seven newspapers in September 1997, plus news magazines and trade publications. Bridge guided the research group that found nine percent of the stories that month were on health care. Nurses, the largest professional group within health care (at 2.5 million), were only four percent of the sources—most often in local news sections and in stories with female bylines. (A similar look at three major newspapers in 1990 had found nurses were only one percent of sources quoted directly, with byline gender not related to nurses as sources. Women physicians were cited more often by women reporters and somewhat more than their presence in the field.)

Presence also sends a message to readers of a greater sense of possibility and diversity. It helps respond to the complaint, "I don't see myself in that newspaper," that is heard from some who believe newspapers have little or no relevance to them. A greater sense of possibility comes from a report commissioned by the Pew Center for Civic Journalism and published last summer. Substantial percentages of the 360 editors who responded (of 512 editors of newspapers with 20,000 or more circulation) said in various ways that they and their staffs work to cover diverse aspects of stories rather than just conflict and controversy. For instance, more than half reported that

they try "always" or "most times" to report "the choices or trade-offs a community might need to address a community issue." Perhaps coincidentally, women are more likely than men to see issues in these levels of complexity.

About the time that women started making inroads into journalism, I set out to earn my way covering government and politics. I didn't know there were issues about journalists who are women. I found out fast and, with the top boss's encouragement, started seeking ways to deal with the issues. Eventually, I accepted a move into management. Many women (and those of our bosses who promoted diversity) believed some of us had to go there to help make changes that could make work better for women *and* men and could help journalism serve the public more effectively. We just didn't think it would take so long to happen.

The experience of pioneers—those women who were "the first," "the only," the plaintiffs—along with the increasing numbers of women who are today in newspaper work and in the executive suites, help define the perspectives and values many women bring with them to their jobs. Research also continues to help clarify and quantify issues and opportunities. When seen through the prism of various perspectives, this knowledge can lead to an expansion of the common ground between the genders. And at these points of common ground can also be found ways to increase journalism's value to democracy. Unhappily, research also reminds us that for now women journalists, in particular, will need to keep asking tough questions about our profession and continue to care enough to insist on getting answers. ■

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# The Value of Women Journalists

A journalist urges others to use their reporting skills to document gender discrepancies in their newsrooms.

By Susan E. Reed

I didn't fully understand what the wage gap meant for women until I was renegotiating a contract in 1994 as an overseas producer for CBS News based in London. I suspected I was being underpaid, so I called a few male producers at CBS who had my same level of experience and asked them how much they were making. Forty percent more, I learned.

I was stunned. I'd covered two wars for CBS, won an Emmy in the nine years I'd worked there, all the while sacrificing special occasions such as weddings, birthdays and vacations to broadcast breaking news. In return, I found out I was being paid less than men who were doing my same job. I called up the vice president of news in New York. We had words. I hung up on him. He hung up on me. He boosted my salary; it was still 18 percent less than the men were getting. That was as high as he could go, he told me, and if I didn't like it, I could leave.

The experience was an epiphany. I had always been interested in women's work issues but had never before fully analyzed the dynamics of my workplace. Before I'd found out what the men were making, I'd met with the other female producer in the bureau to discuss our salaries—she earned slightly more than I—but we were satisfied that we were in the same range.

It turned out we were making the classic mistake women often make, according to psychologist Brenda Major, in comparing ourselves to one another instead of with men. Major observes that this same-gender comparison reduces women's distress over feeling second-class within an organization, but it also erodes their sense of entitlement to better treatment. Comparing ourselves first to the male producers would have illuminated dis-

turbing discrepancies, which we then could have brought to the attention of the bureau chief, and at least introduced the issue of gender equity. However, I didn't pursue this strategy at the time because I was immediately transferred to New York, and until I began reporting on women and work issues, I was unaware of how to push for institutional change.

Because there are now so many women in the labor force, there is a tendency among the general public—journalists included—to think the “women's problem” has been solved. The high visibility of working women distracts us from questions of fairness in the workplace. Yet, compared with years past, today there is little in-depth coverage of gender discrimination and sexual harassment issues in the workplace, including lawsuits brought against corporations, and very little talk about women's issues even within news organizations.

Yet serious disparities persist. In 2000, female editors and reporters, on average, earned 90 percent of what male reporters and editors earned, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. This wage gap results in female journalists having significantly less personal financial power than their male counterparts. Suppose a female reporter begins her career at 21, earns \$35,000, and receives a four percent annual increase until she retires at 66. If her male counterpart earns 10 percent more per year than she does, and works for the same period of time, he will earn \$444,000 more than she does after a lifetime of work. If she takes off five years of work (the average amount of time women are away from their jobs) between 30 and 35, he would earn \$714,000 more, in today's dollars, than she does.

The value of this financial disparity can be measured in opportunities lost—the compromised college education of children, the smaller home, and less secure retirement. Because women earn less, they receive smaller pensions when they actually need larger ones because they live, on average, seven years longer than men do.

Nearly 30 years ago, in 1972, several women at The New York Times launched a fierce protest against management alleging they earned 87 percent of what men made, only three percent worse than the average disparity of print journalists today. Their complaint formed the basis of a class discrimination suit against the company which, after years of determination, the women eventually won.

Why do we hear no protest today about the wage gap? In part, it is because there are now significantly more women journalists on the payroll. Some of them, and certainly many of their forebears, were hired as a result of lawsuits that removed the barriers to entry and replaced them with affirmative action programs. Many more women now occupy some of the most prestigious and highly compensated beats, as White House reporters, foreign correspondents, and columnists. And more are in management positions.

Much of their struggle is now waged more discretely within institutions. Understanding this is key to their advancing within these organizations and to reporting on relevant issues in women's lives. When Maggie Steber became director of photography at The Miami Herald in 1999, she noticed a discrepancy in the pay of photographers who worked there. “There would be a woman who had been here as long as a man, for example, who was in my

opinion as good if not better a photographer and who hadn't been rewarded for it," she said. She examined the salaries and thought they formed a pattern showing the women were paid less than the men were. When Steber brought this to the attention of the assistant managing editor—a woman—she "very grudgingly allowed me to make some changes," Steber says.

After the editor changed jobs and the position of assistant managing editor was eliminated, Steber went directly to the executive editor and the managing editor. "They freaked out because they thought I was talking to the photographers about this. I said 'No, I am bringing this to your attention so we can make this right before something does come of it,'" said Steber, who persisted because she felt she had the law on her side.

Steber, who had no previous managerial experience and, in fact, had been a freelance photographer for 25 years before joining the Herald, saw the increases as a way to develop what she describes as her "stellar" staff. "Money is a reward for dedicating yourself to your profession and a reward for what you create," she said.

Although the women photographers at the Herald had compared their salaries and knew they were low, Steber suspects they were afraid to organize and confront management. She'd been told that the previous manager played the photographers against one another. After I studied corporate management at the Harvard Business School during my Nieman year, I learned about this technique: Some companies induce employees to compete against each other in the belief that it makes workers deliver their best work.

CBS is organized this way. It offers individual contracts to its "talent," a show business term for its producers and reporters. Private negotiations occur between the employee or her lawyer and the network's lawyer. The company offers an increase, and the employee tries to raise it by arguing how important she is, or by presenting a higher offer from a competing network.

By the time I left CBS News in 1997,

how salaries were determined was a mystery to me. There were no published pay scales for the editorial staff, and no one seemed to know what items went into the mix in determining salary levels. It was rumored that story count mattered, but records weren't reliable because producers' names were often left off the program run-downs. In 13 years at the network, I never received a performance review. Raises seemed to result from whether an executive producer liked someone and thought she was doing a good job.

The subjectivity of the compensation process keeps employees guarded and dissuades them from organizing for higher salaries. Workers fear they'll be penalized for questioning their managers. Realistically, the best way to overcome this intimidation is to reach out to others, discuss perceived problems, and join forces in investigating pay and promotion practices within the organization. I would bet that CBS News today would help employees conduct such an analysis. Upper management has changed in the past few years, and they recently settled a sex discrimination lawsuit with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for eight million dollars over the alleged lack of promotion, sexual harassment, and retaliation against female technicians at its owned TV stations.

Addressing salary disparity within a union is easier because often there are records, and there is also a collective consciousness about workers' rights. In order to find out salaries at The New York Times during the 1970's, Betsy Wade, a foreign editor, Grace Glueck, a reporter, and a few other members of the Women's Caucus spent long hours at the New York office of the Newspaper Guild copying salaries. As Nan Robertson vividly recounts in her book, "The Girls in the Balcony: Women, Men, and The New York Times," the women said they needed the information for negotiations, that the names would be expunged, and the chairman of the guild, Harry Fisdale, gladly obliged their request.

In more recent years, women staffers at The Philadelphia Inquirer raised questions about whether or not they

were being paid the same as the men were. Jane Eisner, who was then the editorial page editor and the highest-ranking woman at the paper, helped organize a salary review, which took place in 1997. "The human resources department at PNI [Philadelphia Newspapers Inc], the company that owns the Inquirer, surveyed all the salary data of the guild members, not of the very top editors, but those who were in the union, and looked at pay for males and females according to what they did, broke it down into departments, and while we did see a few discrepancies in a couple of places, overall the picture was one of fairness," she said. "It was an interesting experiment. I give the paper credit for allowing us to do the research. People felt they weren't being valued enough. But it was instructive to know that the facts show otherwise."

Clearly, some news organizations welcome challenges and ideas from managers, as well as the rank and file. Though the labor department documents an average pay deficit among journalists, it doesn't explain why men earn more than women do. It might indicate an institutional bias against paying women the same amount as the men. Perhaps some managers still believe it is the duty of men to support families, that women don't need to work, or that women will accept less. It might be because men occupy more powerful positions—positions into which women aren't promoted in equal numbers.

The proof of how far a newspaper has come in valuing and rewarding its female journalists can be seen on the masthead. The top three editors of The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Philadelphia Inquirer, to name a few, are male. Since 1977, women have been the majority of journalism majors, but something happens to them on the ladder to the top. Women comprise only 34 percent of newsroom supervisors at U.S. newspapers, and 24 percent of news directors at U.S. television stations. They are in the minority when it comes to the highest ranks of management at most networks and major newspapers.

At The Philadelphia Inquirer, Eisner was passed over to become the paper's editor in 1999 and now is a columnist for the Sunday magazine. Although she said she was extremely disappointed about her own situation, she is more concerned there are still no top women editors. "The top editors are still all men and they shape the news coverage. They are wonderful people, all of them, and they've been great to me, but I just don't feel they really understand my life and the lives of many women," she said. "We can't accurately write about our readers' lives unless we understand them better."

Why women aren't being promoted at the same rate as men are, and why they still lag behind in pay, are pressing questions that go well beyond the news business. But they present essential editorial issues for the industry. If men hold greater editorial power in newsrooms, does this influence which stories are covered, which receive the

most play?

In my recent experience as a freelance journalist, I have suspected it does. I pitched a detailed story about how the women science professors at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology managed to persuade their dean that the school had discriminated against them. It was turned down by several magazines—all headed by male editors with predominately male editorial staffs. Obviously, rejections are their prerogative. But had they been sensitized to the frustrating subordination many women experience at work, or if they employed more top female editors, they might have accepted it.

By not publishing these kinds of stories, publications miss an important audience that, I believe, is eager for this information. The New York Times' Sunday business section published an exclusive story I did on the resolution of one of the first sexual harassment cases against a dot-com company. My

reporting on this situation evoked a large response: During the first 24 hours, this story was among the Times' top five stories e-mailed by readers.

To do solid reporting on gender issues, it helps journalists to understand the power of bias and tradition that exists within organizations. By turning our investigative techniques on ourselves, we could begin to challenge the assumptions that women have already "made it" and little more needs to change. ■

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## 'The Girls in the Van'

What happened when a lot of women journalists reported on Hillary Clinton's campaign?

By Beth J. Harpaz

While covering Hillary Clinton's New York senate race for The Associated Press, I happened to read "The Boys on the Bus," Timothy Crouse's classic tale of reporters on the McGovern-Nixon campaign trail. Although nearly 30 years had passed since the 1972 presidential race, many aspects of campaign coverage remained unchanged—bad food, silly songs, inside jokes, and speeches we knew by heart.

But there was one big difference. Crouse and his colleagues were nearly all men. When I covered Hillary Clinton, my colleagues were predominantly female. Of course there were exceptions, notably correspondents for New York City's major dailies, The New York Times, Daily News and New York Post.

But they were outnumbered by women from AP, Reuters, Gannett's suburban daily The Journal News, The New York Observer, Newsday, USA Today, an ABC producer, the WCBS-TV and WCBS radio correspondents, and crews from a local news cable channel, NY1.

Throw in a few female photographers, three out of Clinton's four press aides, her personal assistants, and female TV correspondents from around the globe (who were always interrupting press conferences about taxes with questions like, "Hillary! What is your message for the women of Italy?") and I felt like I was back in my all-girl high school. Only instead of giggling with my friends in the stairwell, I was sharing stories about my kids with the other working moms on the minivan that

drove us from one campaign stop to another.

We were no longer the boys on the bus. We were the girls in the van.

How did that make things different? Well, for one thing, if campaign events ran later than scheduled, those of us with kids had to make emergency calls to babysitters and pay late fines to day-care centers. Some evenings I finished dictating my story by cell phone while pushing the stroller home; other nights I relied on campaign staffers (Clinton's or her opponents') to call with an update on an event I couldn't make without upending a complicated routine of homework, bedtime stories, and baths.

Still, I worried that any small kindness the campaign showed towards my children might compromise my integ-

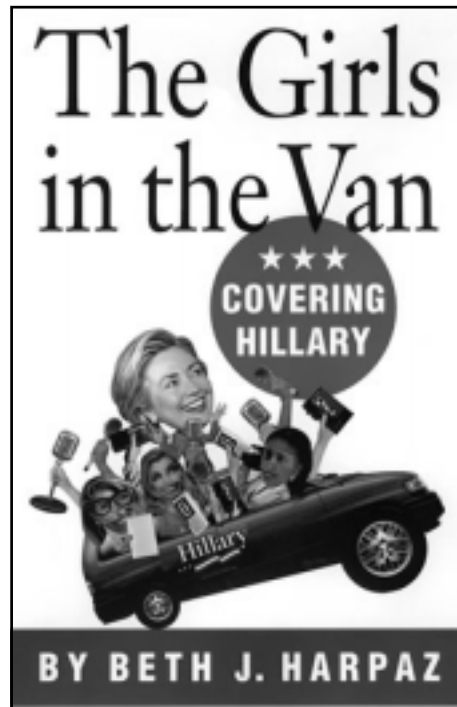
rity. When Clinton surprised me with a copy of her book, “Dear Socks, Dear Buddy,” inscribed to my boys, I sweated buckets worrying that it was an ethical lapse to take her gift. I immediately turned it over to my boss. But it turned out that The A.P. deems a copy of a book from an author to be a token gift, like a cup of coffee, and therefore not a conflict of interest. (I later sent Clinton a copy of my book about the campaign, so I figure we’re even.)

One day when I had to pick my kids up on time, I got word that Clinton was about to release a new campaign ad. The candidate had a favorite phrase to explain some of the choices she makes politically—“conflicting values”—so I e-mailed her press secretary to ask when the ad would be ready and added, “I’m probably walking out the door at four-thirty, so if I need to plan a stop at your office on my way home, I need to know. Sorry, but it’s the old conflicting values dilemma. Hillary on one hand. Seven-year-old Danny and two-year-old Nathaniel on the other.”

Two minutes later, the press secretary e-mailed me back. “Release is going out now. Ads should be available at the office presently. I vote for the kids, by the way.”

Was I wrong to push for the timely release of the ad because I needed to get home? Was I abusing my working mother status? Or was I merely asking for a small scheduling accommodation that might be requested by any reporter, male or female, who had a doctor’s appointment or tickets to a World Series game? This was the kind of question I struggled with daily and hoped that, on balance, my dilemmas were not all that different from anyone else’s.

By the way, I can confidently report that cynicism—the disease that overtakes most political reporters when they watch a candidate up close day after day—is gender-blind. My male and female colleagues were equally prone, when deconstructing campaign developments on the van, to dismiss some new issue promoted by either candidate with an eight-letter word that begins with a noun for a male cow. And both the boys on the bus and girls in



the van became very good at aping the first lady’s distinctive way of saying “Thank you so-o-o-o much!” or doing skits about some of the subjects that turned up repeatedly in her speeches. (Her obsessions ranged from the human genome to Harriet Tubman.) Most if not all of us refrained from voting in the election, a point of pride for many political reporters who want to be able to say that they do not weigh in with their opinions on the campaigns they cover.

Anna Quindlen, one of the only female reporters to cover city hall when she worked for The New York Times, once wrote that she’d had “years of worrying that the best stories were coming out of conversations in the men’s room.” So it was only fitting that on the first leg of Hillary’s famous “Listening Tour” in upstate New York, a couple of male reporters goaded (Albany) Times Union correspondent Lara Jakes into going after Clinton at a rest stop. Carrying a tape recorder, Lara gamely followed the first lady and an aide into the ladies’ room. “I’m not gonna ambush you in the bathroom,” she said in response to their glares. “I’m just gonna make sure no news happens.”

When Lara got back on the press bus, she wondered if she’d let down

her colleagues. “They send me in here to the bathroom and I don’t know if I’m supposed to ask her about Whitewater or what,” she recalled. “...I just don’t really feel comfortable asking her questions in the ladies’ room. I kept thinking, ‘What would a guy do?’”

Despite several other bathroom encounters between Clinton and reporters, I don’t believe anyone ever got a scoop over the sound of flushing toilets. For that matter, I don’t know of any big stories that Mayor Rudolph Giuliani passed on in the men’s room. Nor do I imagine his top press aide, a woman named Sunny Mindel, giving away secrets in the ladies’ room.

But it’s not only access to gender-segregated facilities and work-family juggling acts that are different now; sometimes it’s also the substance of the conversation.

In “Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail 72,” Hunter S. Thompson relates how he got to ride alone with Richard Nixon. There was just one catch: He could only talk about football. I fondly recall my equivalent: the day Clinton asked how my vacation was, and I unthinkingly responded, “It was great! I potty trained my two-year-old.”

The first lady looked at me as if she hadn’t heard me right. “You did what?” she said.

I suddenly realized I should have said something more conventional about my vacation, like “It was so relaxing.” Too late! I repeated the potty training line in a tiny voice, wishing I could disappear.

“You potty trained your two-year-old?” Clinton echoed, as if she couldn’t believe her ears.

I nodded, feeling humiliated. But I needn’t have worried. All of a sudden Clinton looked around at the other reporters and campaign workers and boomed, “This woman deserves a round of applause!”

Apparently when both candidate and reporter are female, a conversation about potty training is no less appropriate than a conversation about the Super Bowl—especially when the candidate’s platform includes not support for the construction of new stadi-

ums but support for child welfare and working families.

That night, the WCBS-TV news broadcast led with a segment on Clinton's new comfort level with the press corps. The segment included a tape of our conversation about potty training. Unbeknownst to me, the cameras had been rolling, and the station's correspondent—of course, a woman—deemed it worthy of the 11 o'clock news. ■

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*campaign, which Harpaz covered for The A.P. Her second book, "Finding Annie Farrell," the true story of five sisters from Maine, is due out in 2003.*

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## Women Journalists See Progress, But Not Nearly Enough

'The shortage of women editors reverberates through the ranks.'

By Jodi Enda

**T**he state of women in journalism today is one of those half-full, half-empty things. We no longer sit in the balcony, but neither do we have the best seats in the house.

During the past three decades, women in journalism as well as women in countless other fields have demonstrated what we always knew: We could do any job at least as well as men. At newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations, women have changed the very definition of news and, with it, the nation's political agenda. As more and more women entered newsrooms, we brought new sensibilities. Stories about education, welfare, children and the elderly have landed in greater numbers on the front pages of the nation's most esteemed newspapers. Stories from war-torn countries have taken on more of a human face, and stories from our own backyards have spawned public responses to homelessness, domestic abuse, and child prostitution.

Betsy Wade, whose married name (Boylan) topped the 1970's discrimination suit against The New York Times, likens the sensitivities of women journalists to those of a nursery-rhyme pussycat. In London, our feline protagonist is indifferent to the queen, choosing instead to zero in on a mouse

beneath the throne. "You see what you're looking for, what you're accustomed to," Wade says.

And women, as well as minorities, see things differently than white men do. Each of these perspectives enriches news coverage. Without each, a part of our society would be less visible. Without each, the picture of who we are would be incomplete.

Newspapers of yesteryear did not cover the waitress struggling to keep her family together or the single mom striving to balance work and home or the female college graduate blazing a trail in the corporate hierarchy. By the 1950's and 1960's, a few pioneering women's page editors reflected women's concerns about education, the economy, and the environment, but many feature sections still read as though women's principal preoccupation was how to remove ink stains from a shirt.

Newspapers not only failed to adequately cover the lives and interests of women and minorities, they insulted them by treating them as second-class citizens, or worse, as invisible. That has changed dramatically, though not dramatically enough. The overarching voice remains that of the white man. To succeed, many women and minority

journalists have learned to emulate that voice. Still, the presence of women and racial and ethnic minorities in newsrooms and on editorial pages has prompted media outlets to pay more attention to such issues as racial profiling and date rape, raising public awareness to a level that could provoke change.

The emergence of women and minorities in newsrooms coincided, of course, with similar shifts in the nation as a whole. No longer do news organizations need to report on the *first* woman police officer in a given city, but we might cover the first woman police chief. Ditto with women in newsrooms. While women have broken through countless barriers and held every position from publisher on down, the emphasis remains on "down." Nearly three decades after lawsuits at The New York Times and The Associated Press changed the face—literally—of the news industry, precious few women have reached top management.

The shortage of women editors reverberates through the ranks. Without women decision-makers, it is tougher for women reporters to have their voices heard and get issues they see as important into print. I am not just talking about breast cancer and abor-



Women journalists gathered at the federal courthouse in New York City's Foley Square on October 6, 1978 when the gender discrimination lawsuit, *Boylan et al. v. The New York Times*, was settled. *Photo courtesy of Barbara Dubivsky.*

tion here, though those topics remain vital. Women reporters often lead the pack on stories about the underclass, immigrants, child abuse, and racial and gender discrimination. I have done battle numerous times over stories about public housing tenants, welfare recipients or immigrants of color, news that my male editors feared would turn off those all-important white, suburban readers.

The dearth of women at the top affects not only how women are treated in the newspaper, but in the newsroom. Newspapers might champion child care on their editorial pages, but few offer it in their workplaces, making it difficult for women with children to put in the long hours required to cover many of the highest profile beats and to climb the ranks of editors. Parenthood has sidelined the careers of more than a few newswomen.

With an eye toward improving the lot of women in the media, a handful of women got together in 1985 to create the Journalism & Women Symposium (JAWS). Now larger and national in scope, JAWS works to support the personal growth and professional empowerment of women in newsrooms and to advocate a more accurate portrayal in the media of society as a whole. In 1998, for example, Sharon Rosenhouse,

then with The (San Francisco) Examiner, led a successful JAWS campaign to convince the American Society of Newspaper Editors to include women as well as minorities in its newsroom census. The idea was to track women's progress—or lack of it—in newsrooms.

JAWS annual gatherings focus attention on such topics as women's health, women in technology, women in the military, women in sports. JAWS also provides a solid network of support for women facing challenges in newsrooms across the country. "When you're one of the only women in a situation, you have to find others to confirm your sanity," explains Wade, who, in 1956, was the first woman hired onto the copy desk of The New York Times.

Two decades later, when Betsy Wade became the named plaintiff in *Boylan et al. v. The New York Times*, a male colleague asked her if she really wanted his job. "No, I don't want your job," Wade told him. "I want an equal shot at the job beyond yours." Which, she says today, "I never got, of course."

Undoubtedly, the atmosphere in newsrooms has improved greatly. For the most part, men and women work side by side with few problems. Men have learned not only to accept but also to appreciate women for their abilities and for their insights. Just as

women now write about such "male" issues as war, politics and football, men have made their own inroads into subjects regarded as traditionally female, such as child care and job discrimination.

And women are no longer relegated to the balcony of the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

Still, there lingers some resentment from white men who have convinced themselves that women are rising at their expense. At least three times in my career—when I was hired by The Philadelphia Inquirer, when I was assigned to cover the Pennsylvania Statehouse and later the White House—a white man told me point-blank that I was awarded his job strictly on the basis of gender. Upon further questioning, each man conceded my qualifications were at least as good as his were. I have seen this scene played out time and again among my colleagues.

What makes matters worse is when male editors assuage male egos by telling these bypassed men what they want to hear: that it is not their skill, but their gender that is holding them back.

In truth, male editors still practice the oldest form of affirmative action. "They hire people who went to the same school they did, who wear the same blue blazers and chinos. They hire people who remind them of themselves," said Kay Mills, author of *A Place in the News: From the Women's Pages to the Front Page*.

Early in her own career, Mills was told she would not be hired for a job at Newsweek because she was a woman. "I need someone I can send anywhere, like to riots," the Chicago bureau chief told her in 1966 and she recounted in her book. "And besides, what would you do if someone you were covering ducked into the men's room?"

Thirty-five years later, we know the answer: Follow him. Because, to a great extent, we still have to *act* like men. ■

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# Redefining the 'Private Lives' of Public Officials

Women journalists have played a major role in this changing coverage.

By Florence George Graves

For some journalists—especially those with old-guard thinking—the September 11 World Trade Center attacks that led to aggressive reporting on Osama bin Laden and bioterrorism brought an oddly welcomed relief. Then Enron followed. Finally, there was a return to “real reporting,” and “important journalism.” No longer was there a focus on “tabloid stories” such as Gary Condit and the missing Chandra Levy and whatever they were doing in private that dominated some news outlets before the 11th. No more messy tales about Bill Clinton and Paula Jones or Monica Lewinsky. In their minds, at least, no more voyeuristic reporting on the so-called “private lives” of public officials.

Of course, for some media organizations, especially the supermarket tabloids and some cable news networks, there's no question that a primary attraction in these stories was the sure-to-boost ratings combination of sex, power, fame and mystery. This is inevitable when the story involves an emotion and instinct as powerful, mysterious and easily exploited as sex. But even though the media sometimes report gratuitous stories involving sex—something I regard as unethical—we should not forget why some aspects of what for decades the press has defined as the “private lives” of public officials, when reported responsibly, are not only of legitimate public interest but also important to pursue and publish.

Unfortunately, this is not the message some influential media commentators seem to be sending. In the wake of the Monica experience, for example, historian and former presidential assistant Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and Washington Post columnist David Broder each have warned journalists about invading the “private lives” of public officials. “[N]othing seems to bother

people more about today's journalism than the blurring of lines between the public records of candidates and their private lives,” Broder wrote. And in a New York Times op-ed, Schlesinger posited that “Reporters seem obsessively interested these days in getting candidates to tell all” about various aspects of their private lives including, he says, “their sex lives.” In arguing for tighter guidelines, he wrote that “A measure of privacy is of estimable value in protecting the stability and sanity of our public servants.”

Public officials, like private individuals, deserve a zone of privacy. On that point there is little debate. However, far too often those urging privacy suggest that all stories with a sexual angle are, by definition, about a public official's private life. Although it perhaps should seem obvious by now, some critics still fail to fully recognize that even if an abusive sexual act is committed in private—meaning no witnesses, or in what traditionally has been considered a person's private realm—it still may be of legitimate public concern as a potential violation of law or ethical standards. Some exhortations for privacy also suggest that the way a politician (usually these stories involve males) treats women (or men) has no relevance to his fitness for office.

Before this kind of backlash thinking takes hold, it is important to reflect on how and why perceptions about what should or shouldn't be considered publicly relevant sexual behavior have changed during the past 30 years. It remains very rare for a journalist to ask about a politician's truly private sex life, as it should be. However, thanks in part to the increased presence of women as both reporters and editors, particularly political journalists, media decision-makers are finally asking

whether particular allegations of inappropriate or abusive sexual behavior—the kind that was well known in the past by some reporters but kept from readers and viewers—merit journalistic scrutiny. This reassessment has been part of evolving changes in society, which for centuries had been conditioned to believe—based on Aristotle's conception of the private and public spheres—that anything involving women (considered a lesser order) or sex (even abusive sex)—belonged in the private realm. As attention increasingly has been paid to consequences of inappropriate sexual behaviors, journalists—among others—have helped the public to understand that many behaviors involving sex should be considered legal or ethical matters relevant to the public interest.

Intellectually, at least, most of us now accept almost without question that rape, incest, child molestation, and child pornography are not private matters. Rape was the first abusive behavior to face legal sanction. As a society, we have been slower and more ambivalent about judging—legally or ethically—abusive behavior when it involves subtler questions concerning consent among adults.

What about a husband who forces his wife to have sex against her will? Is that a private, family matter? What about a boss who demands that his secretary have sex with him to keep her job? Is that private? What about a boss who makes repeated sexual advances to an employee but does not make any overt, explicit quid pro quo? What about a boss who has what he says is a “consensual” sexual relationship with an employee? Does that mean it is consensual? Does that mean it is ethical? What about a politician who presents himself as a happy family man and publicly promotes women's equal rights while





Former senator Bob Packwood catches an elevator in the Capitol a few hours after his resignation on September 7, 1995. On September 6, the Senate Select Committee on Ethics had concluded its three-year investigation into allegations of sexual and other misconduct by recommending his expulsion. *Photo by Kenneth Lambert, courtesy of The Washington Times.*

“privately” is a serial adulterer? What about a politician who has an affair with a young woman who later disappears without a trace?

These are the kinds of questions society—and journalists—have been grappling with over the years. It wasn’t until the early 1980’s that an increasing number of courts began to adopt feminist and legal scholar Catherine MacKinnon’s theory that sexual harassment is a form of illegal sex discrimination. Prior to that, society did not view sexual harassment as a violation of a person’s rights. The “shared narrative” said it was considered private, or “the way things are,” or perhaps a cost of being a woman in the workplace. And over time, as author Suzannah Lessard observed when writing in *Newsweek* about presidential candidate Gary Hart’s “Monkey Business” in 1987, “a feminist sensibility has seeped into the public consciousness...” so that even unethical behavior such as Hart’s became an issue of public concern reflecting “awareness of the dignity and equality of women.”

Anita Hill’s allegations in 1991 about

inappropriate sexual remarks by Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas came five years after the 1986 landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson* established that even a “hostile workplace” (not just quid pro quo harassment) could be illegal sexual harassment. This decision led U.S. companies to create major new guidelines and training programs for employees. Even so, much of the press and the Congress seemed unaware that sexual harassment was a significant problem for women in the workplace. As Geneva Overholser, then with The Washington Post Writers Group observed, “Women’s reporting” made the Thomas-Hill story about allegations of unethical conduct “the story it was.” In fact, “I don’t think it would have been that story if men had been the only ones in those political reporting positions,” she told *Columbia Journalism Review*.

Following the Thomas-Hill hearings, the general problem of sexual harassment on Capitol Hill—known to many Washington reporters—seemed to me

like the most obvious follow-up story. At the time, I wondered why no major news organizations were doing it. Working as a freelance journalist, I began months of reporting to confirm the Senator Bob Packwood story, most of the time in despair, fearing it would never be published. I am pretty certain that, pre-Anita Hill, no major newspaper would have published it.

Even post-Anita Hill, I had trouble finding a news organization willing to take it on before I finally decided to approach The Washington Post, which eventually agreed to pursue it. Others I’d approached told me they didn’t consider it “a story.” If it was a story, a major newspaper would have done it already, or so the thinking went. Some media brass still considered it a story “about sex,” about Packwood’s private life, instead of about abuse of power that involved sexual misconduct rather than financial or some other misconduct traditionally deemed relevant to the public interest.

After the Packwood story—a story of repeated sexual misconduct by the senator over many years—was published in 1992, political pundits and prominent journalists acknowledged there had been rumors about Packwood suggesting this behavior for years. Apparently none had bothered to follow up sufficiently. One reason might have been the prevalent shared narrative that sexual favors were a perk of the powerful. This sense of privilege was reinforced by the fact that Congress had exempted itself from most workplace laws—including sexual harassment—that it had passed for employers in the rest of the country. (This exemption disappeared for senators after the Packwood case, when the Senate adopted the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995.)

Or perhaps journalists had internalized some editors’ attitudes. For example, when we were guests on National Public Radio’s “On the Media” program in 1994, Martin Tolchin, who was then one of The New York Times’ top Washington reporters, observed that his paper would have been very reluctant to pursue the story of Sena-



tor Packwood's predatory sexual behavior. He explained that stories involving sex made editors "skittish." And in Tolchin's new book, "Glass Houses: Congressional Ethics and the Politics of Venom," co-authored with his wife, Susan J. Tolchin, they argue that one of the senator's diary entries, suggesting professional misconduct in soliciting work for his estranged wife from a lobbyist, "was much more damaging" than the charges of sexual misconduct. Their reasoning: "because the allegation involved the more serious charge of using public office for private gain."

I disagreed with this old-school reasoning when I began working on the story. I believed this was a story about human rights, injustice and serious abuse of public office for private gain. Even though the media often downplayed—sometimes even trivialized—the profound consequences Packwood's behavior caused many of his victims, I knew there were serious repercussions for several women who not only had been humiliated, scared or degraded, but also professionally or financially ruined. Some quit their jobs—uprooting their families or taking lower-paying work—because of Packwood's persistent unwelcomed advances.

Our reporting identified more than 40 women whose lives had been negatively affected by the Senator's actions. Seventeen chose to testify during the subsequent Senate Select Committee on Ethics investigation, and several said they'd been terrified by his advances. Some allegations were tantamount to sexual assault. For the first publicly known time, the committee considered sexual misconduct allegations as a violation of the Senate's ethics standards. Although the media repeatedly referred to Packwood's behavior as "sexual harassment," the committee avoided using such legal terms and instead made the same distinction we made in our Post stories by using the broader term "sexual misconduct." The issue was not whether Packwood's conduct met a legal standard for harassment or sexual assault (in fact, the statute of limitations had passed on the

reported incidents). At issue was abuse of power, an ethical issue.

The committee concluded in its 1995 report that Packwood had "engaged in a pattern of sexual misconduct between 1969 and 1990" that brought "discredit and dishonor upon the Senate" resulting in "conduct unbecoming a Senator." The committee's report concluded that "these incidents, taken collectively, reflect a pattern of abuse by Senator Packwood of his position of power over women who were in a subordinate position, either as his employees, as Senate employees, prospective employees, campaign workers, or persons whose livelihood prevented them from effectively protesting or seeking redress for his actions. These women were not on an equal footing with Senator Packwood, and he took advantage of that disparity to visit upon them uninvited and unwelcome sexual advances, some of which constituted serious assaultive behavior, but all of which constituted an abuse of his position of power and authority as a United States Senator."

This was a groundbreaking decision not only because it recognized sexual misconduct as an ethical issue for senators, but also because it recognized that abuse of power, in a case like this, could extend beyond women in the workplace to, for example, conduct with a hotel worker, a waitress, or a babysitter. The committee, whose members and staff included high-ranking women, also set an historic precedent by making no distinction in gravity among the three abuses of power they charged him with—sexual misconduct, obstructing the investigation by altering his diaries (evidence), and linking personal financial gain to his official position when soliciting jobs for his wife. (The other two abuses of power were uncovered during the Senate's investigation of the sexual misconduct allegations.) The committee voted unanimously to recommend his expulsion from the Senate.

Despite this widely publicized, unprecedented official articulation of an ethical standard involving politicians, much of the mainstream media, espe-

cially those at more prestigious publications, still seem skittish about reporting stories that involve questionable sexual behavior by public officials, especially when there is no clear violation of law. This reluctance was reflected by then New York Times executive editor Joseph Lelyveld in a 2001 Times article by Felicity Barringer. She concluded that the story about Representative Gary Condit and the missing Chandra Levy "shows that the press can have legitimate reasons for opening the door to a private life," especially when someone's life or safety is at stake. She also noted her paper's mostly low-key coverage of the story and quoted Lelyveld as saying, "We do our best not to be dragged into a consideration of the sex lives of people public or private." "However," he added, "there are certainly legitimate questions about whether he has been forthcoming and helpful in the search for this woman whom he obviously knew well."

His words caught my attention. Was he saying that the Times makes every effort to avoid stories involving rape, sexual harassment, battering or incest? Presumably Lelyveld, who did not return my phone call seeking clarification, would respond that that isn't what he meant and that, of course, the Times does cover those kinds of stories.

However, some journalists continue to be confused about what the real public issues are when stories involve politicians and abusive sexual behavior. Consider two of numerous examples in which journalists say—erroneously—that high-profile stories involving politicians and sex focused on their private lives. In a 1999 New Republic article, Peter Beinart referred to articles about Gary Hart, Clarence Thomas, and Bob Packwood as "groundbreaking investigations into *politicians' personal lives*." Writing in these pages about Packwood in 1994, Patrick Yack, then editor of The News & Record in Greensboro, North Carolina, noted that "Americans genuinely dislike the notion that the press...is snooping into the *private lives* of politicians" (my italics in both examples).

In concluding his New York Times op-ed, Arthur Schlesinger tried to bolster his case by citing the oft-quoted remark about privacy made by Justice Louis D. Brandeis in a 1928 Supreme Court dissenting opinion. He wrote that the creators of the Constitution conferred on Americans “the right to be let alone—the most comprehensive of the rights of man and the right most valued by civilized men.”

But what about “civilized women”? Don’t they have a right to be let alone, too?

In an 1890 Harvard Law Review article, Brandeis (writing before he joined the court) and Samuel D. Warren condemned the press for “overstepping in every direction the obvious bounds of propriety and of decency” by publishing “gossip,” such as “details of sexual relations,” to “satisfy a prurient taste.” Commentators often cite this passage as they urge journalists to keep their notebooks away from public officials’ private lives.

But in this article, Brandeis and Warren—who were agonizing then about the dangers of the newly developed camera—actually argue for a very broad standard when it comes to reporting on political people, one that continues to make sense now, more

than a century later. They wrote that “in varying degrees,” political figures “have renounced the right to live their lives screened from public observation” and assert that the right to privacy Americans cherish should not keep the public from learning information—especially about those serving in the political sphere—that is “of public or general interest.” They thought this usually should include information that has a “legitimate relation to or bearing upon any act” by an individual “in a public or quasi public capacity” or that has “a legitimate connection with” a person’s “fitness for a public office” or for “any public or quasi public position” that a person seeks “or for which he is suggested.” They fully acknowledged that many judgments would be somewhat subjective but necessary.

Applying their principles depends on your definition of “legitimate.” Fortunately, over time, especially as more women have entered journalism, the definition—like the definition of news—has been evolving and maturing. And after hundreds of years of being irrelevant to society’s evaluation of a politician’s character or competence, sexual misconduct gradually has become considered, at a minimum, a relevant factor.

But because sex is a highly charged issue, traditionally considered a strictly personal or private subject, even an unquestionable “right,” some women believed they risked their careers by urging mostly male editors to reconsider conventional definitions of private sexual behavior. Several women journalists tell me this continues to be a challenge in some newsrooms today. ■

*Florence George Graves, a resident scholar at Brandeis University Women’s Studies Research Center and the founder of Common Cause Magazine, broke with Charles E. Shepard (Nieman Fellow 1991) the Senator Bob Packwood sexual misconduct story for The Washington Post. Her research on the public/private dichotomy in politics and in the media has been supported in part by an Alicia Patterson fellowship, a Pope Foundation Journalism Award, and a Goldsmith Research Award from Harvard University’s Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy. Some portions of this article were published in the Radcliffe Quarterly.*

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## An Internet News Service Reports News and Views of Women

For Women’s Enews, the challenge is to be able to finance the telling of these stories.

By Rita Henley Jensen

Ever Burton takes a bite of her fettuccini while she checks her e-mail on a gadget she wears on her belt. She now teaches law at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism, and after spending her formative years as deputy general counsel for the New York Daily News and then as CNN’s top lawyer, she admits to being a news junkie. She also is a

member of Women’s Enews’ advisory board.

“This is so great,” Burton exclaims when she sees the day’s Women’s Enews story pop up on her tiny screen. “I already know what the news is that I get from everywhere else—the White House did this, the Congress did that, Rumsfeld thinks this. Women’s Enews tells me what I don’t already know.”

Covering stories often missed by behemoth commercial news outlets is precisely why Women’s Enews exists. Each morning, Women’s Enews serves up one story to 6,000 e-mail subscribers and on Wednesdays a commentary appears. Updates are made each day to our Web site ([www.womensnews.org](http://www.womensnews.org)), which receives 70,000 daily visitors. Not only do e-mail subscribers consis-

tently receive news they don't already know, but the journalists who write for this news service report news about issues that affect women's lives, particularly. For example, in a recent week our Web page and news service featured pieces on:

- Women's wages dropping in comparison to men's.
- A government investigation into so-called crisis pregnancy centers run by anti-choice advocates.
- A comprehensive look at women running in gubernatorial races.
- An examination of three proposals for changes in Social Security laws.
- The possible undervaluing of women's lives by the actuarial rules used by the special master in charge of The September 11th Fund.

Women's Enews can best be described as an exercise in optimism. The vision for it emerged out of a 1996 roundtable discussion with the solemn title "Feminism in the Public Eye" funded by Barbara Lee Family Foundation and organized by NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund. Author Susan Faludi, columnist Katha Pollitt, legendary *Glamour* editor Ruth Whitney, and Ms. editor Kate Rounds were asked to help the fund understand why feminism had such a bad reputation in the dominant media and what might be done to change it. At the time, I was writing a column for The New York Times Syndicate on women and the law and joined the discussion.

It wasn't until three years later, in 1999, that the fund decided to act on this vision and create an Internet news service in which stories would go to e-mail subscribers but also be made available to commercial media, all at no cost to the recipient. One hope was that once these stories were found and reported, then coverage of these issues might expand on the pages of U.S. newspapers and in nightly newscasts.

Kathy Rodgers, president of NOW Legal Defense, asked me to create this new entity. In offering me this opportunity, she tapped my personal and professional frustration with the failure of commercial media to adequately

report on many issues critical to women's well-being. Not only did I think welfare reform—an issue affecting millions of poor and low-income women—had not been well covered, but I believed that reporting by the mainstream media often failed to convey essential information and perspectives about women's medical care, reproductive rights, job bias, wage discrimination, and child care. And I knew that many other women shared my frustration and linked the omission of this type of coverage to the relative lack of women in news media ownership and management.

"When women are at the top, we can and do change the culture," Pat Mitchell, head of the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) said at a forum hosted by the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. The occasion was the release of the center's March 2001 report that found that only 13 percent of top executives of media, telecommunications and e-companies were female, and women held only three percent of the "clout" jobs. The American Society of Newspaper Editors issued similar findings a month later. Its most recent annual newsroom census found that two out of three newsroom supervisors were male, as were 60 percent of the reporters. These numbers have remained static, even though women comprise 70 percent of journalism students.

As content analyses demonstrate, women's presence in the news columns and on TV news shows is remarkably similar to the percentage of women in the top ranks. Male sources consistently outnumber female sources, and women's voices appear more often in "soft" news coverage. The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center and Women, Men and Media (a media watchdog project) reported in 1998 that on the three U.S. broadcast networks, 87 percent of sound bites by experts were provided by men.

And this trend continues on the nation's opinion pages and news talk shows. Geneva Overholser reported on National Public Radio that, during the first week after September 11, The New York Times and The Washington

Post—the two dailies most read by policymakers—had 65 signed opinion pieces, with only four written by women. In the Los Angeles Times national editions that week, 22 out of 23 op-eds were by men. In December, the White House Project announced similar findings related to appearances on Sunday talk shows. The project said its research indicated that women constituted only 10.7 percent of guests on these high-profile platforms before September 11, and they made up just 9.4 percent of guests during the following months.

A 1999 survey of women of color in U.S. newsrooms by the International Women's Media Foundation found that only 22 percent of those surveyed believed that the staff in their newsrooms reflected the diversity of the market it served. Among the same group, only one in four believed that the news produced by their organizations reflected the diversity of its market.

Yet another content study of The New York Times pointed out that women wrote only 15 percent of the op-eds in 1998 and only 28 percent of the magazine's cover stories. And when women were published on these pages, more often their topics included family, parenting and other domestic issues, not foreign policy issues or economic analysis.

In September 1999, I became editor in chief of Women's Enews and began to figure out how to create a news Web site that would attract journalists and learn how exactly one would go about finding and reporting news related to women's lives. Scanning The Associated Press's daybook would not work for us. Women's Enews had to find news that people didn't already know and find sources—not the conventional ones—who could lead us to that news.

Gradually, we came to realize we had to identify not new methods of covering the news, but new approaches to how we use available sources. What follows are examples of what we did:

- Because women direct many non-governmental organizations, one of our early efforts was to identify these organizations and develop news sto-

ries relating to their issues.

- Women leaders can be found in federal, state and local governments. Clearly, these women represent broad electoral constituencies, so we decided to look at specific pieces of legislation they might be proposing that related to women instead of simply reporting on them because they are women.
- Every governmental body—from the United Nations to the U.S. Supreme Court, from city councils to boards of education—have platforms, decisions, regulations and policies involving specific women's issues. Reproductive health is an example of an arena of public policy that strongly affects women. Economic development is another. We find them and report on them.

Using these three primary sources of news—and a tiny budget—we reached out to experienced freelance journalists from around the world to report these stories about topics of great interest to women, news that otherwise would be unlikely to receive this kind of worldwide media attention. We also asked every member of JAWS (Journalism & Women Symposium) to subscribe and offer us ideas. And we created a WE-Sources area on our Web site that lists female experts on more than 150 topics as a resource for journalists and others.

On June 15, 2000, Women's Enews was launched. That day our story was about the Philadelphia police disregarding many women's complaints of rape. It was written by a man—the reporter who broke the story—veteran Philadelphia Inquirer investigative reporter Mark Fazlollah. Soon we were off and running and, given that it was an election year, we did a lot of reporting on politics. That coverage focused on efforts to elect more women to public office. Journalists—many of them women—also wrote stories about education, business and finance, science and technology, health and reproductive rights, culture and important legal developments affecting women. There are several topics we watch very closely, looking for oppor-

tunities to report new news.

With each assignment, the central question our reporters ask is: What do these events or this news mean for women? A story about a proposed bankruptcy bill examined what it would mean for single women who are heads of households, and what we reported was not encouraging for women. While the legislation had plenty to please banks and credit card companies, its key provision would have put credit card companies—with their enormous legal resources—on the same footing as parents seeking child support payments. We broke a story about inadequate medical and legal services for rape victims in New York City, and Women's Enews carried a story by a Ugandan journalist who wrote about why women in her country did not have the right to own land. Our reports on anti-abortion violence revealed links between America's neo-Nazis and the anthrax threats to clinics and political leaders.

Bias is a loaded word in journalism, as I am reminded each time a journalist asks me whether Women's Enews is biased. When journalists first write for us, some seem unsure about whether we play by the usual rules or prefer “slanted” pieces. One reporter who worked for Newsday and the (New York) Daily News and now writes as a freelancer for us recently asked me if I wanted her to include comments from the pro-life movement in the piece she was writing about New York City's new abortion policies. “Yes,” I wrote back to her on e-mail. “Yes, indeed.”

Our reporters do seek out a wide range of comment and information and, as editor, I do my best to scrub out adjectives and adverbial phrases that indicate a point of view. But within these parameters, the staff is dedicated to equal and fair treatment for women—and, if that is a definition of feminism, then we are feminists. Thus, our lack of “objectivity” might play out in our story selection, yet we believe that the journalists who write for us report with the kind of fairness, balance and accuracy that would be similarly applauded at other news outlets.

To develop readership for Women's

Enews, we reached out to those we consider our natural audience: women interested in public policy. We sent word to the head of the 100-plus-member National Council of Women's Organizations, to the 92 research centers that belong to the National Council on Research on Women, and state and local women's commissions in every state. We encouraged them to send us their press releases and let their members know about how to subscribe to us. Women's Enews also sought out, as subscribers, journalists and editors at newspapers and other media outlets. Many signed up, and we let them know how they could reprint our stories or otherwise reuse them as long as they asked permission (via e-mail) and credited Women's Enews and the writer. Once a week, we send 200 of the leading newspapers in the country a press release detailing the stories we've published; our weekly commentary also goes to 200 editorial page editors.

Stories have been picked up and republished by other media, from MSNBC's Web site to the Chicago Tribune. But there have not been as many “pick-ups” as we'd like to see. After freelancer Siobhan Benet's story on the increase of AIDS among older women went out via e-mail and was included in our regular press release, we thought we'd be inundated with requests to use the story. Never happened.

To me, this speaks volumes about why Women's Enews exists and how difficult it is to realize our goal—that tiny Women's Enews could be an agent of change for other, larger media. It also reminds me why we must keep at it, not only because we still hope that commercial media will change, but also to meet our readers' need for the information we distribute.

In our first 18 months, our goal has been to build a robust audience and earn recognition for our journalism. We've done that, with individual praise received from many journalists as well as awards for articles we've published. In addition to Benet's AIDS story, which won the Newswomen's Club of New York prize for best Internet “features and service journalism,” we won the

University of Michigan Media Award for Excellence in Coverage of Women and Gender and a certificate of excellence from Women in Periodical Publishing. By the second half of 2001, Women's Enews even began to gather some strong financial support, most significantly a \$250,000 two-year grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Then September 11 happened. NOW Legal Defense—like most nonprofits—was forced to tighten its belt, and Women's Enews began to be seen as an expensive experiment from a different time. Simultaneously, Rodgers and I

decided that Women's Enews would become more credible if it was a stand-alone news service funded by many sources. I wrote a business plan and on January 1, the relocated Women's Enews was born as a self-supporting news agency, with the encouragement of the Knight Foundation and the assistance of the Barbara Lee Family Foundation.

While we travel on this new path, we look with optimism at our growing list of subscribers. We intend to remain a nonprofit while reducing our reliance on foundations and continuing to seek new sources of revenues from what we

do, perhaps by licensing and reprints. Subscribers won't be charged, but we do and will ask them for contributions, much like National Public Radio does. And I keep my fingers crossed that we honor the first rule of a new media outlet: to survive. Then, we move on to the second: to thrive. ■

*Rita Henley Jensen is editor in chief of Women's Enews.*

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## Women Journalists Spurred Coverage of Children and Families

‘...I no longer had to approach my work as though I didn't have children.’

By Jane Daugherty

A handful of reporters and editors, most of them women, many of them parents of young children, diverted significant media resources during the mid- to late -1980's to forge new beats focusing on the needs of children and families. Some won major awards, some flopped, quite a few actually impacted public policy and improved children's lives. Perhaps more surprising, some 15 years later, the beat goes on.

Cathy Trost was a children's beat pioneer, even though she doesn't like the name of what she helped create. “I always disliked ‘the children's beat’ name because it never accurately described the range of serious coverage the beat actually involved,” Trost said in a recent interview. While at The Wall Street Journal, Trost, a versatile and respected national reporter returning from maternity leave, found her personal concerns shared by not only increasing numbers of her readers, but journalism colleagues as well. “For a variety of reasons, suddenly children's issues were on the radar screen. It was important to businesses; it was a pub-

lic policy concern,” she said.

Trost's work focused on public policy and also on the impact on businesses brought about by emerging children's and families' needs. Witness these front-page headlines from her coverage:

- Human Tragedy: How Children's Safety Can Be Put in Jeopardy By Day-Care Personnel (October 1988)
- Pampered Travelers (of the Tiny Kind) Take Over Airliners. (March 1989)
- Born to Lose: Babies of Crack Users Crowd Hospitals, Break Everybody's Heart. (July 1989)
- Second Chance: As Drug Babies Grow Older, Schools Strive to Meet Their Needs. (December 1989)
- Parental Concern: As Nanny Agencies Proliferate, So Do Gripes About Service. (July 1990)
- Workplace Debate: Businesses and Women Anxiously Watch Suit on Fetal Protection. (October 1990)

Trost credits her editor, Al Hunt, then the newspaper's Washington bu-

reau chief, with helping make this work possible. “He's an example of the new breed of male bosses who understood professionally and personally the implications of women in the workforce.... Back when I was starting the beat, he was the father of three young children and had a working wife [TV anchor Judy Woodruff],” said Trost. “It must have had something to do with his thinking about what's news.”

Elsewhere, journalists, initially mostly women, were writing about children's poverty, infant mortality, the dangerous lack of childhood immunizations in many communities, decaying public schools, flawed foster care systems, and child abuse. These reporters were mostly working on the newspapers' traditional pink-collar beats—education, social welfare, human services, poverty and public health. But the content of their stories about children and family was changing. Now, many were based on hard new demographic data, included in-depth analysis of economic and social implications, and most focused intensely on the actual circumstances of children's

and families' lives rather than using a particular incident merely as a transitional anecdote.

Crack cocaine, tragically, was the topic that propelled the children's beat stories onto many front pages, magazine covers, and to the top of the network news. The drug's dehumanizing impact on its users was nowhere more evident than in stories about children being born having been exposed to the drug in utero, about addicted parents selling their children for a few rocks, about the violence involving young people in communities where crack was being sold, and about the violent abuse of children committed by those under crack's influence.

Indeed, the crack epidemic, especially from about 1984 to 1990, directly coincided with the proliferation and institutionalization of children's beats at many of the nation's leading news outlets. Martha Shirk at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Carol Lawson at The New York Times, Carole Simpson and Rebecca Chase at ABC News, Melissa Ludtke at Time, Leslie Baldacci at the Chicago Sun-Times, Carol Kreck at The Denver Post, John Woestendiek at The Philadelphia Inquirer, Trost at The Wall Street Journal, Jack Kresnak and I at the Detroit Free Press, and dozens of others around the country worked hard to ensure that stories focusing on children and families were featured more prominently. This reporting was also bolstered by photo and graphic resources.

These new children's beat stories were crafted very differently than the old fluff/sob story/features formulas. Reporters relied heavily on hard news elements and highlighted public policy dimensions, but their stories lacked neither passion nor good writing. In fact, fine writing was often the norm for the beat. By merging the more creative, storytelling qualities with social and economic analysis (similar to that being done by the business and national desks), children's stories found their way to the newspaper's front page or to the top of the evening news.

The role that many women journalists played in propelling the children and family beat forward cannot be overstated. It is certainly true that many news stories about children's lives would have surfaced and been reported even if women had not been in positions as reporters and editors to champion them. But the particular attention these topics garnered, the play these stories received, the resources allocated to their coverage, and the ways in which reporting was handled, all of these



Logo used by the Detroit Free Press.

decisions were heavily influenced by women journalists. And these women knew—perhaps, in part, from their own experiences as new parents—that what was happening to children and their families was not “soft” news but was as vital and pressing as the topics that normally made it to Page One. That some men, in turn, became champions, too, made easier the job of putting such coverage on the radar screen at many publications.

At the Milwaukee Journal, Nina Bernstein wrote about children and family issues in the broader context of a human services beat, then as a special projects reporter at Newsday, and more recently as a national reporter at The New York Times. While at Newsday in the 1980's, Bernstein covered what would turn out to be a 26-year landmark lawsuit against New York's dis-

criminatory foster care system. (Bernstein wrote about the family involved in this lawsuit in her critically acclaimed book, “The Lost Children of Wilder: The Epic Struggle to Change Foster Care,” published in 2001.) It was then that she began to observe a shift in the public's willingness to empathize with the plight of the nation's increasing number of poor children.

While many news organizations, including Newsday, did not create separate children's beats, many others did.

A study by Margaret Engel, conducted by the University of Maryland's Casey Journalism Center on Children and Families (CJC) in 1993-94, found more than half of the 62 newspapers and news services surveyed had created children and/or family beats, most of them during the early 1990's. But the CJC survey also found that “the reporting power is sparse and thinly scattered. Too often, the existence of a beat depends on the serendipity of having a motivated reporter with an interest in children's matters.” And usually that reporter was a woman.

But as Trost, the founding director of the CJC said, “The emergence of a children's beat is an important development because it professionalizes the reporting topic and puts it on a level playing field with more traditional beats.” To further professionalize coverage, in 1993 the CJC began hosting annual seminars for journalists who applied to come there for intensive study of issues affecting children and families. (Regional seminars have also been held on topics such as coverage of welfare reform.) More than 275 magazine, broadcast and print journalists have attended these CJC children's beat seminars. The vast majority of journalists who do attend are women. I was in that first class of 29 CJC Fellows, four of whom were men. Our topic: “The American Family: A Tradition Under Siege.”

Beth Frerking was also among the first group of CJC fellows. She credits Deborah Howell, Newhouse bureau chief in Washington, for creating her

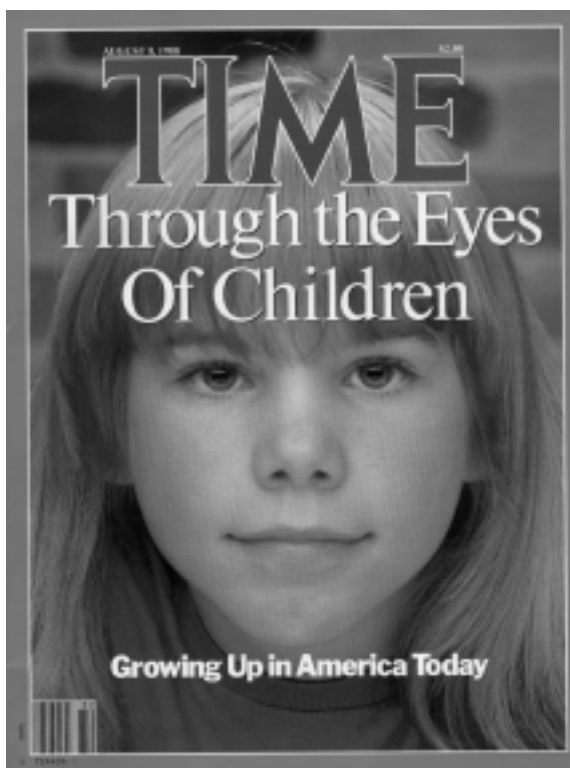


beat at Newhouse News Service. By creating this national news service beat, Howell and Frerking were able to put children's and family policy stories on front pages of newspapers around the country including Atlanta, Seattle, San Diego and San Antonio. "I was on maternity leave when she [Howell] came up with the beat," Frerking said. "She wanted it covered, not from a features perspective, but as hard news. I came from that background, having chased hurricanes, political campaigns, all sorts of breaking news.... The goal was not to cover Washington stories on children and family issues, but to cover stories that were national that affected families and children."

Howell said her decision to create the beat was prompted by "a lot of concern about the American family, high divorce rates, children at risk. [But] we didn't want to just write about problems." Frerking expanded the beat's boundaries with stories that explored the impact of changing family structures on work, the economy, health care, and the ways in which children are being raised. Perhaps her most memorable story was a quick turnaround piece during the investigation of the still-unsolved murder of JonBenet Ramsey. Frerking wrote about how young girls are sexualized in child beauty pageants, a topic that before then hadn't been reported. Her story examined the exploitation of events that dress little girls in provocative clothing with heavy makeup and then have them perform in sexually precocious "talent" routines.

"The story was cutting edge not because it was so brilliant," said Frerking, "but because I no longer had to approach my work as though I didn't have children.... That allowed a perspective that had often been lacking. There was significant reader response and other news organizations jumped on the story."

The question now is whether children's and family beats will be sus-



A Time cover from 1988.

tained and receive similar types of treatment from editors. "There's been very little coverage of that beat since September 11, but many of the stories have included the impact of terrorism on families and children," Howell observed. However, she added, "I can't predict the life of the children's beat."

Now the head of the CJC, Frerking said she is optimistic. "I hope the coverage continues and increases.... I picked up newspapers for several days after September 11 and kept asking myself, 'Where are the women reporters? Where are their bylines?' Then stories started surfacing about who the victims were, how their families were being counseled, the story of the family who died together en route to a fellowship in Australia. Those are the stories people are hungry for." And they also turned out to be stories that were predominantly reported by women.

Indeed, a memorable story of heroism in the wake of the bombing of the World Trade Center was filed by Sue Shellenbarger and published in *The Wall Street Journal*: "Is worksite child care safe? Amid new fears for children,

many parents wonder whether bringing kids to high-profile, visible workplaces is unwise.

"The 14 teachers at the Children's Discovery Center in 5 World Trade Center, a building that later partly collapsed, had taken in only 42 early arrivals by the time the plane hit that morning.

"As the ground shook, teachers grabbed each child's emergency records, took babies in their arms and, following a drill they practiced every month, led the children outside, leaving behind their own purses and, in some cases, their own shoes.... Some parents raced in to pick up children, too, leaving staffers with just 28 kids.

"Once outside, the ragtag band was barred by police from the preset evacuation destination, 7 World Trade. Then, the second plane hit. Split into two groups by flying debris and hordes of fleeing people, teachers began walking north....

Some teachers, with babies propped on their hips, were soon barefoot; the paper booties they'd donned in the center's infant room shredded from all the walking. Armed with the emergency records, staffers borrowed phones to get messages to parents.... All of the kids were returned safe to parents...."

For now, at least, buoyed by such coverage, the beat goes on. ■

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# Words & Reflections

“What does ‘good work’ in journalism look like?” This question is at the heart of a book written by three distinguished psychologists who set out to examine, through *The Project of Good Work*, the factors that permit and sustain work of expert quality in a range of professional endeavors. **Jim Carey**, who is CBS Professor of International Journalism at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, reviews what the authors discovered when they focused on the practice of journalism today. He finds them “pessimistic” about the future.

Radio journalist **Andrew Sussman** explores the power of storytelling as exemplified by stories that listeners contributed to National Public Radio and were collected in a book (and audiotapes) entitled, “I Thought My Father Was God: And Other True Tales From NPR’s National Story Project.” Sussman describes the stories as being ones that “keep you in the car listening, despite the fact that you’ve reached your destination. . . .”

**Katie King**, a journalist who has worked extensively in online news, challenges us to think more broadly about the argument law professor Cass Sunstein puts forth in his book, “*Republic.com*.” He writes that the Internet’s technological ability to tailor delivery of news to suit already-formed interests and opinions of individuals poses a threat to a robust deliberative democracy that thrives on the respectful exchange of diverse points of view. King presents his perspective, then raises her own intriguing questions.

**Robert Sherrill**, a long-time member of *The Nation*’s staff, describes discoveries made by former broadcast journalist Marvin Kalb when he looked at press coverage at the start of the Clinton-Lewinsky story in his book, “*One Scandalous Story: Clinton, Lewinsky, & 13 Days That Tarnished American Journalism*.” What disturbed Kalb about press treatment was “the atmosphere of almost total anonymity in which they [sources] operated.”

**Peter A. Brown**, an editor and editorial columnist at the *Orlando Sentinel*, finds a lot to recommend about Bernard Goldberg’s best-selling book, “*Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News*.” Brown writes that it would be “foolish—especially for journalists—to ignore the chord that ‘Bias’ has struck with a significant portion of the book-reading public and . . . with the population in general.”

**Wilson Wanene**, a Kenyan-born freelance journalist who lives in the United States and writes about African media and political issues, introduces us to British journalist Michela Wrong’s impressive reporting in her book, “*In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz: Living on the Brink of Disaster in Mobutu’s Congo*,” the story of what happened and why during the more than 30-year rule of Mobutu Sese Seko.

**David B. Green**, a 2002 Nieman Fellow and arts and books editor of *The Jerusalem Report* in Israel, invites us along as he follows the differing paths of two Boston Globe reporters who each wrote a book about a religious people with connections to the Middle East. In “*The Body and the Blood: The Holy Land’s Christians at the Turn of a New Millennium*,” Charles Sennott explores the political and social challenges of Christians who live amid Jews and Muslims. And in “*Home Lands: Portraits of the New Jewish Diaspora*,” Larry Tye describes the varying circumstances of Jewish communities which exist outside of Israel. ■



## What Does ‘Good Work’ in Journalism Look Like?

‘Simply put, what is the face in the journalistic mirror that the best practitioners want to see in the morning?’

### Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet

Howard Gardner, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and William Damon

Basic Books. 304 Pages. \$26.

By Jim Carey

The craft of journalism has rarely drawn serious and sustained attention from major figures in the American academy. There are some glittering exceptions to be sure, but beyond a few historians and a small number of philosophers and legal scholars concerned with the First Amendment, journalism—not “media” or “communications” but journalism—perhaps alone among major American institutions has been either ignored, forgotten or found unworthy of scholarly inquiry. We have more work on brothels than we do on newsrooms.

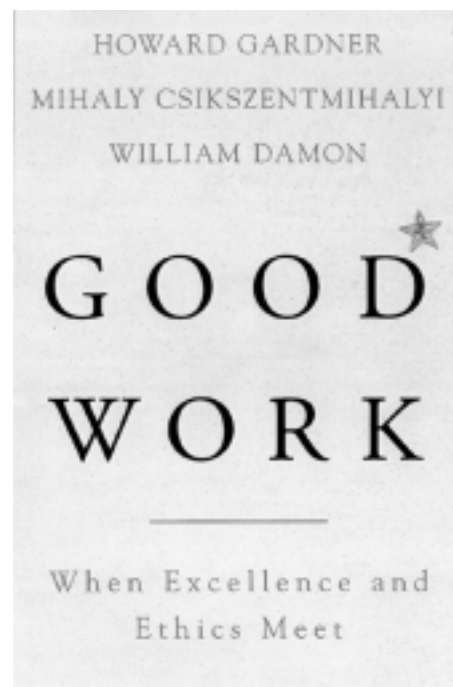
The decision then of three distinguished psychologists to examine the conditions of “good work” in journalism, to assess the craft and attempt to chart a way forward from vexing difficulties, is a notable and much appreciated event. Whatever the shortcomings of this book, and they are considerable, nothing should lessen the appreciation journalists ought to extend at being taken seriously by gifted, thoughtful academics.

The Project of Good Work, of which this book is the first, is a broad attempt to assay the state of major fields of professional endeavor—law, medicine, theater, philanthropy, higher education—as they are challenged by technological innovation and absorbed into corporate culture and financial markets. The question put to each field is this: What is it that permits and sustains good work, work of expert quality that benefits the broader society?

“Good Work” concentrates on genetics and journalism, here united because one inevitably will control the

composition of our bodies, the other the content of our minds. Beyond this handy slogan of similarity, and the ominous introduction of two dystopian works of fiction centered on control of body and mind—Huxley’s “Brave New World” and Orwell’s “1984”—what unites geneticists and journalists is that both are grappling with how to do top quality, socially responsible work at a time when agreed-upon principles and ethical standards are waning, when heroic role models are disappearing, and when ruthlessly competitive markets and rapidly changing technology create vast uncertainty. What differentiates them is that genetics is in the authors’ phrase “well-aligned” because scientists, the general public, and shareholders of corporations agree substantially on goals, whereas journalism has “emerged as a field in which reporters, the general public, and the shareholders of corporations differ sharply in their aspirations.”

The journalism portion of the book is based upon probing, in-depth interviews with more than 100 journalists, including many of the most distinguished practitioners of the craft. In the interviews, they were pressed to state what they considered to be good work, to detail the obstacles placed before their noblest aspirations, and to set forth their hopes, if any, for the future. While a list of interviewees is not revealed, many allowed themselves to be quoted by name throughout the text. The interviews focused on three questions: What is the mission of journalism; that is, why should society reward what journalists do with status



and certain privileges? What are the standards and practices of the field through which people best realize the calling? And, what is the moral identity of journalists? Simply put, what is the face in the journalistic mirror that the best practitioners want to see in the morning?

Based upon these interviews, the authors construct a drearily familiar story. This should be a golden age of journalism based upon the talent and wealth available and the importance of the press in contemporary life, but in the eyes of practitioners, it is not. According to the majority of interviewees, the integrity of journalism has been compromised in recent years and obstructions have been placed in the way

of good reporting. They are also pessimistic about the future. The demand that journalists work for market share rather than truth and significance, the decline of values and ethics among practitioners, the lack of time to practice the craft, and the need to play to the vulgar interests of the audience have left the craft adrift. As Harold Evans is quoted, "The problem of many organizations is not to stay in business but to stay in journalism."

Today's journalists are living off the intellectual investments of their forebears, are awash in entertainment and lurid sensationalism disguised as news, fenced in by an insatiable lust for profits, tyrannized by increasing demands for speed and work within once-proud organizations corrupted as the first families of journalism lose control to financial markets. As a result, the number of young journalists considering alternative careers dwarfs the number in genetics who even mention the possibility. The journalistic ranks are split as editors are absorbed into corporate culture, paid like executives, bribed with stock options, and identify with shareholders rather than the public or their own reporters.

Journalism is at a pivotal moment in its history, for the scales between quality journalism and schlock sensationalism are in a precarious balance; the perception that journalists cannot be trusted and the field is no more than a money-grubbing enterprise, barren of anything but self-serving values, is widespread. If these facts and perceptions continue, we will be robbed, the authors conclude, of our ability to flourish as a society and to adapt as individuals to changing conditions of living.

All this is tough stuff but nothing new. Wisely, the authors recognize that the Hutchins Commission largely predicted this outcome in 1946. The commission was particularly alarmed by the increased economic concentration of the press but was equally sensitive to the growth of damaging practices: premature scoops that were nothing more than gossip and sensationalism, the indiscriminate mixing of fact and opinion, the refusal to cover important stories because they threatened the inter-

ests of the powerful. There was a warning in the report: If we allow cherished institutions to diminish, it may not always be possible to reinvigorate them. "In retrospect, it is clear that the Hutchins Commission was ahead of its time and that, lamentably, it went unheard," the authors write.

What distinguishes "Good Work" is that it is more than an atrocity tale. In a competent, albeit somewhat potted, history of journalism, Gardner and his colleagues tell the story of a proud legacy of moral standards and best practices. Their tracing of the evolution of journalists from printers to partisans to "professionals" highlights the evolution of integrity in journalism and real standards of craftsmanship. This evolution coalesced during the progressive era when good practice became good business, when journalists could pursue their craft skillfully and honorably. These traditions remain part of the resources of journalism. There are moral standards and practices, living traditions of excellence, a sense of mission, pockets within the field (colleagues, employers, institutions, organizations, awards) that still support good work. The authors note with pleasure the attempts that have arisen within the field by the Committee of Concerned Journalists and the Project for Excellence in Journalism, among others, to reaffirm standards and practices. "Good Work" underscores many of the same values affirmed in Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel's "The Elements of Journalism" (William Damon of Stanford University worked on both): a commitment to free, uncensored, truthful journalism, fairness, dedication to craft, to integrity, to independence, to democracy.

In short, the book encourages journalists to have faith in their own hard-won traditions that have stood the test of time. To that end, they identify strategies of journalists that have been successful even in parlous times: the cultivation of an inner moral conscience, maintaining mental distance from events covered, emphasizing a commitment to pluralism and democracy, expanding the domain of journalism through creative innovation, and the

promise of new technology in building institutions of community and democracy.

Alas, the book is marred both by a somewhat uncritical examination of new technology relative to the very traditions of journalism that are honored and by a curt, silly and uninformed dismissal of public or civic journalism based on a misreading of one book and a few equally uninformed comments in interviews.

In all, there are three major shortcomings in the book. The first problem is inadvertent. "Good Work" was written in the hothouse atmospherics of Monica, Linda, Bill and Gary and before September 11, 2001. The gay and irresponsible 1990's, a collective American vacation from rationality, produced a journalism appropriate to that moment. All we needed, as thoughtful observers realized, was war or recession and the silliness of a silly decade would end. Alas, we got both, but damage had already been done to democratic institutions, including the press, and the underlying tendencies that gave rise to the excess continue below the surface of a much different time.

Second, while the book emphasizes the nobility and traditions of journalists, it completely ignores the ethics and responsibility of ownership of an industry that under the Constitution partakes of a public trust. Unless we can save journalism from current ownership, who treat the First Amendment as a property right guaranteeing profits without regard to the health of the political order, the most strenuous efforts of journalists will be defeated.

Third, many of the problems of contemporary journalism come from the very traditions that Gardner and his colleagues celebrate. For example, while lionizing Bob Woodward's pioneering transformation of muckraking into investigative reporting, the authors completely ignore the abuses, such as an attempt to ferret out and contact grand jurors hearing the Watergate case, that were excesses but logical extensions of journalistic traditions of investigation, truth telling, and independence. The authors forget there were two wings of the progressive

movement. One was populist and led to a celebration of strong and participatory democracy. The other was scientific and managerial and led to a thin democracy of spectators.

Increasingly, journalism followed a scientific and managerial route of independence that freed it of the duties of citizenship, the necessity to respect and obey the law, an indifference to the opinions of ordinary citizens, and a failure to respect a basic tenet of democracy—the separation of public from private life. In the eyes of many, journalism evolved from supporting a thick democracy of participation to one that supported a thin democracy of spectatorship, from a journalism conversing with citizens to a journalism informing, by its own standards and lights, a passive public.

The thing that gives us hope is not simply the renewal of tradition but a recognition of the limitations of that tradition and a commitment to new standards and practices that lets the public back in as an active participant in democratic life. If we need a hopeful example, it can found in recent changes at *The New York Times*, changes that were not self-conscious exercises in public journalism but instead spirited innovations to deal with changed circumstances. The willingness to admit to error in the Wen Ho Lee case, to pursue a series on race and pluralism in America that was not tied to current events, the “Portraits of Grief” that grew organically out of observing the anguish of the city rather than the statements of the powerful, and even the opening of the paper to greater feedback via e-mail—these are all signs that we may have turned a corner and that journalism might yet be transformed as well as renewed. But still there is, beyond the *Times* and a few others, the problem of ownership. On that, we are all stumped. ■

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## Telling Stories on Radio, Just to Tell Them

‘Nearly all the stories are memorable, from the mundane to the miraculous.’

### **I Thought My Father Was God: And Other True Tales From NPR’s National Story Project**

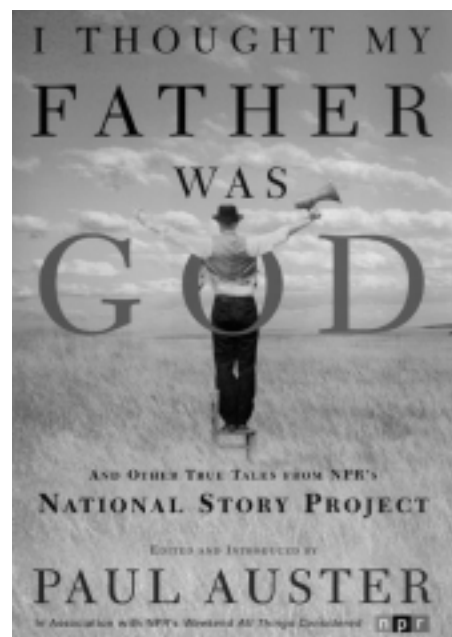
Edited by Paul Auster  
Henry Holt. 383 Pages. \$25.

By Andrew Sussman

Once, when I was working on a weekly news show, the host was interviewing a foreign correspondent in the Balkans. It wasn’t going well. The correspondent could describe with precision the ethnic factions, the regional leaders, and the political costs at stake—all perfectly distilled and perfectly remote. The foreign news remained foreign, with nothing to connect the politics to real people and their lives. Since the interview was being taped before air, the host, lost in mind-numbing acronyms, stopped midway through and searched for a way into the topic. He asked for description, a sense of place, a conversation in a cafe, anything. Finally, at a loss, he pleaded, “Couldn’t you just tell us a story?”

It’s the question that gets asked a lot, but maybe not enough, the hunt for the thing that is remembered long after the political analysis has faded away. But imagine being able to have someone tell a story that needs no news peg to run, no nut graf to explain why; a tale that exists only to be told. The possibilities are endless—or at least they can stretch into the thousands. Just ask Paul Auster and the people at National Public Radio’s (NPR) “Weekend All Things Considered.”

In October 1999, Auster, a writer, appeared on “Weekend All Things Considered” and asked listeners to tell a story. The criteria were simple. As Auster later put it, “The stories had to be true, and they had to be short, but there would be no restrictions as to subject matter or style.” The results—



179 culled from thousands entered—have been put together in “I Thought My Father Was God: And Other True Tales From NPR’s National Story Project.” But the real results have been heard on NPR for the past two years, with Auster reading each submission the first Saturday of every month.

It was a remarkable project. As Jackie Lyden, a host of “Weekend All Things Considered,” said, reporters as conduits for people’s stories usually “carve them up a wee bit,” but that this was “a chance to hear a listener story incarnate.” Auster described the project as “the importance of listening and honoring what people have to say” and, maybe more candidly, an attempt to see if we are all alike in our oddities.

"I Thought My Father was God" is broken down into categories: Animals, Objects, Families, Slapstick, Strangers, War, Love, Death, Dreams and Meditations (if that last category sounds the most amorphous, that's because it is, and it's the weakest section in the book). Most are stories in the true sense, the kind that when they're read on air keep you in the car listening, despite the fact that you've reached your destination—that golden moment all radio producers dream of. Some read like family lore, passed down from generation to generation. Others come across as secrets revealed. [See book excerpts in accompanying boxes.]

Nearly all the stories are memorable, from the mundane to the miraculous. In one story, "Danny Kowalski," Charlie Peters of Santa Monica, California, tells of his ailing father, whose one perk from a sales job in the 1950's was the use of a Jaguar luxury car. For this, Peters feels shame when dropped off at his working-class school, especially when he's glared at by one of the kids, a tough named Danny Kowalski. The

### *Bicoastal*

In the mid-80's, I worked at an underground food co-op in Washington, D.C. One night when I was bagging raisins, I noticed that a woman was staring at me. Finally, she stepped forward and said, "Michelle? Michelle Golden?" "No," I said, "I'm not Michelle, but do you mean Michelle Golden from Madison, Wisconsin? And she said yes, that was exactly who she meant. I told her that I knew Michelle and that many people had mistaken me for her. A few years later, I moved to the West Coast. One Saturday morning as I was walking in downtown San Francisco, a woman approached me. She stopped in her tracks, looked me up and down, and said, "Michelle? Michelle Golden?" "No," I said. "But what are the chances of your making the same mistake twice in your lifetime on two different coasts?"

—Beth Kivel,

### *Salt Lake City, Utah, 1975*

My friend D. reports that when the Vietnam War was winding down, his young son told him that he wanted to celebrate on the day the war ended. "How?" D. asked. And his son said, "I want to blow the horn in your car."

When the war ended, Americans made little of it. No parades. No band music, few outward shows of excitement. Except in a suburban area of Salt Lake City, when a nine-year-old boy got permission and pressed on the horn button of his father's car until the battery died. —Steve Hale

story ends when Peter's father dies, the company takes back the car, and he heads to school with his grandmother.

"When we approached the school yard that morning," Peters says, "I could see Danny hanging on the fence, same place as always, his jacket collar turned up, his hair perfectly coifed, his boots recently sharpened. But this time, as I passed him in the company of this feeble, elderly woman and without elitist English car in sight, I felt as if a wall had been taken down between us. Now I was more like Danny, more like his friends. We were finally equals. Relieved, I walked into the schoolyard. And that was the morning Danny Kowalski beat me up."

In another story, a cardiac surgeon, who identifies himself only as Dr. G, writes of a patient who required a risky coronary bypass. The patient, in his mid-70's, suffers brain damage but, incredibly, the damage proves to be restorative. The elderly patient awakens believing he is 20 years younger, with the strength and energy to match. "Prior to his heart surgery," the doctor says, "my patient had been an alcoholic, a wife-abuser, and impotent for 20 years. After his cardiac arrest and resuscitation—and the loss of 20 years of memory—he had forgotten all these things about himself. He stopped drinking. He began sleeping with his wife again and became a loving husband. This lasted for more than a year. And then, one night, he died in his sleep."


There is much, much more in this collection, and this is where I have to urge anyone interested in "I Thought My Father Was God," to hear these stories first. Buy the audiotapes (Harper Audio, \$34.95, nine hours/six cassettes). Radio is a great storytelling

medium, with the listener making up the pictures with no sense of what the next word or line will be. The listener can be engaged in one thing—chopping the carrots, driving to the store—and entirely focused on another. Auster has a great delivery, reading each story in a low-key but lively way, letting the words speak for themselves. These are stories that benefit in the hearing.

In describing the goals of the National Story Project, Auster has written that he was trying to create "an archive of facts, a museum of American reality." He, and all those who contributed, have succeeded. These stories document America, and they take on a different dimension post-September 11—something Auster himself acknowledged late last year when he read one of the final stories in the project, "One Autumn Afternoon." In that tale, the depiction of a bucolic rural home in upstate New York in 1944 turns dark with the presence of a letter announcing the death of an older brother in battle. But all these stories, ugly and beautiful, funny and strange, add up to create a portrait of who we are as Americans.

Who knows what the next step will be for the National Story Project? It is now in hibernation, possibly to return in some form later. With so many American voices now documented, maybe it's time to put out an international appeal and find out what stories the rest of the world has to tell. ■

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# Dangers Lie Beneath the Promise of the Internet

By using Web technology to tailor the news a user receives, does democracy suffer?

## Republic.com

Cass Sunstein

Princeton University Press. 240 Pages. \$19.95.

## By Katie King

Visualize a future in which you never again have to tolerate reading an opinion you don't agree with, slog through boring world news to get to the sports section, or happen across those disturbing pictures of the homeless. Technology can make that happen. But should a free society allow that to happen?

In his new book, "Republic.com," Cass Sunstein, Karl N. Llewellyn Distinguished Service Professor of Jurisprudence at the University of Chicago's law school and department of political science, argues that one of the great promises of the Internet, in fact, also poses a threat to robust deliberative democracy.

Sunstein focuses on "The Daily Me," which has become a shorthand term for the ability of Internet technology to let users target the information they want and screen out what they don't. Its application ranges from portal sites ("My Yahoo!," "My Excite," etc.) to news sites that let users create their own news package, to powerful search engines that can track down Web sites, single documents, groups or people.

This technology has revolutionized the way individuals are able to filter highly specific information online and to find like-minded thinkers with whom to exchange views. But, Sunstein argues, it can also lead to individuals too easily walling themselves off from diverse opinions, shared experiences with the general community, and the joy of the serendipitous encounter with information they never would have thought to look for. Society, he says, could become more fragmented.

"When society is fragmented in this way, diverse groups will tend to polar-

ize in a way that can breed extremism and even hatred and violence. New technologies, emphatically including the Internet, are dramatically increasing people's ability to hear echoes of their own voices and to wall themselves off from others," Sunstein writes.

He carefully balances his support for the benefits of the Internet with what he regards as the threats posed by it. Sunstein also outlines specific suggestions for making the Internet a more robust public forum for diverse ideas.

Much of what Sunstein proposes in "Republic.com" are controversial suggestions. Among Sunstein's proposals for alleviating the negative effects of the "The Daily Me" is his suggestion that government should regulate sites to provide links to sites with opposing views. This argument serves as a lightning rod for strongly held views about regulation of the Internet—whether it should happen and, if so, by whom—and about freedom of speech and the right to publish online. Sunstein points out that the Internet is already regulated in areas such as property rights, contract law, libel and pornography. The question, he then argues, is not whether to regulate the Internet but how.

"When we are discussing possible approaches to the Internet..., we should never suggest that one route involves government regulation and another route does not. Statements of this kind produce confusion about what we are now doing and about our real options," he writes.

Sunstein draws parallels between broadcasting and the Internet on the issue of providing a diversity of ideas. He recalls the history of the now de-



funct Fairness Doctrine, which required broadcasters to provide equal time to differing political viewpoints and was meant to stimulate political debate and provide a wide range of opinion on broadcast channels. It was finally eliminated, in part, because it chilled coverage of public views, he says.

However, Sunstein, who has written extensively on constitutional law and the First Amendment, notes that the Supreme Court has upheld other legislation that requires cable television providers to make local community and educational programming available on their channels. And he quotes Justice Stephen Breyer's separate opinion in this case (*Turner Broadcasting Co. v. FCC*, No. 95-992): "[The statute's] 'policy, in turn, seeks to facilitate the public discussion and in-

formed deliberation, which, as Justice Brandeis pointed out many years ago, democratic government presupposes and the First Amendment seeks to achieve.” Sunstein calls this “an unambiguous endorsement of the idea that government has the power to regulate communications technologies to promote goals associated with deliberative democracy.”

Sunstein treads carefully in laying out his suggestions acknowledging that new Internet technologies offer enormous opportunities, but adding that it would be “worthwhile to consider public initiatives” where they fail. He outlines specific reform possibilities to improve exposure to diverse points of view on the Internet. They include:

- Creation of “deliberative domains” where diverse exchange of views can occur online
- Disclosure of relevant conduct by Web producers
- Voluntary self-regulation by Web producers
- Publicly subsidized programming and Web sites
- Government-imposed rules that would require the most popular Web sites to provide links to sites with diverse views
- Government-imposed rules that would require highly partisan Web sites to provide links to sites with opposing views

Some of his ideas are intriguing, if politically difficult to achieve. As an example of publicly subsidized programming, Sunstein quotes a suggestion by Internet specialist Andrew Shapiro that the government should support a special Web site called, perhaps, “Public.Net,” that would be dedicated to public debate of important issues. Acknowledging the dangers of government control, Sunstein suggests a mixture of government and commercial subsidies and non-government control of such a site and, as an example, points to the Public Broadcasting System (PBS).

Perhaps the most controversial suggestion is one of creating legislation that would require either very popular

or highly partisan sites to provide links to other sites. Many Internet sites do this already, and Sunstein argues that this type of voluntary compliance is preferable. His principle concern with

can change on the Internet, Zatsco.com, which is cited by Sunstein as an example of the trend in personalized news, did not survive the “dot-bomb” economic slump. Indeed, many smaller

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**‘New technologies, emphatically including the Internet, are dramatically increasing people’s ability to hear echoes of their own voices and to wall themselves off from others.’ —Cass Sunstein.**

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enforced linking is that site managers might steer clear of any controversial issues as a result.

This proposal raises obvious questions. Who would decide what constitutes a very popular or highly partisan site? What would the criteria be? What kinds of links and how many should be provided? What happens to sites that don’t comply and how are they policed?

Other questions arise throughout the book. How big a problem is “The Daily Me”? Does the fact that many sites offer a personalization function mean that fewer people are using general interest sites? Perhaps they are using both or multiple sites. And what of the mainstream news media? Sunstein refers to newspapers, magazines and broadcasters as “public forums of an especially important sort,” saying they provide “the unplanned and unchosen encounters” that counteract the effects of “The Daily Me.” He argues that increased consumer-driven personal control over consumption of news online decreases the power of what he calls “general interest intermediaries.”


But this author fails to address the success of these publishers and broadcasters in reaching a large audience through their Internet versions. The most trafficked news sites on the Internet are MSNBC.com, CNN.com, The New York Times on the Web (NYTimes.com), Washingtonpost.com, and USAToday.com, among others, drawing millions of news consumers each month.

In an example of how quickly things

niche sites have disappeared and the current trend, at least for news publishing on the Internet, is toward consolidation of small sites under the umbrella of big mainstream publishers.

In “Republic.com,” Sunstein contributes a strong argument that, at the very least, we should be paying closer attention as the Internet continues its evolution. His suggestions for reform are thoughtful and invite further debate. And he rightly challenges us not to stop asking the important questions: “If we seek to enlist current technologies in the service of democratic ideals, what reforms would be better?” ■

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## Examining the Vanishing Standards in Reporting

'Now one source, however flimsy, was okay.'

### One Scandalous Story:

#### Clinton, Lewinsky, and Thirteen Days That Tarnished American Journalism

Marvin Kalb

The Free Press. 306 Pages. \$26.

### By Robert Sherrill

For 30 years Marvin Kalb was one of our most respected broadcast journalists (CBS, NBC). Fourteen years ago, he gave that up to become a teacher and administrator at Harvard. But he kept wondering what big changes had occurred in journalism since he left it, and when the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal came along he saw his chance to find out. So he zeroed in on 13 days: eight days leading up to the story's breaking, the day it broke, and the four following, "when journalists focused on the scandal as if nothing else in the world mattered."

Indeed they did. On one fairly typical day, the scandal got 20 stories in *The New York Times*, three on page one; 20 in the *Los Angeles Times*, five on the front page; 16 in *The Washington Post*, five on the front page. "Serious" television was just as fixated; Ted Koppel's "Nightline" had 15 straight broadcasts exclusively on it.

(Not everyone went nuts. On a day when the *Post* ran 25 stories on the scandal—more than any other newspaper in the country—*The Wall Street Journal* ran not one major story on it. *USA Today* and the *Chicago Tribune* also approached the topic with some caution—for a while.)

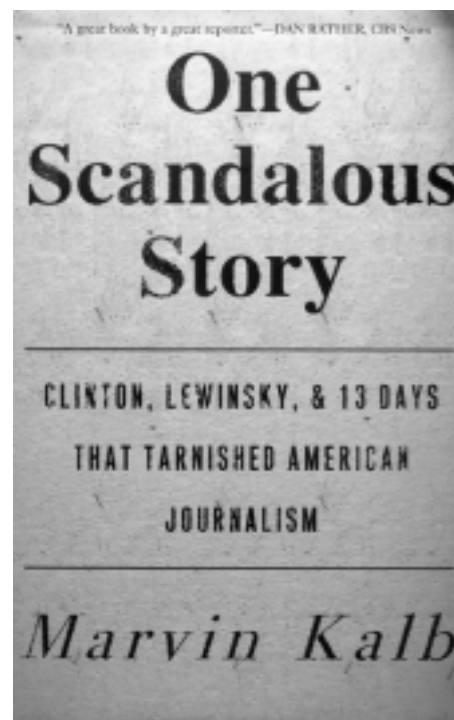
Surely Kalb's study of the press's overheated reaction will arouse considerable embarrassment in the profession. After all, one must bear in mind this hysteria was caused by an affair that—however regal the setting—was simply mutual seduction resulting in sex between two consenting adults that, until the press made so much of it, had in no way interfered with government. Strictly as a sidebar, but no less important, Kalb raises the issue of right to privacy, which until recently was

accorded presidents, yes, even the swinging Mr. Kennedy.

Kalb found, over and over, reportorial conduct that, though perhaps admirable for its aggressiveness, was willing to smash and scatter professional standards. He describes these 13 days with phrases like "media madness," "a frenzied atmosphere," and "journalism run amok." And when the media got the scent of semen on Lewinsky's dress, he writes, "it was a world that had suddenly gone mad."

Kalb points out that "One Scandalous Story" is the second act of a drama that started in the early 1970's, when the press brought down President Richard Nixon and his corrupt courtiers. Watergate was the mother lode of fame for *The Washington Post* and its two intrepid diggers, Woodward and Bernstein. After that, a kind of gold fever seized many editors and reporters—including some at the *Post* who had been left out the first time around—who yearned to achieve similar fame by sinking their shovels into an equally rich vein of scandal at some later White House.

Given the reputation Bill Clinton had already achieved for womanizing and assorted duplicity as governor of Arkansas, it isn't surprising that his White House was the chosen one. But for a long while it looked like Clinton would escape his pursuers. At first, the best scandal they could come up with—"Whitewater," as it was simply known—was a flop. It broke in *The New York Times* on March 8, 1992, but over the next nine years, neither the press nor federal investigators could show it to be more than a smelly small-scale land deal hatched up years before by Clinton and some of his old Arkansas cronies.



Nevertheless, for a while that "scandal" excited the rest of the press, and the race was on. Leonard Downie, Jr. had been a superb reporter at *The Washington Post* during the Watergate era but had missed any part of that coverage. Now, as editor of the *Post*, he could try to make up for it by dominating the Whitewater story which, he later told Kalb, he "loved."

Indeed he did. "No newspaper, no network, no magazine devoted more time, energy and resources to the Whitewater scandal than *The Washington Post*," Kalb tells us. Some of the *Post* staff, feeling that Downie was overdoing it, agreed with the analysis of Karen DeYoung, who in 1999 was assistant managing editor for national news, that "Len thinks this is his Watergate."

Finally, in a roundabout way, that's what this trivial story was transformed into. In 1994, Kenneth Starr, "a partisan Republican with right-wing connections," was appointed independent counsel by the federal government, with nothing to do but try to look busy with the Whitewater case. After three years he was so bored he thought of quitting. Such thoughts ended on January 21, 1998, the day the Clinton-Lewinsky affair hit the front page of *The Washington Post* and the rest of the press went bonkers catching up.

It wasn't the Post's scoop. It was using material cribbed from the gossipmonger Matt Drudge who, three days earlier, had written on the Internet that *Newsweek* had "killed" a story about a "sex relationship" between Clinton and a "23-year-old former White House intern." The (temporarily) killed story had been written by Michael Isikoff. He had once worked at the Post, a most resourceful and often irritating investigative reporter, perfectly willing "to cozy up to felons and other disreputable sources" to get his material. From Paula Jones to Lewinsky, says Kalb, Isikoff "was hooked on the journalistic narcotic of Clinton's sex life. He pursued one clue after another, one woman after another," so fervently that even editor Downie got tired of him and Isikoff moved to *Newsweek*.

The key player in the unfolding of

To some degree, this was also true of most of his major competitors in the press. Many of them had been in Arkansas in the early days of the Whitewater investigation, developing a strong distaste for Clinton and becoming buddies with the extreme Clinton-hating lawyers in and out of government—"the lawyers' cabal," to use Kalb's good phrase—especially those on Starr's staff, who constantly violated government regulations by leaking anti-Clinton goodies to the press.

At the very front of the scandal was a Dickensian pair whose part in launching it was absolutely vital. Linda Tripp, who was consumed by her hatred of Clinton, betrayed Lewinsky, her supposed friend, by secretly taping their conversations. Lucianne Goldberg, a professional gossip, helped Tripp spread the word.

They were not exactly Junior League types, but Kalb is not concerned with the character of the sources who manipulated the press so much as he is with the atmosphere of almost total anonymity in which they operated. The original *Washington Post* story quoted 24 anonymous sources. Gone was the Post's "two-source" requirement that it imposed on itself in the Watergate era. Now one source, however flimsy, was okay. Kalb gives dozens of examples to show that the rest of the press was just as sloppy. Also angering Kalb were the ubiquitous talk shows

founded analysis, punditry and pure gossip—such as the "sighting" of Clinton and Lewinsky "in a compromising position." That was a hot one that really made the rounds (except at *The New York Times*, where two heroic reporters checked it out, found nothing to it, and refused to mention the rumor).

What hope for reform does Kalb offer? Not much, partly because of the incredible multiplication of TV channels. Broadcasters have found that, "aside from wrestling matches," talk shows are the most profitable form of entertainment and in some ways imitate the make-believe of wrestling matches. "These shows have managed to befuddle viewers into believing that whatever they see or hear can be equated with news," writes Kalb.

So what happened to things like foreign news? Don't be silly. There's very little profit there. Kalb recalls the old days, his days, when CBS, for example, had a dozen full-time foreign bureaus. Now, he tells us sadly, it has four. ■

*Robert Sherrill has been on the staff of The Nation for 30 years.*

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**Kalb found, over and over, reportorial conduct that, though perhaps admirable for its aggressiveness, was willing to smash and scatter professional standards.**

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the drama, Isikoff was "for a journalist, in very heady terrain," and often lost his professional bearings, says Kalb. Isikoff later admitted that he became " beholden to sources with an agenda," and "I realized I was in the middle of a plot to get the president." He became not merely a spectator but a central part of the cast.

that, with zilch evidence, endlessly implied that Clinton was about to resign, or—long before it was seriously mentioned in Congress—that he was about to be impeached.

By Kalb's measure, the major TV news shows used more than 70 percent of their air time discussing the scandal via anonymous sources, un-



## Bias Among the Media

Journalists share more liberal perspectives, but do those views impact their news coverage?

### **Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News**

Bernard Goldberg

Regnery Publishing. 234 Pages. \$27.95.

By Peter A. Brown

There aren't many people who pick up "Bias" without a preconception about the book's major theme: that a pervasive liberal tilt in the news business shows up in the daily news coverage. From my vantage point as a long-time newspaper reporter and editor, I think former CBS correspondent Bernard Goldberg's contention is correct, in a general sense, although I can't speak about CBS specifically since I never worked there. The nation's newsrooms are more often than not staffed with reporters and editors whose stories and their placement reflect a mindset that fairly could be described as liberal. In fact, I discovered as I read the book that, to buttress his case, Goldberg quotes a study I did in 1993-94 with a professional pollster in which we surveyed journalists and people who live in their market areas about their values and lifestyles, and we reported on the large differences we found.

There are two main themes to Goldberg's book. There is his ideological argument that is threaded throughout "Bias," and then there is the story of what Goldberg says happened to him at CBS News once he began voicing his views about a liberal bias. In that section, he spends a great deal of time discussing CBS News anchor Dan Rather's personal and professional flaws. In the book, Goldberg criticizes Rather for his alleged two-faced behavior and being unable to recognize and deal with his own bias. This criticism of Rather gives "Bias" a celebrity appeal that might, in part, explain why it rose to number one on national bestseller lists.

But it would be foolish—especially for journalists—to ignore the chord

that "Bias" has struck with a significant portion of the book-reading public and, I'd argue, with the population in general. After all, public opinion polls show that journalists compete with members of Congress when it comes to their low ranking in public esteem. Other polls indicate that more Americans ascribe a liberal bias to the media than they do a conservative one. Interestingly, during January, for the first time Fox News Channel (often derided by those in the news business for its "conservative slant") topped both CNN and MSNBC in viewership, though it is available in millions fewer homes.

Although Goldberg wasn't aware of Fox News Channel's ratings coup when he wrote the book, its success enhances his argument. Fox News Channel's Roger Ailes bristles at critics' claims that his network has a conservative slant: "The TV industry in New York believes that if a conservative gets to give his point of view, that's bias," Ailes observes.

What Goldberg drives home in "Bias" is his contention that most newsroom staffers share a similar left-of-center mindset. However, he is also quick to point out that this liberal bias is not widely evidenced in the news media's reporting on political campaigns or parties: The news media, Goldberg observes, are not tougher on Republicans than Democrats. In fact, this aspect of coverage is the most misunderstood part of the traditional argument regarding bias in the media. Certainly, examples of slanted coverage can be unearthed. And virtually every study of journalists' political leanings and voting behavior shows they are much, much more likely to be Democrats than



are members of the general population. But these demographic findings don't get translated into charges of widespread bias. Even those who dispute the liberal-bias-in-politics argument don't quarrel with the data: Their argument is that journalists ignore their own political biases to present balanced stories.

Goldberg does not dwell long on the debate over bias and political coverage. Instead, he offers a more profound argument that even those who dispute the "bias" charge should consider because it emerges from the demographics of who chooses to work in the news business. "The old argument that the network and other 'media elites' have a liberal bias is so blatantly true that it is hardly worth discussing anymore," Goldberg wrote

in a Wall Street Journal op-ed that led to his writing this book. “No, we don’t sit around in dark corners and plan strategies on how we are going to slant the news. We don’t have to. It comes naturally to most reporters.”

In “Bias,” Goldberg makes the case that the media’s tilt is not the product of a left-wing conspiracy but the result

ality.” Goldberg notes that people in news stores about homelessness or AIDS were more often shown to be white and middle class and were portrayed as victims, regardless of their personal behavior.

Goldberg contends that the reporters’ effort to select as subjects those people who were more mainstream

AIDS population was comprised of gay men. (In 1999, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that about 14 percent of AIDS victims contracted the disease through heterosexual contact.) Only two percent of the victims shown in televised news coverage were IV drug users, yet among AIDS patients, 23 percent used IV drugs. On TV, 16 percent of victims were black or Hispanic, compared to 46 percent nationally.

Goldberg makes the valid point that most journalists would not take information from a conservative group and report it without checking it thoroughly. But when they receive information from liberal advocates, journalists do not apply the same scrutiny because their natural predisposition prepares them to accept the perspective they are being told.

Few who work in America’s newsrooms are open-minded about Goldberg’s argument. Many have derided his thesis and disputed his evidence. But by instigating discussion about media bias, Goldberg has prompted the emergence of an important dialogue that had long been simmering beneath the surface. And if one assumes, if only for the sake of having this discussion, that Goldberg is correct—that like-minded people from similar backgrounds disproportionately inhabit newsrooms and that unanimity creates bias in the coverage—then a more pressing question is what can or should be done about it?

Goldberg doesn’t offer prescriptive solutions in this book, and proposing what those might be is very difficult since seriously addressing this set of circumstances would require a major reexamination of how the news business operates.

Don’t bet on it happening any time soon. Unfortunately. ■

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## **In ‘Bias,’ Goldberg makes the case that the media’s tilt is not the product of a left-wing conspiracy but the result of like-minded people being attracted to the same profession and reinforcing their existing views and values.**

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of like-minded people being attracted to the same profession and reinforcing their existing views and values. As they gain stature, the work that consumes their daily lives does not bring them into much contact with average Americans. Nor do they live in the same neighborhoods, nor socialize with, nor have conversations with “Joe and Jill Six-pack.”

As this separation grows larger, journalists develop unanimity of thought, which is out of sync with many who comprise their audience. Goldberg argues that these circumstances are what lead to the bias problem because in American newsrooms there develops a perceived way in which reporters look at certain issues—especially social ones. Data from a variety of studies (including mine) find that journalists overwhelmingly favor gay and abortion rights, affirmative action, and subscribe to the general view that government (not the private sector) is best equipped to solve social problems. In the general population one finds a greater division of views on these issues.

Goldberg uses homelessness and AIDS to illustrate the practical effect this perspective has in influencing news coverage of certain issues. News stories about these topics, Goldberg argues, contain healthy doses of what The New York Times TV critic Walter Goodman called “the prettifying of re-

than the actual AIDS patient or homeless person fit the agenda of advocates, who use this reporting to elicit public sympathy for their cause and tax dollars for their programs. He contends that within newsrooms this politically correct mindset led reporters and editors to support—through their news coverage—the perspectives and arguments of these homeless and AIDS advocates. Not coincidentally, this idea that these things were happening to a large degree in middle-class suburbia made more arresting news stories.

The problem is that the data on who was homeless and who got AIDS were in conflict with the media’s picture. Studies have consistently shown that the vast majority of AIDS patients are IV drug users or sexual partners of homosexuals; they are not the white, freckle-faced, middle-class teenage girl exposed to HIV in her first sexual experience. The homeless were heavily male, in many cases mentally ill and former convicts, not single mothers with three cute kids.

Goldberg cites the following statistical comparisons to underscore his point. The Washington, D.C.-based Center for Media and Public Affairs studied network news stories during 1992 and found that six percent of AIDS victims shown on the networks’ evening news programs were gay men compared with government figures showing that 58 percent of the U.S.

## ‘Monstrous Passions at the Core of the Human Soul...’

A journalist adroitly chronicles the catastrophes that were Mobutu's Congo.

### **In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz: Living on the Brink of Disaster in Mobutu's Congo**

Michela Wrong

HarperCollins Publishers. 338 Pages. \$26.

#### **By Wilson Wanene**

Not too long ago, if trouble brewed somewhere in Africa, one waited for the announcement over the radio—the continent's main source of news—indicating whether the country's radio station had been seized by a rebel faction. The airport was another signal. Due to their importance, whoever ran one or both of them was likely the real power. This was the case between the 1960's, when most African countries won their independence, and the end of the cold war, when the West applied new pressure on repressive regimes to loosen up on their opponents. This, added to local African dissent—which always existed, if only just below the surface—forced a good number of military and civilian autocrats to legalize opposition parties and relax controls on the media.

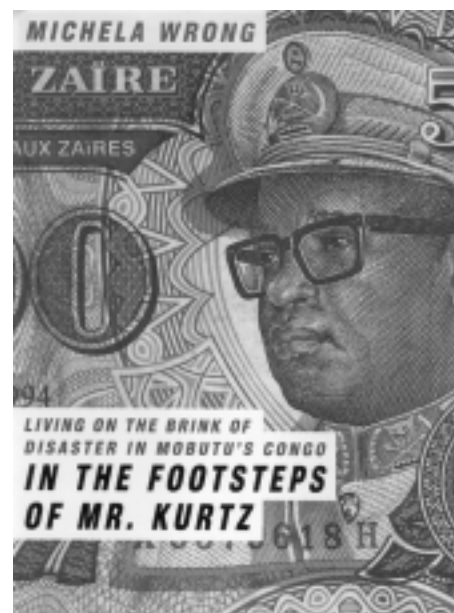
To those captivated when power slips away from repressive, corrupt and seeming intractable regimes, Michela Wrong's book, "In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz: Living on the Brink of Disaster in Mobutu's Congo," will provide good reading. It has a rambling beginning, but the author quickly finds her voice and the narration gets focused. She looks at Zaire, now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which under Mobutu Sese Seko's rule was one of the most notorious in the bunch. Consulting sources far and wide, she presents a nuanced portrait of the Central African nation and its strongman who described himself as "the all-powerful warrior who goes from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake."

Mobutu, a former journalist, led a coup in 1965 when he was the army's chief of staff, with help from the CIA.

The West, in turn, came to his help when necessary and looked the other way during his excesses. Since Patrice Lumumba, Congo's first prime minister, who was murdered in 1961, was a nationalist with a leftist outlook, Mobutu assured Washington that he would keep the vast, mineral-rich country free from communist control or sheer chaos. He ruled until 1997 and was no ordinary dictator. The graft and plunder of state resources by him and his cronies—in a nation fortunate to have assets like cobalt, uranium, diamonds, gold, copper, timber and oil—was so extreme as to inspire the term "kleptocracy." Some alleged that Mobutu, a cook's son, could personally clear his nation's foreign debt of \$14 billion.

He was also wily and ruthless. A successful insurrection from within his army was out of the question. He set subordinates against each other or simply bought them off. And the sensitive positions went to men from his home region. The crisis that finally toppled him didn't result from his rigging or canceling an election, or attempting to amend the Constitution to allow more time in power, as has recently happened elsewhere in Africa. Rather, what forced him out was a throwback to the old days when an autocrat stubbornly held on to power until an act of greater force brought sudden death or forced exile.

Wrong explains how after the Rwandan genocide in 1994, which was organized by Hutu extremists against their Tutsi countrymen, the Tutsis got control of the country. A quarter of the Hutu population then fled to neigh-



boring countries. The extremists mingled among the refugees. Those who ended up in Zaire started mounting raids into Rwanda after coying up to Mobutu's senior army officers.

But what's particularly interesting is that Wrong shows how the arrival of the huge number of refugees, following the harrowing events in Rwanda, necessitated a major response from humanitarian organizations. Before long, the refugees were enjoying a higher standard of living than the Zaireans. Furthermore, a good amount of money was now being pumped into the refugee areas of Zaire to obtain the necessary humanitarian services, and Mobutu had no control over it. The Zairean economy was in shambles. For instance, the \$336 million that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other aid groups set aside

to handle the refugees in Zaire during the last nine months of 1994 was more than the annual operating budget for Mobutu's government. The country's elite now saw another source for business deals and survival.

As if this wasn't enough, the Hutus also began to instigate tensions in eastern Zaire, which has ethnic Tutsis of its own and who have never been on easy terms with the nation's other groups. The new Rwandan government, already overburdened with the challenge of rehabilitating the country after the genocide, had to do something.

The result was a seven-month-long invasion that exposed Mobutu's army for what it was: poorly trained and totally incapable of putting up any defense. Starting in the eastern region of a country the size of the United States east of the Mississippi, town after town fell to a coalition of Zairean, Rwandan, Ugandan and Angolan troops, who

its title from Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," the famous novella first published 100 years ago. Kurtz, one of the main characters, is the European ivory trader who goes to the Congo, as a company manager, to make money and introduce civilization. Instead, he descends into extreme savagery. The tale has been interpreted differently over the years and has sparked controversy. Wrong states how she views it: "The 'darkness' of the book's title refers to the monstrous passions at the core of the human soul, lying ready to emerge when man's better instincts are suspended, rather than a continent's supposed predisposition to violence."


The author—to her credit—declines an easier approach that would merely argue that Mobutu was the black substitute for King Leopold II, the Belgian monarch who seized a chunk of African land in 1885 as his personal possession

being wrecked by his regime's corruption, these institutions kept lending money since he was treated as an indispensable Western ally. (Few might know that the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were made with Congolese uranium.) Also, the representatives they posted to Zaire simply didn't stay there long enough to catch onto Mobutu's tricks. Each new official seemed to start from scratch in terms of learning the ropes. But there were exceptions such as Erwin Blumenthal, the courageous German dispatched by the IMF to repair Zaire's central bank. He only lasted a year before throwing up his arms in despair. Nevertheless, his experience, as told by Wrong, is fascinating.

The Zairean economy, according to the World Bank's own calculations, has now shrunk to the level it held in 1958 while the population is three times as large. Mobutu died of prostate cancer four months into his exile in Morocco at 67. The alliance that knocked him from power broke up and began fighting itself. Laurent Kabila, his successor, who brought back the country's previous name, was assassinated last year and replaced by his son, Joseph. The government is unable to control major portions of the east and north, which are in rebel hands.

"In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz" is a diagnosis of the system, created against the cold war backdrop that produced and sustained Mobutu at an enormous price to the Congo. Wrong shows there's enough blame to go around, from Western capitals to his collaborators at home. ■

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**Wrong does a very good job in exposing how the World Bank and IMF played their own roles in propping up Mobutu. Despite project after project being wrecked by his regime's corruption, these institutions kept lending money since he was treated as an indispensable Western ally.**

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called themselves the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire. In short, Mobutu's domestic and regional foes ganged up on him—in an unprecedented fashion for Africa. By May 1997, they had made it to the other end of the country and were suddenly poised to descend on the capital, Kinshasa. By now the West was tired and viewed him as an embarrassing leftover from a bygone era. No rescue was sent. Mobutu finally realized his time was up and fled the country.

Wrong, a British journalist, covered Africa for six years as a foreign correspondent for Reuters, the BBC, and the Financial Times. The book draws

and named it, ironically, the Congo Free State. Leopold then proceeded to ruthlessly exploit it of its rubber, and his mercenary army committed world-shocking atrocities against villagers who failed to meet the extremely high production quotas. International pressure, however, forced him to hand the Congo over to the Belgium government in 1908, which in turn colonized the country until 1960. In 1971 the country, which since 1964 had been known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was renamed the Republic of Zaire.

Wrong does a very good job in exposing how the World Bank and IMF played their own roles in propping up Mobutu. Despite project after project

## Examining Religious Paths Into and Out of the Middle East

Through the eyes of two journalists, the lives of Christians and Jews are explored.

### **The Body and the Blood:**

#### **The Holy Land's Christians at the Turn of a New Millennium**

Charles M. Sennott

PublicAffairs. 512 Pages. \$30.

### **Home Lands: Portraits of the New Jewish Diaspora**

Larry Tye

Henry Holt & Co. 336 Pages. \$27.50.

### By David B. Green

Journalists generally have a reputation for being secular, if not insensitive to matters of religion and faith. So it is gratifying to encounter two books—both by Boston Globe reporters—that examine the contemporary lives of their respective co-religionists. Charles M. Sennott, who from 1997 until last year was the newspaper's Mideast bureau chief, is an identifying but non-observant Catholic who examines the precarious situation of Christians of all denominations in the Holy Land on the occasion of the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus. Larry Tye, a 1994 Nieman Fellow, is a strongly identifying, non-Orthodox Jew who travels principally outside the Holy Land to describe Jewish life among those who have chosen not to settle there.

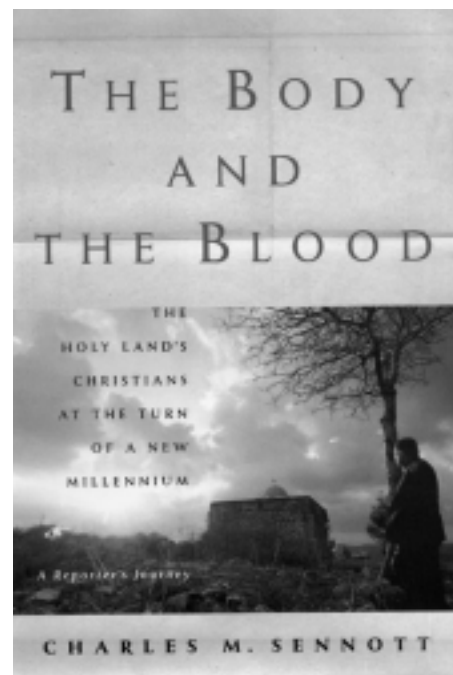
Using the New Testament as a road map of sorts, Sennott travels to the sites that played the principal roles in the life and death of the Christian messiah, including Bethlehem, Nazareth, Egypt and, of course, Jerusalem. The book's real interest is the political and social challenges facing Christians caught between the rock of what Sennott sees as a chauvinistic Jewish state and the hard place of fellow Arabs who are predominantly Muslim and increasingly intolerant of their Christian brethren. Because of this focus, the book's "in the footsteps of" structure seems a bit forced, even unnecessary. But if that's the case, it is only because Sennott has so much interest-



ing material about an otherwise largely ignored group.

Sennott apparently took advantage of his time in Jerusalem to go deep into a subject that was of particular interest to him—the dwindling size of the Christian community in the land that was the birthplace of the faith. His account has the depth and much of the understanding of Israeli society that one would hope for from someone living there.

This is far less the case with Larry Tye's book, which takes on the daunting challenge of describing Jewish life



in eight different places: the author's native Boston; Atlanta; Buenos Aires; Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine; Dublin; Düsseldorf; Paris and Israel. Though the criteria Tye used for some of his choices remain obscure, any one of those locations would have provided enough material for a book of its own. Particularly fascinating are two chapters: one includes his interviews with members of the revived Jewish population of Düsseldorf, who are not oblivious to the multiple layers of irony inherent in their presence in a country that was under Nazi rule little more

than a half century ago; the other is about Dnepropetrovsk, where some think the Jews number 10,000 and others say 75,000, but all agree that the community's revival is due to the force of personality of a Lubavitcher rabbi from Brooklyn named Shmuel Kaminezki.

More often than not, however, the chapters in "Home Lands" read like a series of long newspaper features strung together and don't often exceed the depth that such a format restricts one to. Moreover, whereas Sennott is appropriately gloomy throughout almost all his tale, Tye seems to have felt compelled to put a cheerful gloss on the prospects of each community he describes, even when objective conditions—as he presents them—don't seem to merit such optimism. At times, this gives him the tone of a cheerleader, doubtless not what he intended.

Tye takes off from a paradoxical starting point: Jews were exiled from their ancestral homeland in the year 70 C.E., and the peripatetic existence they led for the following two millennia is characterized in their collective memory by persecution and longing to return to Zion. Finally, in 1948, they regained an independent state, and that was so dramatic a turnaround that for at least one generation Jews worldwide who refused the imperative to "come home" felt defensive, if not guilty, about their choice to stay put.

Today, argues Tye, a new *modus vivendi* exists for Diaspora Jewry and Israel. It is a "partnership of equals." Whereas Israel is "inwardly focused, multifaceted, and increasingly prosperous, although also subject to the volatility of a faltering peace process," the "metaphor of a people longing to go home" is "outdated," since the big world has become a secure place to live for the majority of Jews. In other words, it is a win-win situation.

Tye is too savvy a journalist not to understand that with a population of 1,000, the Jewish community of Dublin can't be long for this world. Nor does he fail to recognize the seriousness of the traumas that the Jews of Buenos

Aires have endured during the last decade, including the still-unsolved bombings of the Israeli Embassy there in 1992 and, two years later, of the offices of Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA), the central organization of Argentine Jewry. Between those events, corruption among the leadership of AMIA, and the country's economic problems (Tye wrote before the country's latest chapter in bankruptcy), it's little surprise that Argentina's Jews are heading for the exits. Even though Tye says in his introduction that he will examine "Jewish communities that are growing and ones on the verge of death," he always seems to be looking for that silver lining.

As an American-born Jew who chose to settle in Israel and raise a family there, I share an appreciation of both the richness of Diaspora Jewish life and the miracle of the rebirth of a Jewish commonwealth in my people's historic home. But there are disturbing trends in evidence today, including intermarriage and other symptoms of assimilation among the vast majority of U.S. Jewry, a lack of Jewish pluralism in Israel, and the domination by a corrupt rabbinical establishment of religious life there, to name just a few. Though these trends are touched on by Tye, they don't prevent him from concluding that there hasn't been a better time than now to be a Jew. And none of that is to mention—and Tye barely does—the apparent intractability of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which continues to threaten the very future of Israel as a state.


The Israeli-Palestinian conflict plays a major role in Sennott's book, which examines why the Christian population of historic Palestine (Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza) declined from 145,000 during the period of the British Mandate (1917-48) to 133,000 in 1995. Today, no doubt, the number is even smaller. (The author quotes a recent survey showing that half were considering emigrating.) These "living stones," as the apostle Peter referred to the Holy Land's indigenous Christians, find themselves both courted and attacked by Muslims and Jews. In Arab

Nazareth, in Israel's Galilee, Jewish politicians, writes Sennott, encouraged local Muslims to push for construction of a mosque in the front yard of the Church of the Annunciation, causing a Christian-Muslim dispute so bitter that it ruined the city's plans to undertake a makeover on the eve of the Millennium.

Sennott is fully engaged by his subject. He mocks American pilgrims who are surprised to learn that there are Christian Arabs in the land of Jesus. He argues with a Palestinian Christian who describes his admiration of the way the Israelis have "marketed" the Holocaust. He challenges Osama el-Baz, right-hand man to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, about his country's treatment of its shrinking Coptic population. And he describes an encounter with Israeli soldiers guarding the West Bank settlement of Rachelim, after Jewish settlers from there overturned a Palestinian family's olive harvest and stole their donkey. Sennott convinced the soldiers to let him return the donkey.

I have some quibbles with Sennott's book, as well. He could have told us more about the descendants of the Crusaders who still live in the Holy Land and should have devoted more than four pages to the dilemma of hundreds of thousands of Christians from the former Soviet Union, who entered Israel as citizens during the 1990's under the terms of the country's Law of Return, but who don't really feel at home. And referring to Israel as "the closest thing to a democracy in the Middle East" seems like a gratuitous swipe. But on balance, his book is a superbly reported, highly credible, sadly moving account of a group whose existence is characterized by irony no less than that of the Jews of Larry Tye's Düsseldorf. ■

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# Nieman Notes

Compiled by Lois Fiore

## Documenting the Rhythms of Cuba

A photographer uses digital video 'to capture the passion and grittiness of contemporary Cuba.'

By David Turnley

In 1997, working as a photographer for *Life* magazine, I went to Cuba with Muhammed Ali. We had the opportunity to connect very quickly with the heart and soul of the Cuban people for whom Muhammad Ali is a hero. I was enchanted by the sensuality, the pathos, the exuberance, the tension, and the incredible visual quality of Cuba.

Three years later, after a Nieman Fellowship studying documentary filmmaking, I was given support and funding from Corbis, a digital image company, to shoot and direct a feature-length documentary. We wanted to choose a theme that would be compelling to a mass audience and to use small digital cameras to achieve a look and an intimacy that I have tried to find in my photographic work.

As my thoughts turned back to Cuba, I imagined that there must be a kind of "speakeasy" in every quarter of Havana where Cubans go to dance. But during a research trip, we found out quickly that there is really only one place where working-class Cubans have always gone to dance—a club known as La Tropical on the edge of Havana, the "Apollo Theatre" of Cuba. I immediately fell in love with the place—a funky, run down, open-air amphitheater that turns into a gyrating pool of passion as the sun goes down. La Tropical would serve as our central character and the window we would use to reach into the everyday lives of a cast of contemporary Cubans. It also became clear that the history of La Tropical would offer a



look at the legacy and importance of race in Cuba.

With two-month visas, we went to Havana in the summer of 2000 with a crew that included a producer and a world-class sound engineer. There, we worked with a driver and a brilliant young Colombian woman, Arianna Orejuela, who has been in Cuba for the past 10 years and who is currently writing what will certainly be among the notable references of contemporary Cuban music.

Every evening during June and July we filmed the daily concerts and cabarets at La Tropical. I worked as the principal cameraman, usually with a second camera. For a couple of important concerts, we worked with as many

as six other cameramen. During the first week, we cast six to eight characters, whose lives I then tried to immerse myself in from morning until night during the next eight weeks. This work I did by myself, working both the camera and sound and speaking Spanish without a translator. I found out very quickly that this was the only way that a kind of confidence, conversation and serendipity would happen that would provide the opportunity to witness this variety of characters "living" their lives in front of the camera.

We shot 300 hours of footage using, principally, a small Sony DV camera. We also collected some 100 hours of interviews from musicologists, sociologists, historians and ethnographers, and



recorded hundreds of music tracks at La Tropical using a DAT recorder.

Before going to Cuba I made the decision to shoot the film on video in black and white. My rationale had to do with wanting to create a powerful visual aesthetic, to capture the timeless quality one feels there—it is as if nothing has changed since the revolution in 1959—and to capture the passion and grittiness of contemporary Cuba.

I interviewed a number of talented editors before selecting Chris Horn, who worked with me for a year to edit the film. Chris came from a commercial background and his work had a feel I loved. I found him to be temperamen-

tally and sociopolitically someone whom I respected enormously. We built a structure together, then tried to establish a process that let the edit have its own organic quality. It is as if Chris co-directed the film, and I feel very fortunate because of our collaboration. The difficulty of trying to weave together an enormous quantity of music while using a foreign language and a voiceover with no narrator made the edit a challenge, and a large number of people participated in the process.

I will always feel that I am a photographer who has taken on the challenge of the extra layers of storytelling enabled by moving-image narrative film-

making. “La Tropical” is now making the circuit of dozens of film festivals, and it just won the Golden Light Award for Best Documentary in the Miami Film Festival. We are seeking a theatrical and television distributor.

I am back at work as a freelance photographer and filmmaker and would like to continue pursuing different forms of narrative storytelling, including photographic book projects, exhibits and filmmaking. ■

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All of the accompanying digital video still images are from David Turnley's documentary “La Tropical.” They reflect themes of life in Cuba that Turnley's film captures.







## —1946—

**Arthur Hepner** died on December 7 in the Presentation Rehabilitation and Nursing Home in Brighton, Massachusetts. He was 87.

Hepner, a 1938 graduate of Harvard University, had a career that stretched from his start as a freelance reporter in New York to a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for the St Louis Post Dispatch, where he won the award as part of a team of reporters covering a coal-mine disaster. The stretch continued with assignments in Latin America and Europe, followed by a return to New York. Back in the city, he left the print press and worked with Edward R. Murrow at CBS Radio as a war correspondent followed by a job as a producer for Chet Huntley and David Brinkley's news show on NBC-TV.

The twists in Hepner's career path continued when he left television news and turned to a new career, in publishing, moving to Houghton Mifflin in Boston in 1968. He also began an affiliation with The Boston Globe, reviewing classical music (covering more than 300 performances between 1983 and 1990) and writing book reviews.

Richard Dyer from The Boston Globe describes Hepner in this way: "He had a limitless capacity for enjoyment, which he passed on to his readers, and when something was not quite right at a concert, Hepner always conveyed this with a sense of puzzled regret."

During this time, Hepner was also an enthusiastic guest at many Nieman seminars and events. He thrived on the camaraderie of the fellows and the stimulation of the seminar discussions and fellows, in turn, got the chance to know a most interesting man.

Hepner is survived by his wife, **Elizabeth**, and his son, Thomas.

## —1949—

**Grady Clay** was awarded the Louisville Historical League's Founder's Award, presented each year "to an individual who epitomizes a lifetime of achievement and dedication to the cause of preservation awareness, education and community involvement

which has enriched the metro area." The award has been given since 1990 in honor of Allan M. Steinberg and Reverend Clyde Crews, who founded the league in 1972.

Clay has been involved in urban preservation and planning issues since his time as a newspaperman working for the Louisville Times as real estate editor and eventually as the paper's first urban affairs editor. He has written several books on urban environments: "Close Up: How to Read the American City" (1973), "Alleys: A Hidden Resource" (1978), and "Real Places: An Unconventional Guide to America's Generic Landscape" (1994). Until his retirement in 1984, he was editor of Landscape Architecture magazine.

Clay continues to be active in the Louisville community on planning and design—recently leading a group of 200 on a tour through the alleyways of the historic Cherokee Triangle neighborhood. Each week, he presents a commentary on rural and urban landscape issues on National Public Radio entitled "Crossing the American Grain."

## —1953—

**Jack and Audrey Flower** have moved into a retirement village in North Turrumurra, Australia, and the move seems to have been a good one for them. Flower says that "we've been pretty unwell, I'm afraid, but seem to be coping better now."

The Flowers can be reached at: Cotswolds, Unit 5, 28 Caragul Road, North Turrumurra, 2074, Australia.

**Melvin Mencher's** book, "News Reporting and Writing," was published in its ninth edition, the Silver Anniversary Edition, by McGraw Hill Higher Education. The textbook has been adopted by more than 300 colleges and universities. The ninth edition comes with two CD-ROM's, "Brush Up: A Quick Guide to Basic Writing and Math Skills," and "NRW Plus," which contains many stories and the comments of the reporters who handled them, including coverage of the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks.

Mencher, who worked for the United

Press and newspapers in New Mexico and California, is professor emeritus at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University.

## —1957—

**Anthony Lewis** has been named Visiting Lombard Lecturer at the Institute of Politics, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. A long-time columnist for The New York Times, now retired, Lewis twice won the Pulitzer Prize, once in 1955 for national reporting and once in 1963 for his coverage of the Supreme Court. He is the author of three books. As visiting lecturer, Lewis will teach the course "The First Amendment: Legal Doctrine and Political Practice."

## —1958—

**Stanley Karnow** was presented with the first annual Shorenstein Award last January, a \$10,000 cash prize given by The Shorenstein Forum for Asia-Pacific Studies at Stanford University jointly with The Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics, and Public Policy at Harvard University. The award "honors a journalist not only for a distinguished body of work, but for the particular way it has helped American readers understand the complexities of Asia."

At the Shorenstein Award ceremony, according to the Stanford Report, Karnow spoke of the importance of recognizing differences in Asia—between East and West—as well as the many differences among regions and peoples of the continent. "His advice to reporters," continued the report, "especially foreign correspondents, was the advice Harold Ross, once editor of The New Yorker, gave to his reporters. 'Don't tell me what you think,' Ross said. 'Tell me what they think.'"

Karnow has worked for Life, The Saturday Evening Post, The London Observer, The Washington Post, and NBC News. In addition to this Shorenstein Award, he has received three Overseas Press Club awards, six Emmys, and a 1991 Pulitzer Prize for his book, "In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines."

—1963—

**Patrick J. Owens** died on February 22 after long illness, at age 72, in Kalispell, Montana. He was a columnist, editorial writer, and reporter for Newsday for about two decades.

Not a college graduate, Owens began his career working for the Flatland Monitor as a “printer’s devil” while in school in Libby, Montana, where he was born. He grew up amid miners’ labor struggles and, as his career unfolded, he often sought out stories of popular struggle—labor issues and the civil rights movement.

Owens’ survivors include his son, James.

—1971—

**James D. Squires** has been breeding and raising horses in Kentucky since 1990, after his job as editor of a seven-time Pulitzer Prize-winning staff at the Chicago Tribune ended. He already had 20 years successful experience raising the animals when he ventured as a novice into the breeding of thoroughbreds—and wound up breeding Monarchos, steel gray winner of the 2001 Kentucky Derby with the second-fastest time in the Derby’s 127 years.

“Finally I was where the old Chicago Tribune editor Robert McCormick had predicted all those who’d chosen his profession would be eventually—to the point in life where I preferred the company of animals to men and that of books to animals,” Squires writes in PublicAffairs’ spring catalog.

Squires’ book, “Horse of a Different Color: A Tale of Breeding Geniuses, Dominant Females, and the Fastest Derby Winner Since Secretariat,” is to be published by PublicAffairs in April.

—1981—

**David Lamb** has a new book, “Vietnam, Now: A Reporter Returns.” “I hoped that...I could share with others the discovery of a country, not the rehash of a misguided war,” he writes in PublicAffairs’ spring catalog.

Lamb took a fresh, four-year-long look at the country from whose

frontlines he first reported three decades earlier. In 1997, the Los Angeles Times sent him to Hanoi, he explains, “to open the paper’s first peacetime Indochina bureau. The questions came in a rush: What had happened to Vietnam since the guns fell silent? What would it be like to live in the former ‘enemy capital’? How had I changed in the 30 years since I’d traipsed around the Ashau Valley and Hamburger Hill and the Mekong Delta? I jumped at the opportunity and set off for Hanoi with my wife and two cats.

“Four years in Hanoi enabled me to bury the stereotypes and at least some of the ignorance that had shaped my impressions during what the Vietnamese call the American War. I submerged myself in the history and culture of Vietnam, intrigued by its depth and richness. I made true and lasting friendships among a people I had once dis-

daind. I found in Hanoi not the decay and Stalinist overlay I had expected, but a charm and beauty unmatched by any other Southeast Asian capital.”

Lamb is currently a staff writer for the Washington, D.C. bureau of the Los Angeles Times.

—1983—

**Callie Crossley** will be one of five fellows at the Institute of Politics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University for the spring 2002 semester. Crossley had been a producer specializing in health issues for ABC’s “20/20” for almost 13 years. She left that position in June of 2001 to find “a creative way to reinvent myself.” At the Institute of Politics, Crossley will lead a study group on the media, perspectives and biases.

### William Davis Taylor:

#### A Remembrance for a Special Nieman Friend

*William Davis Taylor, the former publisher of The Boston Globe and a special friend of the Nieman Foundation, died on February 18. A few days after his death, Bob Giles offered these thoughts on Davis Taylor at the beginning of a Nieman dinner.*

Davis Taylor’s contribution to the Nieman program is not widely known, but it was as important, perhaps, as that of Agnes Wahl Nieman, whose bequest of one million dollars in 1937 enabled Harvard President James Conant to establish the Nieman Foundation.

By the 1960’s, the income from the original gift was not sufficient to support fellowships for 12 U.S. journalists or to meet other needs of the program.

The Ford Foundation gave Harvard a grant of \$1.2 million with the requirement that it be matched. Harvard President Nathan Pusey asked Davis Taylor if he would lead the fundraising effort to match the Ford grant.

As Taylor recalled years later, “An extraordinary thing happened to my life. I’d always loved this university but

never done anything for it.” So he and Dwight Sargent, the curator, made 113 calls in 38 states and raised the matching amount with \$100,000 to spare.

Every gift and pledge except one was honored. “I think that’s a great honor to Harvard University and to a newspaper [The Boston Globe]....”

Those were days when some publishers were skeptical of the Nieman Fellowships. Davis remembered one who asked, “What can Harvard teach a Nieman scholar?” To which he replied, “Harvard isn’t there to teach. It’s there to let somebody learn.”

The \$2.5 million that was added to the Nieman endowment as a result of Davis Taylor’s leadership is the largest single gift to the foundation. It stabilized the program and enabled it, over the years, to benefit from Harvard’s fabled portfolio management.

In his quiet way over the years, Davis Taylor encouraged a strong relationship between his newspaper and the Nieman Foundation. It was an extraordinary contribution that, perhaps, has not been fully recognized. ■

—1985—

**Joe Oglesby** was named editor of The Miami Herald's opinion pages on January 3, after a six-month interim assignment in that position. He writes, "During my Nieman year, I designed my course of study around public policy issues with the hope that I could become a better editorial writer. I've held a number of newspaper jobs since that time, but in none of those jobs did I rely on my Nieman experiences as much as I do in my current position as editorial page editor."

Oglesby replaced Tom Fielder, who is now the paper's executive editor. According to the paper's announcement, Fielder called Oglesby "the rock I leaned on. He has tremendous judgment and innate leadership skills." Herald publisher Alberto Ibarguen praised him for his guidance of the opinion pages following the September 11 attacks. Oglesby is the first black opinion pages editor for the Herald and the fourth person since 1958 to hold the position.

—1991—

**Rui Araújo** received a national journalism award on December 19 in Lisbon given by the monthly newsmagazine Grande Reportagem. "I got the award for a long piece of investigative reporting I did for *Expresso*, a Portuguese national weekly newspaper," Araújo says. "It was a story on the Portuguese war in Guinea-Bissau, the Portuguese Vietnam, in the 70's. 'Morrer no Cacheu'—Die in Cacheu (river)—is a 12-page story where I compiled data from various sources including the marines, government files, etc. It is my seventh national journalism award."

### Editor's Error

In the Winter 2002 issue of *Nieman Reports*, Peter Turnley is described as a "Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist." However, it was Turnley's brother, David, who won the 1990 Pulitzer Prize for photography. We regret the error.

## 2002 Winners of Chris Georges Fellowships

This year, two Christopher J. Georges Fellowships to support in-depth reporting projects have been awarded. One, to a member or members of The Harvard Crimson, Harvard's undergraduate newspaper, was awarded to Lauren D. Dorgan, Anne K. Kofol, Kathryn L. Rakoczy, and Catherine E. Shoichet. The students will examine the status of women in four areas—undergraduate life, the faculty, Radcliffe and women's studies. The fellowship awards each student \$1,000 and covers the cost of printing their project in The Harvard Crimson.

The second Georges fellowship, for an in-depth reporting project by a journalist under age 30, goes to Annys Shin, a senior writer for the Washington City Paper. She will report on the impact of the release of thousands of

prisoners in Washington, D.C., finishing their mandatory sentences. Shin, 29, will receive \$10,000 to fund research and writing of the project.

Chris Georges was a reporter for the Washington bureau of The Wall Street Journal. In 1997, three of his stories on the welfare system were nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. In 1998, he died at age 33 from complications related to lupus. The fellowship was begun in order to encourage work by young journalists reflecting Georges' own commitment to in-depth reporting documenting the social and human impact of public policy. Before going on to The Wall Street Journal, Georges was executive editor of the *Crimson* and an honors graduate of Harvard College.

The Georges fellowships are administered by the Nieman Foundation. ■

—1997—

**Deborah Seward**, after three and a half years in France, moved to Moscow in December 2000 as bureau chief for The Associated Press. Seward has responsibility for coverage of Russia and 10 other former Soviet republics, including Central Asia. She is there with daughter Anna, 7, and husband, **Nicholas**, who pitches in with ideas and expertise. Anna is now a second-grader at the French school, and Nicholas is finishing novel number two.

—2001—

**Anil Padmanabhan** writes: "After my Nieman year, like so many before me, I was at a loss. Prior to the Nieman experience, I had covered economy and business for publications including India's premier agency (Press Trust of India) and more recently headed the reporting team at *Business Standard*, an economic daily. During my Nieman year, I spent time studying the impact of information technology on our daily existence, both within and outside the profession. I bolstered this with studies on what one perceived

was a rapidly changing—economically and demographically—United States.

"As a result, when *India Today* offered me the correspondent's job in New York, I grabbed the opportunity. For a journalist these are (even before the unfortunate events of September 11) very exciting times to cover the U.S. economy. *India Today* is the flagship of Living Media India group, which includes a 24-hour news channel in Hindi (Aajtak), a business fortnightly (*Business Today*), an IT fortnightly (*Computers Today*), and an Internet newspaper [www.newspapertoday.com](http://www.newspapertoday.com).

"The daunting task before me, since my return to the United States, is to feed the various entities of the group. Especially daunting since I had taken a great leap of faith to abandon my niche as an economic/business journalist. I had to position myself as a journalist in the era of convergence. Essentially, I have the ability to file stories for the Internet edition, analytical stories for the weekly and fortnightly publications, and phone-in commentaries in Hindi for the news channel. Though the work has been hectic, the experience has been enjoyable and has entailed an almost daily learning experience." ■

# End Note

## A Nieman Year During Difficult Times

A Jordanian journalist learns to listen and reflects on what he does and why.

By Rami G. Khouri

The September 11 attacks against the United States and the subsequent American-led war against terrorism have comprised one of the top news stories of recent decades. During the past seven months of my Nieman Fellowship, though, I've had to adjust to the novel challenge of not writing or commenting about a news story and a political dynamic that normally would have consumed my professional life and much of my personal life, as well. Being on the sidelines and looking in has been difficult, but the perspective it has given me has been rewarding.

As an Arab (Palestinian-Jordanian) and an American national whose life has been defined by professional interaction between the Arab and Western worlds, this story goes to the very core of my identity and working life. It is all about identity and mass sentiments in the Arab-Asian region; the interplay between religion and politics; relations between Islam and the West; the cultural and political contests within the Arab-Asian region; the modern history of American-Arab interaction, and communication and miscommunication between these worlds. Yet, as this extraordinary story unfolded, I wasn't able to pursue my normal routine. Usually, I'd be writing a weekly syndicated column, talking with guests on my television interview show, and working on freelance articles and op-ed pieces for the international press.

Initially, I was frustrated at being journalistically shackled by the terms of the fellowship at such an historic moment. But that sentiment quickly gave way to an important realization that proved far more significant to me, personally and professionally: I was

reminded again how important it is for a journalist to listen, without writing or commenting. I also learned, for the first time, how important it is to take a pause in our profession to assess what we do, why we do it, and where we hope to go. What I have discovered is that the Nieman Fellowship is not so much about our learning new things about the world around us, but rather it is an opportunity to define values and directions for us, as journalists, and for the person within us.

I've discovered this year that the art of listening is among a journalist's greatest assets. Perhaps this approach should be incorporated more deliberately into journalism education and training. Because I'm not writing my syndicated column, I don't have to summarize my thoughts each week and package them in an 800-word bundle of analysis, opinion, reporting and entertainment. Unconstrained by such deadlines, while at the same time challenged to deal with the many complex dimensions of the September 11 attack and its aftermath, I find myself listening more deliberately and intently than I have before as I try always to hear, digest and analyze what others are saying.

There is no shortage of opinion in my encounters with others in my daily life, or in the mass media. Much of what I've heard is impressive, though some ideas have seemed bizarre and comical. But it is all instructive. I now appreciate and respect more the journalist's responsibility of synthesizing the many opinions in society and of accurately reflecting the variety of ideologies and perspectives that exist in any society. Listening more intently and carefully gives me a much better understanding of the society around


me than I would have had if I'd been in my regular routine. Suddenly, what I think becomes less pertinent every Tuesday—the day I'd usually write—when I don't have to put these thoughts on paper as I've done for the past 20 years. I am grateful to the Nieman Fellowship for reminding me of this.

This awareness also seeps into my personal journey, as I pause and reflect on my work and career path. At its most immediate level, the luxury of a year at Harvard is defined by the astounding bounty of courses, lectures, discussions and new friendships. At a deeper level, it offers moments for serious, if relaxed, introspection. I understand now, as I didn't when I came here, why the Nieman Fellowship requires that journalists stop what they normally do. This suspension of the daily journalistic routine allows the time and space for pondering why I do what I do.

When I resume my career, it will be with a different approach to the issues I deem important and the media that I find most enjoyable and satisfying. I intend to devote more time to exploring the interaction of history, religion, identity and culture and will devote more time to radio and international syndication in an attempt to foster improved intercultural communication.

There are, perhaps, many people who are glad I was kept quiet for this year. And now that I've experienced the benefits of a more quiet and humble profile, count me among them. ■

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