

# NIEMAN REPORTS

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Five Dollars

## Reporting on Health



Investigating Scandal in the Catholic Church

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Journalists Testifying at War Crimes Tribunals

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

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

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## 5 Reporting on Health

- 7 Frustrations on the Frontlines of the Health Beat BY ANDREW HOLTZ
- 10 The Public Health Beat: What Is It? Why Is It Important? BY M.A.J. MCKENNA
- 11 The Anthrax Attacks BY PATRICIA THOMAS
- 14 Useful Lessons From Reporting the Anthrax Story BY SANJAY BHATT
- 16 Public Health Reporting: After September 11th, It's More Difficult BY MADELINE DREXLER
- 18 Reporting on America's Widening Racial Health Gap BY DAVE DAVIS
- WATCHDOG** 20 Lead Poisoning: A Failed Response and Sick Children BY JUDY PEET
- 24 Reporting on the Business of Health Care BY MADGE KAPLAN
- 26 The Uninsured Story Is Seldom Fully Told BY SUSAN DENTZER
- 28 Alcoholism: Its Origins, Consequences and Costs BY ERIC NEWHOUSE
- WATCHDOG** 30 Is the U.S. Government Making Children Fat? BY BARRY YEOMAN
- 32 Explaining Why 24,000 People Died Yesterday BY JAMES F. SMITH
- 35 AIDS in Africa: A Story That Must Be Told BY HUNTLY COLLINS
- 37 Journalism Is Failing in Its Coverage of Global AIDS BY SABIN RUSSELL
- 39 Documenting the Plague of AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa BY JAMES NACHTWEY
- 44 Reporting on HIV/AIDS in Kenya BY JOSEPH NGOME
- 46 Why Reporters and Editors Get Health Coverage Wrong BY MELINDA VOSS
- 48 An Education in How to Cover the Issues BY LARRY TYE
- 50 Examining the Content of Health Care Reporting BY FELICIA MEBANE

## Journalist's Trade

**WATCHDOG**

## 52 Investigating Scandal in the Catholic Church

- 53 Reporting Stories With Children as Victims of Priests BY ELIZABETH MEHREN
- 55 Shining the Globe's Spotlight on the Catholic Church BY WALTER V. ROBINSON
- 59 Secrecy Remained in Place With the Church's Finances BY STEPHEN KURKJIAN

- 61 The Neglected Vatican Beat By JOHN L. ALLEN, JR.  
 64 Reporting the Catholic Church's Scandal in Ireland By EMILY O'REILLY  
 66 In the 1980's, a Chicago Newspaper Investigated Cardinal Cody By ROY LARSON

## Words & Reflections

### 69 Journalists Testifying at War Crimes Tribunals

- 70 Testing Different Expectations of Journalism By NINA BERNSTEIN  
 74 Consequences Occur When Reporters Testify By ROY GUTMAN  
 78 Deciding to Testify About Rwanda By LINDSEY HILSUM  
 79 Objectivity Without Neutrality By KEMAL KURSPAHIC  
 81 The Roles Journalists Played During the Balkan War By SENAD PECANIN  
 83 A Reporter Decides to Testify, Then Decides Against It By BILL BERKELEY  
 84 Balancing Journalism and Justice By RUSSELL MILLS

WATCHDOG

### 86 Coverage of War

- 86 The Unseen Gulf War By PETER TURNLEY  
 91 War Reporting: How Should Civilian Casualties Be Reported? By BOB ZELNICK

### 94 International Journalism

- 95 The Korean Election Shows a Shift in Media Power By IN-YONG RHEE  
 97 Reflecting the Life of China in the Mirror of His Life By YVONNE VAN DER HEIJDEN  
 99 Creating a Different Approach to Telling the News By NICHOLAS DANILOFF  
 101 Journalists Built a Bridge of Understanding Between East and West By WATSON SIMS

- 3 **Curator's Corner:** Media Ownership and the Quality of News By BOB GILES  
 104 **Nieman Notes** COMPILED BY LOIS FIORE  
 104 Courageous Zimbabwean Editor Becomes a Nieman Fellow By SHYAKA KANUMA  
 105 Class Notes  
 110 End Note: 'News to Images' By LOIS FIORE

# Media Ownership and the Quality of News

As the Federal Communications Commission considers changing rules, journalists need to pay better attention.

By Bob Giles

The American press has a tendency to underreport its own story. Right now this means that as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) proposes to change the rules governing ownership of local television stations, the public is being left largely in the dark. Normally, the press would love to report this story about powerful conglomerates and a concentration of markets and questions about how well the public will be served. But many of the players in this story are big media companies, whose newspapers and broadcast outlets seem to be shying away from their obligation to help readers and viewers anticipate what the changes might mean for them.

A decision by the FCC is expected this year. If the proposed changes are approved, a single corporation could own newspapers, radio and TV stations in one community. It is possible, too, that a single company could control access to more than 35 percent of all TV households in the nation.

The current rules were established in an era when local citizens had fewer choices: typically, three TV stations and a couple of newspapers. There were many independent owners and few giant media corporations. The FCC argues that it wants to modernize its rules to accommodate new technologies such as the Internet and satellite transmission of sound and video images.

Those who support the rule changes argue that worries about monopoly control are unfounded. In its filing to the FCC, Gannett documents the experience of KNPX-TV and The Arizona Republic in Phoenix in which resources are shared on major breaking stories, though the news staffs usually operate competitively. Gannett argues that the community is better served on big stories by this collaboration.

Critics fear the changes are being pushed along too fast, without sufficient input from the public and without in-depth reporting in the press. They fear there will be less diversity of programming in local markets, based on the experience of radio after the FCC liberalized group ownership rules in 1996. Before then, independent ownership was the standard. The largest group controlled fewer than 65 radio stations: Now Clear Channel Communications dominates radio station ownership with 1,225 stations. Moreover, the number of station owners has dropped by one-third. And, when a huge corporation takes over a local station, there tends to be less interest in local news coverage.

Such sweeping changes in how the public's airwaves are used require a national debate. Newspaper editorials and broadcast commentators should urge FCC Chairman Michael Powell to schedule a series of discussions. Frank A. Blethen,

publisher of The Seattle Times, is building a grassroots organization called "Voices of Concern" in an effort to preserve "diverse control and independence of the nation's press and of the nation's channels of information distribution." His is among a growing number of voices critical of America's newspapers for failing to tell this story. "The silence is deafening," he says.

The FCC's contention that technology and the growth of broadcast outlets has increased the diversity of choice in local markets is challenged by those who define diversity not just by measuring such numbers. Critics contend that communities of color are still being marginalized in coverage, and people of color are underrepresented on news staffs and in the ownership of broadcast properties. In its brief, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists argues that the "FCC has not spent enough time examining the role and function of news in our society or how rewriting the broadcast ownership regulations will affect the quality of news being produced." The value of this brief is the questions it asks the FCC to address about how the rule changes would affect ethnic and racial communities. Organizations representing African-American, Asian-American and Native-American journalists are joining forces to bring their concerns to this debate.

To some extent, the FCC and organizations asking for a broad dialogue about relaxing media ownership rules, might be talking past one another. The FCC narrowly defines its responsibility as writing rules to accommodate a broadcast marketplace driven by new technologies. The FCC does not think it needs to consider the meaning of failed media mergers or anticipate how the market might react to less restrictive rules. Nor is it likely to consider whether local broadcast news organizations might have higher news values under newspaper ownership than as part of a company without deep roots in journalism.

The grassroots groups want to bring to hearings and public forums an urgent plea for the FCC to embrace as part of its decision the need for diverse, independent and serious broadcast journalism. They hope, too, the nation's press will finally pay attention. The absence of a national debate and the disinterest of the press suggest that, in a few years, as new concentrations of media power emerge, journalists might look back at this time and ask themselves, "Why weren't we better watchdogs for the public when these changes were proposed?" ■

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## Web Site Sources for Examining FCC Media Ownership Proposal

*The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has been considering changes in rules that govern ownership of the American news media. Under the FCC proposal, media companies would no longer be prohibited from buying a newspaper and television station in the same city or from owning more than one TV station in the same market. What follows is a list of Web sites journalists can use to examine arguments put forth by supporters and opponents of this proposal. Many journalists fear that if these proposals are approved, a diminishing independent press will be even more threatened.*

• **FCC Web Site on Media Ownership Policy Reexamination** ([www.fcc.gov/ownership](http://www.fcc.gov/ownership)): The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), an independent government agency, was established by the Communications Act of 1934 and is responsible for “regulating interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite and cable.” The FCC site provides background information, public notices, and press releases about the reexamination of media ownership policy.

• **Journalism.org: Research, Resources and Ideas to Improve Journalism** ([www.journalism.org](http://www.journalism.org)): Journalism.org presents issues related to the work of the Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Committee of Concerned Journalists. Both organizations examine journalism's essential role and work to clarify its standards and principles. This Web site provides links to background and official comments about the FCC proposal, published commentaries and news stories, responses to FCC research, deregulation developments, the FCC view, as well as other valuable informational links.

• **Media Access Project** ([www.mediaaccess.org](http://www.mediaaccess.org)): Media Access Project is a nonprofit public interest telecommunications law firm that represents listeners' and speakers' interests in electronic media and telecommunications issues in the courts and before policymaking bodies such as the FCC. “Media Consolidation/Encouraging Diversity of the Electronic Media” provides information on media ownership limits that are facing repeal at the FCC and are under attack in court, civil rights and media ownership, and other resources about media consolidation.

• **Center for Digital Democracy** ([www.democraticmedia.org](http://www.democraticmedia.org)): The Center for Digital Democracy is committed to “preserving the openness and diversity of the Internet in the broadband era ...” and working on development of noncommercial, public interest programming. “Media Ownership” provides information about this policy's effects on the online media, links to groups supporting ownership diversity, and media concentration resources.

• **MediaChannel** ([www.mediachannel.org](http://www.mediachannel.org)): Dedicated to global media issues, MediaChannel.org is a nonprofit, public interest Web site that offers news, reports, action toolkits, forums for discussion, an indexed directory of hundreds of affiliated groups, and a search engine. “Media and Communication Policy Center” provides news about the FCC's proposed changes, U.S. media ownership rules, copyright laws and digital media, as well as a guide to media concentration issues throughout the world.

• **I Want Media** ([www.iwantmedia.com/consolidation](http://www.iwantmedia.com/consolidation)): Created by freelance journalist and corporate writer Patrick Phillips, I Want Media focuses on diversified media news and resources. This Web site provides up-to-date articles, a list of organizations, position statements, and resources about media consolidation.

• **Media Tank** ([www.mediatank.org/ownership](http://www.mediatank.org/ownership)): Media Tank is an “innovative nonprofit organization working to bring together media arts, education and activism to build broader awareness and support for media as a vital civic, cultural and communications resource.” This Web site provides a list of FCC media ownership rules under review, public hearings and forum notices, and related resources.

• **Media Alliance** ([www.media-alliance.org](http://www.media-alliance.org)): Media Alliance is a 25-year-old nonprofit training and resource center for media workers, community organizations, and political activists whose mission is “excellence, ethics, diversity and accountability in all aspects of the media in the interests of peace, justice and social responsibility.” This Web site provides access to MediaFile, the Bay Area's media review published by Media Alliance, and action alerts.

• **Reclaim the Media** ([www.reclaimthemedial.org](http://www.reclaimthemedial.org)): Reclaim the Media was formed by a coalition of independent journalists, media activists, and community organizers in the Pacific Northwest, “promoting press freedom and community media access as prerequisites for a functioning democracy.” This Web site provides updates, upcoming events, articles and links related to media ownership. ■

# Reporting on Health

Few topics receive more media attention today than the topic of health. Yet, in the view of some journalists, many of the stories being told about health are not ones journalists want to tell or that members of the public need to hear. As **Andrew Holtz**, a freelance health reporter and president of the Association for Health Care Journalists, observes, “. . . stories I think need to be told, are often not the ones that easily sell. My personal frustration is not the issue, but we should be concerned when journalists are inhibited from the work of sustaining an informed and involved citizenry.”

**M.A.J. McKenna**, a staff writer for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, explains what the public health beat is and why such coverage, which “investigates the threat, occurrence and prevention of health problems—infections, chronic diseases, injuries and exposure to toxins—not in individual patients, but in groups that can be as small as an elementary school classroom or as large as the global population,” is so important. In excerpts from a report she wrote for The Century Foundation, journalist and author **Patricia Thomas** examines how and why journalists encountered difficulties in trying to report essential public health information during the 2001 anthrax crisis. **Sanjay Bhatt**, medical reporter for The Palm Beach Post, then describes what worked and didn’t work when he set out to cover news of the nation’s first anthrax case that occurred in Palm Beach County. Author and journalist **Madeline Drexler** uses her experiences in reporting on public health to demonstrate how much more difficult it is to report such stories after September 11th. With many sources, particularly those connected to the government, she writes, “. . . there’s an unmistakable chill in the air.”

Using computer-assisted reporting, **Dave Davis**, an investigative reporter at The Plain Dealer in Cleveland, Ohio, identified fault lines in this nation’s widening racial health gap. His five-part series then drew attention to communities where black Americans are hardest hit by disease and violence by telling stories that brought the statistics to life. In Newark, New Jersey, The Star-Ledger dispatched a team of reporters and a photographer in a months-long investigation of lead poisoning in children. News feature writer **Judy Peet** explains how what seemed like an oft-told urban story took on new dimensions as the reporting team “learned about the politics, followed the money, studied the research, and tracked the lawsuits,” and then found families whose children had been failed by the system set up to protect them. Photographer **Mia Song’s** pictures portray the lives of those affected by lead poisoning.

As Boston bureau chief for “Marketplace,” a nightly public radio business news program, **Madge Kaplan** was involved in the production of more than 1,500 stories examining health care trends since 1995. Now, as senior health desk editor at Boston’s WGBH Radio, she is concerned that “with so many stakeholders and powerful forces intersecting throughout the system, it becomes harder and harder for patients to be portrayed in our stories as anything more than victims or people being acted upon.” **Susan Dentzer**, who is health correspondent with “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer,” examines why journalists have such a difficult time fully reporting the story of the millions of Americans who do not have health insurance.

“... we have not yet managed to fully penetrate the health system and serve as direct eyewitnesses to the precise ways in which the uninsured get short shrift,” she writes.

In a yearlong series about alcoholism that won a Pulitzer Prize, Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune projects editor **Eric Newhouse** debunked myths and unearthed facts about this disease. He also learned lessons about reporting on people who are made vulnerable by illness, and he shares those with us. By exploring the connections between farm policy and what children eat for lunch in public schools, freelance writer **Barry Yeoman**, reporting in Mother Jones magazine, defied conventional wisdom and discovered some unexpected causes of childhood obesity. Yeoman notes that “until other journalists start thinking critically about school nutrition—and asking different questions—the national debate over childhood obesity is not likely to shift ...” The Boston Globe sent reporters and photographers to four developing countries to see, in the words of foreign editor **James F. Smith**, “how lives were being lost due to the lack of basic health services.” Pictures taken in Cambodia by Globe photographer **Michele McDonald** convey the impact that poor or nonexistent health care has on a nation’s inhabitants.

No disease sickens or kills as many people worldwide as does AIDS, and in developing nations its murderous toll is rapidly increasing. Journalists, particularly those who work in the hardest hit nations of Africa, confront challenges in reporting this story. **Huntly Collins**, who covered AIDS at The Philadelphia Inquirer, writes about going to South Africa as a Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation Teaching Fellow to offer guidance to African reporters in ways to improve their reporting on a disease that each day kills 6,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa. **Sabin Russell**, medical reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle, also spent time reporting on AIDS in Africa and writes that “most reporters and news organizations are ill-equipped to write about this disease and its health issues on a global scale.” In 2000, Time sent photographer **James Nachtwey** and a senior writer to Africa to document in a 20-page cover story the ravages of this disease on its victims, their families, and caregivers. In words and images, Nachtwey describes why he must tell this story. **Joseph Ngome**, a reporter for BBC Kisumu radio in Kenya, explains how cultural beliefs, government interference, and lack of training in science writing become barriers to good coverage.

**Melinda Voss**, executive director of the Association of Health Care Journalists, contends that health journalists need and want special training in how to improve their coverage. “However, almost no program offers training in such journalism fundamentals as how to interview health and medical researchers or how to report medical research,” she writes. **Larry Tye**, a former Boston Globe reporter who directs the Health Coverage Fellowship in Massachusetts, shows the value of an intensive eight-day fellowship in which medical and health reporters are equipped with tools and information they need. **Felicia Mebane** shares information about the content of health care reporting and finds that “issues involving health care and health care policy do not get the attention they deserve.” Coverage reflects neither the importance of these issues in our lives nor “does reporting on them even receive its fair share of attention when the overall subject is health.” ■



# Frustrations on the Frontlines of the Health Beat

News organizations need to find spaces ‘to be homes for stories that are now often orphaned.’

By Andrew Holtz

**H**ealth news gushes from media outlets. Federal spending at the National Institutes of Health has ballooned. The bucking bronco of health care business has thrown off its managed care rider, and premium hikes are arcing upward. The unprecedented supply of stories and the rapacious appetite of broadcast, print and Internet companies should mean we are in the glory days for an independent journalist with experience on the health beat; yet, in important ways, we are not.

Don't get me wrong, it's a lovely beat. There are important stories to tell, often chock full of truly new information, which are easily connected to human elements. Yet as I've racked up more years on the beat and taken advantage of more training and education, I'm increasingly nagged by a problem I did not expect. The stories I want to tell now, stories I think need to be told, are often not the ones that easily sell. My personal frustration is not the issue, but we should be concerned when journalists are inhibited from the work of sustaining an informed and involved citizenry.

Take this little quiz. Rate the selling strength of these health stories:

1. A pill for heart failure,
2. A plan to expand coverage of prescription drugs,
3. A proposal to regulate placement of garages and front windows in new homes,
4. A discussion of grocery store locations.

Wait, you say, two of those examples aren't even health stories. You're right. The first two involve topics that make relatively little difference to the health

of the nation, while the last two can have profound effects on the health of a community. No, I didn't make a mistake in that last line. Heart failure treatments might be vitally important to individuals who are already sick, but they have nothing to do with keeping people healthy in the first place. Prescription drug coverage (as critical as it might be to our personal budgets) just shuffles medical spending from one balance sheet to another, from a personal expense to a component of taxes or to business expenses that are factored into product prices. By contrast, home and neighborhood design are closely linked to physical activity, and community involvement and grocery store placement determines what sort of access people have to healthy foods.

The problem facing health journalism is that the first two stories are easy sells; the last two tend to get blank looks from editors.

## The Wasteland of Health News

Recently I spoke to a group of high school students about health news. To prepare for the presentation, I taped local TV newscasts for several days. I got the expected medical news round-ups; that is, jumbles of 30- to 40-second voice-over stories serenely devoid of context, caveats or qualifications. One spectacularly empty report heralded an immunology “breakthrough” without mentioning anything more about the research than that it would help the immune system prepare for an infection before disease struck. (As one student remarked, “I thought that’s what vaccines do.”) It was no surprise to document that much local TV health and medical news coverage looks like

the media equivalent of a 99-cent drive-thru menu: quick, cheap, but ultimately un nourishing.

What stood out on the tape was that the best health report was not a health report. It was a story of a university professor who writes a sex advice column for the school's student newspaper. The profile touched on the inadequacy of sex education, how a complaint from a parent once prompted administrators to suspend the column, and how a newspaper can satisfy the needs of its readers. The long report (almost three minutes) dealt with cultural attitudes toward sex, conflict over the roles of parents and educational institutions, freedom of the press, and the turmoil of young adults. It bore no resemblance to the typical “latest pill” or “promising discovery” stories, and yet by telling a tale of how we equip (or more often fail to equip) them to navigate sexual minefields, it had more connection to health than any number of medical research bulletins or diet tips.

The story was not labeled as a “health” story, and it did not come from the station's health reporter. These features are key to understanding some of the failings of the health news marketplace. Most media outlets have a lazy definition of a health story: It has to involve patients or lab rats, doctors or researchers, a pill or procedure, or food and exercise in the “lifestyle” reports. As medical news obsesses over treatments and lab experiments, it is generally blind to broader concepts of health that explore connections to families, neighborhoods, social activities, law and politics.

The failure to see that wider view of health is not unique to news editors;

it's the same tunnel vision that leads the United States to burn through more than a trillion dollars a year on medical treatments, while skimming on prevention efforts. (Need heart bypass surgery? No problem. Want the lights to stay on at the park so you can toss a ball around after work? Forget it.) Americans are less healthy and die younger than residents of dozens of nations that spend only a fraction as much per capita, yet most of the health care debate here revolves around how to pay for doing more of the same. The dearth of public discussion of the determinants of health is linked with the rigid parameters of most health news reporting.

## The Marketplace for Health Stories

The source of my frustration with the health news marketplace is that I'm interested in writing, for example, about how tax policy and anti-smuggling measures relate to tobacco consumption. But it's easier to sell a story about how tweaking chemotherapy might improve average lung cancer survival by just a month. I like writing about how reducing the fear of crime in public parks by using police patrols, grounds keeping, and lighting boosts physical activity of neighborhood children (thus fighting obesity). But the easier story to sell is how to use new techie gadgets as stand-ins for a personal trainer.

Of course, in order to sell something, you have to have a buyer. Who "buys" health stories? Readers and audiences create demand by telling market survey consultants that they like health stories. Advertisers who have a natural interest in associating their products with stories touting benefits of medical care include drug companies, device makers, health care providers, and insurers. The example I'm most familiar with is the long-standing sponsorship of medical news at CNN. (I was a medical correspondent at CNN from 1987 to 1997.) While CNN has an

official policy intended to protect editorial decision-making from advertiser pressure, there were still disincentives to pursuing stories that challenged the paradigm that the key to better health is more medicine.

These sponsored medical spots have mandated airtimes; that is, show producers run the stories on a fixed schedule, along with the accompanying ad. If the content of a story might clash with the ad, the ad is moved away from the story. However, in those cases the airtime mandate is also dropped. In 1991, for example, when we reported on emerging research linking acetaminophen (Tylenol and other brands) to liver damage, the ads were moved, but instead of the normal three airings, the story appeared just once, and only after a day of pleading with producers. CNN is not unique; many news outlets in all media have special segments and

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**Most media outlets have a lazy definition of a health story: It has to involve patients or lab rats, doctors or researchers, a pill or procedure, or food and exercise in the 'lifestyle' reports.**

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sections that attract health industry advertising. While the good organizations try to protect their reporters, managers also know that too many stories questioning the value of medicine could lead advertisers to drift away, thus draining funds that support a health beat staff.

I am not dumping all the blame on medical advertisers. It's only human to wish for a "magic bullet" pill, rather than to be reminded that staying healthy involves effort, discipline and regulation. Also, it's easier for reporters to write a "gee whiz" story on lab research than it is to captivate readers or viewers with tales of how urban planning that encourages walking or bicycling to school and work can boost levels of physical activity and reduce air pollution. In addition, the same voyeuristic impulses that drew crowds to old car-

nival freak shows and produce "gawker block" at car crash scenes, fuel a steady stream of so-called health reports on poor little sick kids, researchers working on ugly, but rare, diseases, and families pursuing malpractice claims. These stories are "entertaining" and popular, but they have little to do with health.

## The Limitations of Training

Most discussions about the shortcomings of health reporting include calls for more training opportunities. Indeed, training of journalists is generally neglected. It must be expanded and enhanced, especially for beat reporters faced with technically complex subjects such as health and health care. Yet as important as training initiatives are, they have limitations. That observation is not a knock on the efforts

themselves; let me explain. Consider the "luxury edition" of the type of program aimed at individual reporters: the fellowship. Programs offered by major foundations with an interest in the health beat (Knight, Kaiser Family, of which I am an alumnus, Commonwealth, etc.) offer several months to a year of study, research, con-

templation and exploration. To anyone living the daily grind, these fellowships look like utopia. Anyone fortunate enough to have experienced one of them knows how precious an experience it is. One objective of such programs is to produce better-informed and more thoughtful journalists, and they do. [See articles by Melinda Voss and Larry Tye on pages 46 and 48.]

But talk with former fellows, and some will reveal, while trying hard not to sound whiney or ungrateful, that in reality the experience is, in important ways, imperfect. At the extreme, fellows returning to "real life" sometimes find they no longer have a job to come back to, or at least not the same job they left. More often, returning fellows discover that while they studied and learned and grew, their workplace is the same as they left it: The boss's

priorities and perspectives are the same, the deadlines are the same, and the pressure for efficiency might well be more intense than ever. Sometimes, and in some ways, depending on the individual and the organization, a returning fellow might be able to apply some of what he or she gained in order to affect some improvements in the workplace. In other cases, however, the homecoming journalist encounters friction and resistance to change.

## The Environment of Health Reporting

So, what to do? Parallels with the practice of public health can be instructive. While the influence of lifestyle and personal behavior on health is enormous, there is a growing body of evidence supporting calls to look beyond the individual in order to see the effect of the environment. By “environment” I do not mean just toxic pollutants, deforestation or declining biodiversity, but rather a broad view of the circumstances and conditions within which we live, which encompasses the physical environment as well as the social and economic environments.

What, then, are environmental strategies that could be applied to the health beat? That’s a big question, for which I can’t provide a simple or conclusive answer. But I would argue we need to focus more effort on constructing new media “spaces” designed to be homes for stories that are now often orphaned. Again, a health analogy: If a community is suffering, one of the first initiatives that comes to mind is to build a clinic. Obviously, health care providers work best when they have adequate facilities at hand. The same is true for journalists. In terms of their organizational structure (not the actual rooms and equipment), most media spaces today are constructed to deliver the common sorts of quick bulletins and light lifestyle features. We need more programs and sections that welcome and nurture new and different types of health coverage.

We need more of an “environmental awareness” of the constraints and confines, the incentives and deterrents, which are part of the professional, corporate and economic circumstances of health journalism.

The situation is not entirely gloomy. According to a content analysis by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Princeton Survey Research Associates that appeared as a supplement to the Columbia Journalism Review last year, coverage of health policy stories by major newspapers and broadcast networks increased by more than a third from 1997 to 2000. The stories tended to follow presidential and congressional politics or the economic effects of health care costs, but at least health policy was a growing part of the media diet. What’s more, it appears readers and audiences are paying attention.

There is evidence that, contrary to

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**There is evidence that, contrary to the instincts of many news managers, people are actually more interested in health policy stories than in ‘disease of the week’ blurbs.**

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the instincts of many news managers, people are actually more interested in health policy stories than in “disease of the week” blurbs. Every two months since 1996, the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health have conducted a poll, the Health News Index, to find out what national breaking health news stories people are following (which means it does not include local, human interest, or feature stories.) A preliminary look at an analysis of responses from all those polls indicates that more people closely follow stories about public health and health policy than closely follow stories about specific diseases or medical advances. (A full report on the analysis is pending review by the Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law.)

While the findings seem to contradict gut news instincts about what stories draw an audience, they actually make sense. As the Kaiser Family Foundation’s Mollyann Brodie explained, public health and policy issues often affect most or all of us, while news about a specific disease or medical advance is likely to catch the interest of only that segment of the audience that feels a personal connection to the condition or risk. For example, the Health News Index last spring found that 35 percent of respondents said they were closely following news about prescription drug discount cards, while 19 percent were closely following discussions over FDA approval of the new colon cancer drug Erbitux. Maybe stories about the bigger health picture are also the ones that will help boost circulation and ratings after all.

My point is not that good stories on broad health issues never sell, of course they do; but that fact doesn’t mean the solution is just harder work by individual reporters. Think about the “against all odds” story of a poor child of jailed and/or addicted parents who, despite attending a high school with low test scores and high violence rates, wins a scholarship to Stanford. Is the moral of that story that kids in dysfunctional families and bad schools can succeed, if they just study harder? No, what they really need is systemic reform to improve the odds, so that academic success is commonplace, not a rarity worthy of network coverage. In a similar fashion, we need to encourage structural change in the health news marketplace, so that there are more welcoming homes for stories that need to be told. ■

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# The Public Health Beat: What Is It? Why Is It Important?

‘To follow a public health story is to feel the classic pull of a mystery . . .’

By M.A.J. McKenna

**O**n October 4, 2001, the first case of inhalational anthrax in Florida was reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This marked the discovery of the first fatal attack of bioterrorism on U.S. soil. Ultimately, anthrax killed five Americans, sickened another 17, and caused 30,000 people to be put on antibiotics. It also changed the country’s understanding of its vulnerability to biological attack.

This October date signals another development as well: the necessity of considering public health a significant beat in newsrooms and a key component of helping news organizations interpret major developments in defense, health policy, international relations, medical advances, and community needs. The anthrax crisis—which included an unfamiliar disease organism, clashing government agencies, confused messages about prevention and treatment, and persistent difficulties in defining whether people were at risk—was a classic public health story.

## The Public Health Beat

As a newspaper reporter who has concentrated on public health coverage since 1989, I have seen the beat lumped with—and sometimes mistaken for—science, clinical medicine, consumer health, and what could most accurately be called “public medicine” or the provision of health care for the poor and underserved.

Public health is none of those, though some public health stories touch on many of these areas. Put simply, public health and reporters who cover it investigate the threat, occurrence and prevention of health problems—infections, chronic diseases, injuries and exposure to toxins—not in individual patients, but in groups that can be as small as an elementary school

classroom or as large as the global population.

If this makes the beat sound remote, consider that prior to the space shuttle Columbia disaster on February 1st many of the major science and medicine stories of the past 12 months—in fact, many Page One stories—were about public health. As we look back, there were the reports of multiple epidemics on cruise ships; the *Listeria* outbreak in the Northeast that triggered the largest food recall in U.S. history; the explosive expansion of the West Nile virus epidemic and discovery that the pathogen could be transmitted by organ transplants and move into the blood supply, and the post-anthrax discovery that the country’s network of health departments, labs and computer networks is woefully underfunded and inadequate for detecting bioterrorism.

Then there is the ongoing story of the national smallpox vaccination campaign, announced by President Bush December 13th and organized by the CDC. As initially proposed, the campaign called for vaccinating up to 500,000 health department and emergency room staff, followed by up to 10 million police, fire and hospital workers, who would serve as frontline defenders if smallpox were used in a bioterrorist attack. It appears the first phase of this campaign might include no more than 250,000 workers, and the second phase might never happen. The campaign has foundered on fears of the vaccine, questions of legal liability, and confusion about how much financial protection will be offered to victims of the vaccine’s serious side effects.

## Reporting These Stories

This list, which is only a highlights reel of last year’s major public health stories, should indicate why the beat de-

serves more attention than many news organizations give it. Public health stories have urgency, drama and novelty. They are complex—what a public health scientist would call “multifactorial.” Frequently, they are compelling. They arise out of the near-universal dread of the new and frightening. Or they may stem from the conflict between basic impulses and learned behaviors, whether that is neglecting to wear a condom during sex or forgetting to put on mosquito repellent before cutting the lawn.

Reporting on public health requires a particular set of skills that differ from those put to use by journalists on other science and medicine beats. But there are some similarities: As with medical reporting, covering public health demands a basic familiarity with biology, lab science, and clinical medicine. But because public health is a government function, to write about it requires developing the ability to decipher budgets and politics and to place the science within this broader context. And since reaching conclusions about public health leans heavily on statistical analyses, it is useful for a public health reporter not to be afraid of math.

Above all, writing about public health requires a willingness to do painstaking reporting. When a medical advance is reported by a university or a research consortium, a reporter often hears of this news with stories of patient experiences included. In public health coverage, reporters usually begin with either the person *or* the research results, but often not both. If the starting point is three people on one block with similar cases of cancer, then reporting the story will require an extensive search for data to back up what can seem like an apparent trend. But when the initial information a reporter receives is about an uptick in disease rates—statistics from which personal identifiers have

usually been stripped—associating the numbers with actual victims can require lengthy research.

To balance such demands, public health reporting offers compensations. The fundamental question asked by epidemiology, “Compared to what?” is essentially the same question asked by serious journalists: “To prove significance and accuracy, what questions must we ask?” Just as every medical student is told at least once, “When you hear hoofbeats, think horses, not zebras,” every public health student learns that “Coincidence is not the same as causation.” The rigor of public health research, which makes an effort to look beyond the obvious answer, lends toughness to public health writing. And public health stories are authentic trend stories; they represent real associations extracted, by exacting analysis, from the surrounding data storm.

This argument risks forcing public health reporting into the same trap that for many years imprisoned reporting on the environment—it was considered dull but important. Public health coverage is rescued from dullness by the fascinating personalities who practice it and the extraordinary stories it reveals. To follow a public health story is to feel the classic pull of a mystery, but in this case it is the relentless detective pitted, not against

a human murderer, but against a remorseless natural force.

In pursuit of such stories, I’ve watched a scientist empty a refrigerator of a week’s worth of groceries to search for clues to a food-borne disease that was causing a rash of miscarriages while she ignored the risk to her own first-trimester pregnancy. I helped another one wrestle with a thrashing, angry heron with a wingspan longer than I am tall, because a sample of its blood might provide clues to an outbreak. I sat in a hospital room with a vibrant 51-year-old woman who had suddenly become paralyzed to her collarbone, while researchers debated whether she might be one of the first cases of West Nile virus paralysis. In India, I watched a young father who had carried his limp, feverish son on a 26-hour train journey, crumple when he realized that none of the boy’s four immunizations had adequately protected him against polio.

The personal drama of those stories, and the research and policy issues they illuminate, ought to be an argument for public health coverage in themselves. In case they are not, I offer a final consideration, based on a remark I once heard in an Atlanta public meeting. It was made by Dr. William Foege, a revered figure in American public health who was most recently

senior advisor to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “At its base,” Foege said, “the provision of public health is the search for social justice.”

Considerations of justice and equity are the foundation of the best work that news organizations do. Giving a home to the public health beat allows us another forum to explore those issues, while it gives us an additional set of complex, dramatic, human stories to tell. ■

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## The Anthrax Attacks

A journalist assesses what went wrong in coverage of this story.

*Following September 11th, The Century Foundation began its Homeland Security Project to help inform the public and policymakers about complex challenges related to terrorism. One facet of this project is a series of case studies examining the public’s need to know. What follows are edited excerpts from a paper in this series entitled “The Anthrax Attacks,” which explores how and why the press encountered difficulties in reporting essential public health information during the anthrax crisis.*

By Patricia Thomas

**A**nthrax bioterrorism was the third most closely followed news story of 2001, topped only by the September 11th attacks and the war in Afghanistan. Some 24-hour news channels were “all anthrax, all the time” for several weeks; Tom Brokaw uttered the memorable phrase “in Cipro we trust” as a sign-off after the NBC newsroom was targeted, and print coverage reached blizzard proportions. For example, the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention (CDC) was mentioned in more than 12,000 newspaper and magazine articles during the final three months of the year.

Meanwhile, a behind-the-scenes struggle was developing between government agencies, which held a near monopoly on information about the attacks, and journalists clamoring for access to what government scientists and investigators knew. This situation came to light in late October, about

three weeks into the crisis, when prominent journalists began venting their frustrations in print: Usually helpful press officers were stonewalling, government scientific experts were not being made available for interviews, and public officials were generally failing to make accurate health information available fast enough. This mismanagement of news harmed the public good, reporters said. Some writers blamed Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Tommy Thompson, speculating that his devotion to the Bush administration's credo of "speaking with one voice" led him to silence experts, damage his own credibility, and wound the reputation of the CDC in the midst of a national emergency. Other critics attributed disruptions in news flow to structural deficiencies and incompetence at the CDC itself.

Regardless of whom these influential reporters held responsible, all expressed concern that an information shortfall left the American people susceptible to panic, vulnerable to hucksters, and confused about how best to safeguard the health of their families. More than one year after the last anthrax victim died on November 21, 2001, one might expect reporters to have lost interest in these issues and moved on. But that has not happened. In fact, more recent actions of the Bush administration have made thoughtful journalists increasingly worried that tight government control of health and science news might disrupt the flow of timely, accurate information about scientific research and personal health to readers and viewers....

When the attacks began, "All the government agencies, including NIH [National Institutes of Health] and CDC, were told not to talk. They were trying to develop a model where all the information came from a central source," NBC's Robert Bazell said. He cuts the Bush administration some slack because they were newly in power, there is always a learning curve, and no one had any practice with bioterrorism. Washington Post reporter Rick Weiss is less forgiving about how the administration's "speaking with one

voice" policy hampered journalists' effort to keep the public informed about breaking science. "One department, one voice. But that one voice is busy right now, so please leave a message," he said wryly....

### Calling the CDC

Every reporter covering the anthrax story called the CDC at least once, but not many actually managed to interview a CDC scientist. Understaffing was an obvious problem in the first phase of the crisis. From October 4th through 12th, the single media relations specialist assigned to bioterrorism documented 137 anthrax calls received during business hours. More calls probably came through but were not written down. At the very least, she faced 20 media requests during each working day, which public relations experts say is about the maximum that one person can handle. Outside normal business hours, however, CDC estimates that this same individual received "hundreds" of calls and pages from reporters seeking help with information or interviews. CDC press officers with other responsibilities say they pitched in but acknowledge they lacked the expertise of the woman on the anthrax beat.

Press inquiries that reached the CDC's central media relations office were tracked separately, and this tally indicates that the phones rang non-stop: 2,229 calls about anthrax and 287 concerning bioterrorism were documented between October 4th and 18th, and these are thought to be underestimated. This translates into nearly 230 incoming calls on an average day. No one in the central office appears to have been officially designated to handle these calls until 10 days had passed: Then, on October 14, five of the office's 10 media relations specialists were assigned to anthrax and bioterrorism. CDC also selected several senior scientists as official spokespersons and began setting them up with interviews.

There is no comprehensive record of how the 2,516 press inquiries that reached CDC media relations during

these two weeks were resolved. Those who got in touch with a press officer were likely to be referred elsewhere. If they asked about field investigations they were asked to call local officials in Florida, New York, New Jersey, or Washington. (There, press officers in the field sometimes bounced inquiries back to the CDC in Atlanta.) Reporters who asked about the search for the perpetrators were told to contact the FBI, which released prepared statements about the investigation but was otherwise tightlipped. If reporters called to follow up on comments made by Secretary Thompson or to ask about policy issues, they were usually referred to the public affairs office at HHS. And, although they did not realize this was happening, many reporters then had to wait while their requests were vetted by HHS officials in Washington....

So-called anthrax experts seemed to be coming out of the woodwork, and they were getting plenty of airtime on the 24-hour television news channels. One of the most notorious was a supposed authority who repeatedly referred to anthrax, which is a bacterium, as "the anthrax virus."

Two weeks after anthrax hit, HHS leadership realized that the public needed more information from credible medical experts and that many of those people worked for the CDC. In Atlanta, 10 media relations specialists from satellite press operations elsewhere on the CDC campus were brought to the central office to join forces with the five already taking anthrax calls. These 15 professionals, along with about half a dozen support staff, were divided into two teams and put on shifts that kept the press office open 10 to 12 hours daily, seven days a week. This schedule went into effect during the week of October 15th....

CDC's revamped press operations went into high gear on October 18th. Reporters got a multipurpose press release confirming that a postal worker in New Jersey definitely had cutaneous anthrax, announcing that updates on the crisis were being posted in Spanish on the agency's Web site, and promoting a video news release featuring CDC director Jeffrey Koplan. Despite

Koplan's stiff delivery and the tape's lack of pizzazz, news directors were so hungry for information from CDC that the video aired 923 times and reached an estimated 50 million viewers....

## Reporting on a Health Crisis

Just as a standard news story contains certain elements, there is a checklist of what people need to know about a public health threat. Basic information includes signs and symptoms of illness, how exposure or transmission occurs, how to estimate one's own degree of risk, what interventions can prevent or treat the problem, what outcomes are likely, and when and where to seek help if needed. Because no two people are alike or have exactly the same risks, it is seldom possible to make a "one size fits all" recommendation. This is why science and medical journalists lean heavily on physicians or scientists who can lay out the facts about a specific health threat and explain the pros and cons of various choices. This enables consumers to act in their own best interests, which may mean doing nothing at all.

But what if reporters cannot reach those experts and are offered political appointees and bogus scientific experts instead? According to an October 23rd article by New York Times reporter Sheryl Gay Stolberg, muddled messages from the government confused and frightened the public. She faulted the Bush administration for failing to deliver accurate information, "even if it might be scary," and criticized Secretary Thompson in particular for suggesting that the first victim might have been infected by drinking from a stream. Instead of complaining about the administration's "speaking with one voice" policy, however, Stolberg cited contradictory information emanating from local public health officials and "self-proclaimed experts" as the main source of confusion for reporters and the public....

Just as bioterrorism preparedness is part of a larger public health context, what happened between government news managers and reporters during the anthrax attacks is part of a bigger picture, in which Bush administration policies are changing the rules of engagement for reporters and their

sources. Journalists worry that when an end to the "War on Terror" is eventually declared, access to government scientists and tax-supported scientific research will still be limited.

## Moving Forward From Anthrax

At the CDC, phone banks for handling inquiries from health care providers, journalists and worried citizens have been expanded since fall 2001. A facility for broadcasting televised press conferences, or for linking CDC officials with HHS leaders in Washington, also has been set up. These are important steps in the right direction.

Government agencies also must prepare accurate information about various organisms in advance: If another bioterrorism attack occurs, communication offices should have fact sheets and rosters of experts on hand in order to disseminate critical knowledge immediately. Crisis communications experts emphasize that credible doctors and scientists should be talking to the press from the start and should be available on a schedule that suits today's 24-hour news cycle so that less reliable speakers will be shut out. Although political appointees can convey important messages to the public, the CDC director, surgeon general, and other medical authorities should handle technical matters.

Experts see the anthrax attacks as an atypical form of bioterrorism and predict that if bioweapons are used again, the assault will probably unfold more slowly, in more locations, and may well involve an organism that spreads easily from person to person. Communications challenges will be greater than before, and press officers sent to site investigations will need clear guidelines for coordinating messages with those emanating from Atlanta or Washington.

Another lesson that HHS and CDC communication managers may derive from the anthrax experience is that the eye of the storm is not the place to suddenly decide that all reporters should be treated in the same way. If CDC and HHS press officers had con-

## Preparing for Bioterrorism Reporting

Individual reporters and the profession are adapting to a world where bioterrorism is no longer unthinkable. Some journalism schools have instituted courses such as "Covering International Terrorism," which was taught at Boston University for the first time last year. Professional organizations have created educational offerings for working journalists.

With help from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation (RTNDF) produced a two-hour bioterrorism seminar that was broadcast by satellite in late 2001. The organization also distributed a journalist's guide to covering bioterrorism to every television and radio newsroom. For

2003, the RTNDF plans another satellite forum, workshops, presentations at professional conferences, and additional publications—all aimed at preparing broadcast journalists to cope with biological warfare.

The Foundation for American Communications (FACS), a 25-year-old organization that conducts educational programs and develops print and online resources for journalists, has turned its attention to bioterrorism as well. In December 2001, FACS teamed up with the television news directors and the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, and Institute of Medicine for a workshop aimed at training reporters to cover terrorism. ■ —P.T.

tinued giving elite reporters the same degree of access they usually enjoyed, at least some of the critical articles in national newspapers might never have been written. One rationale for doing this is that such reporters are more knowledgeable and experienced than most of the press corps.

A final piece of advice for news managers was offered by former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, who testified before a congressional subcommittee in November 2001. Koop told legislators that communicating threats to the

public was mostly a matter of common sense and laid out some rules about how to do it effectively. The final item, and most important in Koop's view, was "keep the press on your side through honesty and forthrightness."...

Everyone, of course, hopes that bioweapons will never again be deployed against Americans. But if this does happen, the timely flow of information from experts to the public via the mass media will be the nation's best protection against panic and potential disaster. ■

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## Useful Lessons From Reporting the Anthrax Story

A journalist describes what happened and shares what he learned.

By Sanjay Bhatt

I was interviewing Florida's director of substance abuse services by phone when an editor stood up in the middle of the newsroom and yelled in my direction, "Anthrax! We've got anthrax!" I made sure I had heard right, then cut the phone interview short, explaining that we had a human anthrax case in Palm Beach County, and I had to go *now*. It was a few minutes before 3:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 4, 2001.

I rushed to the county health department, which had scheduled a four o'clock press conference, and then to JFK Medical Center, where Dr. Larry Bush was speaking to reporters shortly after five. Next to him was the state's top epidemiologist, Steven Wiersma, sent by pediatrician John Agwunobi, who was having an unusual first day as Florida Department of Health Secretary. Though no one wanted to believe it, Robert Stevens, a photo editor at The Sun, a supermarket tabloid published by American Media, was going to die from a disease so rare that most of our knowledge about it was derived from 1979, when dozens of Russians died after being exposed to spores cultivated in a Soviet biological weapons factory.

What, in retrospect, is obvious was

completely baffling on October 4th. Today we accept that terrorists—whether foreign or domestic—target suburban communities (illustrated again by last fall's sniper shootings), but back then pundits insisted that *real* terrorists strike power centers such as Washington or New York City. More than a few reporters still tell me that their suburban newsrooms aren't prepared to cover such an attack. And when the big story hits, it's too late to begin thinking then about which experts to tap, how to staff round-the-clock shifts, and what risks journalists in the field should and should not take.

With the necessity of preparation in mind, journalists might find some useful lessons in what my colleagues and I at The Palm Beach Post experienced on and after October 4th.

**Lesson 1: Plan ahead of the event, as you would for a natural disaster.** Back in 1999, I listened to military experts share doomsday scenarios with more than 200 nurses, paramedics and public health workers in a Tampa conference center. One of the scenarios involved terrorists silently dispersing anthrax spores through the air-ventilation shafts of a shopping mall and infecting thousands of people. It was so

chilling that I led my piece with it. The headline: "Florida 'Inviting' for Bioterrorism Attack, Experts Warn." My skeptical editors ran the story inside on 4A. I stuffed my notes into a jumbo envelope, tucked it away and moved on.

Two years later, a dozen other reporters and I, who were attending the Association of Health Care Journalists' National Conference, were standing outside a maximum containment laboratory at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Only government labs in Atlanta and Moscow are known to possess old strains of the virus that causes smallpox, which the World Health Organization declared eradicated in 1980. Someone asked how the laboratory received shipments of lethal viruses, such as Ebola, during the 2000 outbreak in Uganda. "We use Fed-Ex," the tour guide said. Jaws dropped.

After I returned to West Palm Beach, I pursued a story on how specific lethal germs, or so-called "select agents," like anthrax are transported between laboratories. Private couriers had never lost a package since the program began two decades ago, CDC officials said. The Department of Energy's Inspector General, however, had faulted CDC for



neglecting some of its duties in overseeing non-CDC labs' registration of select agents. The report didn't address military labs, which have their own layer of oversight.

It wasn't obvious at the time I attended the terrorism seminar or the CDC tour that I would ever put the information to use. When the unthinkable happened, I was prepared to ask tough questions, offer readers context, and score a few scoops.

**Lesson 2: Do your job, but don't be reckless.** Whoever was behind the anthrax attacks considered the media an enemy worth killing. The Palm Beach Post and other newspapers in Florida moved mail operations off-site, made disposable gloves available to staff, and beefed-up security. We knew many of the September 11th hijackers had spent time plotting schemes in our county. What we didn't know scared us more.

I was too busy and naive to worry about being infected. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency refused to let me or other reporters follow their team inside the American Media Inc. headquarters. The U.S. Postal Service also refused when we asked to go inside the county's main sorting center—which the health department had said was decontaminated. Now, looking back, my bravado seems stupid. The terrorist outfoxed the world's best disease detectives once, who was to say he or she couldn't do it again?

Barely a month after anthrax killed Stevens, we had reports of dozens of flea-market shoppers feeling ill and hazardous materials teams scanning the area. It was a Sunday. The editor sent the reporter working that day's shift to the scene. Fire officials were telling the media that early tests suggested VX. The editor didn't know what VX was. It's a nerve agent that kills within minutes of exposure. Fortunately, it turned out to be Freon, not VX—and the media circling the flea market didn't become part of the story.

The news industry has a dismal record of investing in training, especially for the most inexperienced reporters who are likely to be sent into the field. The government is spending a great deal of public money training

emergency workers on how to respond to a future terrorist attack. It bothers me that no one, even within the news industry, seems to be giving frontline reporters their due. Aren't journalists first responders as well? [See Melinda Voss's story on page 46.]

We would have been faced with difficult choices that October if people were infected with a contagious germ, such as smallpox or pneumonic plague. There's no guarantee public health workers would have isolated all exposed contacts. What if the germ had an unexpectedly long incubation period? What if it was genetically engineered to behave differently than an ordinary germ? What if my editor wanted me to go to the dead victim's home and talk to neighbors? Where would I feel comfortable going if the victim was a politician who had shaken hands all over the county during a recent campaign? How many official assurances would I require before I could think about doing my job? My news instinct would be, and is, to do my job.

**Lesson 3: Report official statements. Then explain what they don't say.** On day two of the anthrax investigation, Governor Jeb Bush told the press, "People don't have any reason to be concerned. This is a cruel coincidence. That's all it is." Health officials reiterated there was "no evidence of terrorism." I knew from covering foodborne outbreaks that that wasn't the whole story. "The fact that Stevens never regained consciousness after arriving at the hospital Tuesday, and the lack of other human cases, could mean investigators might never discover how he was infected," I reported. In essence, investigators reassured the public based on their lack of data. Is that really so comforting?

Later, it became clear that the attacks challenged what the experts thought they knew about anthrax. Hundreds of spores must be inhaled before achieving a lethal dose. Oops, not always. As a reporter trying to convey truth to my readers, I tried to cut through the official gibberish and ran the risk of sounding too certain. When officials gave me strong declarative

statements, I rejoiced—only to hear them retracted as events unfolded.

Months later, I uttered more than a few groans as I reviewed my clips: An October 11th piece quoted the state health secretary saying the threat of anthrax exposure didn't extend beyond the Boca Raton building; the same story quoted a U.S. postal inspector saying, "There is no evidence the mail was used. There has never been any chemical or biological agent ever sent through the mail that harmed anyone." An October 24th piece reported that tests of the first-floor air vents in the American Media building showed no trace of the germ—"That means it is unlikely the bacterium was dispersed widely in the building." Days later, I reported exactly the opposite. Perhaps a large disclaimer above stories is needed: "Stay tuned. What seems true today might not be so tomorrow."

On a big story like this, the pressure to feed readers fresh angles and insights is unrelenting. To be honest, too often there was nothing new to report. Nevertheless, I would find a story because I was terrified the competition would, too. An October 26th piece stripped across the front page told of one woman who was hospitalized after taking Cipro even though doctors like Larry Bush didn't think the antibiotic could cause such a severe reaction. I cowrote the story, but I don't think it deserved top billing. Drug reactions are common, and the publicity might have scared others at risk from taking Cipro at all. I can imagine similar issues will emerge when the first person is hospitalized from smallpox vaccination. There's an ethics paper in all of this for a journalism student.

While I think there's plenty of room for ethics discussions about this coverage at news organizations, I believe I was on firm ground in seeking opinions from nongovernment experts during the crisis. I had no choice. The federal government imposed a news blackout for several days and gagged state and local officials. Calls, faxes and e-mails to the federal agencies went unanswered. [See Patricia Thomas's story on page 11.] The urge for imme-

diate explanations is only human and can't be expected to sit still until the next press conference. Do we honestly think it's *more* responsible to tell the public, "We don't have any clue as to why this person died from a disease that last killed dozens of Russians in the 1970's outside a biological weapons factory. Stay tuned. 'Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?' is next."

It's still a mystery why this happened in Florida. And it amazes me that the perpetrator(s) remains at large. Natu-

rally, when more than 1,000 people reported getting diarrhea on cruise ships late last year, the news media jumped on it because of the specter of terrorists poisoning buffet lines. Getting the runs on all-you-can-eat boats certainly wasn't new. I was covering that story when the CDC recommended something more basic than Cipro: Wash your hands! ■

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*ered public health for the Post since the spring of 1999. He was the lead reporter in the paper's anthrax coverage, for which both he and the Post staff received numerous honors, including first place in the Excellence in War on Terrorism Coverage given by the Florida Press Club and the Society of Professional Journalists' Green Eyeshade award.*

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## Public Health Reporting: After September 11th, It's More Difficult

Important stories aren't getting told, sources are hard to reach, and what was once public is now considered secret.

By Madeline Drexler

**T**he September 11th attacks dramatically changed and constrained the way journalists—especially public health reporters—are able to do their jobs. I submitted the manuscript of my book, "Secret Agents: The Menace of Emerging Infections," exactly three weeks before September 11th. Since then I've observed and dealt with disturbing new restrictions. For the two-and-a-half years I was researching my book, I felt I had full access to public health experts at all levels of government and academia. But the gates have closed. Now a journalist must negotiate an obstacle course of silence and spin, bland obfuscations and tightly controlled facts. Simply put, in this new climate I could never have written my book.

Although I didn't realize it at the time, when I began my research in early 1999, a window had briefly opened for medical reporters. The U.S. government had started to acknowledge the wretched condition of public health in this country. The full spec-

trum of neglect was glaring: obsolete labs, archaic data collection systems, rigid organizational fiefdoms, and demoralized workers. That autumn, the startling arrival of the West Nile virus exposed the system's gaps and flaws.

Insiders were willing to talk about this deteriorating state of affairs. In an atmosphere of heightened awareness, unfettered by any explicit emergency—and free of a White House that micromanages the pronouncements of government employees—I was able to travel and conduct hundreds of interviews. Even at the time, I reveled in a sense of journalistic spaciousness.

### Access to Sources

In New York City, I spent a day with a tough-talking veterinary technician, driving to the secretly sited "sentinel chickens" whose antibodies warned of the West Nile virus. Such a leisurely lark under government auspices would surely be banned today. In Baltimore, I strolled along the harbor with D.A.

Henderson, the crusty public health icon who had directed the World Health Organization's smallpox eradication campaign in the 1960's and '70's; nine months later, he was bunkered and virtually unreachable back in Washington, enlisted to help brace the nation for a possible return of the scourge he had extinguished. In Atlanta, I spent a week hanging out with scientists in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) foodborne infections branch, as endless reports of salmonella and listeria and E. coli swept through the warren of basement offices; today, the CDC has become a frontline command post for the war on terrorism, one that strangers with steno pads cannot breach. [See Patricia Thomas's report on page 11.]

Above all, I enjoyed long and repeated interviews with federal, state and local public health officials. I could call up a source at the CDC, or anywhere else, and ask a question—and get an answer. Public health was not a state secret: It was public.

No more. In order to converse with anyone at the CDC, a reporter must now make a formal request, which can take weeks to be processed through a complex public affairs filtration system that reaches all the way to the Washington, D.C. headquarters of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. If the interview actually takes place—little guarantee, there—it will be monitored by a public affairs minder ostensibly on the call to offer relevant “resources,” but in fact there to corral the discussion and closely watch the clock. Talk about the corporate model of government: A reporter would have more latitude grilling the CEO’s of Merrill Lynch or ExxonMobil.

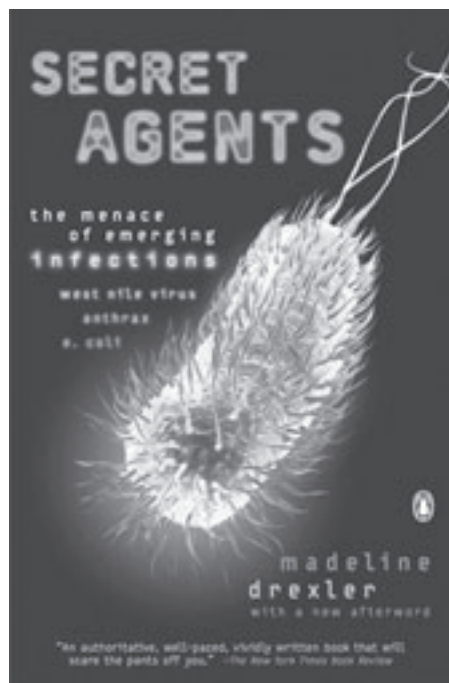
Don’t get me wrong. In recent months, I have been able to interview the CDC director, state and local health officials, emergency room physicians, public safety managers, and others, trying to make sense of this new national puzzle. But there’s an unmistakable chill in the air.

Admittedly, health workers at all levels are toiling triple-overtime these days, girding their departments for terrorism and carrying out the White House smallpox vaccination plan, all while trying to hold back the daily, unpublicized tide of disease. They have precious little time to talk to their spouses and children, let alone to journalists. But reporters—and readers—desperately need access to the facts, now more than ever. What evidence is there for an imminent smallpox virus release? How exactly did the White House settle on its controversial vaccination plan? What will happen if, in an emergency, public health is subsumed under public safety? Will the Department of Homeland Security forever change the face of the CDC?

## The Stories That Get Missed

Perhaps most important, in this era of all-smallpox-all-the-time, is how are we faring against other health threats right on our doorstep? If, on September 10, 2001, a public health reporter had asked CDC leaders what peril most preoccupied them, most would have said anti-

biotic-resistant bacteria, which have fueled an inexorable rise in deaths and illness in both hospitals and our communities. Ask these officials the same question today, off the record, and they might well answer the same way. In the past year, every dreaded predic-



tion about drug-resistant staph and other organisms has come to pass, but these alarming developments have been overshadowed by more speculative—if more dramatic—headlines.

Likewise, pandemic flu remains poised to leap out of Asia. Meat recalls of record proportions are quietly announced in dry bureaucratic prose. West Nile virus has surged across the entire Western Hemisphere. AIDS is spreading its devastation from Africa to India and Asia. Now, as throughout all of history, the most talented bioterrorist remains nature itself. Yet, in the fog of war preparations, we have lost sight of the bigger picture.

Three weeks after I submitted the manuscript of “Secret Agents,” the unimaginable happened. Three weeks later, anthrax broke out. As galleys and page proofs and final edits piled up on my desk, I furiously reworked my long chapter on bioterrorism, trying to chase

a moving target. With hourly news dispatches jerking me this way and that, composing a “first draft of history” left me with a distinctly sick feeling. The day before Christmas 2001, I gritted my teeth and sent off the pages to my publisher. Fortunately for the hardcover edition of my book, but unhappily for the rest of the country, the anthrax story hasn’t appreciably advanced since then. Why not? That’s another unanswered question.

Public health only gets support when it’s politically strategic. During the past year, billions of dollars have been poured into health departments at all levels of government—but it’s not necessarily being spent in the most effective ways. In the name of preparedness, weary officials are trying to solve the same problems across the country, inevitably duplicating efforts. The endemic problems in America’s public health system—short staffing, spotty training, heavy bureaucracy—endure.

And that might be the biggest untold story in public health today: How is the vast, unsung network of people and labs and communications that protects all of us from disease being transformed by the recent emergency infusion of cash and attention? Is it a cosmetic fix or a long-term cure? Five years from now, will we be better defended not only against terrorist-sown diseases, but also against contaminated poultry or childhood whooping cough? Will more elderly citizens be immunized against flu and pneumonia? Will hospital infection rates have dropped? And, if journalists are still struggling just to talk with authorities in the know, how will the public ever find out? ■

*Madeline Drexler is a Boston-based journalist. The paperback edition of “Secret Agents: The Menace of Emerging Infections,” is due to be published by Penguin in March. A former medical columnist for The Boston Globe Magazine, she was a Knight Science Journalism Fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.*

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# Reporting on America's Widening Racial Health Gap

Using computer-assisted reporting, The Plain Dealer found the fault lines.

By Dave Davis

In Bacon County, Georgia, black families are being destroyed by an epidemic of heart disease and diabetes—diseases that are usually caught and treated in white residents. In Essex County, New Jersey, thousands of HIV-infected drug addicts live on the streets of Newark. They don't vote, don't have high-powered lobbyists, and are largely ignored by state lawmakers who hand out money for AIDS treatment and drug rehabilitation. And in Mahoning County, Ohio, African-American women are being murdered by husbands, boyfriends and drug dealers so often that public officials appear to have grown used to it.

These counties form the fault line of the nation's great racial health divide. Although others have documented the nation's widening racial health gap, many of the places that have been hardest hit hadn't received much attention. At The Plain Dealer, we spent a year trying to find these places, then we wrote about them in a five-part series published in March 2000.

## The Racial Health Gap

Using the tools of computer-assisted reporting and mortality data gathered from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), we found that a racial health gap exists in virtually every county in the nation with a sizeable number of minority residents. But in what places was the disparity the worst? And why? What characteristics did these fault-line counties have in common?

Ultimately, we concluded that poverty and a lack of health insurance had a profound impact on the widening disparity. But even after these factors were taken into account, we found that African Americans admitted to hospitals receive less medical care than whites who are the same age, same gender, and about as sick. Our analysis of 44.9

million patient stays from 1996 to 1998 found that, compared with the treatment of white patients, doctors were slightly more likely to either just order tests for blacks or administer no treatment at all.

But the idea behind our series was to publish a geography-based analysis of the nation's racial health disparity, the first-ever county-by-county look at the problem. We believed that by visiting these places and writing about what we found, we might shed light on some larger truth about these hidden tragedies. We believed that by telling the stories of people who were struggling to survive but had never looked into the eye of a reporter or public official, we might contribute new voices to the national discourse and help shape the public health system's response to these problems.

I don't know that our stories had any lasting effect. Immediately after they appeared, then-Surgeon General David Satcher praised the stories as a road map for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which had assumed responsibility for developing a national approach. The Ohio Commission on Minority Health distributed 3,000 copies of our stories to its constituents, and my colleague, Elizabeth Marchak, participated in a weekend retreat with 80 black mothers and daughters to explore ways to end violence against women.

Those women were from the Youngstown, Ohio area, which had the nation's highest murder rate of black women. Still, Youngstown Mayor George McKelvey said our reporting was simply designed to make his city look bad. "I had fun trashing your story on the radio talk shows," he told us the day after the third installment, when the stories on Youngstown were published. Several days later, 70 black Youngstown residents jammed the city

council chambers to protest what they said was the city's indifference to these killings. The mayor formed a task force to study the problem.

But today, three years later, the task force has been abandoned. Nobody even recalls when it stopped meeting. David Satcher is no longer Surgeon General. And the whole issue of the racial health disparity, which just a short time ago seemed on the brink of becoming a national priority, has been all but forgotten in Washington as our leaders turn their attention to military and security matters.

All that's left are the stories, stories worth retelling and remembering.

## Stories The Plain Dealer Told

They are the stories of people like John Holley, a 47-year-old Lima, Ohio resident who suffered a near-fatal heart attack just days after a doctor refused to see him for chest pain. His wife, Mary, felt certain that the couple's lack of health insurance was the reason. "When we got there, the doctor said, 'I don't understand why they sent you here. I'm not going to touch you,'" his wife recalled. "I was so shocked. I just said, 'Thank you.'"

They are the stories of people like Maxine and Cynthia Wright of Youngstown, who share a bond beyond most mothers and daughters: Each lost a child to homicide. "It is hell," Maxine said wearily.

And they are the stories of Harold Moore, who was partially paralyzed from a drug overdose and lay dying from AIDS in a hospital bed at the Broadway House, a home for indigent AIDS patients in Newark. Drug-addicted, homeless, forgotten men like Moore wander the streets of Newark and the other northern New Jersey cities that lie in the shadow of Manhattan, whose brightly lit skyscrapers seem

to taunt this boarded-up city from across the Hudson River.

Here, women sell themselves for \$15. Men run heroin. Using dirty needles, they shoot up behind abandoned buildings, in cemeteries or in public bathrooms. They are spreading HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, at a pace that rivals some Third World nations. They are overwhelmingly black, and we called them “The Lost Ones” because, despite being desperately ill from AIDS, they did not seek medical treatment. They have no addresses. They have no telephones. They have no hope.

In Essex County, where black residents were dying from AIDS at 10 times the rate of whites, poverty and affluence live side-by-side, creating one of the widest racial health gaps we could find in the nation. “When I was out on the street, I had lost all my moral value, my self-respect,” Moore said. “All that flies out the window when you use drugs.”

Moore’s story was sad, compelling and uplifting, all at the same time. On some days, when he felt okay, he went in his wheelchair to speak to groups about “living with the virus.” While he was sick, for the first time in his life he spent time with his mother, becoming the son he had never been as he came to recognize the importance of family and friends. Lying in his hospital bed, through his tears, he told us something amazing, “I wouldn’t change these last seven years for nothing.”

## Transforming Data Into Stories

Our deathbed interview with Moore became the foundation upon which we built the fourth day of our five-day series. His words gave us the ability to share his story with our readers, and that was the payoff we received for more than 200 hours that we’d spent querying the CDC’s online mortality database (<http://wonder.cdc.gov>).

As we began our reporting, we ran death rates, by race and gender, for the nearly 1,200 counties in the United States. Then, we imported the results into a database. Armed with this pow-

erful data, we started talking with health officials and experts around the country. Few of them knew what we were talking about. Nobody had ever seen numbers like we had tallied. Many local and state public health officials simply told us we were wrong, though they could not offer us different numbers. Others—when confronted with data showing these disparities—denied there was any problem in their county or state. And some refused to talk to us.

Even so, the problems of minority health are not unknown to public health officials, especially those in federal agencies and at universities. In our search for information, we’d found studies and federal grants, involving all sorts of bureaucracies, devoted to—but not necessarily solving—a myriad of minority health problems.

As we traveled the nation and our state, one thing became increasingly clear: People working on the ground (on the streets, in public clinics, and community health centers) understood the scope of the tragedy and were scrambling to solve the problem on their own, often with little or no institutional support.

Two nurses in Lima, a depressed industrial city that sprouted up in the middle of central Ohio’s cornfields, were working in the city’s worst neighborhood, trying to catch untreated high blood pressure and diabetes before the diseases became disabling. In Youngstown, the Ursuline Nuns weren’t waiting for any of the city’s boards or commissions to act on the city’s homicide epidemic. For nearly a decade, they had been buying up old homes and filling them with single moms and their kids. The nuns knew, after 125 years in the city, that preserving families would help rebuild the community. It was their investment in the next generation, they said.

And in Cincinnati, a group of doctors and nurses had given up the comfort of private-practice medicine to start a clinic in an abandoned elementary school in Cincinnati’s over-the-Rhine district, a neighborhood split evenly between poor Appalachian whites and inner-city blacks and Hispanics. Patients were asked to pay what they could

based on their income. Doctors at the Crossroads Health Center said they saw more similarities than differences in the white, black and Latino patients they treated.

## People Respond to the Reporting

Reaction to the series was swift. The frontline health care workers we had interviewed all applauded the stories. They took them as a sort of call to action, proof of what they had been trying so hard to communicate to others about the problems they were treating. But those above them—high-ranking hospital administrators and public health officials at the state and county level—didn’t respond, even though we sent them copies of the stories and offered to publish their reaction.

We received hundreds of telephone calls, letters and e-mail from readers. Many wanted to tell us their personal stories. Many more simply wanted to express their appreciation. I was surprised, time after time, to hear callers tell me that they were shocked that our newspaper would undertake such a project. “How did I manage to do this story?” they asked.

I understood that many young people felt detached from daily newspapers. I knew that poor people felt this way. But many of the callers were educated professionals. To hear them talk about their distrust of news organizations was eye opening.

Our stories also became a bridge to our African-American readers, people who had buried too many in their family before their time. One elderly woman who met me in person was surprised to discover that I am white. She gave me a bear hug and whispered in my ear, “I didn’t think white people cared.” ■

*Dave Davis is an investigative reporter for The Plain Dealer in Cleveland, Ohio, who has specialized in health care issues. Reprints of his series are available through Davis at his e-mail address.*

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# Lead Poisoning: A Failed Response and Sick Children

A team of reporters and a photographer tackle a familiar story with a new approach.

By Judy Peet

**M**y first reaction was that I didn't want to work on the project my editor at The Star-Ledger was suggesting. I'd done a fairly comprehensive look at lead poisoning in New Jersey a decade before. A good one. The issue had been done to death. This time around it seemed just another case of an editor trying to force new life into a tired, button-pushing ghetto story about the hopelessness that comes when poverty, ignorance and disease converge.

It took me about four hours to change my mind. That was all the time it took to discover that most of the remarkable innovations approved by legislators 10 years earlier—which should have put New Jersey in the national forefront for the prevention of childhood lead poisoning—weren't actually happening. It was as though the laws they'd passed didn't exist. Testing hadn't been done. Abatement never happened. Prevention and education, the only real weapons against this silent but crippling disease, were woefully inadequate. And no one was even sure how bad the problem was because nobody was keeping track.

Within three phone calls, I realized two things: Not only is lead poisoning still the leading childhood environmental disease, but it had expanded beyond the inner city to New Jersey's suburbs. A recent trend of young, well-to-do families renovating glorious old houses without a clue about lead paint hazards had created more brain-damaged children. Just a few hours of asking questions, and I was already angry that so much money had been spent for studies and so little for treating this most preventable of all killers.

## Taking a Fresh Look

I was ashamed that I hadn't known about these failures because I never

followed up after last reporting on this issue. But now that I knew what I knew, the first job I had was to admit all of this to my editor, let him know I was wrong in my initial negative response to his story suggestion.

My next task was to find a fresh approach to an old reporting project. For at least 40 years, journalists have tried to tell this story; there probably isn't an environment reporter or a person on the children's beat who hasn't done some reporting about lead poisoning. In the six months before we began the project, there had been two brilliant series about this topic, one by The (Baltimore) Sun, the other by The Providence Journal.

So I studied their work. Reporters in Providence, working closely with health officials in Rhode Island, had done exhaustive, computer-assisted analysis of neighborhoods. Baltimore went after major landlords and lobbied successfully for legislative change. Neither approach seemed like the right one for us to take in New Jersey. In our state, laws were already in place; what was missing were the dollars and willpower to implement them. Nor could we track the problem house to house, because health officials refused to identify where known hazards existed.

My editor was pushing for numbers. He had dreams of maps exactly pinpointing problem areas and of slumlords going to jail. Early on, it became obvious that we weren't going to get the comprehensive statistics that had made the other newspaper's project so complete. In a way, this circumstance helped us. Unable to focus on the numbers, we examined how the system was supposed to work and where and how it had gone wrong. We discovered that what should have been straightforward—test the children, clean up the houses—was an incredibly complex process with pitfalls almost every step

of the way.

I decided to take advantage of the substantial assets we, as a staff, brought to our renewed coverage of this topic. We had an editor willing to give us the time we needed for the kind of reporting that would enable us to do the digging we needed to take a fresh look at this. We had a world-class photographer, Mia Song, with a magical eye for drama, and the reporter I was working with, Russell Ben-Ali, has enviable talents for finding and befriending people and tracking down minute detail.

Ben-Ali's beat is Newark, the state's largest and one of its poorest cities. His proposal to do a more modest story about life in the city's "safe houses" was what actually led to the emergence of this larger project on lead-paint poisoning. These city-owned units were supposed to provide temporary housing for families who were forced to relocate when their children were diagnosed with lead poisoning due to unsafe housing conditions.

New Jersey is one of the few states in the country to offer such homes, and the idea of having them represented a worthy effort to help families and children. But it was turning out that these safe houses were not a success. They ran hugely over budget. Once families moved in, they never moved out, because they couldn't find decent, lead-free housing. And "safe" house was a misnomer—children were still getting poisoned from lead paint, even while they lived in these houses.

This situation showed me my reporting pathway into this project. From that beginning, we started to get the numbers, examine in detail the programs, chronicle its failures—which turned out to be massive—and recorded its few successes. We learned about the politics, followed the money, studied the research, and tracked the lawsuits. Through all of this, we kept

reminding ourselves to never lose sight of the children. They were, after all, whom this public effort was created to protect.

Since I had written my last lead-poisoning project in 1993, I had become a parent. Early on, I realized that having children of my own skewed whatever objectivity I thought I'd brought to my reporting nearly a decade ago. So I decided to let my feelings of outrage act as our guide as we tried to determine what it is our readers—as voters, as citizens, as parents—would want to know.

## Reporting the Story

Ben-Ali hit the streets, while I immersed myself in the bureaucratic process and talked with the experts. I also went to clinics where some doctors had been treating lead poisoning for 30 years. They remembered treating generations of children—some from the same families—coming out of the same lead-tainted buildings. In one family, three generations of children had been poisoned in the same building. The doctors called these buildings “serial poisoners.”

Soon, I left the clinics and found these buildings. We created databases to track families and landlords. Ben-Ali found the families and gained their trust. He listened and talked with the landlords, too. He visited some of the ugliest parts of Newark late at night, tracking down families who had once lived in these buildings. When he found people with compelling stories, he stayed with them, followed them to court, to welfare offices and clinics. At times, he was there when children were diagnosed with brain-damaging levels of lead and when they were evicted by landlords who refused to remove the lead from their buildings.

My job on this reporting team was to keep track of the details and find documentation. This meant that I registered complaints with the state's Administrator of the Courts when municipal court workers refused to give us public records. I also filed Freedom of Information requests with city officials who refused to release public health statis-

tics. (These complaints and requests did end up providing invaluable detail, but it took months of paperwork and follow-ups.)

We also pulled city budgets, tracking lead funding. I kept after 10 state and federal agencies as we attempted to follow millions of dollars that had been allegedly spent on lead programs. I was fortunate to get an extraordinary interview with the state's new health commissioner, who is the father of a lead-poisoned child. He was surprisingly candid about how these programs had failed the children of New Jersey. I also waded through thousands of pages of reports and used census information to pinpoint—to a block-to-block level—where there were neighborhoods filled with housing old enough to be a lead paint hazard.

If I couldn't portray the total picture, I wanted our smaller stories rendered in exquisite detail. When a case went back 20 years, I wanted to follow it back each step of the way. And every time I documented yet another snafu in the system, Ben-Ali found the children.

As the months progressed, our editors got edgy about getting our reporting into print. Another reporter was added to our team. John Martin went into the suburbs, a daunting task in a home-rule state like New Jersey where each of several hundred municipalities is independent, with its own rules and officials. We had with us lists of suburban houses that had been treated for lead hazards, but addresses were often incorrect or the owners had changed. When we did find parents, they refused to cooperate with us. They were angry, guilt-ridden, and protective of their privacy.

We just kept looking. In higher-income suburbs, we found doctors, lawyers and teachers who had unwittingly exposed their children to dangerously high levels of lead. In fact, the two worst cases of lead poisoning in recent New Jersey history involved children of educated parents in the suburbs. Both families refused to go on the record. They were ashamed they hadn't known enough to protect their children and afraid the children would be

stigmatized in school if the lead poisoning was made public. These parents did not seem to understand that the levels of lead were so high in their children—10 times what the level of danger is—that it is likely that their children will be too brain-damaged to attend mainstream school. We never could convince those two suburban families to go public, but Martin was hugely successful in finding other families who were more cooperative, even if their circumstances weren't quite as dramatic.

Photographer Mia Song was with us every step of the way. A Korean immigrant who was still mastering English, Song was lousy with directions and shaky on names. But the pictures—from the very beginning, it was obvious they were special for their clarity and poignancy. She had another, unexpected talent. Small, slender and quietly composed, Song calmed the most nervous parents and children. Once, when Ben-Ali tracked down a man who had survived one of the worst cases of lead poisoning in New Jersey history and I interviewed him, neither of us could convince the family to let us take photographs. Song went to the house and was able to persuade them to let her take pictures. People trusted her.

It was Song's remarkable pictures that convinced editors this project was worth the extra time. I taped her images to my computer while I wrote, a reminder, as though I needed one by this time, to always remember the children and their parents. And these photographs also reminded me that a good portion of this project was not only about lead poisoning: It was about inner-city families who live in conditions that are unacceptable by any standard.

All of this effort to tell the story the way we believed it needed to be told took several months. But such an investment of time is needed to tell this story. Lead poisoning is still overwhelmingly a disease that afflicts the poor. For many of them, lead is just another lousy break. Gaining their trust means they will call you about all their problems. Failed by the system, many of them look to reporters—who, after all,

## Reporting on Health

were some of the first who truly wanted to listen to them—to help fix their broken children. But the ugly fact about lead poisoning is that, once it's happened, the child can't be fixed. It also means, to a certain extent, you owe these families. Some still call, looking for help. Often, I have no answer and nothing I can do to help. ■

*Judy Peet is a news feature writer at The Star-Ledger. She and her colleagues won the Garden State Association of Black Journalists Award for community impact for the series on lead poisoning; Mia Song, whose photographs appeared with The Star-Ledger's story and appear below, is a staff photographer. She was hon-*

*ored as photojournalist of the year by the Sidney Hillman Foundation, and the series won the ARC of New Jersey Community Media Excellence Award for print and photography.*

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Kids play around Bridget Bornes's house, which has given her son Allen, 3, background, lead poisoning. The boy in the foreground was visiting his father, who is a tenant in the building.



After being released from Beth Israel Hospital for lead poisoning treatment, Allen lies on his mother's bed next to unfinished repairs in their lead-filled apartment house. Allen was not supposed to return to the apartment due to his lead poisoning, but his mom had few options.



*Photos by Mia Song/The Star-Ledger.*



Nyraziah Smith, 2, washes her hands in the bathroom of her family's apartment. The faucet is missing and the water comes straight out of the wall. Lead poisoning frequently goes hand-in-hand with poor living conditions.



Nyraziah looks out of the paint chipped window of the bedroom.



Nyraziah has her regular checkup for her lead level at University Hospital in Newark. She was hospitalized for more than two months in 1999 when her lead level soared.



*Photos by Mia Song/The Star-Ledger.*

# Reporting on the Business of Health Care

‘... this beat is a rich, exciting and suspenseful journey.’

By Madge Kaplan

As a reporter and editor, 1995 was a watershed year. While most of the press were still delivering parting shots to President Clinton’s health reform plans, I was given the opportunity to imagine (and plan for) what health care reporting might sound like for a national nightly business show on public radio. Our bureau, based at WGBH Radio in Boston, had received its first grant to develop timely stories on health care trends for “Marketplace,” a nightly public radio business news program. And it was an ideal time to be doing this. The proposed government fix to health care’s spiraling costs had been rejected, and this left the private sector in charge. Given these circumstances, it wasn’t difficult to produce a bountiful stream of story ideas, a stream that continues flowing strongly today.

Since 1995, our health desk has produced more than 1,500 stories, reporting on a plethora of health care news in the United States. Much of the news involves the major financial stakeholders in the health care system—insurers, hospitals, physicians, nurses, drug companies, government agencies, legislatures and consumers. In the beginning, I viewed our task as helping listeners better understand the inner workings of one-seventh of the U.S. economy by explaining the logic that underpinned the various strategies of participants. That approach worked well until internal contradictions in the health care industry foiled even its best-laid plans. It wasn’t long before managed care (or at least its mid-to-late 1990’s version) was criticized as an artificial, arbitrary and unpopular fix to the system’s problems. These contradictions made it difficult to tell the coherent story we had first imagined. In fact, the first rule of thumb when covering health care is to map out why the system behaves so irrationally.

## Covering Health Care’s Convulsions

Our health desk team has shifted its focus to reporting more on the health system’s convulsions—the clash of competing interests; the rising costs and marketing of pharmaceuticals; the backlash against managed care; the see-saw of solvency and insolvency of many big time HMO’s and hospital chains; the difficult task of reducing medical errors, and the country’s appetite for high-tech and expensive health care. Major policy initiatives to cope with health care woes—involving the control of costs or caring for the uninsured—remain elusive, and our reporters work hard to also explain why.

Sticking with such vexing issues is a grinding commitment. Seasoned health reporters often wonder aloud why this constant state of confusion that we call a “system” never seems to improve. Can health care be profitable *and* serve the needs of our entire population? As a journalist, I don’t have to answer that question, but I have the ability to point listeners to experts who are struggling to come up with possible answers. Given the enormous range of people working on so many health care problems, this beat is a rich, exciting and suspenseful journey. This is true even on days when I wade through details of another survey or study. Plus, reporting for a business show hones one’s skill at finding the money—whether the issue is Medicare, menopause or the Onco mouse (a specially designed mouse to study potential cancer vaccines and treatments).

The business world also has a way of steaming ahead with innovations and inventions in health care despite inertia on the legislative policy front. The drug industry is always grist for interesting stories, but the past decade has

also seen the introduction of incredible lifesaving products like the portable defibrillator, which people can learn to use. Business ingenuity is largely responsible for the explosion of health information via the Internet and for making health research more widely available. These are challenging pathways for reporters to explore.

## Radio’s Unique Reporting

Other challenges seem unique to radio reporting on health care. As Boston bureau chief for “Marketplace” (a job now held by my successor, Helen Palmer), the dilemma has been how to explain complex developments in short, one-minute news spots or three-to-four-minute features, while maintaining the upbeat and stylish tone of a half-hour evening news show or snappy morning modules. “Marketplace” prides itself on being irreverent and clever. Covering health care can be deadly serious and rarely lends itself to that tongue-in-cheek approach.

As I’ve learned more about health care and am able to draw on information I have already assimilated, it’s gotten easier to reveal the ironies so endemic to our health care system. At times it’s hard not to be glib, a pitfall veteran health reporters have to be careful of. Listeners relate to our stories in very personal and often painful ways. To create our best work, we often depend on people who volunteer to share their own or a family member’s health care situation as the backbone of our story. I might believe that my story exemplifies the craft of great radio with its ability to distill gobbledegook health care data and wonkish speech. But for listeners—and readers—it’s almost always a personal connection that makes the story work for them.

It can sometimes be hard to use effectively this sometimes wonky language of policy experts. When such experts are given a microphone, they can be deadly dull. Only by working on this beat for a while does it become clear whose ideas are best read (by the reporter) and who will come across well over the air. And sometimes we have to keep some of the smartest people in the field to no more than 20 seconds. As for the health care world's more dazzling speakers, we risk over-using them. What reporters yearn to develop is a deeper pool of talent to enliven ongoing debates and bring new ideas to the table. Finding fresh voices is one aspect of our work we need to do a better job with.

The sounds of health care are of course critical to radio journalism, but here, too, new challenges emerge. I have a stack of tapes of beeping heart monitors, crying newborns, ringing phones, doctors being paged, and busy corridors—vintage hospital sounds of not so long ago. Some remain relevant, but as health care becomes computerized and moves online, hospitals are far quieter places than they used to be. Relative quiet affords more comfortable environments for patients and improves the staff's working environment, but it has made the work of radio journalists that much more difficult. Similarly, outpatient care and managing illnesses at home has yet to emerge as sound-rich material. We need to rethink and enlarge the scope of our audio palette to weave more sense of the ebb and flow and movement of health care delivery into our health care stories.

## Discovering New Reporting Pathways

In my new role as senior health desk editor, I have new opportunities to produce more in-depth feature stories for public radio. And as I recently discovered, when health events strike close to home—as my aging father suffered a stroke and family members assumed new caregiving responsibilities—my work is an asset in navigating the system. I doubt nurses and doctors wel-

come my father's pronouncement, "Did you know my daughter is a health care journalist?" but the introduction often elevates the conversation. At the same time, having a personal encounter with the health care system helps me create a rich bed of story ideas to be harvested in the future. Why does one nurse stop to visit with a patient while another does not? What is it about physical therapists that make them so encouraging? How are hospital patients informed when one of their suite-mates dies?

I also step back from my own reporting at times to track trends in health journalism. More time and space is now being devoted to covering developments in medical science. It is hard to resist describing the myriad ways in which genetic discoveries revolutionize health care, but unfortunately such an intense focus on this topic tends to drown out other reporting and ignore important issues: What is it like for patients and families to navigate and negotiate the health care system with so many new drugs, devices and genetic discoveries?

With threats of bioterrorism more real, our public health system is being "called up" to protect us in dramatic new ways. For example, the \$1.1 billion dollars recently allocated to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to monitor and prepare for possible bioterrorist attacks is in stark contrast to shrinking government dollars elsewhere in the health care system, including public health. It's going to be a challenge for health reporters—regardless of medium—to determine how to allocate resources to this story at the expense of covering other issues that might not seem as urgent. Reporters might not always get to make this call. Editors will, and they, too, will likely be under some pressure.

My hope is that health care reporting stay closely tied to the central purpose of health care—service to patients. With so many stakeholders and powerful forces intersecting throughout the system, it becomes harder for patients to be portrayed in our stories as anything more than victims or people being acted upon. Yet, whether disease,

poor treatment, or one more medical bill suddenly overtakes a person's life, no individual reacts the same way. This means we need to do a better job illustrating our story subject's multidimensional character. And we need to find ways to integrate their opinions about the care they receive into our reports and not only focus attention on their particular illness. I don't have answers about how to do all of this, but I know it is not enough to talk to patients only when they're caught in the headlights of illness.

In the time I've been reporting on this beat, the nation and the health care beat have come full circle. The conversation is once again about double-digit health care inflation, about the dramatic climb in Americans without health insurance, a health care crisis, and the pluses and minuses associated with a single-payer system. Insurance executives are proclaiming American health care near collapse. The private sector's solution, managed care, has been deemed a failure, so it will be looking for something new. Single-payer advocates and universal coverage proponents (some fearful of a major tax-supported financing scheme) might find common ground. And employees who are shouldering most of the increases in health insurance premiums might actually stop to listen to what health care reformers have to say.

Health care reporting takes on special significance during times like these. It's a great responsibility and a privilege to cover issues in which so much is at stake. ■

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# The Uninsured Story Is Seldom Fully Told

Reporters rely on experts instead of going out where the story is happening.

By Susan Dentzer

For those of us in television news—as I am now after 20 years as a print journalist—the painful reality is that much of the real action takes place when the camera is turned off. This truth came home to me several years ago as I reported a story about the more than 40 million Americans without health insurance in a given year. As health correspondent for “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer,” I had gone with my producer and camera crew to a public hospital serving the uninsured in the capital of a Midwestern state. While there, we taped some compelling footage, capturing scenes of undocumented immigrants, many from Mexico, working low-wage jobs in the city and fully reliant on the free health care the hospital provided. We also learned that 500 employees of this hospital got all their health care provided there since, unbelievably enough, they, too, lacked health insurance.

But it was only when the taping was over, and our camera crew had packed up and gone, that we stumbled into an unforgettable moment in this national scandal.

We were saying our goodbyes to one of the hospital’s officials and complimenting her on the institution’s programs, when she blurted out some of her own anxieties and doubts. She pointed across the street to a private, nonprofit children’s hospital just steps away from her own public facility. She explained that under a deal with the private hospital, uninsured children with serious diseases such as cancer were treated there, with the public hospital paying the tab. But the arrangement had some quirks. For example, parents of kids with cancer and on chemotherapy first had to collect the plastic bags with the chemotherapy

drugs at the pharmacy in the public hospital, where the drugs were given to them for free. Then—because no one in this jerry-rigged system apparently was willing or able to do so on their behalf—they had to carry the bags across the street to the private facility, so their children could be infused with the life-saving medication.

We listened, astounded, contemplating anew the unfathomable inequities of health care in America. Like anyone covering the field, I knew well that we’re the only industrialized nation that can’t see fit to insure everyone, even though we spend one-third more per capita on health than the next biggest spender, Switzerland. But the mental image of these parents having to ferry drugs to their own sick kids captured the wide gulf between the haves and the have-nots.

Admittedly, in this case the division was mostly symbolic, since the uninsured kids were probably getting great care and arguably their parents were only mildly inconvenienced. But the story was so compelling that we immediately pressed our source to tell it again, on the record and in front of the camera. She demurred, explaining that she would be fired if she spoke publicly about this embarrassment. And, in any case, our camera crew was gone. In television, where the visuals are critical, the verbal exchange alone was as good as useless.

We moved on to our next round of interviews.

## Telling What It Means to Be Uninsured

I tell this tale now in the spirit of a confessional, for the sins of omission some of us have committed in covering

the story of the uninsured. Clearly, my producer and I could have gone back to the hospital to find some affected parents and capture their tale on tape. But we didn’t. And therein lies a prime example of how we have failed to do our utmost to enable viewers and readers to understand what it means to be uninsured.

Whether in print or broadcast, it takes less effort to substitute easier types of reporting on the uninsured than to dig deep to show how the uninsured get second-rate, third-rate, or even zero care. Particularly for those of us Washington, D.C.-based reporters who focus on health policy—and we are the ones who do most of the reporting on the uninsured—it’s simpler to sit in the nation’s capital and phone up the “experts” for quotes than it is to get out in the trenches to capture actual health and economic consequences of people being uninsured. It has been said that social statistics are “human beings with the tears washed away.” Most of us have spent too much time repeating the statistics—nearly 42 million uninsured, roughly eight million of them children—and devoted too little time telling how it is the uninsured come to cry real tears.

This has not been for any lack of ability to find people who are uninsured; with so many millions of them around, that’s easy. A segment we did on The NewsHour in February 2002 about the Venice Family Clinic, a private, nonprofit community health clinic in Los Angeles county, California, offers an example.

We told the story of Eric Moore, a UCLA graduate and 30-year-old employee at a local tourism Web site who lost his job when the travel business plummeted after September 11th. Un-

able to afford a doctor's visit, he deferred seeking care for leg pains until he collapsed one day on the street. Taken to the Venice Family Clinic, he was found to have a blood clot that had traveled from his leg to his lung and lodged there as a pulmonary embolism. He was transferred to a hospital; his subsequent three-day stay there cost him \$16,000.

We also told the story of Beatriz Samayoa, a Guatemalan immigrant living in Los Angeles with legal residency status. She'd worked a succession of jobs until gaining one tending the linen service at a fancy beachfront hotel in Santa Monica. It was the first job she'd ever had with health insurance—and it, too, disappeared with the tourist slump after September 11th. She turned to the Venice clinic for treatment of depression and other ailments. Her teenage son, born in Guatemala, was unqualified for any state health coverage and was also treated there. Samayoa's two younger children, born in the United States, were qualified for coverage under Medi-Cal, the state's Medicaid program—illustrating how the crazily xenophobic premise of public health insurance creates haves and have-nots even within families.

## How to Convey the Reality of the Uninsured

In addition to telling personal stories like this, many of us have tried to get across key truths about the uninsured. A 2000 survey we did in conjunction with our partner in The NewsHour's health unit, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, showed that six out of 10 adult Americans falsely believe that most of the uninsured are jobless. In fact, as we've reported, eight out of 10 uninsured adults are in families where at least one other adult is working full time. Many Americans also believe that the uninsured suffer little in the way of health consequences, but we routinely cite a range of studies that clearly docu-

ment the opposite. As the Institute of Medicine, a division of the independent National Academy of Sciences, noted in its 2002 report, "Care Without Coverage," uninsured adults are less likely than those with health coverage to receive preventive and screening services, like mammograms and blood cholesterol checks; more likely to get

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**We can't but, somehow, we must. We have an obligation to throw into the sharpest possible relief the story of how the richest nation on earth systematically undermines the health and longevity of at least one in seven of its citizens.**

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substandard care for chronic conditions like diabetes; less likely to obtain services when they suffer trauma or heart attacks, and more likely to be diagnosed with cancers when they're more advanced and less treatable.

So why do I still believe that we have failed to fully cover the story of the uninsured?

First, because we have not yet managed to fully penetrate the health system and serve as direct eyewitnesses to the precise ways in which the uninsured get short shrift. I recently spoke with a prominent emergency room specialist from one of the nation's best-known public hospitals and asked whether there were still widespread violations of federal "anti-dumping" legislation. This law in effect bars hospitals from transferring uninsured patients until they have been stabilized. "Of course there are lots of violations," he replied. I asked him how we could show this, short of holing up incognito in a hospital for several days with a hidden camera. "You can't," he replied.

We can't but, somehow, we must. We have an obligation to throw into the sharpest possible relief the story of how the richest nation on earth systematically undermines the health and longevity of at least one in seven of its

citizens. This is not only true for television news—which nearly seven out of 10 American's depend on as their primary source of information—but for print journalism as well. Yet I confess I have few practical ideas about how to do this. Should I persuade The NewsHour to let us use hidden cameras that are associated more with tabloid shows than with our typical "serious" approach? In an age of strict new federal privacy regulations governing health care, should print journalists work surreptitiously to obtain patient records demonstrating inadequate care, or encourage whistleblowers to come forward to provide us with other evidence?

Recently I met with a group of writers who script many of the popular TV dramas like "Law and Order" and "ER." The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which has sponsored a national effort to raise awareness of the uninsured, had asked several of us familiar with the issues to brief the writers on how they could incorporate realistic plot lines about the uninsured into their shows. I joked that, unlike them, I'd been doing "reality TV," covering our long-running national hit, "Who Wants to Get Health Insurance?" But I also told them that if they incorporated some of our plot lines about the uninsured into their shows, their dramas would probably do a better job of getting at the truth than my news segments on people without coverage ever could.

After all, in their end of television, unlike in mine, all the important stuff happens when the camera is turned on. We owe it to the uninsured to be able to say the same for journalism. ■

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# Alcoholism: Its Origins, Consequences and Costs

A reporter's journey into this story results in lessons learned—and a Pulitzer Prize.

By Eric Newhouse

**M**y job is to amplify the voices of those who often go unheard. It is vital that everyone understands how our laws and policies actually affect people's lives, so a large part of my work as a journalist has been to help people voice concerns and express fears about circumstances they confront. Recently my reporting took me from Skid Row to the state prison to mental health hospitals as I explored alcoholism. Along the way, I came to understand more fully how alcohol connects these three public places and institutions and how future brain research might lead to solutions for some of the behaviors we now label as normally abnormal—unacceptable conditions that we have come to accept.

This odyssey began four years ago when I proposed doing a conventional, weeklong series of stories on alcoholism for the Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune. Other editors thought my original proposal didn't address some aspects of the situation, so Executive Editor Jim Strauss suggested expanding the series to 12 parts and publishing one part each month for the calendar year 1999.

We did just that. We called the series "Alcohol: Cradle to Grave," a title as broad as Montana's skies. It ultimately blossomed into about 50,000 words of copy—a huge commitment for a newspaper with just a score of reporters and a circulation of about 40,000 on good days. Ultimately, the series won the Pulitzer Prize for explanatory reporting in 2000.

## Unearthing the Facts About Alcoholism

Not surprisingly, I learned a lot during a brutal year of meeting monthly deadlines. I wrote on subjects as diverse as fetal alcohol syndrome and addiction



Tara Fatz, manager and former owner of the Lobby Bar in downtown Great Falls, Montana, says people are lined up at the door when she opens for business at 8 a.m. Photo by Larry Beckner/Great Falls Tribune.

within our prison system. I shared with readers what I learned about the psychological harm of growing up in an alcoholic household and the physical damage alcohol does to human bodies. Among the other lessons my reporting unearthed are these:

**Alcoholism is a medical disease.** Although social stresses play an important role in a person becoming an alcoholic, alcoholism tends to run in families in which a chemical imbalance in the brain's neurotransmitters is a hereditary trait. Sons of alcoholics are four times more likely to become alcoholics themselves, even if they are raised in foster homes by nonalcoholic parents. Researchers have also bred lab rats indifferent to alcohol, as well as others that actively seek it out or are repulsed by it.

I talked with many alcoholics who vividly remember the first drink they

ever took. They speak of it making them feel as though they fit in for the first time: Suddenly, they were brilliant, exuberant, alive. Researchers now believe that feeling occurs because alcohol hijacks the dopamine system, which is the body's natural reward center. Dopamine normally gives a feeling of intense well-being to activities that are good for the body—things like eating well or sex or exercise (a runner's high is produced by dopamine). For some people, getting drunk gives them this extra sense of euphoria.

**Alcohol is everywhere.** The first installment of the series looked at a day in the life of Great Falls. At dawn I was in the Rescue Mission, then moved to a DARE classroom by 8:30, the morning "suds and soaps" hour at a bar at 9:30, an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting at 10:00, a recovery center at 10:30, municipal court at 11, a bartender training class at 11:15, and so on. During that



Paula Firemoon keeps these crosses on Highway 2 in Poplar, Montana decorated in memory of her two daughters, Lorriane and Jessica Brien, who died in a car accident when they were hit by a drunken driver in 1992. *Photo by Larry Beckner/Great Falls Tribune.*

evening, I rode with a police officer who handled eight calls: All but one involved alcohol. I came to see alcohol as an invisible river that runs through our lives uprooting people and flooding out families, much like the Missouri River that runs past our newspaper offices. Occasional floodwaters are seen as an act of nature just as excessive drinking is seen as human nature. Their ravages come as no surprise.

**Alcoholism is a costly disease.** One Great Falls family and marriage counselor, Wava Goetz, reviewed the 700 cases she had handled over the past five years and came to a stunning discovery. She found that alcohol was a factor in two-thirds of them. “Without alcohol, I’d probably be out of business,” she told me. “And that would be a happy day.” State welfare workers in Great Falls estimate that half their clients’ lives were so impaired by alcohol that they couldn’t work. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that alcoholism costs American businesses more than \$100 billion a year. “Thirty to 50 percent of all hospital admissions nationally are related to alcohol,” said Dr. Dan Nauts, medical director of the Benefis Healthcare Addiction Treatment Center.

I visited the Montana State Prison at Deer Lodge, where I found 85 percent of the inmates are locked up for crimes fueled by alcohol or drugs. In 1998, the state spent \$46.8 million locking away its adult criminals and another \$1.5 million on pre-release centers and parole officers. Those figures don’t include expenses for county or city jails. “I know a few people in here who say they don’t have a drug or alcohol problem,” said inmate Marty Quick, “but I don’t believe I know any that I actually believe.” As Joseph A. Califano, Jr., chairman of The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University put it, “Contrary to conventional wisdom and popular myth, alcohol is more tightly linked with violent crime than crack, cocaine, heroin or any illegal drug.”

In examining the costs of alcoholism, I realized that like the river of alcoholism running through our lives, some of this disease’s costs are known while others remain invisible. With the help of the governor’s budget director, Dave Lewis, I asked state agencies to tell me how much of their spending could be directly attributed to alcohol. I also asked them to estimate the hidden costs, including such things as the

state’s prison population and welfare caseload.

When the numbers were compiled, we concluded that the hidden costs of alcohol abuse might total at least \$135 million in Montana. “I can’t quarrel with your numbers,” Lewis later told me. “It’s certainly eye-opening to see the amount of money that alcohol costs the state.” This amount is more than the state spends on its university system, about \$120 million each year.

## Lessons a Journalist Learned

As I reported this story, there were also valuable lessons I learned as a journalist.

**Believability comes through personal connection.** To make these stories believable to our readers, I knew we had to use names and photos of the people I interviewed. That proved extraordinarily difficult. Imagine being asked to reveal your darkest secrets, then having them—along with your name and your picture—printed on the front page of your local newspaper. But because in the second part of our series we so prominently and forcefully labeled alcoholism as a disease, the stigma was reduced. In addition, most recovering alcoholics are compelled to take responsibility for their lives and to help others, both of which could be achieved by going public with their stories.

**Sources should be treated with consideration for their circumstances.** I felt that people whose careers and personal lives could be jeopardized by what I wrote should have the opportunity to read their stories before publication. We used this procedure sparingly, but found it was an excellent quality-control mechanism. A 22-year-old victim of fetal alcohol syndrome, Lissy Clark, whose brain was damaged before she was born by her mother’s drinking, was the first person to whom I offered this opportunity. Lissy had told me a story of how she answered the front door at home one day and found a young man who invited himself in, walked to her bedroom, removed their clothes and had sex with her. She didn’t understand

that such behavior was wrong. I didn't want to victimize her again (and we have a policy about not naming rape victims), but her story was also a compelling illustration of the problems she faced. I used the rape as the lead of my story, then took the story to her and asked her to share it with her stepmom, her counselor, her priest, or whomever she chose. Three days later, I returned (with my heart in my mouth) to find that Lissy and her stepmom agreed that this experience so perfectly illustrated the problem that it had to be printed. They did, however, have a few other minor corrections that only improved the story.

**The rights of people should be protected.** Our stories had to demonstrate our respect for the rights of other people, particularly those who have been victims. I had been invited to visit

a meeting of Al-Anon, a group similar to Alcoholics Anonymous that helps the families of alcoholics. Although I had introduced myself as a reporter and openly taken notes during the meeting, a delegation of women met me at the door and requested that I leave my notebook behind. They explained their tradition that what was said in the room remained in the room. Journalistically, I had no reason to comply since they knew who I was and spoke anyway. Again, however, I didn't want to revictimize them. Ultimately, these women agreed to sit with me in a local park and tell some of the same stories in ways that didn't hurt family members who read my article. Understanding their rationale, I agreed.

I didn't understand the full consequence of that decision until about a month later when I was interviewing

members of a different family. Mary Keeler asked me how I'd handled the situation at Al-Anon, and I told her about the second interviews. "I know," she grinned. "That's the only reason we're here tonight. If you had tried to screw those people over, no one in town would have talked to you again." ■

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WATCHDOG

## Is the U.S. Government Making Children Fat?

By asking different questions, a journalist connects farm policies to childhood obesity.

By Barry Yeoman

When I agreed to write about school lunches for the magazine *Mother Jones*, conventional wisdom tying junk food to childhood obesity was so rampant that I could have produced a serviceable story with very little research. Reading newspapers and talking with food professionals and government officials, I repeatedly heard that the nation's biggest nutrition problem was the unhealthy food that tempts children every day: chips and sodas from hallway vending machines, along with Krispy Kreme doughnuts and Domino's Pizza slices that schools now sell à la carte.

These foods, I was told, distract kids from the nutritious offerings cooked up daily in their lunchrooms. With the National School Lunch Program up for renewal this year, we'd created an obvious panacea for childhood obesity: Eliminate vending-machine snacks and

brand-name burgers, pizzas and doughnuts, I was led to conclude, and weight-related diseases will promptly start to disappear.

Defying this conventional wisdom was not easy. After all, it came from people whose opinions we tend to trust, like school dietitians—professionals whose primary interest is (or should be) children's health. But as I tracked down other insiders, I started to follow a different reporting trail than that of most of my colleagues. And by following this trail, my story "Unhappy Meals" reached very different conclusions about what is happening with children's nutritional health.

### A Different Reporting Path

Having little experience covering children's nutrition, I initially cast my source net wide, talking with advocacy

groups, nutritionists and academics who had examined the relationship between school lunches and children's health. One of my first finds was Suzanne Havala Hobbs, a health policy expert at the University of North Carolina, who had researched the politics of school lunch for her doctoral dissertation. She made one referral that led to others, until I had assembled an impressive collection of sources who had participated firsthand in some of the most contentious political activity involving children's nutritional issues. They included (among many others) Ellen Haas, a former assistant secretary in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) under President Clinton; Graydon Forrer, USDA's former consumer affairs director, and Marshall Matz, a lobbyist whose law firm represents both school nutritionists and the food industry.



The picture these sources painted was considerably more complex than what I had read in the newspapers. The underlying problem, as I came to understand it, is that the 57-year-old National School Lunch Program has a dual mission. It's supposed to provide healthy meals to schoolchildren, in many cases for free or at a reduced price. But it's also an agricultural subsidy program that props up farmers' income by buying up surplus food. And much of that food is the very stuff that clogs children's arteries and makes them fat. Using USDA's figures, I learned that in 2001 the department spent a total of \$350 million on surplus beef and cheese for schools, compared with \$161 million it spent on fruits and vegetables.

Because USDA is a farm agency—not a nutrition agency—its main constituency is agribusiness. In interviewing former department officials, I learned that the commodities program was considered sacrosanct, even though it was known to funnel unhealthy food to children. "This was never talked about publicly," Forrer told me. "It was talked about after work, over beer: If you were designing a system for health and nutrition, you wouldn't cordon off part of it and say, 'This will serve the commodities community.'" But, he added, "You've got to dance very lightly around the commodities people, because if you don't, they're going to get to the agriculture committee, and they're going to get to the [agriculture] secretary, who's always from a rural state. It's understood that commodity programs exist, that commodity programs will continue to exist, and they've got the power."

For a liberal magazine like *Mother Jones*, it would have been easy to blame the quality of school lunches solely on the meat and dairy industries and to show collusion between agribusiness and the government. But that would have told only half the story. Interviews with former government officials and others were revealing another, more surprising important player—the 55,000-member American School Food Service Association, which represents the employees who plan and prepare

students' meals. Throughout the mid-1990's, the organization resisted attempts by USDA reformers to mandate a new menu-planning system (championed by Haas) that would have reduced the amount of unhealthy food in school meals. The association argued that implementing the new system would require expensive computer technology, which cash-strapped districts could hardly afford. To press their case, they hired the well-connected Matz, who convinced Congress to overturn the Clinton Administration's reform efforts. Until my article ran, Matz' efforts had received no media coverage, according to an extensive Lexis-Nexis search.

### Deciding How to Tell the Story

Telling this story properly meant maintaining a level of critical thinking that is often hard to sustain when interviewing people who accept the basic assumptions of the current system. In this case, the primary assumption was that the government had a role in propping up agricultural prices when farmers were suffering. The commodities system was so deeply entrenched at USDA that even my most informed sources didn't identify it as a problem. Ellen Haas, for example, never challenged the commodities program during her aggressive reform effort as assistant agriculture secretary.

But I consider myself a "radical" journalist, in the purest sense of that word. To me, this means that through my reporting, I try to look for the root causes of problems. The basic hypothesis I developed—that the National School Lunch Program served as a dumping ground for fatty surplus foods—was such a fundamental fact that many of my sources could no longer see the plain truth of it. Additionally, school nutrition directors whom I interviewed were so desperate for resources that they could only see the commodities as a blessing. Sometimes, after a day of interviews, I would find myself adopting my sources' givens. It took the cool distance of my editor, Eric Bates, to bring me back to

the essentialness of that truth.

I also needed to keep some distance from my own fascination with political personalities. While reporting, I heard lots of inside stories. Haas, I learned, had lost valuable allies by cultivating the friendship of gourmet chefs while dismissing the concerns of school food-service workers. Marshall Matz, the lobbyist, supposedly used his credentials as an anti-hunger activist to greenwash his current industry connections. Much of this information made it into the first draft—but my editors at *Mother Jones* reminded me that my political junkie's interest was a distraction from the essence of the story.

Finally, bringing critical thinking to bear on this reporting also meant an ability to do simple arithmetic. When I interviewed current USDA officials, they maintained that school lunches were healthy, despite the department's finding that 85 percent of American schools fail USDA's own standard for saturated fat, a leading contributor to coronary disease. "There have been tremendous moves to reduce the fat content in school meals," department spokeswoman Jean Daniel told me.

It required only a pocket calculator to uncover the fallacy in Daniel's rhetoric. From the USDA's Web site, I downloaded the nutritional statistics of the commodities served American schoolchildren. I checked the fat content of whole milk, which many schools are required to serve under federal law. Then I educated myself about how to calculate the maximum acceptable fat levels for teenagers. When I plugged in all these numbers, I discovered this: Based on USDA's own recommendations, an adolescent girl should receive no more than 24 grams of fat, including no more than 8 grams of saturated fat, at lunch time. Yet one portion of USDA surplus chuck roast, plus a glass of the required whole milk, delivers 31 grams of fat and 14 grams of saturated fat.

These calculations made me realize that while the USDA was insisting that schools reduce the fat in their lunches, it is impossible to do so with the department's own surplus commodities. Schools were forced to accept

these commodities to qualify for federal subsidies, and few school nutrition programs could survive without these subsidies.

This Mother Jones story broke just as the nation's attention was starting to focus on childhood obesity. A similar story ran in *The New York Times* about two weeks later. Whether these articles will help shift the political debate remains to be seen. After all, conventional wisdom dies hard.

In late January, I watched an interview between CNN's Paula Zahn and U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, which put the

blame for childhood obesity on individual actions—children eating too many French fries and watching too much TV instead of exercising. After having spent several weeks thinking about this problem and reporting on some of its root causes, this interview seemed preposterous. Are children supposed to make correct individual nutritional decisions when the federal government is plying them with beef and whole milk rather than fresh fruits and vegetables? Until other journalists start thinking critically about school nutrition—and asking different questions—the national debate over child-

hood obesity is not likely to shift, and kids will keep getting fatter and sicker as a result. ■

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## Explaining Why 24,000 People Died Yesterday

The Boston Globe looks worldwide at the result of scant health care.

By James F. Smith

In mid-2002, development economist Jeffrey Sachs, then at Harvard University, presented a challenge to *The Boston Globe's* foreign affairs correspondent, John Donnelly. Sachs had just led a World Health Organization (WHO) study that concluded that 8.8 million deaths could be prevented each year with basic health care. "Why weren't the media reporting such a disaster?" Sachs asked.

Donnelly, who has reported for years on world health issues, recalls that at first he shrugged off the notion as naive: These deaths weren't news, they were simply part of the grinding daily misery in poor countries around the world. After all, no newspaper would publish a headline saying thousands of people died needlessly yesterday.

But then Donnelly began to wonder: Could he make these deaths real for readers? Could a newspaper transform the WHO's numbing statistics into words, photographs and graphics that would focus the thoughts and emotions of Americans on this distant suffering? Could such an effort make a difference?

Donnelly and veteran Globe pho-

tographer Dominic Chavez planned to travel first to Malawi in southern Africa, a country ravaged by AIDS and other diseases. The idea was to produce a major article on all the needless deaths that occurred on a given day. The *Globe's* editor, Martin Baron, and executive editor Helen Donovan wondered aloud at a meeting in September: "Why just Africa? Why not worldwide?"

The undertaking grew quickly: In late October, the *Globe* dispatched four teams of reporters and photographers to distant corners of the world to see how lives were being lost due to the lack of basic health services. The goal was to learn who these dying people were, what their deaths meant to their families and their communities, and to look for ways similar deaths might be prevented.

The material the reporters and photographers brought back was so powerful that the project became still more ambitious—a 16-page special section, in full color. And this special section's publication signaled the start of a year-long occasional series on this topic. The story's print version, which ap-

peared January 26th, was mirrored by a sophisticated Web version on *Boston.com*.

The strength of the "Lives Lost" project is that it avoids the pitfall of predictability. The people's stories are as distinct as the countries they come from: 37-year-old Nikolai Bogdanov failing to take his tuberculosis medication in Russia; one-year-old Franklin Veliz dying of pneumonia in Guatemala for lack of a simple vaccine; a 27-year-old mother, Sath Yan, dying in childbirth in a Cambodian jungle village because her family couldn't find \$15 to get her to a hospital, and a dying 16-year-old Malawian boy, Nenani Lungu, who whispers: "I see angels when I close my eyes."

The *Globe's* headline for this special section: "None of them had to die." Below, in bold type, the story began: "Yesterday, 24,000 people worldwide could have been saved with basic care." ■

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Kin Tem, 53, was a driver for a humanitarian organization before he died at the National Center for Tuberculosis and Leprosy Control in Phnom Penh of tuberculosis a few days after this photo was taken. His wife took care of him in the hospital. In Cambodia, tuberculosis infection rates are believed to be the highest in the world, according to the World Health Organization.



A pond contaminated by manure from the surrounding rice fields, and by human waste during flooding, serves as the only water source for seven families in the village of Tropeang Khha, in western Cambodia.



A Cambodian family travels by motorbike with an IV hookup. Eighty percent of Cambodians lack access to proper medical care.



*Photos by Michele McDonald.*

Hang Por tries to revive his wife, Ly Chanthon, 26, who later died of tuberculosis in Phnom Penh's National Center for Tuberculosis and Leprosy Control.



Meas Rom, 36, a former soldier, lies dying from advanced stage tuberculosis. His mother, 55-year-old Chun Em, exhausted her meager savings to bring him to the National Center for what proved to be a futile attempt to treat him.



In a room doctors called an "intensive care unit," a child, left, was seriously ill with typhoid fever. On the right, an older boy is being taken care of by his family.



*Photos by Michele McDonald, a 1988 Nieman Fellow, who is a staff photographer for The Boston Globe.*

# AIDS in Africa: A Story That Must Be Told

Reporters confront significant barriers, imposed by governments, editors and their own experiences, to accurately portray this health crisis.

By Huntly Collins

Every day, 6,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa—more than twice as many as were lost in the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center—die of AIDS-related illness. And each day, nearly 10,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa contract the AIDS virus. Though AIDS has fallen off the front page in America as life-extending drugs have dramatically reduced mortality rates in the United States, a widening epidemic confronts reporters in countries such as South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe.

I got a close-up look at some of the challenges these reporters face when I spent the better part of last year training reporters covering AIDS throughout the region, particularly in South Africa. My six-month stint in South Africa, which was sponsored by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, focused on helping reporters at the country's largest English-language newspapers understand the complex science of HIV and translate that into layman's language. But I also helped journalists develop story ideas, thoroughly explore those ideas in their reporting, and write stories in a compelling way with a strong human element. In the process, I learned as much, if not more, from the reporters I mentored as they learned from me.

## Mistakes Journalists Make

By way of background, it's important to know that the AIDS epidemic took off in sub-Saharan Africa nearly a decade after the first AIDS cases were identified in the United States. So it's not surprising to find the African media guilty of some of the same sins that plagued early coverage of the epidemic in the West—a tendency to stigmatize people with HIV, to pass on unsub-

stantiated claims, and to hype putative breakthroughs in AIDS research.

The most egregious example of stigmatization that I saw was a headline on the obituary of a Gaborone woman who died of complications from HIV. "Have you had sex with this lady?" blared the headline in *The Voice*, a privately owned newspaper in Botswana.

In December 2001, the *Sowetan*, the largest newspaper in South Africa and the voice of the black majority, kicked off World AIDS Day with a front-page story titled "US plot against blacks and gays." The story went on to quote a man named Ed Graves, described as a black American AIDS researcher, who claimed that the AIDS virus was concocted in a secret cancer research program sponsored by the U.S. government.

Last spring, *The Sunday Independent*, a respected weekly in Johannesburg, ran a story titled "Threat of AIDS Orphans Gangs." The lead was a model of yellow journalism. It said: "Time is running out for South Africa to come to grips with the nightmarish specter of feral AIDS orphans gangs—similar to those terrorizing Brazil—roaming our city streets." The story contained no evidence that any AIDS orphans had actually formed gangs and, if they had, that the loss of a parent to HIV had anything to do with them being on the street.

## Successes Journalists Have

But there are also shining examples of journalistic excellence. Lynne Altenroxel, a medical reporter at *The (Johannesburg) Star*, broke one story after another last year, including the government's use of private investigators to track down the academics who

leaked a government-sponsored HIV mortality report to the press after health officials tried to quash it. There was one key fact that the government was trying to suppress—AIDS, the researchers found, is now the leading cause of death in South Africa.

Kerry Cullinan, a reporter at the Cape Town-based *Health-e News Service*, consistently reports on complex AIDS-policy issues by illustrating their impact on people in a compelling way. Her story on home-based care for those with HIV began: "Under a camphor tree on a green hill in Bizana in the Eastern Cape, Chief David Mlandizwe sits with his council of elders, their horses grazing nearby." AIDS, the chief explains, is claiming the lives of three or four young people every month and, until home-based care arrived, the village had little to offer them as they died.

And last spring, when a bizarre treatise endorsed by a top official of the ruling African National Congress posited that AIDS was the invention of Western capitalism, the staff of the weekly *Mail & Guardian*, based in Johannesburg, did some clever electronic sleuthing. Reporters tracked the mysterious document, titled "Castro Hlongwane: Caravans, Cats, Geese, Foot & Mouth and Statistics: HIV/AIDS and the Struggle for the Humanisation of the African," to a computer in the office of South African president Thabo Mbeki.

## Barriers to AIDS Reporting

To cover these and other AIDS stories, reporters in sub-Saharan Africa often face daunting challenges. Some, such as those working for opposition newspapers in Zimbabwe, fight their governments simply for the right to pub-

lish. Others, including those in Kenya and Uganda, have to confront corruption in state-owned media. [See Joseph Ngome's story on page 44.]

At an AIDS reporting workshop I conducted with journalists from East Africa, for instance, several reporters asserted that they couldn't pursue enterprise stories about AIDS without paying off their own editors. "What?" I asked. "Pay your own editor so you can do the work you are supposed to do?" Yes, they explained. For if a reporter actually wanted to do a story, that meant that the reporter was probably being paid off by someone else. Editors, I was told, wanted a cut of the take.

Throughout the region, reporters also face cumbersome government bureaucracies, some of which throw up Kafkaesque obstacles to obtaining what in the United States would be regarded as public information. In Botswana, for instance, it took Altenroxel and me two and a half days to get the government health ministry to approve a half-hour visit to a public health clinic to interview pregnant women coming in for prenatal exams. We traipsed from one office to another, first being told we had to be approved by the national health minister, then being told no, we had to be approved by the local health official, and finally being told to visit the town clerk. Two hours after schmoozing with him about everything from local sewage problems to the weather, we got the scrap of paper we needed. "Kindly permit these two lady journalists from South Africa to observe and ask a couple of questions," the handwritten note said.

As significant as the government barriers, however, are challenges presented by media owners. To cover AIDS in the hardest hit countries in the world requires more reporters and more space. But, throughout the region, as in the United States, media organizations are paring their budgets by cutting staff, shrinking the news hole, and trimming spending on everything from news research to transportation.

At many papers, the reporter covering AIDS is a general assignment reporter who also covers the local schools, the police, and public health. Few reporters, even at major publications such as *The (Johannesburg) Star*, have access to the Internet at their desks, making it impossible to keep up with the

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### **Throughout the region, reporters also face cumbersome government bureaucracies, some of which throw up Kafkaesque obstacles to obtaining what in the United States would be regarded as public information.**

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latest medical information about AIDS. And for a reporter to spend any more than one day on a single story is often regarded as a luxury. For instance, one reporter with whom I worked for a week on a story about the emotional stress of caring for people with HIV was later told that she would never again be given that much time to pursue a story because the paper was just too strapped for staff.

### **The Emotional Toll on Reporters**

One final note. While AIDS is taking a crushing toll in human lives south of the Sahara, it is taking an enormous emotional toll on those who cover it. For some, AIDS is not just a story; it is a watershed event in their own lives. One Ugandan reporter I came to know, for instance, lost both his parents to HIV and helped raise his two siblings while anchoring the nightly news on Ugandan television. Reporters throughout the region often spend their Saturdays going to the funerals of family, friends and colleagues. And many a news organization is running short on cash for employee medical benefits because workers with HIV are draining the coffers. Virtually everybody, including reporters, has a personal connection to AIDS.

As I traveled around South Africa, mentoring reporters in Johannesburg,

Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria, I found one other thing that reporters had in common: the telltale signs of posttraumatic stress syndrome. How long, they asked, can you continue to sit in huts and interview emaciated children who have lost their parents to AIDS and who are now starving because there is no one to harvest the crops? How long can you drive off in your company car and dine at a five-star restaurant while you sort through your notes? How long can you hide your tears behind the mask of journalistic objectivity?

And so, on a morning last May, I called the reporters together for a different kind of workshop. This one was facilitated not by me, but by professional grief counselors from the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in Johannesburg. The group was originally established to help people deal with the trauma of apartheid. I turned to it to help reporters deal with the trauma of covering AIDS in the most impacted country in the world. One by one, we pounded wet slabs of clay, trying to find the feelings that many of us had buried in order to do our jobs.

■

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# Journalism Is Failing in Its Coverage of Global AIDS

‘The worst global pandemic since the Black Death of the Middle Ages receives less media attention than a World Cup soccer match.’

By Sabin Russell

**N**o matter how drawn-out, or how dreadful, the global AIDS pandemic turns out to be, those of us who have covered the story from San Francisco will always have a unique perspective. It was here, in a world center of an emerging culture of gay liberation, that the virus first signaled what it was capable of doing to a community.

When we write about sub-Saharan rates of HIV infection to describe the double-digit prevalence rates found in Zimbabwe or Botswana today, the numbers do not yet approach the disastrous percentages recorded among gay men in the Castro neighborhood of our city in the early 1980's. The San Francisco AIDS experience has also demonstrated how human ingenuity, paired with political will, can contain a disease that now threatens entire populations of underdeveloped nations.

Yet, two decades into this scourge, the story of AIDS is anything but a tale of human triumph. The ghastly fact that AIDS has claimed more than 19,000 lives in San Francisco is becoming just a footnote to the larger story of a global calamity where the sick and dying are measured in the tens of millions and where the political stability of entire nations is at stake.

## A Local Story Becomes Global

A profound local story has been eclipsed by one of international stature. This changed circumstance does not bode well for the quality of American coverage of the current AIDS epidemic. My fear is that just as the crafty AIDS virus evolves to sidestep the drugs, vaccines, antibodies and other components of the immune system, the epidemic is slipping from the grip of those who

covered it well as a homegrown tale. Most reporters and news organizations are ill-equipped to write about this disease and its health issues on a global scale. I count myself among the culpable.

No doubt, the world is a smaller place in the era of the Internet. Yet in all but a select few media organizations, international coverage is a poor cousin to domestic news. Terrorism and the prospect of conflict in Korea and the Middle East have invigorated international reportage, but resources scraped together for a bureau in Baghdad are likely to drain the budgets that might otherwise serve AIDS coverage in Africa, India and China. America might be capable of fighting a two-front war, but I am not certain that the American press can handle a third front, the global war on AIDS.

Publishers assume, with some justification, that demand is limited for stories that don't happen on Main Street. Editors are allotting their prime real estate to the stories that marketing consultants and focus groups say their target audiences desire. The appetite for international AIDS stories exists, but it is limited not only by America's cultural myopia but also by the quality of the international product that limited news budgets can afford.

Too often, the global AIDS disaster is relegated to semiannual statistical updates from UNAIDS, or the biannual reports from International AIDS Conferences. The worst global pandemic since the Black Death of the Middle Ages receives less media attention than a World Cup soccer match. No doubt, some of the international AIDS coverage has been brilliant. Pulitzer Prize-winners Laurie Garrett (with *Newsday*) and Mark Schoofs (then writing for *The Village Voice*) have shown us how

it can be done. And Elizabeth Rosenthal's dispatches for *The New York Times* from China have alerted the world about the looming AIDS crisis in Asia.

That there are bright lights in the field should not distract us from the larger problem afflicting AIDS reporting. International stories, by their very nature, are more difficult and expensive to report. Some of the barriers are obvious, others less so. As news organizations shrink their foreign bureaus, staff resources in those bureaus might be restricted to coverage of political changes, conflict, commerce and the occasional plane crash. These days, it is the rare news organization that can afford a roving foreign correspondent, let alone a globetrotting AIDS reporter. The pool of experienced AIDS reporters is limited, and there are few among us that can break away regularly for international stories.

## Difficulties in Reporting the Global AIDS Story

Reporters might be able to find outside support for the coverage of AIDS. The Kaiser Family Foundation, for example, offers paid fellowships for coverage of a wide variety of health policy stories. I was able to travel to South Africa, Uganda, Kenya and Zimbabwe through a Kaiser grant in 2000, although the *San Francisco Chronicle*, at the time, would not accept stories partly underwritten by an outside organization. I sold pieces instead to *Salon.com*.

Travel costs, language barriers, time zone differences, poor electronic communications, harsh conditions, and even physical danger make international reporting inherently more challenging. Yet none of these barriers has stopped the best of our profession

from covering apocalyptic international stories: wars, revolutions, famines and natural disasters. AIDS is perhaps best described as a slow-moving natural catastrophe.

And therein lies the problem that has dogged AIDS coverage almost from the beginning. We journalists are great at covering the fast-breaking story, the new scientific discovery, sudden tragedy. Slow viruses and chronic wasting diseases do not play into our strengths as storytellers. As dramatic and important as the AIDS epic may be, it is a 20-year-old horror movie in which, at times, it seems that only the names of the victims are changing.

The most critical international AIDS story of our time—the bid to bring affordable versions of antiretroviral drugs to the Third World—is unfortunately mired in the nuance of intellectual property law, global trading protocols, and the obfuscation of diplomatic prose. Critical decisions are reached behind closed doors by diplomats in remote locales such as Doha, Qatar and Phoenix, Mauritius.

I was struck, during the 14th International AIDS Conference in Barcelona, with the passion of former President Bill Clinton, as he spoke of the need for the West to bring cheap drugs to the developing world. His view was echoed by *former* South African President Nelson Mandela, and *former* Canadian Prime Minister Kim Campbell, and *former* Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral, and *former* Tanzanian President Ali Hassan Mwinyi. What a nice thing it would have been, had all these *former* global leaders the courage of their convictions when they could have *done* something about it.

Lacking the resources of The Wall Street Journal or The New York Times, I've had to pick my spots in the international AIDS story. Like any of us, I try to keep up with the pack and find stories others are overlooking. My first front-page story about the movement to bring down the cost of AIDS drugs in Africa was printed in May 1999.

I've been drawn to stories I feel are underreported, such as the strong association between lack of male circumcision and high prevalence rates of

HIV. If this simple, low-cost, one-time, and permanent medical intervention reduces HIV risk by 50 percent or more, as some studies suggest, the world ought to know about it. There is also intriguing evidence that widespread re-use of hypodermic needles, washed in buckets of tepid water, might be a far more significant factor in the spread of AIDS in Africa than previously recognized.

I'm fascinated by the progress achieved in deconstructing the AIDS virus and the hunt for new and better therapies. But the technical fix for the AIDS epidemic has the look and feel of the nuclear fusion solution to our energy woes—the answer is forever just a decade or so away. The steps that brought this epidemic under control in San Francisco are well known, but in the Third World they are grossly underutilized: condoms, clean needles, prevention education and marketing, treatment of venereal diseases, HIV testing, and treatment with triple-combination antiretroviral drug therapy. By ignoring international patents and producing its own AIDS drugs, Brazil is an example of a country that has contained a potentially explosive epidemic and demonstrated that a treatment strategy can work for an impoverished population.

### The Politics of AIDS

AIDS has always been a highly political story, and its political dimensions have only grown as the story goes global. But the level of international coverage, like the global response to the epidemic itself, is inadequate for the task at hand. Secretary of State Colin Powell said in November that the AIDS pandemic was “the biggest problem we have on the face of the earth today,” yet the gap between rhetoric and reality appears wider than ever.

Three years after Pearl Harbor, American troops were poised on the border of Nazi Germany, Japan was in retreat, and the Manhattan Project was months away from its test of the atomic bomb. In the nearly three years since the Durban AIDS conference, when the prospect of cheap AIDS drugs was

first widely publicized to the world, 95 percent of those who might benefit from such therapies still have no access to them. The path to widespread distribution of generic antiretroviral drugs is littered with American-led objections and obstruction.

It is a story that has been widely reported, but seldom on the front pages of our papers. It is a political story, but political editors love horse races, not snail's paces. It seems to be that this slow-killing virus, which preys on the human penchant for denial, also exploits our short attention spans. The AIDS story is chronic, slow moving, and subtle. We favor the acute, the dramatic, and spectacular.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has a goal of raising \$10 billion a year, to scale-up AIDS prevention and treatment in the developing world. But pledges to the fledgling fund are but \$2.2 billion. The program is in danger of running out of cash. The Bush administration pledge to this fund remains \$500 million, even as the President announced his intent to devote \$15 billion during the next five years to fight AIDS in Africa and the Caribbean. But even that intention wasn't in evidence in the budget he submitted to Congress; instead of the two billion he pledged for next year, the Global Health Council analysis indicated a funding request for a bit more than one billion.

Meanwhile, America has cut its aid to family planning programs that have any link to abortion, and Africa is undergoing a condom shortage. Worldwide, donor nations are providing *fewer* condoms than in 1990, and the U.S. latex contribution has been cut in half. HIV rates are soaring in India and China, the two most populous nations on earth. The fastest growing population of the HIV-infected is in the states of the former Soviet Union. Twenty million people have died of AIDS since the disease was first discovered there in 1981. There are an estimated 40 million currently infected by HIV, and forecasts are for 68 million deaths by 2020. Yet how many people know this is happening there? Given the press coverage of this preventable human



tragedy, far fewer know than should.

Powell might be right. AIDS might be the biggest problem facing the world today. Yet where does this epidemic rate among the Bush administration's priorities? Where does it rate among the priorities of our newsrooms? The

world's biggest problems should be journalism's biggest stories. By that standard, we are all falling down on the job. ■

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## Documenting the Plague of AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa

By photographing this disease's devastation, James Nachtwey appeals 'to stop the madness, lend a hand, restore humanity.'

By James Nachtwey

**F**or a photographer, a single word can be worth a thousand pictures.

During the past 20 years, my work has taken me to the darkest corners of the planet—man-made infernos that make Dante and Hieronymus Bosch look like straight, social documentarians. To my eyes, recent history has unfolded like a serial apocalypse. "Genocide" is a word so heavily freighted with memory and responsibility that it caused the most powerful, technologically advanced nations in the world to turn their backs as more than a half million people were slaughtered in the space of a single season with weapons that were no more than farm implements. The destruction of food as a weapon of mass extermination is a phenomenon so unthinkable that it makes a euphemism of the word "famine." "Ethnic cleansing" is a sanitized term for the wholesale murder, rape and mass deportation of one's neighbors. The uninhibited military assault on civilian populations politely passes as "civil war." Such words have become synonyms for the bloody homestretch of the 20th century.

The images conjured by these words burned a hole in my consciousness that I can only attempt to fill with the stark hope that publishing pictures in the mass media not only informs, but also makes an appeal to stop the madness, lend a hand, restore humanity.

As we entered the third millennium,

the plague years descended upon sub-Saharan Africa. AIDS will probably wipe out more people than all the wars, famines and natural disasters of the past decade put together. The drama of the AIDS epidemic is more subtle than the older calamities that rocked the African continent. It plays itself out behind closed doors. People are suffering silently, in hospices and hospital wards and in isolation inside their homes. Most Africans cannot afford the cocktail of drugs that forestalls the effects of the disease. AIDS is a death sentence, and people are dying quietly, one by one, in the millions.

The frontline troops in this war are the gentle souls who have committed themselves to the saintly task of attending the dying. Grass roots NGO's and Christian missionaries bathe, feed and lend emotional support where it is most needed, but they are waging an uphill fight. As I accompanied caregivers on their rounds in shantytowns, hospices and farms, I was awed by their selfless, unsung devotion. Where hope no longer existed, they replaced it with comfort and dignity.

In the early 1990's, I spent a good deal of time in South Africa documenting the epic battle to overthrow apartheid, culminating in the election of Nelson Mandela. According to statistics, South Africans are being literally triaged by an invisible enemy that is oblivious to the courage and idealism with which they prevailed against im-

possible odds in their political struggle. The AIDS epidemic is a devastating postscript to a story that embodied the best that humanity has to offer; there is no alternative but to defeat it.

Its defeat will only be accomplished through awareness and education, both within the countries affected and in the rest of the world, which is morally obliged to lend support and assistance. My goal as a photojournalist has always been to help create that awareness.

When a photo editor and I approached the editors at Time with the idea of a story about AIDS in Africa, they were extremely supportive. The magazine let me stay in the field for more than two months and sent a senior writer to do in-depth interviews. This cover story, which appeared in February 2001, included 10 pages of photographs and 10 pages of text.

I am continuing my visual documentation of the AIDS epidemic, paying special attention to caregivers, with the continuing interest of the editors at Time, the generous assistance of the Alicia Patterson Foundation, and a grant from the Kaiser Media Mini-Fellowships in Health. ■

*James Nachtwey has been a contract photographer for Time since 1984. He has devoted himself to documenting wars, conflicts and critical social issues worldwide. His book, "Inferno," was published by Phaidon Press in 2000.*



Boitumelo Mogorosi, three months old, who is HIV positive and whose mother has AIDS, lives with and is cared for by her grandmother, Emily Mogorosi, 68, in Thaba 'Nchu, South Africa. September 2002.



Rosinah Motshegwa, 29, HIV positive, lives with her two unemployed brothers in Khutsong, South Africa, and is tucked into bed on a sofa in the sitting room by a caregiver from the Carletonville Homebased Care Program. August 2000.

*Photos by James Nachtwey.*



Children who are HIV positive are comforted by Dawn Bell, an administrator at the Sparrow Ministries, which serves as a home and daycare center for those infected with the AIDS virus, in Roodepoort, South Africa. August 2000. *Photo by James Nachtwey.*



A brothel in Harare, Zimbabwe, where prostitution is openly practiced even though it is illegal and is one of the most common ways in which HIV is spread. July 2000. *Photo by James Nachtwey.*



A patient who has just died from AIDS-related tuberculosis at Beatrice Road Infectious Diseases Hospital in Harare, Zimbabwe, is covered by an orderly before being transported to the morgue. October 2000. *Photo by James Nachtwey.*

# Reporting on HIV/AIDS in Kenya

‘Medical experts are not willing to release the information to the media because they fear rebuttal from government authorities. . . .’

By Joseph Ngome

From the time the HIV/AIDS scourge was first reported in Kenya in 1986, health experts and members of the public have remained secretive about this disease. Kenyans had heard of the “slim” disease (named this because of weight loss, emaciation and frailness that occur before death) from a distance as AIDS was devastating neighboring Uganda. Doors in villages in the Ugandan countryside were closed, homes deserted, and children left orphaned as parents were swept away by the AIDS storm.

Kenyans continued to interact with Ugandans, especially along the common border in the western region of our country. Soon the disease was spreading like a bush fire in Kenya, claiming the lives of people both in rural and urban areas. However, even as the number of deaths grew, the factors that were contributing to the HIV/AIDS emergence in Kenya remained difficult issues for people to talk about, even while some progress has been made in reducing the rate of AIDS deaths. This disease has been shrouded in mystery, even by medical experts who ought to be helping the public to understand how HIV is transmitted as a way of preventing its spread.

## Beliefs About AIDS in Kenya

In rural villages, people regard HIV/AIDS as a taboo subject in the community. When it is spoken of, people use the word “Chira,” which is understood to be an ailment that strikes the body slowly and persistently until one is so wasted and tired-looking that no modern treatment can help. Villagers don’t admit that AIDS is real. Illness is believed to strike a man or a woman who

goes against communal norms. And the consequences of these transgressions can only be treated by village “medicine men.” In some regions of western Kenya, death from AIDS is attributed to the evil hands of envious neighbors who bewitch their sons or daughters. If not, then the sons or daughters must have done something against the community’s set of norms.

Such cultural practices and myths permeate nearly all of Kenyan society and also exist in many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. These, among other factors, are stumbling blocks in the fight against AIDS. Scientists, health officials, and workers in Kenya agree on one thing: Cultural practices contribute immensely to the spread of HIV/AIDS in Kenya. For instance, wife inheritance (a practice in which a widow becomes the property of clan members after the husband’s death) is a widespread phenomenon in some communities, and efforts to stop it become divisive national issues. Even when local HIV/AIDS counselors or health officials visit communities to educate people about this disease, their messages are not persuasive. Old habits, especially here, die hard.

The culture of denial and stigmatization among the public and victims’ relatives has also fueled the spread of this disease, whose prevalence increases every year. Even former President Daniel Moi, cabinet ministers, and key government officials continually denied the emergence of AIDS in Kenya, even as the disease was devastating the Kenyan populace.

## Reporting on AIDS in Kenya

As a journalist, reporting on HIV/AIDS presented many challenges. The dis-

ease itself presents a lot of scientific issues. To cover them accurately requires medical knowledge and science writing skills, and these hurdles have been difficult for journalists here to get past. The primary role journalists can play in reporting on this situation is to bridge the gap between what scientists know and what the public needs to know. And this is only possible if the journalist understands the subject well enough to disseminate information about it.

In Kenya, very few journalists have had training in science writing, and those who are science writers head for greener pastures in research institutions. And editors tend to prefer political accounts about AIDS rather than scientific ones. Such stories don’t require a lot of research work, but they are also often relegated to the inside pages. The brief training I did have through the Kaiser Family Foundation program [See Huntly Collins’ story on page 35.] and my attendance at the 14th International AIDS Conference in Barcelona, Spain have been valuable in improving my ability to cover this story.

Getting authentic information from medical experts is essential to us being able to do this reporting but, in most cases, accurate information has not been forthcoming. Medical experts are not willing to release the information to the media because they fear rebuttal from government authorities, who conceal facts and figures about this disease and work against the interest of the general public. Doctors often won’t release information even when the symptoms leading to a person’s death are clearly the result of HIV/AIDS. They hide behind patient-doctor confidentiality, but this should not bind them to not release information about whether

patients they are treating are dying from AIDS.

Two years ago, a government-owned news agency published a story about a young woman suffering from HIV/AIDS who told members of the press about her intention to have the names of men with whom she had had sexual intercourse read at her burial. She said she'd given this list to her grandmother and instructed her to read the men's names when she had died. She wanted to become the first AIDS victim in Kenya to go public with the names of those men with whom she'd had love affairs so they'd know the fate awaiting them. She saw her actions as a way to fight the disease.

By the time I traveled to the hospital to meet this woman and find out more information from her and ask her if she actually had authored the list, she was dead and buried. She had died quietly in her hospital bed and was hurriedly buried outside of her grandmother's compound. Family members, and even those in the hospital where she was a patient, were tightlipped. Her grandmother denied having ever seen such a list. Nobody wanted to talk about the incident because government officials had gone there before journalists like me arrived and had given a stern warning to the family, confiscated her list, and guarded her burial.

The public never actually heard the names on her list. What the public did know about the list led to divided opinion about it and the way this woman had been treated. There were those who believed that her intended action could have deterred many people from extramarital involvements. But some felt differently.

Until 2000, when President Moi declared HIV/AIDS a national disaster, all information about the disease was treated with much secrecy, and this hindered openness in discussing issues surrounding the disease. This climate of fear on the part of medical officials and the secretive behavior of victims and their families made it difficult for journalists to report effectively and accurately on the subject. And Moi's declaration did not change much be-

cause it was not accompanied by any full-scale political backing.

After his declaration, the AIDS epidemic continued to grow. The National AIDS Control Council (NACC), where HIV/AIDS programs and funds were managed, was moved from the Ministry of Health to the Office of the President, where the programs to attract donor funding in Kenya were housed. Appointments to this team were based on loyalty and nepotism. Professionalism and experience were secondary and, as a consequence, NACC's performance was below par. Those appointed to the AIDS programs often succumbed to corruption, and funds meant for the control of the disease were mismanaged and misused, as if this disaster was not of national importance. Without transparency in government, corruption spread just as AIDS continued to spread.

During the Moi regime, members of the Kenyan press were similarly compromised; some of them were accused of being corrupt. Only in rare cases did journalists at mainstream publications expose any of this corruption. Not only as individuals, but also as news organizations, reporters and editors were afraid of repercussions from those who were in power. And they had reason to be fearful: Reporters lost their lives from exposing scandals about drug trafficking, and media owners were warned of dire consequences for publishing such investigative stories.

### Using the Internet

Now, because of information technology, I can rely on the Internet to find current scientific and medical information from different regions in Africa and throughout the world. From this information and data, I'm able to compare and contrast what is happening in Kenya and provide an accurate context for my reporting. The information I can find using the Internet provides me with new story ideas and lets me learn about the experiences—both the successes and failures—in fighting AIDS in different regions. Having access to this kind of information sharpens my

skills in reporting on this disease and improves my knowledge.

What I've been able to convey in my stories about AIDS has changed the perceptions many have of this disease. While in years past the public paid little attention to news about AIDS, now public interest in learning more about how this disease is increasing. This encouraging trend is due, in part, to a concerted campaign by opinion-makers, who today are more willing to speak boldly about HIV/AIDS.

However, many in Kenya still lag behind on information due to the nation's high level of illiteracy. A majority of Kenyans live in rural areas where they cannot get the newspapers that are read by more educated people and few own transistor radios. And women rarely own or listen to radios so they often rely on information relayed from third parties.

In Kenya today, HIV/AIDS remains a controversial subject. The science involved with understanding the disease, its prevention and treatment, is also quite complicated, so what happens is that the public—and even medical experts—are often confused in terms of how to act. And because of this confusion, less attention than is needed is given to the fight against this killer. ■

*Joseph Ngome is a reporter for BBC radio in Kisumu, Kenya. He has worked with various media organizations including The Daily Nation, The East African, and the former ruling party newspaper, the Kenya Times, where he was a bureau chief. Besides reporting for BBC from western Kenya, he also coordinates a network of journalists with interest in reporting on health and environment issues—the Health and Environment Media Network (HEMNet).*

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# Why Reporters and Editors Get Health Coverage Wrong

Health journalists need and want special training.

By Melinda Voss

In 1997, I left behind 26 years of reporting at The Des Moines Register to pursue a master's degree in public health. The switch proved great fun. I devoured courses in epidemiology and biostatistics, health policy and health behavior theories, research methods and program evaluation, among others. Invariably, however, in class, professors criticized—or, to my chagrin—ridiculed some ineptly done news story about health and medicine. Adding to my dismay were various studies I came across that criticized journalists for careless, unscientific, inadequate or unfair coverage of AIDS, women's health issues, chronic fatigue syndrome, health reform, and medical research.

Often, I have felt hard pressed to defend the news industry. Having been a reporter, I knew all too well how little preparation and on-the-job training journalists typically receive for covering such complex issues as fetal brain cell implants, HIV/AIDS and, as we have witnessed recently, bioterrorist threats.

I am not alone with my concerns. A recent article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* pointed to the frequency of exaggerated reporting about preliminary medical studies. Dr. Lisa Schwartz of the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in White River Junction, Vermont reviewed a year's worth of health-related research that resulted in news coverage. Her review of 147 research presentations at five major scientific meetings in 1998 found more than one-quarter of the studies generated front-page news stories in at least one major newspaper. Yet more than one-third of those reported-on presentations either involved small numbers of human subjects or were based on animal or laboratory studies. Three years later, only half those research papers generating general news cover-

age were published in a leading peer-reviewed medical journal, with smaller numbers appearing in lesser journals and others going unpublished altogether.

"The current press coverage of scientific meetings may be characterized as 'too much, too soon,'" Schwartz wrote. "Results are frequently presented to the public as scientifically sound evidence rather than as preliminary findings with still uncertain validity. Press coverage at this early stage may leave the public with the false impression that the data are in fact mature, the methods valid, and the findings widely accepted."

## Health Journalists Need Training

How can this be? The simple answer is that many journalists who cover health and medicine have had no specialized training. In fact, a 1999 survey I did showed that nearly 83 percent of 115 Midwestern health reporters who responded said they had no training, besides on-the-job experience, that specifically helped them cover health issues. And more than two-thirds of the respondents identified four skills—understanding key health issues, putting health news in context, producing balanced stories on deadline, and interpreting statistics—as troublesome. The survey also found that the health reporters (all of whom were at daily newspapers) know they lack proficiency and want help. Only 31 percent felt "very confident" reporting health news and only 9.7 percent felt "very confident" interpreting statistics.

Though these results didn't surprise me, I find it shocking even now that the news industry pays so little attention to preparation and training for reporters and editors, particularly if they are being asked to report on complex issues

involving health and medicine. Indeed, the idea of providing on-the-job training holds so little sway in the journalism industry that no one knows how much is spent on professional development. The best estimate comes from a recent study by Northwestern University's Media Management Center, which used the standard benchmark—percentage of payroll spent on training—to track spending in the newspaper industry. On average, newspapers spend seven-tenths of one percent of payroll on professional development, Northwestern's researchers found. The national average of all industries was two percent in 2000, according to the American Society of Training and Development.

Though specialized training should be available for reporters on any beat, it is essential for reporters who cover health and medicine, the business of health care, consumer health issues, or health policy. For one thing, health journalists—unlike education or city hall reporters—need skills and knowledge not easily acquired on the job. They should know, for example, the strengths and weaknesses of clinical trials vs. case control studies, the difference between relative risk and absolute risk, and how to interpret a statistical significance or correlation score, just to name a few. Without such knowledge, journalists can wreak havoc or, at the very least, confusion.

## Causing Confusion in Readers' Minds

Consider last summer's blockbuster story about the decision to halt the large federally funded hormone replacement therapy (HRT) trial because the drugs increased the risk of heart attacks, although slightly. Surely, many of the six million women taking these drugs wondered how could this be



## Covering the Quality of Health Care: A Resource Guide for Journalists

In 1997, about a half-dozen journalists gathered in Chicago one September weekend to form the Association of Health Care Journalists (AHCJ). The founders shared a vision that such a group could raise the quality, accuracy and visibility of health care reporting by helping one another. Creating a resource guide—the Association's first major publication—was a natural way to help turn that vision into reality.

Our 220-page guide is intended to put journalists in touch with the experts they need to quote, the background materials that will give their stories perspective, and online links to turn an amorphous subject into a clear picture for citizens, consumers and policymakers. Chapters are included on medical errors and mal-

practice, the price of quality, comparing doctors and hospitals, mental health, long-term care, disparities in health care, and complementary and alternative medicine. A 40-page resource list offers names, phone numbers, Web sites, and e-mail addresses.

Designed to help journalists of all stripes—broadcast, online and print—the guide is intended to cover this critical issue in an informed, systematic way. It provides crucial context and vital data that will make it easy for journalists to use this book as a quick reference when doing breaking news stories or as a thoughtful, provocative starting point when working on long-range stories.

To order a copy, go to [https://pygmy.jaws.umn.edu/%7Eahcj/resource\\_guide.cgi](https://pygmy.jaws.umn.edu/%7Eahcj/resource_guide.cgi). ■

when the press had reported numerous previous studies showing those drugs lowered the risk of heart attack and Alzheimer's disease.

My theory is that few stories during the last decade put information about HRT in its proper context. Specifically, many reporters routinely failed to inform readers that nearly all previous studies were *observational* studies. Observational studies, as a well-educated health journalist knows, are a considerably weaker way to assess a treatment's risks and benefits. That's why the HRT trial, a well-designed clinical trial with a large number of participants, offered strong enough evidence for doctors and scientists to halt the study in midstream.

But let's not blame reporters here. Editors should be catching errors and omissions—and demanding context. The problem is that editors typically aren't any better at doing this than untrained reporters. This situation be-

came apparent to me in 2001 when I analyzed news coverage of a clinical trial involving a new treatment for Parkinson's disease patients. The Washington Post published a news brief about a study that mistakenly confused stem cells with fetal brain cells. A knowledgeable editor would have prevented such a silly mistake from appearing in the newspaper.

If news coverage of health and medicine didn't matter so much, maybe I wouldn't care. The fact is that news reports about health and health care affect the well being of many Americans. And there's plenty of evidence to prove it:

- A 1997 National Health Council survey showed that more than half of Americans (58 percent) claim a medical or health news story led them to consider changing their behavior or to take a specific action, such as seeing their doctor, changing their

eating patterns, modifying their exercise habits, or getting some kind of medical treatment.

- A January 2000 poll conducted for the American Dietetic Association found 48 percent of respondents who cited television as a leading source of nutrition information, while 47 percent said they get information from magazines and 18 percent from newspapers. Physicians were cited as a leading source by *only* 11 percent of respondents.
- A March 2002 Harris poll showed that about 110 million American adults—nearly 80 percent of all American adults who use the Internet—spend at least part of their time online searching for health care information. On average, they search for health information three times a month.

In short, misleading reporting can be dangerous. As Schwartz noted, "Patients may experience undue hope or anxiety or may seek unproven, useless or even dangerous tests and treatments."

### Encouraging Professional Development

So, what's to be done? The first thing is to encourage the news industry to do its duty: Provide the proper training for its reporters and editors. There is no question that journalists want help. A study, "Newsroom Training: Where's the Investment?," done for the Council of Presidents of National Journalism Organizations and funded by the Knight Foundation, showed that the number one complaint among journalists is lack of training. Luckily, some movers and shakers within the journalism industry are working to transform attitudes so professional development becomes an indispensable part of a newsroom operation. Last summer, the American Society of Newspaper Editors drew together representatives from about 25 journalists groups to develop a plan to remedy this situation.

An analysis the Association of Health Care Journalists (AHCJ) did about a year ago found many wonderful pro-

fessional development opportunities out there. But they reach relatively few health and health care journalists. All told, each year these workshops and seminars attract no more than 200 to 400 of an estimated 3,500 to 5,000 journalists who report on these issues.

Training also seems to reach mostly experienced reporters at large media outlets. Small news outlets often do not allow staffers to attend workshops and seminars. This means that young and inexperienced journalists at small- and mid-sized news outlets—the very journalists who need training the most—are less likely to receive it.

Another conclusion: Most workshops and seminars deal with one subject, such as cancer or genetics. Some programs, such as the Knight Fellowships at Stanford, do not focus on health care, but journalists can use the fellowship year to study health topics. However, almost no program offers training in such journalism fundamentals as how to interview health and medical researchers or how to report medical research. The only systematic health education typically requires 12 months to two years in a graduate program, and this is often too costly and time-consuming for journalists.

Those training programs that do exist also need to be better assessed.

Few, if any, of these programs have been evaluated by outside parties to determine if they improve the knowledge and skills of participants—or, what's more important—if they actually raise the quality of news reports. This is where groups such as the AHCJ can provide leadership. We are working to develop the framework for a comprehensive curriculum that will be readily available to large numbers of journalists who cover health and health care and will be properly evaluated. As part of this effort, AHCJ produced a 220-page resource guide for reporters on covering quality issues in health care. [See accompanying box on page 47.]

In devising such a curriculum, we will avoid reinventing the wheel. We want to include existing programs such as those offered by the Kaiser Family Foundation, the Knight Science Journalism Fellowships at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Knight Center for Specialized Journalism at the University of Maryland, and at workshops and seminars put on by such groups as the National Press Foundation, the Foundation for American Communications, the American Press Institute, and the Poynter Institute for Media Studies.

This new curriculum and approach

might not be fully up and running for a decade, but I believe it will provide a workable and credible way to systematically provide the skills and knowledge health journalists need to do their jobs well, without requiring them to leave their jobs for a year. It's certainly something I wish had been available when I was reporting on health and medicine. With the knowledge I acquired earning a master's degree in public health, I blush to think of the mistakes and omissions I undoubtedly made. Perhaps this is why I've made it my life's mission to do what I can to improve the quality of news reports about health and medicine. ■

*Melinda Voss earned a master's degree in public health after 26 years as a reporter at The Des Moines Register. She is cofounder and executive director of the Association of Health Care Journalists ([www.abcj.umn.edu](http://www.abcj.umn.edu)). In addition, she is the coordinator of the Health Journalism Masters Program at the University of Minnesota and vice-chair of the Council of Presidents of National Journalism Organizations, an umbrella group of 44 journalism organizations.*

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## An Education in How to Cover the Issues

In eight days, journalists gain knowledge and experience that improves coverage.

By Larry Tye

**I**t is one week, with one mission: to ignite medical and health reporters with a passion for their beat and equip them with the tools and information to cover it. It is not the Nieman or the Knight but a novel fellowship, a short-form course that can make a huge difference. Most of all it is fun.

We go to hospital emergency rooms at midnight and government emergency bunkers just after dawn. We talk

to old men who sleep in trees about living with mental illness and without a home and to fast-food workers about managing with no medical insurance. We've eaten cheese sandwiches and talked health politics with a soon-to-be presidential candidate, drank beer and debated medical ethics with the former editor of *The New England Journal of Medicine*, and discussed various dilemmas facing doctors with the head of

the Massachusetts Medical Society.

It is called the Health Coverage Fellowship, and it's open to medical and health reporters from across Massachusetts.

### The Health Coverage Fellowship

Professional development courses are critical for journalists no matter their

assignment. But this is especially so on the health beat, where the issues are particularly complex and perpetually evolving. With that in mind the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation last year set up the Health Coverage Fellowship to address the difficulties journalists—particularly at small news organizations—have navigating today’s health care maze.

The fellowship runs each spring at a residential conference center near Boston, for eight days and nights, and continues with half-day programs and mentoring. It involves 10 reporters and editors from Massachusetts newspapers, radio stations and television outlets, selected by a panel of prominent journalists based on past performance and potential. Now entering its second year, the fellowship might eventually expand to accept applicants from across New England and beyond.

The program’s fundamental objective is to familiarize fellows with major issues in health care and medicine in Massachusetts. They are pushed to ask the right questions and shown where to look for answers. They learn to recognize which issues require daily reporting and which warrant more in-depth work. They compare notes and talk about how they attack comparable challenges. And when they head back to work, they keep in touch via a listserv and Web site.

## Learning Outside the Newsroom

Eight days isn’t much time to accomplish the program’s ambitious goals, but having great speakers helps. There were 55 of them last spring, from Howard Dean, the doctor-governor-presidential aspirant from Vermont, to journalist Eric Newhouse from the Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune, whose 12-part series on alcoholism proved you don’t have to be from a big paper (his has a circulation of about 40,000) to win a big prize—the Pulitzer. [See Newhouse’s article about his reporting on this series on page 28.] Legislators, business leaders, and economists argued about how we got into the cur-

rent mess with Medicare and Medicaid and how to get out, while terrorism experts talked about natural disasters and man-made ones.

A dozen field trips helped bring to life issues raised by our speakers. The fellows spent one night wandering Boston’s streets with mental health care workers, coming away with a clearer understanding of the connections between homelessness and mental illness and why both are so intractable. They rode ambulances to see first-hand how overcrowding in emergency rooms forces hospitals to shutter their doors and shuttle patients elsewhere.

What do all those speakers and site visits add up to? Call it an abbreviated journalism curriculum for those who never went to journalism school, with a medical focus for those who never expected to be on this beat. While it doesn’t offer the emancipation or duration of a Nieman Fellowship, cash-starved editors and publishers find it easier these days to say yes to a shorter program like this one, focused on the precise issues and region the reporters will cover when they return to work.

Nor does the fellowship end when the journalists head back to their stations or papers. As its director, I am on call for another full year. Drawing on 15 years covering medicine and the environment for The Boston Globe and teaching journalism, I try to help when fellows are stuck for ideas or for whom to call. I assist in thinking out projects and carving out clearer definitions of beats. And I maintain a Web site [[www.larrytye.com](http://www.larrytye.com)] with breaking research reports, trend studies of community health issues, and postings of fellows’ stories.

## Connecting Coverage With Policies

The Health Coverage Fellowship has a second agenda that starts not with journalists but with those whose lives are affected by these health care issues. It is to raise public awareness about a series of what the foundation believes are critical but undercovered issues—from public health to mental health,

the closure of community hospitals to the proliferation of medical errors. Fellows are encouraged to cover these issues at the community level, where they occur and where voters and office holders are likely to pay attention.

Consider the millions of Americans without health insurance. Everyone knows this is an enormous problem, yet it doesn’t receive consistent coverage in big papers and gets even less attention in smaller ones or on commercial television and radio. [See Susan Dentzer’s story on page 26.] This is partly because the issue is so complicated and so difficult to address. But the fellowship tries to address it, helping reporters present these stories in the compelling human terms that will put them on Page One.

As we get ready to welcome our second class of fellows, can we convincingly claim to be helping to improve health and medical journalism in Massachusetts?

There is no doubt the fellowship is meeting a perceived need: We received applications from enough top-notch applicants this year to fill two classes, despite the media’s economic woes. We also were able to reenlist our best speakers as well as recruit others who were hesitant last time around. And while I doubted whether fellows would come to me for advice on story ideas or execution, I have heard from two or three each week for a year.

Then there are the evaluations filled out by our first class of fellows, who came from big papers like The Boston Globe and smaller ones like the MetroWest Daily News, and from large broadcast outlets like Boston’s WCVB-TV and smaller ones like WFCR-FM in Amherst. “I think every science writer should have this opportunity,” said the Globe’s Ellen Barry. Rhonda Mann of WCVB-TV called it a “great week of learning from the top people in health care, top researchers, top medical journalists, and from each other.”

What really matters in a program like this, however, is not what the journalists say but what they do. After returning to work, the fellows continued to be frustrated with their newsrooms’

short-staffing and were pressed into service on beats beyond theirs. Still, they have managed to publish or broadcast nearly 100 stories—on issues ranging from insuring the uninsured to the homeless mentally ill—that they tell us grew directly out of seeds planted during their fellowship. ■

*Larry Tye, a 1994 Nieman Fellow, directs the Health Coverage Fellowship. For 15 years, he reported on medicine and the environment for The Boston Globe, and he is the author of two books, "The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays & the Birth of Public Relations," and "Home*

*Lands: Portraits of the New Jewish Diaspora." He is presently writing a book about the Pullman porters and their role in the civil rights movement.*

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## Examining the Content of Health Care Reporting

Neither the health care system nor policies creating it receive coverage they deserve.

By Felicia Mebane

In schools of public health, everyone is aware that the boomers are coming. That's because in 2010 the first wave of the Baby Boom generation will be ready for retirement, and health care services will be in even greater demand than they are today. By then the difficult political conundrum of how to pay for Medicare will have had to be addressed. So when the University of North Carolina issued a press release with the headline, "Old Age Won't Boost Health Care Costs As Much As Some Have Predicted," I expected that Edward Norton, one of the study's authors and a colleague of mine, would receive a lot of calls from reporters who would be clamoring for more information. After all, the study's results challenged the prevailing policy predictions about rapidly rising costs of care as Americans age. What Norton and I hoped was that this study might become a catalyst for a nationwide discussion about the elderly and their health care issues.

This didn't happen. Coverage stretched as far as brief reports on a local public radio station, CBS radio, and a story in a local newspaper.

Why didn't a report like this one generate more news stories? I think what happened here is illustrative of a trend in the coverage of health care policy. Health is a multifaceted, trillion-dollar industry. Yet issues involv-

ing health care and health care policy do not get the attention they deserve. These stories are not told in proportion to the importance these topics play in our lives, nor does reporting on them even receive its fair share of attention when the overall subject is health. Too often, "health" news consists of reporting on diseases or lifestyle issues, rather than the ways in which health care is delivered and the reasons why.

More health care policy news is justified. A 2002 Pew Research Center survey shows that 71 percent of Americans closely follow health news. More specifically, according to a Kaiser/Harvard School of Public Health survey in July/August 2002, 55 percent of Americans closely followed discussions in Congress about a Medicare prescription drug benefit. By comparison, in the same survey 82 percent of respondents closely followed stories about U.S. military efforts in Afghanistan. Even in the midst of the war on terrorism, Americans sought information about a change in government policy that might affect their health care benefits.

Though news consumers tell us in surveys that they like much of what they find in health coverage, they also have ideas about ways it might be improved. According to a survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation and the National Association of

Black Journalists in 1998, about 60 percent of the public believes that the media do a good job of telling them and their families what they need to know about health and health care. But a similar percentage indicated that they would like to see more news coverage of three topics: changes in government policies and the health care industry that might affect their health care or health insurance; Medicare and Medicaid, and how to find a health care plan, doctor, hospital or other health providers to meet their needs. These results suggest that Americans need more information that can help them understand how the health care "system" works and how they interact with it, both when they are well and when they are sick.

New and improved coverage of health care policy could be approached from a variety of angles. As news fodder, health care and health policy have it all: lots of money, drama and conflict; drugs and new technologies, and plenty of just plain contentious issues. Access to health care, for example, challenges us to think about our rights as human beings, and it can also provoke a look at specific consumers' concerns by asking questions like what an uninsured family can do when a child's fever reaches 104 degrees and emergency medical care is required. These seem like examples of stories that would

entice news audiences *and* provide news that consumers can use.

## Assessing News Content

When health policy stories are reported, how various issues are presented can become a point of contention. For example, some policymakers accuse journalists of repeatedly misrepresenting Republican efforts to cut spending for Medicare. And at a recent academic health conference, I heard a presenter contend that “biased news coverage” of pharmaceutical advertising contributed to increased demand for a particular medication. When faced with critiques of health care policy coverage, I think journalists should be skeptical. It often turns out that such critiques arise typically out of anecdotal evidence. And while specific examples might be illustrative, they actually provide little real insight into what health care news the American public absorbs and acts upon.

There are, however, some reliable studies by which to judge the quality of such news coverage. For example, Julie Lima and coauthor Michael Siegel, a Boston University professor, have shown that newspaper coverage of the 1997-98 tobacco settlements focused on the generation of new revenue rather than highlighting specific mechanisms for preventing and controlling tobacco use. When I looked at news coverage of long-term care issues in 1998, I found that few reports provided an underlying context or described in any depth the issues that were affecting demand for long-term care or the provision of such services. Both Lima’s study and my own demonstrate that the ways in which journalists deal with setting a news story in its broader context and organizing information are not as comprehensive as health policy researchers would like.

The tone of news coverage matters, too. During the 1990’s, some policymakers and insurance industry representatives blamed news reports for the public’s backlash against managed care. Since then, a well-regarded media study—done by Mollyann

Brodie, vice president and director of public opinion and media research at the Kaiser Family Foundation, colleagues there, and Princeton Survey Research Associates—has shed light on this connection between news coverage and public perception. Their research found that in the 1990’s, most news coverage of managed care was neutral in tone. However, the tone of the coverage grew more critical as time went by, and its negativity was more in evidence in televised reporting.

The researchers’ assessment of the impact of this news coverage was mixed and offered a good reminder of how one’s sense about something can be proven incorrect once evidence is gathered and analyzed. The researchers did find that a large majority of people believed that rare anecdotal incidents of HMO’s withholding cancer treatment from children—like cases featured in television news programs—occurred often or sometimes. On the other hand, about half of the public viewed media coverage of managed care as fair, and only 22 percent said that this coverage “most influenced” their views of managed care. The authors concluded that “based on our findings, it would be difficult to argue that media coverage is by itself creating whatever backlash currently exists.”

A significant weakness of such studies is the lack of practical advice that emerges from them to benefit reporters. It would help us, as researchers, if journalists demanded that we provide more news about coverage that they can actually use. Journalists’ organizations such as the Association of Health Care Journalists, and AcademyHealth, a professional society for health services research and policy, should bring together reporters and editors, representatives of news audiences, health care providers, researchers and policy analysts to discuss what news the public wants to and needs to know about health care policy. Information gathered in such forums could be used to develop new approaches to aid in the coverage of “old” issues, increase reporters’ access to expert sources, and provide useful guidelines for report-

ing these stories. With commitment and creativity, internal and external critiques can lead to constructive conversations, training and research that might improve coverage of health care and health policy.

By reporting on the U.S. health care system—and about the public and private policies affecting its ability to function effectively—journalists provide a valuable service to the public. News reports are one of only a few ways that the public is able to keep abreast of the rapid changes in the health care system. And these changes have profound effects on their lives. As reporters and editors consider coverage of possible health stories, priority should be given to issues of health care policy, such as how reductions in Medicaid budgets—which are now happening in many states—will affect families and elderly citizens who depend on this program for medical services. This certainly isn’t the only health policy story out there, but more coverage of what’s happening with Medicaid or the uninsured would signal a promising step in the right direction. ■

*Felicia Mebane is an assistant professor in the Department of Health Policy and Administration in the School of Public Health at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She conducts research about coverage of health policy and politics with an eye toward improving news coverage. Her study, “Want to Understand How Americans Viewed Long-Term Care In 1998? Start with Media Coverage,” was published in The Gerontologist in February 2001.*

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## Investigating Scandal in the Catholic Church

As New England bureau chief for the Los Angeles Times, **Elizabeth Mehren** reports for West Coast readers on the region's newsworthy events. In her story opening our series of articles about press coverage of the Catholic Church's sex abuse scandal, which began in Boston, Mehren provides a journalistic context for understanding the pressures reporters and editors were under as this "runaway freight train of a story . . . roared along with fierce—and sometimes frightening—momentum." As Mehren notes, it is now more than a year since this story broke, and it "shows no signs of going away, much less slowing down."

**Walter V. Robinson**, editor of The Boston Globe's Spotlight Team, which broke the story and led the press's investigation of sexual abuse by Catholic priests and cover-up by the archdiocese, chronicles how his newspaper secured the documents it needed to break the secrecy surrounding these crimes and used them to give the church's victims a voice they hadn't had. **Stephen Kurkjian**, a member of the Globe's Spotlight Team who has worked on the clergy abuse scandal for more than a year, writes about how difficult it has been to obtain the necessary documents to report in-depth on the Boston archdiocese's finances. Given the secrecy with which the church handles its financial matters, Kurkjian reports that "we could identify our sources only as 'unnamed,' and could not even hint at their business affiliation."

From Rome, **John L. Allen, Jr.**, Vatican correspondent of the National Catholic Reporter and a Vatican analyst for CNN and National Public Radio, explains why there is so little solid news coverage of the Vatican by English-language journalists. Allen explains how this affects his coverage: He is forced to cut "through popular misconceptions that are reinforced by careless reporting." He also describes difficulties inherent to the beat, including the need to have time to cultivate sources and learn languages, to figure out how to cope with the absence of "spin" and too many unnamed sources, and the lack of editorial commitment and knowledge in the newsroom.

From Ireland, **Emily O'Reilly**, political correspondent with The Sunday Times who has written and broadcast on the topic of clerical sexual abuse, explains how Irish libel laws and "cultural censorship"—"an unwillingness by the news media in general to give the bad news until the populace has been adequately softened up in advance"—made "sexual deviancy within the priesthood [something that] had been whispered about for decades; yet, during those years, no reporter was prepared to go behind the whispers." The story broke in the Irish media only after British TV stations aired a series of documentaries. As O'Reilly notes, "A phenomenon of Irish journalism, and Irish life, is that our scandals are often first made public by reporters in another country, usually Britain."

In the early 1980's, the Chicago Sun-Times devoted 18 months to investigating suspected financial wrongdoing of Cardinal John Patrick Cody. **Roy Larson**, then the newspaper's religion editor, writes about how Publisher James Hoge issued a warning to the investigative team: "We're going to have to do as careful and as in-depth reporting as anyone's ever done, because this is dynamite." As Larson reports, "the stories were explosive—even before they were published." The Cody case ended inconclusively but, Larson says, at that time his paper's "investigation of the cardinal and archdiocese was unprecedented." ■

# Reporting Stories With Children as Victims of Priests

For journalists in Boston, ‘this crazy locomotive’ of a story has been unceasing and, at times, wrenching to cover.

By Elizabeth Mehren

For the thousands and thousands of families involved, the clerical abuse scandal that exploded in Boston in January 2002 was a tragedy of unimaginable dimensions. For Catholics in America, the crisis was a massive blow to the faith and the institution they were raised to love. For journalists, it was something else entirely: a runaway freight train of a story that roared along with fierce—and sometimes frightening—momentum. Day after day, story after story, outrage after outrage, this crazy locomotive just kept tearing along. Many days, it felt like no one was in the driver’s seat.

It was a special challenge for me, a one-woman bureau assigned to cover six New England states for the Los Angeles Times. This ongoing tale of shattered trust and broken lives also gnawed at me as few news sagas have managed to do. The same month that lawyer Roderick MacLeish, Jr. produced documents detailing horrific violations of children by former priest Paul Shanley, my son Sam turned 12—the very age when so many victims of pedophile priests were stalked and savaged, physically and emotionally.

Grown men and women wept in my presence as they described alarmingly similar experiences with men who stole their innocence: men who called themselves “Father,” men who called themselves holy. My office is at home, and I share a wall with my son’s playroom. Some days, transcribing these victims’ accounts into fodder for news stories, I would hear Sam and a friend sharing the simple joys of childhood. Twelve is an age when boys boast machismo and vulnerability in equal measure. They tell dirty jokes at one moment—and, in the next, they role-play with stuffed animals. I am an old-hand reporter, so ancient that in the days of Linotype



Cardinal Bernard F. Law departs Suffolk Superior Court in Boston in May 2002 after he gave his first deposition in the clergy sex abuse scandal. *Pool photo by David Ryan/The Boston Globe via The Associated Press.*

machines, I learned to read backward and upside down. I have covered dreadful stories of human atrocity. I like to think of myself as even-keeled and objective. But on these days, I wept, too.

This is how it started: For a sturdy corps of local reporters, peppered by the handful of national correspondents who call Boston their home, the year 2002 dawned in a courtroom in Cambridge, Massachusetts. A mammoth, muscular father pegged by his lawyer as a “gentle giant” was charged with beating another father to death following a dispute at a skating rink. The “hockey dad” trial, as this surreal scene soon became known, picked up its pitch and its pace each day—until finally, as the verdict was handed down, four reporters from *People* magazine were jockeying for seats in a minuscule

courtroom already packed with news people squeezed between two families who made the Hatfields and McCoys look like kissing cousins.

This Thomas Junta trial was, in its way, a preview of coming Boston news attractions. That case ended on a Friday. The following Tuesday, in the same Middlesex county courthouse, the child molestation trial of former priest John J. Geoghan began.

Midway through the Junta proceedings, *The Boston Globe* published an extraordinary story. In painstaking and sensational detail, the *Globe* used court records to show that the Boston archdiocese knew all about Geoghan’s history as a pedophile priest. Rather than yanking him from the priesthood, local church leaders moved Geoghan from parish to parish—the “geographic

cure," as this practice is known. Rather than protecting young parishioners from a monster in a Roman collar, archdiocese officials aimed to safeguard the reputation of the church.

Let me say right here, loud and clear: Hats off to *The Boston Globe*. Some days—many days—it was frustrating and downright annoying to add the phrase "as reported in *The Boston Globe*" to stories I wished could have been fully original in content. But the *Globe* outran us all on this one, starting with its dogged fight to obtain damning documents the church kept hidden for decades. The *Globe's* coverage was so thorough and relentless that at times I felt like a solitary runner competing in an uphill marathon against a relay team that never ran out of stamina, not to mention Gatorade.

I called my editors in Los Angeles the day the Geoghan story broke in the *Globe*. Heads-up, I said: Watch out for this one, it's going to be B-I-G. Yeah, yeah, yeah, they said, barely suppressing their yawns: We have dirty priests out here, too. Besides, my editors countered, this guy Geoghan was only charged with one count of fondling a kid at a swimming pool. What kind of a scandal was that?

Just wait, I promised.

## The Scandal Unfolds

Geoghan's trial stretched through February. By March, I was writing about rumblings that Cardinal Bernard F. Law would step down. I broadened the scope to write about women in the church: How was the crisis affecting them? I went to New York to meet with some Jesuits, writers themselves, who debriefed me on the innuendoes of clericalism. I sought out victims' groups in Boston and around the state. I stood on the frozen steps of a church in Worcester, waiting to talk to priests and worshippers there. I drove out to Leominster, in central Massachusetts, to watch a group of women charge their childhood priest with raping them as little girls. I tracked down "good" priests who were as angry and appalled as any of us. I tried to make contact with church officials and their lawyers.

Call after call to the venerable Rogers Law Firm, long the counsel to the archdiocese, went unreturned.

All this unfolded in the face of dozens of other New England news stories. There was the murdered fashion writer, Christa Worthington. There were verdicts for the teenage killers of Dartmouth professors Half and Susanne Zantop. There were impending elections, Acting Governor Jane Swift's latest antics, and the forthcoming corruption trial of Providence mayor Vincent A. "Buddy" Cianci, Jr.

But the church abuse locomotive kept steaming along. Chug, chug, chug: That was the sound of scandals breaking out in parishes all across America. Slam, slam, slam: That was the sound of the church perfecting the art of inaccessibility.

In April, Boston was the setting for what might have been a three-ring media circus. Instead it was a turning point that sped the scandal up still more. Looking every inch the circus impresario as he snapped his lapel microphone into place, attorney MacLeish filled a hotel ballroom with reporters and dozens of others who turned out to be abuse victims and their friends and family. The lights darkened and a 30-foot Power Point screen lit up. All we needed now were lions, tigers and cotton candy vendors.

But MacLeish delivered, mesmerizing the room with pictures and documents that made it clear that former priest Paul Shanley's predilection for sex with children was no secret to church authorities. Journalists are notorious for our short attention spans. Fifteen minutes, and we start to fidget and reach for our cell phones. But what MacLeish produced was spellbinding. For almost two hours, the only movement from journalists was the furious scrawl of pens across notepads.

Never mind that my story the next day ran inside the paper. This was one of the challenges in a year-long story: making it fresh and new every day—and doing so for editors and an audience 3,000 miles away. Time after time I whispered the phrase "Page One candidate" as I pressed the "send" button

to transmit the latest church-scandal offering. Time after time, I told myself: Forget about it, get this story in the paper, wherever it runs. That became my objective: advancing this amazing news organism, keeping up with it as it grew and morphed and mutated.

By the time the cardinal at last resigned on December 13th, an odd camaraderie had grown up. Journalists, protesters and counter-protesters all knew one another from gatherings outside the chancery or in front of Boston's Cathedral of the Holy Cross. Lawyers got way too candid and victims shared black-humor jokes, along with copious quantities of tears. Rodney Ford, the father of one alleged Shanley victim, became so accustomed to my phone calls at his home that he would playfully shout to his wife, "Honey, it's that pain in the ass from the L.A. Times!"

Under "C," for Catholics, my contact file began to bulge. On many Sundays I went to Mass twice—once at the cathedral and once at some rebel parish. I am not Catholic, but by Advent I had memorized the responses that worshippers recite each Sunday. I knew when to kneel and when to stand. "Hum a few bars and she fakes it," said Father Frank Fitzpatrick, a Brockton "good priest" I came to know and admire.

Now a full year has passed. The cardinal is gone, but this story shows no signs of going away, much less slowing down. Almost 500 civil claims are pending against an archdiocese that has threatened bankruptcy to avoid payment. New victims continue to pour forth. Previously confidential church documents—papers long kept locked in secret chancery files—now are entered into court records. After all this time, the shock of reading those records has not worn off, not one bit. Journalistic jadedness or battle fatigue has yet (thank heaven) to rear its weary head.

The sadness never leaves this story. These are, after all, real people. Almost universally they seem less intent on financial restitution (if such is possible) than on striving to assure that no boy or girl ever suffers the way they did. But mixed with the sorrow is the promise of transformation. All over



America, Catholics are questioning their hierarchy and calling for reform. Fine, strong priests have emerged to make their profession proud.

In some ways, the clerical abuse scandal has become a journalism textbook. Consider the elements: power, corruption, intrigue, tragedy, sex, betrayal, money—and an institution that dates back 2,000 years. Faith and morality juggle with hundreds of heroes

and just as many victims. The villains are despicable. Meanwhile, the proverbial quest for truth and justice—what brought us all into this line of endeavor, after all—is always at the forefront.

All these qualities and characters are crammed onto that freight train that rushed out of the Boston station more than a year ago. One thing is certain: This wild and crazy ride is nowhere

close to complete. ■

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## Shining the Globe's Spotlight on the Catholic Church

After publishing more than 900 articles about sexual molestation by priests, The Boston Globe's coverage isn't over yet.

By Walter V. Robinson

**B**y August 2001, after three decades of investigative work, The Boston Globe Spotlight Team had filled scores of file drawers, computer queues, and warehoused cartons with left-over documents, old notes and the like, chronicling misdeeds by a cast of scoundrels familiar to reporters at most any newspaper: corrupt politicians and judges, greedy developers, no-show public employees, cops on the take, even an FBI agent who protected mob bosses who had themselves been under the Globe's scrutiny. As far as we can tell, there was nary a file folder on a priest, much less a bishop or a cardinal.

Eighteen months later, the Spotlight Team's offices are littered with stacks of documents and crammed with boxes of the most private and incriminating files of the U.S. Catholic Church. Those documents describe criminal acts far more heinous than the wrongdoing ascribed to the newspaper's usual investigative targets: In the Boston archdiocese alone, countless children were sexually molested in recent decades by so many priests that the number admitted or accused is now about 150. These hideous crimes were hidden, forgiven, overlooked—and, indeed, all but fa-



Michael Sweeney (second from right, pointing) expresses his opinion as he stands with fellow victims of sexual abuse during a press conference in October 2002 in Lowell, Massachusetts, after meeting with Cardinal Bernard F. Law. *Photo by David Kamerman/The Boston Globe.*

cilitated—by bishops and cardinals who were unquestioned moral icons in the most Catholic of America's major archdioceses.

On January 6, 2002, we published the first of more than 900 news stories about this scandal. Since then, more than 500 people have emerged with legal claims that they were sexually

molested by priests in the Boston archdiocese. America's most influential cardinal, Bernard F. Law, has resigned in disgrace. The archdiocese he ruled imperiously from his Italianate mansion is close to fiscal ruin.

For decades, the church's cover-up succeeded: The overwhelming majority of the crimes are well beyond the

criminal statute of limitations. Only a half dozen priests have been indicted. And a secret state grand jury has been forced to use its subpoena power to extract documents and testimony from a recalcitrant church hierarchy.

In Boston, the *Globe* struck a match very near some very dry tinder. The fire spread quickly. Nationally, in 2002, similar accusations forced the removal—often grudgingly by bishops—of an estimated 450 priests. The U.S. Catholic Church, which claims more than one in every five Americans as members, is mired so deeply in a crisis of confidence and leadership that the story is likely to preoccupy journalists for years to come.

Yet, despite all that, and excepting Boston and a handful of other dioceses where powerful forces have compelled wide disclosures, many American bishops have made only minimal admissions. And few newspapers in other cities have pushed to the degree necessary to get at the extent of the problem. Elsewhere in the country, many people, journalists among them, seem to think there was something unique about Boston, perhaps something in the water, which made priests here more likely to molest minors. Not so. The evidence suggests that most of that iceberg has yet to be discovered.

Even in Boston, the cover-up continues.

### Getting Church Documents

Like many major stories, this one began with a trek, without high expectations, down one narrow path—a well-worn one. Like other newspapers have done since the 1980's, the *Globe* set out to discover how the predatory sexual abuses of a local priest could have gone unchecked. In the end, we won access to documents that exposed that story in excruciating detail. But just as we started our reporting, we stumbled onto something much larger.

Here at the *Globe*, investigative re-



Cardinal Bernard F. Law reads a statement of apology in November 2002 before Mass at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross. *Photo By Tom Herde/The Boston Globe.*

porting is good work if you can get it. In a typical year, the four-person Spotlight Team produces two or three investigative series, with the pace broken up now and then with a one-day special report that might be turned around relatively quickly—in perhaps two or three weeks. For reporters accustomed to the frontlines of daily newspapering, Spotlight has long offered the lure of never having to write a lead that contains the word “yesterday.” Until Martin Baron moved from *The Miami Herald* into the *Globe* editor's chair on July 30, 2001, it was a job you could do and still get home for dinner.

Baron was fresh from a state where just about everything is public record. So, almost immediately, Baron expressed curiosity about a fresh legal admission by the cardinal's lawyer that was buried in a court filing. In 1984, Law had transferred the Rev. John J.

Geoghan to a new parish knowing that he had molested children. The new editor wanted to know why all of the church documents turned over to a lawyer representing Geoghan's victims were under a court-imposed confidentiality seal. The answer: The church's lawyers had asked for the protective order.

Within days, Baron made two decisions. First, he asked the newspaper's attorney, Jonathan M. Albano, to file a motion asking the court to lift the confidentiality seal, on grounds that the public's right to know about the issue outweighed the Catholic Church's privacy claim. The second decision was to ask the Spotlight Team—me and reporters Matt Carroll, Sacha Pfeiffer, and Michael Rezendes—to take a look at the Geoghan case and how one priest could have accumulated so many victims in six different parishes before being removed in 1993.

This was a tall order. The Boston archdiocese, like every arm of the Catholic Church, had long been secretive about its inner workings. In 1992, when the *Globe* aggressively reported on the case of James R. Porter, a pedophile priest who had more than 100 victims in the adjoining Fall River diocese, Cardinal Law denounced the news coverage. At one point, he called down the “power of God” on the media, and especially the *Globe*.

Baron had given us—dare I say it?—the assignment from hell: A newspaper's investigative team pointed at the city's—any city's—preeminent sacred cow. How do you get at a story that no one within the church would discuss? How do you breach an institution that has neither the obligation nor the inclination to make its records public nor discuss how it operates?

Until then, the Geoghan case had received modest news coverage, often accompanied by adamant church assurances that his was an isolated instance of a single aberrant priest. Only Kristen Lombardi at the weekly Boston

Phoenix had written extensively about Geoghan's victims and their belief that the church knew more than it had admitted.

If that was so, how to prove it? We started by interviewing everyone we could think of who knew anything about the Geoghan case. We called lawyers, known victims, prosecutors, the small circle of people who had studied the issue of clergy sexual abuse. Within a week, we had learned precious little about Geoghan that was new. But we came across something unexpected. Geoghan, we were told, was the tip of a very large iceberg, anomalous mainly because his crimes had become public. During the 1990's, we learned, the Boston archdiocese secretly settled claims by victims of a "large number" of other priests. Lawyers—on both sides—called the settlements "hush money." How many priests? We did not know. The people we talked to would not say. Perhaps a dozen, maybe 15, we thought. It seemed incredible.

Baron and Ben Bradley, Jr., the deputy managing editor for projects, were alerted to what we had been told. We were ordered to launch a full investigation. Albano filed his motion and then argued it on September 6, 2001 in a Springfield courtroom before Superior Court Judge Constance M. Sweeney, a product of 16 years of Catholic education. The only reporter in the courtroom was Mike Rezendes from Spotlight.

The following day, September 7, I was given in confidence the names of more than 30 priests in the Boston archdiocese whose cases had been secretly settled by the church during the 1990's—without the lawyers for the victims ever having to walk into a courtroom. Soon, we made contact with victims of Geoghan and other priests, most notably the Rev. Paul R. Shanley and the Rev. Ronald H. Paquin. Both men had accumulated numerous victims during their years in the Boston archdiocese. Reporter Pfeiffer learned how Shanley, a well-known street priest during the 1970's, lured troubled teenagers into counseling sessions and then molested them. One of Paquin's many

victims, she learned, died in a car crash with Paquin behind the wheel after a night of drinking.

### Following a Church Roadmap

We had faces and voices. But we struggled for ways to quantify the extent of the abuse and the church's efforts to hide it. That is where the church, unwittingly, provided us with a roadmap: Its annual directories list every priest and his parish or administrative assignment. But they listed other categories, too, where we knew priests like Geoghan, Shanley and Paquin were placed after the church finally lost patience with their sexual misbehavior. "Sick leave" was the most common. But there were others, like "awaiting assignment," "clergy personnel office," and "unassigned."

Using nearly two decades of the directories, we set out to determine how many priests were in "on the shelf" categories. We combed the directories and plucked out the name of any priest who had ever been in any of those categories. Then, going book by book, the team's computer-assisted reporting specialist, Carroll, entered his entire assignment record into a spreadsheet.

This work was tedious and took several weeks. Here is what we discovered:

- In the mid-1980's, there were usually about two dozen priests in all those categories combined in any one year, out of more than 1,000 priests.
- By the mid-1990's, after the church had begun to pay secret settlements and quietly remove offending priests from parishes, the number shot up to more than 100 priests.

In this database, we found the names of most of the 30 priests who had been identified to us in September. When the scandal broke in January and we were inundated with calls from victims eager to identify priests who molested them, we found many of the abusers' names in our original database.

### Searching Court Records

We also combed through a state trial court database, looking for cases in which victims had filed lawsuits. That led to the identities of other accused priests. Then we assembled a list of every attorney we knew who had handled a sexual abuse complaint, the cardinal's lawyers included. From the courts, we obtained docket numbers of all civil cases those lawyers had handled since the late 1980's. Among the hundreds of docket numbers, we found other lawsuits that had never been reported.

In some instances, we plugged in a docket number and the computer gave us a brusque response: No information available on that case. Suspicious, we went to courthouses in Suffolk and Middlesex counties and asked for files. We were told we could not have them. The judges in those cases had ordered all the records impounded. It was as if the lawsuits had never been filed.

Early in 2002, the Globe won court victories in both counties lifting those impoundment orders. The records showed that church lawyers were eager to have the files sealed. The lawyers for the victims, just as eager to get their settlements and the one-third or greater share they took as their fee, were all too willing to go along. And so were the judges.

Some of the offending priests unwittingly identified themselves. We knew the archdiocese warehoused many of its sexual predators at a mansion the church owned in suburban Milton. More than a dozen of those priests had obligingly listed themselves on the town's annual census. Last year, the archdiocese even had to remove the director and counselor at the facility. Both men had been accused of molesting minors.

In November 2001, Judge Sweeney ruled on the Globe motion in the Geoghan case. She lifted the seal and ordered all the documents filed with the court. The archdiocese, shocked by the decision, appealed her decision to the state Appeals Court. In December, a single justice upheld the order.

With those documents set for re-

lease in January, Spotlight shifted gears. We had voluminous evidence about other priests, but we knew the Geoghan files would be explosive when the 10,000 pages became public in late January. We prepared a two-part Geoghan series for early January. Even without the 10,000 pages, we had already discovered, in public court files, documents that contained strong evidence of the Geoghan cover-up, and Law's involvement in it. There was even a letter from an auxiliary bishop advising Law not to make that fateful 1984 assignment.

Geoghan always loomed large. His case was public. He had scores of victims. He was facing criminal charges. And, surely, the reporting about him was a serious blow to the church. But it was the extent of the abuse, the large number of priests involved, and the church's preoccupation with keeping it secret that shook the Catholic Church to its core.

## The Archdiocese Responds

The archdiocese, sensing what we had, tried a little intimidation. On December 13, 2001, Wilson D. Rogers, Jr., Law's lead attorney, wrote to Albano, our attorney from the law firm of Bingham Dana. "It has been brought to my attention that certain reporters of your client, The Boston Globe, have been making inquiry of a number of priests of the Archdiocese of Boston regarding these cases," Rogers wrote. He went on to state that our questioning was based on the secret court files and that we were violating court rules by doing so. In fact, we didn't get those particular files for another month. But some documents were already a part of the voluminous public file. "In the event that The Boston Globe in any way further disseminates these materials, either by way of inquiry or publication, I will seek appropriate sanctions against both your client and Bingham Dana," Rogers warned.

Albano ignored the threat. So did Globe editors. And after the avalanche of news stories began in January, Rogers never asked the court for sanctions. The story quickly developed so many



A press conference in the law office of Mitchell Garabedian, right, on the day Cardinal Law resigned. Several clients are with him, victims of priest sexual abuse. William Oberle is at the microphone, while Patrick McSorley collects his thoughts. *Photo by George Rizer/The Boston Globe.*

tentacles that the Globe doubled the corps of reporters assigned to it, adding religion reporter Michael Paulson and investigative reporters Stephen Kurkjian, Kevin Cullen, and Thomas Farragher.

On January 31, 2002, after three weeks of damning disclosures about Geoghan, the Globe reported that the archdiocese had secretly settled sexual abuse claims against "at least" 70 other priests in the previous 10 years. No one from the archdiocese took issue with that report. Small wonder: Now, after 14 months of unending disclosures on our pages, all too many with the word "yesterday" in the lead, the number of accused priests is more than double that initial number.

## Lessons Journalists Learned

All of us, reporters and readers alike across the country, have learned a lot about the Catholic Church since January 2002. Now that many of the scandal's headlines have moved off Page One, it's time for journalists to consider what we've learned about what we do. Though we are still caught up in a story producing fresh disclosures, the experience has been an invigorating refresher course, a reminder of

some basic journalistic principles.

Some are obvious. We afflict the comfortable from time to time, or so they believe. But we're not so good at comforting the afflicted. There are people in pain, with grievances long ignored. They have no voice but the one we provide them. Each of the victims of priests who had the courage to step forward is a reminder to all of us.

After months of reporting, we knew something else by the time we broke the story—how little we knew. So we asked for help. Starting with the first story we published, we ran an accompanying box asking readers for information. Hundreds of victims responded, and it was their accounts—some of which had never even been shared with family members—that propelled the story forward. If we had waited for the church's response, we would never have printed a word. Just before we published our first story, the spokeswoman for the Boston archdiocese told us that the cardinal was not even interested in knowing our questions.

If the church's most embarrassing secrets can be exposed, there surely must be ways to retrieve information from other institutions. Even the most secretive of organizations have soft

underbellies. Recent scandals involving the United Way and the American Red Cross also remind us of something else: Not nearly all of the wrongdoing we should be looking for is confined to government agencies and for-profit, parasitic companies like Enron.

In a story of this magnitude, there is no substitute for documents to prove a case. We found some on our own. But the fruits of the Globe's decision to go to court suggest there is a powerful incentive for other news organizations to do the same when the public interest is at stake in civil lawsuits. Judge Sweeney agreed, and her ruling became the basis for her subsequent decision ordering the public disclosure of records on scores of other priests. Confidential settlements, and not just in clergy abuse cases, have kept matters of enormous public importance hidden from the public, with the risk that more people will be injured as

long as secrecy prevails.

For some of us at the Globe, the most important lesson is one we are still learning. It's about the institutions that mean so much to the life of the community. Most newspaper editors, no matter the size of the city, know that the Catholic Church and other religious, charitable and cultural institutions expect to receive respectful coverage. And most often, they deserve it—whether or not the publisher sits on an institution's board.

When we began publishing this story, we steeled ourselves for an onslaught of criticism from Catholics we thought would be upset at reports of corruption in the chancery. But no serious criticism materialized. Save for a few nicks, the messenger escaped unscathed. Despite the trauma prompted by months of revelations, Catholics directed their anger at the church. Most Catholics, including some long-time

critics of the Globe, are grateful the crimes have been exposed and for the opportunity to help their church heal.

If that reaction suggests anything, it is this: Especially in our coverage of our most respected institutions we, as journalists, should not check our skepticism at the door. The institutions might chafe at the tough questions. But our readers expect us to ask them. ■

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## Secrecy Remained in Place With the Church's Finances

Journalists were not able to secure the financial documents they needed to back up their reporting from informed sources.

By Stephen Kurkjian

**T**he scarring of the faithful's trust in the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church from the clergy abuse scandal has had a devastating effect on the church's ability to raise money. From Sunday collection plates to the generous annual checks received from well-heeled business leaders and family foundations, there has been a precipitous decline in giving to the church. A Gallup poll in December found 40 percent of Catholics less likely to give to the church and its worthwhile missions because of their disappointment in the handling of the sexual abuse cases.

"It is clear that some people who have supported the Church's work in past years are withholding, at least temporarily, their support financially due

to their feelings regarding the terrible scandal of sexual abuse of the young by clergy," David W. Smith, chancellor of the Archdiocese of Boston, said in a prepared statement in September. Smith, the chief financial officer for the archdiocese, said this as he announced the archdiocese's decision to mortgage the 16-acre site of its chancery and the cardinal's residence on the Boston-Newton line to borrow \$38 million from the Knights of Columbus.

It was a surprising admission, since several months earlier Smith and other church leaders were denying that the scandal was having any significant effect on Sunday collections or larger donations. Regrettably, there was no way for journalists to document the accuracy of either of these claims.

### Trying to Follow the Money

The Constitution's First Amendment provides complete protection from state oversight to religious institutions. This means that even though the Catholic Church operates with a \$45 million annual budget and owns an estimated \$2 billion worth of real estate in eastern Massachusetts, the Boston archdiocese, like the 185 other dioceses and archdioceses in the United States, cannot be forced to make public any data on its financial condition.

When reporters at The Boston Globe went looking in customary places where such information on nonprofits is found—the state Attorney General's charitable division of GuideStar.org, a national database—they learned nothing.



Cardinal Bernard F. Law issues a statement in December 2002 to the press inside the Creagh Library on the grounds of the archdiocesan chancery complex in Brighton, Massachusetts. *Photo by Bill Greene/The Boston Globe.*

ing. For an institution that had found ways to keep silent the complaints of more than 200 victims during one two-year period, who were molested by priests in the Boston area, the secrecy with which it maintained its financial dealings was not surprising. And this secrecy was maintained, even as the news of the priests' sexual abuse and the church's cover-up was published, and the financial impact of the scandal became an increasingly larger part of the story.

On the financial frontlines, several situations received considerable coverage:

- Boston Cardinal Bernard F. Law's fiscal advisers rejected as too costly a settlement package for 86 victims of Rev. John J. Geoghan.
- The archdiocese's two major insurance companies threatened to present legal defenses that would leave the church having to pay all of the \$100-150 million in expected claims out of its own pocket.
- The Archdiocese took serious steps towards becoming the first Catholic organization in the United States to file for bankruptcy.

Yet each of these developments got into the paper only on the basis of information we gathered from informed sources. Unlike the *Globe's* reporting on the priests' sexual abuse and the Church's attempts to keep that information hidden—in which documents were often made available by court order—these financial stories had to be published without any adequate

documentary backup. This meant that with these financial aspects of this story, we weren't able to give our readers—who were by now accustomed to us sharing with them the documents we'd found to substantiate our reporting—this level of detail.

The church did not begin to place a tight grip on its financial records with the clergy abuse scandal. To a great measure, the faithful have always been denied information about its finances. Two years before the scandal broke, I was focused on the personal and financial activities of a priest at one of the archdiocese's largest parishes. In seven years as the church's pastor, he had never provided the lay council that was appointed to advise him on financial issues any basic information, such as where he kept the parish's bank ac-

counts or even how much money was in the accounts. When a member of the church, a lawyer and certified public accountant, asked for an accounting, he was informed by the archdiocese that he had no standing to question the decision-making of the parish priest. The pastor is answerable only to the cardinal as bishop of the archdiocese, and he is answerable only to the pope.

The byzantine structure of the church and its hierarchical decision-making process on money issues complicated the task of reporters who became focused on the fiscal side of the scandal. Although public records show parish property to be listed in the name of the archbishop of Boston (as a “corporation sole”), through our reporting we discovered that there were limitations to this centralized power. Under canon law, the bishop or archbishop can sell a parish building or parcel only with the assent of the parish priest. This limitation left Cardinal Law with fewer options in settling the sexual abuse claims.

To document that the Church was losing money before the scandal broke, the archdiocese released copies of re-

cent independent audits that showed it had sold \$40 million in stocks and bonds to pay its bills. But when further questions were posed about the \$600 million in assets maintained in separate insurance, health and pension accounts, the archdiocese refused journalists access to those audits.

We were also told that Cardinal Law had the sole authority to determine whether the archdiocese would approve a settlement. Yet, as the cardinal got ready to approve a deal that would have paid the 86 victims of former priest John Geoghan between \$15 million to \$30 million, reporters learned of the existence of an arcane group, the Archdiocesan Finance Council. This turned out to be a group of about 15 members comprised mostly of Catholic business leaders who provide financial advice to the cardinal.

Although they were appointed by the cardinal and serve at his leisure, when we made calls to several of them their responses revealed great unrest on whether the Geoghan settlement should be approved. In the end, Law’s request that the deal be signed was overwhelmingly rejected. But because

the council’s sessions are shrouded in such secrecy—members don’t even know what’s on the agenda until a day or two before the meeting—those who were willing to share any information had to be given strict pledges of confidentiality.

This arrangement meant that when our reporting appeared in the paper, we could identify our sources only as “unnamed,” and could not even hint at their business affiliation. “I’ll not meet with you,” one member, who provided pieces of information along the way, told me. “If anyone ever asks me if I’ve ever spoken to you, I want to be able to say, ‘No, I’ve never met him.’” ■

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## The Neglected Vatican Beat

‘... most reporters are constrained to do less than full-time work on a beat that demands more than full-time competence.’

By John L. Allen, Jr.

With few exceptions, English-language journalism doesn’t take the Vatican terribly seriously. The Vatican press office accredits dozens of English-speaking Rome-based reporters, but most of them spend perhaps 25 percent of their time on the beat. A typical correspondent for an American or British media outlet is also likely to be responsible for European politics, business and culture, as well as the southern Mediterranean and the Balkans. These days, several Rome-based correspondents have been

deployed to cover the possible war in Iraq. The Rome bureau chief for CNN, for example, just spent several weeks in Kuwait.

It’s not that the Vatican doesn’t merit coverage. The pope sets the spiritual and moral tone for one billion Catholics scattered in every corner of the globe, and the Vatican is an influential player in the critical political or cultural debates of the day, from the Middle East to cloning.

Yet full-time English-language reporters on the Vatican beat can be

counted on two hands. The Associated Press and Reuters each have a Vatican writer, and Newsweek has a part-time correspondent whose primary interest is the Vatican. In the “trade press” of specialized Catholic news organizations, there are perhaps five or six full-time Vatican English-language correspondents.

The inevitable result of this neglect is that much reporting is superficial, driven by stereotypes and conventional wisdom. During the past year, this weakness showed up repeatedly as the

American press too often missed the context necessary to account for developments in the emerging sexual abuse crisis. An example of this occurred in the reporting about the policy adopted by the U.S. bishops in Dallas; those who cover the Vatican knew it wouldn't be accepted. Since the mid-1980's, Vatican officials have repeatedly insisted on using church courts rather than a bishop's administrative authority to remove priests from the ministry. More informed reporting would have prepared the public for what was likely to happen. Instead, most American news media outlets appeared to be blindsided by the Vatican reaction and, at least initially, they insisted on treating it as another example of "conservative Vatican vs. independent-minded American church." (In fact, often the more liberal bishops and canon lawyers in the United States were the ones who hoped the Vatican would demand changes towards greater due process for accused priests.)

### Challenges on the Vatican Beat

The greatest challenge I have as a Vatican correspondent is cutting through popular misconceptions that are reinforced by careless reporting. These misconceptions include:

**Vatican "secrecy":** Few stereotypes are more enduring. Consider this lead from a story about the sex abuse scandals that appeared above the fold on the front page of a major American daily: "The sense of impenetrability begins at the Vatican gate just beyond St. Peter's Square. Swiss Guards ... lift their pikes to allow passage only after receiving orders. Farther inside, a gatekeeper checks his list before giving a reluctant nod for a visitor to enter a 12-foot door reinforced with steel and iron spikes to repel invaders .... Inside the fortress-like building, an air of secrecy and monarchical power wafts through elegant, marble halls like a thick plume of incense."

Such imagery may make copyeditors salivate, but the truth about the Vatican

is far more prosaic. The Swiss Guards are indeed colorful, but they're no more adept at managing the information flow than Enron's security force. As with any other bureaucracy, nothing remains hidden for very long. For example, since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), a body called the Synod of Bishops has met 20 times in Rome, bringing together some 250 bishops from around the world to advise the pope. They deliberate for three weeks, and at the end they adopt a set of propositions. The bishops are sworn to absolute secrecy about the content of the propositions and, every time, without fail, an Italian news agency called Adista publishes the propositions within a matter of days.

How? They do what reporters do—they gather news from their sources, without getting an engraved invitation from officialdom to do so. Indeed, many bishops at the Synods are actually eager to hand out the texts of their supposedly secret speeches, wanting to see their golden words in print. The problem with the Vatican is not that it is secretive, but that it is unique, and it takes time to become familiar with the system and its personnel. Once that's accomplished, however, there's very little an enterprising reporter can't ferret out.

Why is the secrecy myth a problem?

- It leads to a tolerance of speculation, and this means that a lot of frankly ridiculous reporting ends up in print or on the air. Then, everyone else has to respond, and time and energy gets tied down in doing nonstories. (The best current example is the theme about an "aging, out of touch" pope manipulated by his aides that cropped up repeatedly in reporting on the sex abuse scandals).
- It creates an impression that there is no hard information about the Vatican; hence one guess is as good as another about what's happening. This confusion obscures the distinction between correspondents who make it up as they go along and those who carefully cultivate sources

and handle information responsibly. The result is that some people regard covering the Vatican as a half-step up from a gossip column.

Hence, an appeal to editors: Declare a moratorium on the "ultra-secretive Vatican" rap. You'll be doing the journalistic enterprise a favor.

There are several other difficulties facing a Vatican correspondent (what the Italians call a Vaticanista), created by the unique nature of the assignment.

**Time:** To cover the Vatican well, one must master at least three foreign languages: Italian, because it is the working language of the papal bureaucracy; the language of the Catholic Church, because without a knowledge of church history, scripture, theology, liturgy and canon law, a Vatican reporter will be lost; and the language of the Roman Curia, the pope's civil service, which has its own history, culture and argot.

It's a beat where personal contacts outside official channels make an enormous difference and that takes time to cultivate. It requires taking Vatican officials to lunch and dinner, attending the sometimes tedious symposia and book presentations and embassy parties, where contacts are made and impressions formed, and reading theological journals and news services in several languages where intelligence on the Vatican is found. A reporter needs the phone numbers and e-mail addresses of theologians and church historians and diplomats, with the understanding that these folks are disposed to be helpful.

With English-language journalists, coverage of the Vatican thus amounts to a mismatch: Most reporters are constrained to do less than full-time work on a beat that demands more than full-time competence. News organizations need to free up the time and resources to do the job right.

**Cultural Gaps:** While Italian is the default working language of the Roman Curia, people who deal with the Vatican use any of six European tongues: Italian, French, German, Span-



ish, Portuguese and English. “Vatican documents” are prepared in any or all of these languages (English is not always among them). Moreover, the reporting, theological discussion, and correspondence important to understanding the Vatican goes on in all six of these languages and many more. This places a premium on linguistic competence, leaving many Anglo-Saxon journalists disadvantaged. The result is that American and English reporters covering the Vatican tend to depend on English-speaking officials, thereby limiting their range of sources.

Language is the doorway to culture, and reporters covering the Vatican face the challenge of crossing the gaps that divide Anglo-Saxon readers from other cultures. For example, southern Mediterraneans have a very different attitude towards law than Anglo-Saxons. Mediterraneans see law as an expression of an ideal, understanding that most people in most circumstances will fall short; Anglo-Saxons regard law as the rule to be obeyed. Hence, when the Vatican inveighs against birth control, Anglo-Saxons are scandalized because many Catholics simply disregard the rules; in Rome, the attitude is, “What else is new?”

There are also Latin Americans, Asians and Africans in the Vatican, as well as northern Europeans and North Americans. In order to cover the beat, one has to know something about the cultural background, both social and ecclesiastical, of all these regions, be able to apply them to specific debates in the church, and then explain the impact of those differences to readers. This amounts to an exercise in cultural anthropology that doesn’t come easy.

This cultural gap became clear in coverage of the sex abuse scandals. For example, Vatican officials repeatedly expressed caution about policies obliging bishops to report accusations of sexual abuse against priests to the police. Americans, by and large, saw this as a cover-up. For churchmen (such as Pope John Paul II himself) from cultures in which the police and criminal justice system have frequently been tools of oppression, however, there

was a very different outlook. Good reporting means providing the cultural context necessary to help the readers understand.

**Lack of Spin:** As much as journalists complain about spin doctors, the truth is that when a major story is breaking, it can be helpful if an institution puts public relations people in the field. At the very least they can provide basic information and, in the rush to file stories or assemble TV packages, the institution’s view gets into the mix. For whatever reasons, the Vatican doesn’t spin its own story very well.

When the American cardinals were in Rome in April 2002 for a special summit with the pope on the sex abuse crisis, an army of American reporters occupied the square outside the Vatican press office. They were desperately hoping for any scrap of information or comment. While the American bishops did a creditable job of making themselves available, little was forthcoming from the Vatican, to the point that many reporters were still desperate to find someone who could tell Rome’s side of the story.

This absence of spin can be seen as either a symptom of an unaccountable institution that disdains the press or a charming lack of concern for public relations. Either way, it creates a real headache for journalists. The Vatican press office closes most days at 3:00 p.m.; if news breaks later in the afternoon, reporters are basically on their own. There is also no such thing as a daily briefing, and top Vatican officials almost never give news conferences. When they want to communicate with the world, they typically grant an interview to one Italian news outlet, counting on the rest of the press corps to pick it up.

**Sourcing:** The Vatican employee handbook specifies that only the officials at the highest levels in a given office are allowed to speak with the press. Technically, this would mean only three people in each of the nine congregations and 11 councils—a grand total of 60 people—can deal with reporters. In fact, Vatican reporters talk all the time to the desk officers

who actually do the work. This rule means, however, that most Vatican sources can never be quoted by name.

Even for those officials who can theoretically speak to the press, many prefer to do so only on background. For one thing, in Vatican culture the emphasis on someone’s “competence” is very strong, so that if it’s a particular official’s job to speak on an issue, colleagues are reluctant to be seen as invading his area of responsibility. For another, Vatican officials often see the press do a lazy job of reporting, so they are understandably wary about attaching their name to information that might be misused.

The result is that Vatican correspondents are frequently constrained to write stories on the basis of unnamed sources. Good reporters find this a frustrating, dangerous practice, and do everything they can to get voices on the record. The problem, of course, is the potential for abuse. Who are these unnamed sources? How does the reader know they’re real or how seriously to take their information? In the end, only the journalist’s reputation offers a reliable guide.

**Lack of Editorial Critique:** If a White House reporter filed a story claiming that George W. Bush was about to resign, it wouldn’t make it very far up the copyediting chain before somebody raised questions. Most editors know enough about the White House to realize how improbable such an event is and have their own sources from whom they could get an independent read of what’s going on. That kind of familiarity with the Vatican doesn’t exist inside most English-language newsrooms. Copyeditors and assignment desks don’t have much sense of who John Paul II is, how the Vatican works, or the internal politics of the Catholic Church. The result: Stories that would never make it past the editorial filters on other beats can sail through when it comes to the Vatican. Correspondents thus have to find other sources of feedback and critique for their coverage of the Vatican and, like any self-imposed discipline, there’s always the tendency to get lazy.

**Lack of Editorial Commitment:** It's a well-documented reality that editors and reporters in the American media tend to be less religious than the general population, at least as measured by participation in institutional churches. Many editors regard religion as a less serious beat than politics and finance. The Vatican seems a bit like Buckingham Palace: good theater, but the real news is at 10 Downing Street.

The wake-up call in the sex scandals of 2002 for the American press was that the Vatican is an enormously consequential player in the lives of 65 million American Catholics. News organizations scrambled to get people into Rome to do stories on how the Vatican

makes decisions, how it views the American situation, who is actually in charge, and which policies are likely to be pursued.

That interest, however, was episodic and has already diminished. There is little sustained commitment in many news organizations to getting the Vatican right. Even when reporters do produce serious, well-sourced, groundbreaking stories, they sometimes find little editorial interest in their own newsrooms. Aside from occasional bursts of frenzy related to planning coverage of the death of the pope, there's been little new investment of resources to bring a more attentive, deliberate focus to the beat.

Until this neglect changes, the English-speaking world will get the uneven Vatican coverage it deserves. We can't blame that on Vatican secrecy. ■

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## Reporting the Catholic Church's Scandal in Ireland

Hindered by its secrecy culture, Irish journalists were helped by dogged reporting from Britain.

By Emily O'Reilly

Some years ago, a reporter for the Irish national broadcasting channel, RTÉ, asked the then-Archbishop of Dublin, Desmond Connell, if the archdiocese had paid money to a named victim of clerical sex abuse. The archbishop denied the charge. Later it emerged that the archdiocese had advanced a "loan" to an abusing priest effectively to pay off one of his victims. Strictly speaking, the Cardinal was telling the truth: the archdiocese had not paid the money directly to the victim.

The Cardinal's deeply disingenuous reply would become a watershed for what would transpire in the years ahead—as the painstaking revelations of widespread clerical sexual abuse of children throughout Ireland emerged in the press, as did the attempts to cover up the scandal by some of the most senior members of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

A phenomenon of Irish journalism, and Irish life, is that our scandals are often first made public by reporters in

another country, usually Britain. British TV stations beam into Ireland and are watched as easily and almost as regularly as the national channels. In the past 10 to 15 years, two of the biggest stories of corruption were broken by British TV stations. One concerned corrupt practices in the Irish beef industry; the other—clerical sex abuse—was brought to public attention in a series of documentaries.

The Irish media were no less avid than their British counterparts to get these stories out, but two things conspired against them doing so. The primary one was our libel laws. Irish courts demand high standards of proof when it comes to media allegations. Victims' stories, no matter how compelling, were not enough to beat the libel laws. Concepts of freedom of speech and fair comment are not as highly developed in this country as they are in the United States. The second was a sort of cultural censorship, an unwillingness by the news media in general to give the

bad news until the populace has been adequately softened up in advance. Sexual deviancy within the priesthood had been whispered about for decades; yet during those years no reporter was prepared to go behind the whispers.

### Irish Press Tell the Story

The Irish press began to more aggressively pursue this story around the mid-1990's. At that time, the church was already reeling from a series of scandals that in hindsight seem almost innocent: One concerned the fathering of a child by high-profile and popular Bishop Eamon Casey, the other concerned the fathering of another child by a high-profile Dublin priest. The fact that the media reported both stories proved that a massive sea change had taken place.

In 1994, for reasons too complicated to retell, the Irish government fell—in a very tangential way—over a scandal involving an abusing priest.



Archbishop of Armagh Sean Brady, left, and Cardinal Desmond Connell at a press conference in Maynooth College, where they announced an independent audit to be held into the controversy surrounding clerical child sexual abuse. *Photo by © Leon Farrell/ Photocall Ireland, August 2002.*

The revelations that led to the controversy were revealed in a British TV documentary, which opened the floodgates in Ireland. One by one, victims emerged to tell their stories. Investigations were carried out, charges pressed, convictions secured. Once a conviction had been secured, the press at last were able to reveal what had happened and to dig deeper.

The reporting wasn't easy. The Catholic Church stonewalled, denied and hid behind canon law—the laws of the church that appear to bypass the norms of civil law but which in fact have no legal standing. But the media were emboldened by the fact that respect for the church—in the wake of a series of scandals—was collapsing. Culturally, it became much easier for journalists to break the bad news.

Yet the Irish media were still hindered by a secrecy culture. There was precious little access to court or other documents. Unlike The Boston Globe reporters, who were able to access a mountain of church documents and records, the Irish media had to rely on the testimony of victims, most of which, naturally, was uncorroborated.

In the late 1990's, RTE producer Mary Raftery produced a documentary

called "States of Fear." This wasn't about abusing priests per se but rather about a whole culture of child abuse within the clerical-run institutions that looked after destitute, orphaned and abandoned children until relatively recent times. Raftery had managed to access records, and with that access she produced a program that sent shock waves through the church and state. The result: a strengthening and emboldening of the growing acceptance of widespread abuse among the clergy, accompanied by further revelations by victims of what they had suffered.

By 2000, the revelations and convictions were coming thick and fast. What was also becoming clear was that many of the abusing priests could have operated only if they were in some way sheltered by their leaders. In a direct parallel with the Boston experience, priests appeared to have been moved from parish to parish as soon as their abusing practices became known. In no case, however, were the abusers reported to the civil authorities.

### Confronting Church Denials

Archbishop Connell was now Cardinal Connell, and he was under pressure.

He repeatedly denied any collusion on the part of the church hierarchy with the protection of abusing priests. Irish reporters found it difficult to break through the wall of obfuscation and denial. Then another British TV documentary propelled the story forward. Broadcast last year, it told the story of Father Sean Fortune, a priest who had committed suicide some time earlier, before he could be tried on 66 charges of rape and molestation of young boys. The program proved beyond doubt that Fortune had been protected, moved from parish to parish as soon as his "guilt" became known.

Bishop Brendan Comiskey, in charge of Fortune's former diocese, resigned in the wake of the program revelations. A few months later RTE's Raftery produced a program that for the first time pieced together the entire jigsaw of clerical abuse and the hierarchy's collaborative efforts to keep knowledge of that abuse away from the people, particularly from the courts. Her program profiled a number of convicted or known clerical abusers and traced their



George Bell, right, breaks down crying after trying to tell his story about childhood abuse during a protest in Dublin when Cardinal Desmond Connell was celebrating a mass. *Photo by © Leon Farrell/Photocall Ireland, August 2002.*

abusive path from parish to parish. Viewers were left in no doubt that the men had been deliberately moved on to avoid detection by the civil authorities.

Raftery's program proved to be another watershed. There were calls from victims' groups, from some Catholic laity, even from some priests for Connell to resign. The Minister for Justice promised to set up a public inquiry into the alleged collusion and cover-up, an inquiry with powers to compel witnesses to attend. Connell

already had another church-run inquiry under way that he was forced to drop.

It's been a long road for the Irish media. The Catholic religion is in the nation's DNA, and it is consequently much more difficult to explore and attack the Catholic Church than in other, more secular countries. Yet, despite these difficulties, individual journalists and producers have produced fantastic investigative work. But it was the added input of our colleagues across the sea that made the vital difference. ■

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## In the 1980's, a Chicago Newspaper Investigated Cardinal Cody

'We're going to have to do as careful and as in-depth reporting as anyone's ever done, because this is dynamite.'

By Roy Larson

**B**oston's Cardinal Bernard F. Law was not the first member of the Roman Catholic Church's elite College of Cardinals to be the target of a major investigation by a newspaper in his own metropolitan area. That distinction belongs to Cardinal John Patrick Cody, archbishop of Chicago from 1965 to 1982 at a time when his archdiocese, with 2.4 million members, was the nation's largest.

On Thursday, September 10, 1981, the Chicago Sun-Times splashed across its front page a three-tiered headline that jolted the city: "Federal grand jury probes Cardinal Cody use of church funds." A subhead read: "Investigation centers on gifts to a friend." The first in an extended, multifaceted series of investigative stories did not appear until a team of three Sun-Times reporters had completed an 18-month search for sources, documents and other substantiating evidence. And this investigation took place at a time when reporters still shared information with federal authorities, including the Internal Revenue

Service. (In December 2002, Chicago magazine, in a story about the Cody investigation, revisited the retired Internal Revenue Service agent who had cooperated with the reporters two decades earlier. Referring to the Cardinal, the agent, who did not want his name to be published, declared, "I believed then and I believe now that he was guilty.")

### Investigating a Cardinal

Fully aware that they were dealing with an explosive issue in a metropolitan area where the Catholic Church was a powerful institution with members at the top levels of the city's political, judicial, business and labor establishment, the tabloid's publisher and editors were not in a rush to get into print. When the reporting team was first assembled, Publisher James Hoge told the investigative unit: "We're going to have to do as careful and as in-depth reporting as anyone's ever done, because this is dynamite."

The team's painstaking approach made it difficult to dismiss the paper's findings casually. Soon after the series was published, Illinois Governor James Thompson, in the fourth year of what was to be a 14-year reign as the state's top official, was asked to respond to the Sun-Times's stories. "I wouldn't touch that with a 1,001-foot pole," Thompson replied. But a month later, Thompson, who had been elected governor after building a reputation as a tough prosecutor as U.S. Attorney in Chicago, told the Chicago Conference on Media Practices and Investigative Reporting that the stories represented an "extraordinary piece of journalism."

Expanding on this, Governor Thompson said: "It occurred to me ... when I read the preface of the series, would the Sun-Times or the Tribune or Channel 7 or any other news organ in the city, or indeed in the country, had been quite so delicate, quite so careful, had been at such pains to assure its readers that they had gone the extra inch, or indeed mile, before they

brought this story to the front page if the subject were not a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church of one of the largest Catholic archdioceses in the country, indeed in the world, but were a Chicago alderman?"

Unlike The Boston Globe's investigation into sexual abuse of children by priests and Cardinal Law's handling of priests accused of this abuse, the main issue in the Chicago investigation was money. Carrying the bylines of investigative reporters William Clements and Gene Mustain and me (then religion editor), the lead story on September 10th began: "A federal grand jury in Chicago is investigating whether Cardinal John P. Cody illegally diverted as much as \$1 million in tax-exempt church funds to enrich a lifelong friend from St. Louis." It went on to report: "The grand jury has issued a subpoena for Cody's personal banking records as well as one seeking financial documents of the Archdiocese of Chicago dating back to the mid-1960's."

Other related stories in the same edition of the paper demonstrated that the paper was "all over" the exclusive story. These accounts, illustrated with photographs, reported that Cody provided the money for a luxury vacation home for his friend, Helen Dolan Wilson, in Boca Raton, Florida and that in earlier years he had helped Wilson get a job in the administrative offices of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Louis where Cody was the chancellor. For the next several days the Sun-Times produced new revelations. The paper reported that Cody had put Wilson on the payroll of the Archdiocese of Chicago while she was living in an expensive apartment on the city's lakefront; that Cody had steered insurance contracts to his friend's son, David Dolan Wilson, and that Wilson was the beneficiary of a \$100,000 insurance policy on Cody's life.

The newspaper went to great lengths to keep the focus of the stories on the issue of money, specifically charges that the cardinal illegally used tax-exempt church funds to enrich his friend. Without implying there was an intimate relationship between the archbishop and Wilson, a divorced mother

of two, the reporters still felt it was necessary to explain to readers the nature of the ties that bound the two. The task was made difficult by the fact that Helen Wilson was described in different ways by different people. As a result of news reports in St. Louis and Chicago, some people, including priests, were led to believe she was Cody's cousin; others thought she was his niece. Cody himself called her his cousin although, genealogically, she was not. At times, in published reports she was described as a widow when, in fact, she was divorced and her former husband was still alive.

### Reaction to the Reporting

As Publisher Hoge predicted at the investigation's outset, the stories were explosive—even before they were published. It was no secret around Chicago that the Sun-Times and, at one stage, reporters for the Gannett newspapers, were investigating the cardinal's financial dealings. As early as July 1980, more than a year before the Sun-Times first story appeared, the Chicago Catholic, the archdiocesan weekly newspaper, launched a preemptive strike. It accused the Sun-Times of conducting a "journalistic inquisition," contending that the paper and its editors were not "proper judges of an archbishop, a successor to the Apostles, whose authority did not come from a board of election commissioners." Subsequently, the church paper declared the Sun-Times was "engaged in a program of clandestine character assassination that perhaps would win the endorsement of the Ku Klux Klan."

In November 1980, Cody escalated the attack by authorizing his public relations officer to release a statement to the Chicago Tribune in which the cardinal said the Sun-Times investigation was "an affront to all Catholics." The statement, published on the Tribune's front page, suggested that the Sun-Times was attacking the cardinal because he and the Church "have enunciated a lifestyle opposed to that of the Sun-Times."

Given the volatility of the subject it was covering, the Sun-Times, which

had a long track record of publishing hard-hitting investigative stories, developed a strategy to present this series in a low-keyed fashion. Instead of breaking the story on a Sunday, as was usually the case with its previous investigative reports, it introduced the series on Thursday. Publication was not accompanied by a promotional campaign. The writing style was simple and straightforward, with no rhetorical flourishes. No cartoons related to the subject appeared in the paper. And, once the stories were published, the reporters were instructed not to be interviewed by other publications or to appear on radio or television talk shows.

Needless to say, that strategy did not ward off criticism. One of the city's most powerful political leaders, then and now, Alderman Edward M. Burke, said a few days after the story broke: "It would seem to me that one could conclude that the only difference between what the Sun-Times did to Cardinal Cody in this instance and what the Ku Klux Klan did to the Catholic Church in the early 1900's is that the Sun-Times leaders did not wear hoods and white flowing capes. It is vicious; it is unwarranted; it is clearly ... the greatest example of yellow journalism that I've seen in a Chicago newspaper in decades."

A month after the first story appeared, the paper's public relations department had logged 241 negative phone calls and 223 that were supportive. Sun-Times Editor Ralph Otwell reported that the series had almost no effect on the paper's circulation figures or advertising revenue.

Before and after publication of this series, the newspaper's editors and reporters worked under some degree of emotional stress. Mustain learned that Chicago police had looked into rumors that his home was the scene of wild parties, a report that he denied. In one of his classrooms at a Catholic high school, Mike Clements, a son of reporter William Clements, heard his teacher say the Sun-Times reporters would go to hell. A letter sent to Otwell described me as "a fallen away Methodist with an axe to grind" and ended with the threat, "I work in the building,

so watch it, Roy.”

In another letter to the editor, a veteran Chicago priest advised Otwell to “get your affairs in order. We pray for your sudden and unprovided death every day.” For several weeks, the Archdiocese’s public relations office answered all phone calls from the Sun-Times with the stock reply, “It is our policy not to speak to the Sun-Times.” One rewrite man was startled to get this robotic response when he called the church office to verify information about a fire in a Catholic school.

## How the Cody Case Ended

Legally, the investigations by the paper and the federal prosecutors ended inconclusively. In that sense, the legal tactics followed by Cody and his lawyers—chiefly a strategy of delays and stalling—succeeded in preventing any indictments. Eight months before the first story was published, the U.S. Attorney’s office issued subpoenas to Cody and the archdiocese, but the information that was sought was never turned over to the government. Even after the series was published, the stonewalling continued. A new U.S. Attorney, Dan Webb, had taken over the government’s investigation and issued new subpoenas, but Frank McGarr, the chief judge of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, did nothing to move the case along. Finally, the Cardinal’s health became an issue. On April 25, 1982, he died. In July 1982, Webb terminated the investigation, stating: “Once the cardinal passed on, the investigation as to the allegations against the cardinal became moot.”

Two days after Cody’s death the vicar-general of the archdiocese at a press conference released a copy of a letter Cardinal Cody had written in the weeks before his death in which he said: “I have forgiven my enemies .... I can turn away because I am a Christian, a bishop, a person. I do so. But God will not so forgive. God’s is another way—he stands before my former enemies insisting forever with good will that they change. If they change, it will be because God has given something

to them that they do not now have—a gift, a grace—to renew themselves by turning from a delusion toward truth.”

Cody never publicly stated what the investigators would discover if they did turn “toward truth.” He refused to be interviewed by the Sun-Times, and he refused to turn over any documents to the federal authorities. On the day following the publication of the first stories, Cody’s powerful attorney Don H. Reuben stated that “the Cardinal is answerable to Rome and to God, not to the Sun-Times.”

The Rev. Richard McBrien, then chair of the department of theology at the University of Notre Dame, immediately took issue with Reuben and his client. “As the principal pastoral minister (servant) of the local church, the bishop is answerable not only to Rome and to God, but to his own people as well.”

## Reporting on Church Leaders

Two decades later in Boston and at Catholic dioceses across the country and throughout the world, the issue of a bishop’s accountability again has risen to the forefront of debate within the church and in civil society. And so it is perhaps instructive to compare the 1981 and 2002 newspaper investigations of the Roman Catholic Church and understand more fully what has transpired in the coverage of religious institutions in the time between when these two stories were being reported.

The 1981 Sun-Times investigation of the cardinal and archdiocese was unprecedented. A year earlier, the Gannett News Service won a Pulitzer Prize for its investigation of the scandalous financial wrongdoings of the Paulist Fathers, a Catholic religious order based in Pennsylvania. That dramatic and well-researched series, though widely criticized by church officials, did not evoke the kind of outbursts as the Chicago investigation because the Paulist Fathers, unlike the Archdiocese of Chicago, did not have a solid core constituency concentrated in one metropolitan area where its religious and secular power were considerable.

In 1982, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the Korean-born leader of the controversial Unification Church, was convicted on charges of income tax evasion and subsequently served a term in a federal prison. Although a number of mainline religious leaders filed friendly briefs on his behalf, Moon’s conviction and the news reports about it elicited fairly mild reactions, to no small extent because Moon’s following in the United States was comparatively small and widely dispersed, and he was disliked by many more people who thought of him as a cult leader.

As director of the Garrett-Medill Center for Religion and the News Media at Northwestern University the last eight years, I have closely monitored the way the media have covered religious issues. In 1981 there still was a climate around newsrooms that tended to treat the church and its leaders deferentially that, instead of reflecting respect, often reflected a kind of secular cosmopolitan condescension. But that climate was starting to change, especially at papers like the Sun-Times, whose editors were firm in their belief that religious leaders should be treated like all other public figures. By 2002, when stories about this sex abuse scandal broke, this point of view had become the conventional wisdom at metropolitan papers across the country, but most notably in Boston. ■

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## Journalists Testifying at War Crimes Tribunals

Should journalists who cover war be required to testify before tribunals in which cases involving those accused of war crimes are heard? A December 2002 ruling by the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia clarified that reporters cannot routinely be subpoenaed. But this ruling did not end debate among journalists about whether they *should* testify, even if not forced to do so.

Some who have reported on war crimes share their perspectives about various journalistic and ethical issues that arise. **Nina Bernstein**, now a New York Times reporter, writes about when she was asked to provide evidence from reporting she did in Bosnia in 1992 for Newsday. That request—and her consideration of it—led to an abiding interest in this issue, which she written about for the Times. Here she describes her experience and the reaction of other journalists to it. Excerpts follow from a brief filed by a coalition of news organizations to argue against the court's ability to compel journalists to testify.

**Roy Gutman**, whose reporting for Newsday disclosed systematic killing at concentration camps in northern Bosnia, urges journalists to report more about how the tribunal process treats journalists and what happens when journalists testify. Excerpts from his witness statement and Boston Globe reporter Elizabeth Neuffer's affidavit accompany his story.

**Lindsey Hilsum**, diplomatic correspondent for Britain's Channel 4 news, explains her decision to testify about her reporting in Rwanda and describes why British reporters are more likely to agree to testify than are their American counterparts. **Kemal Kurspahic**, the former editor in chief of the Sarajevo daily *Oslobodjenje*, agrees with the court's decision not to compel journalists to testify, but also strongly supports reporters who went to The Hague as witnesses for the prosecution. "There are some things in this world that a person simply can't be neutral about," he writes. In reviewing Kurspahic's recent book, "Prime Time Crime: Balkan Media in War and Peace," **Senad Pecanin**, editor in chief of *Dani* magazine in Sarajevo, says that it "provides excellent testimony to the devastating things that happen to journalists when they fall under the control of authoritarian leaders."

**Bill Berkeley**, now a reporter for The New York Times who reported as a freelancer in Africa during the early 1990's, takes us through his reversal in thinking as he first decides he will testify about what he reported from Rwanda, then decides against it. **Russell Mills**, former publisher of the *Ottawa Citizen* and currently a Nieman Fellow, shares his idea about creating a journalistic organization with the ability to do case-by-case reviews before a subpoena is issued, when an international court seeks evidence from a reporter.

## Coverage of War

Photojournalist **Peter Turnley** and former ABC News correspondent **Bob Zelnick** present through images and words ways for us to visualize and reflect on casualties of war, both military and civilian. Turnley's photographs show scenes of death at the end of the Persian Gulf War; Zelnick's article recalls various ways in which civilian casualties have been reported during previous wars. ■

# Testing Different Expectations of Journalism

An American journalist wrestles with the request to provide evidence to a war crimes tribunal.

By Nina Bernstein

The call from The Hague came in July of 2001, almost nine years after I had torn open the Velcro strips of my secondhand flak jacket for the last time and passed it on to another journalist heading into Bosnia.

Nothing since has seemed as important, as frightening, or ultimately as frustrating as reporting from eastern Bosnia in the late summer of 1992. But I did it only for a month, dispatched by Newsday as temporary reinforcement for Roy Gutman when he broke the story of Bosnian death camps. Why did an investigator for the U.N. International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) want to meet with me now?

What the ICTY was after, I eventually realized, was a sheet of paper stashed in a sagging cardboard box above a garage in upstate New York. Stored as a souvenir with my notebooks and clippings, it was a routine document in Serbian that gave Nina Bernstein, journalist, permission to enter Serb-held territory in Bosnia between August 18th and 20th. One of the illegible signatures at the bottom, I had reason to remember, belonged to Biljana Plavsic.

Plavsic was the former biology professor and strident nationalist who called Bosnian Muslims “a genetic defect on the Serbian body.” She had celebrated the bloody beginning of the Bosnian war of “ethnic cleansing” in the spring of 1992, publicly embracing the paramilitary chieftain known as “Arkan” after his troops casually executed Muslim civilians in the streets of Bijeljina. She had been deputy and then successor to Radovan Karadzic, the leader of the movement that carved out an “ethnically pure” Serbian state in Bosnia through massacre, rape and deportation. And, by 2001, like the



Journalists watch a giant monitor in a hall in The Hague, while former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic appears at the U.N. war crimes tribunal in The Hague, July 2001. *Photo by Serge Ligtenberg/The Associated Press.*

Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic who orchestrated it all from Belgrade, she had been indicted for genocide and other crimes against humanity.

## Encountering Biljana Plavsic

But when I first glimpsed her on a hot August day in 1992 at Villa Bosna, the Bosnian Serb headquarters in Belgrade, Plavsic just looked like a 62-year-old woman with badly dyed hair, in an office meeting with half a dozen men.

The door was ajar, and my two seasoned companions recognized her—Jonathan Landay, then a stringer for United Press International, and Seska Stanojlovic, our translator. Landay barged in and began arguing for what we had been falsely promised the day before by Karadzic: an escort and spe-

cific, written authorization to enter Batkovic, a secret detention camp said to exist on a dead-end road north of Bijeljina. Without an escort, Landay considered the hunt too dangerous. The week before, he and another reporter, Peter Maass, had been threatened with death by paramilitary goons guarding the road.

Plavsic finally pushed aside coffee cups, took our ordinary passes, and added her signature. Then she named a top police official in Bijeljina who could escort us to the camp. As it turned out, our entry was delayed by a day when camp guards, acknowledging that we had “civilian authorization,” demanded an okay from the military garrison in Bijeljina, as well. The next day, when we managed to get into Batkovic, we found it was hiding survivors of



other camps as part of the Bosnian Serb shell game to appease international opinion.

## Weighing the Arguments

I had gone to Bosnia believing that if we journalists only reported out the story of the camps and ethnic cleansing, the world would have to intervene. I soon realized that Western governments unwilling to risk casualties had their own ways of defusing the initial public outcry. The U.S. State Department was “unable to confirm” what it studiously avoided learning. Experts blamed “centuries of incomprehensible blood hatred” for a conflict fomented by neofascist propaganda over state-controlled news media. Jewish groups split over the evocation of the Holocaust as a goad to action. Congress failed to hold hearings on whether “ethnic cleansing” met the international definition of genocide, and diplomats announced peace agreements that went quietly unenforced.

The tribunal might be the last chance to hold perpetrators accountable. If its investigators believed that I could actually help build the criminal case against Plavsic, my first reaction was to feel gratified and eager to talk. Then the investigator, Susan Malone, mentioned that she was a former FBI agent. Suddenly I knew it was not so simple—not for a reporter steeped in the culture of the First Amendment.

During the Nixon era, FBI demands for evidence from reporters were widely criticized as a danger to news media independence and the free flow of information. Federal court rulings on the matter were equivocal. But after reporters demonstrated a willingness to go to jail rather than violate professional principles, limited protections came from shield laws passed in 31 states and guidelines adopted by the justice department.

The least I owed that tradition, I decided, was to consult with colleagues and newspaper lawyers about the ethical, legal and practical issues at stake.

The views I gathered were contradictory. Last year the debate sharpened after the tribunal court tried to

compel the testimony of Jonathan Randal, a retired correspondent for The Washington Post. He appealed the ruling, backed by 34 news organizations, and on December 11th, the tribunal’s appeals court set aside the subpoena. For the first time, the decision set limited legal protection for war correspondents against being *compelled* to testify. But it did not resolve the question that a growing number of reporters will face in this era of international courts and terrorist wars: whether, or when, to give evidence voluntarily. My own experience shows how complicated and conflicted such a choice can be.

John Kifner, veteran New York Times war correspondent, was my nearest neighbor in the Times’s newsroom when the investigator reached me. I shouldn’t even speak with her off the record, Kifner contended. His strongest argument was the most personal: Since I was now a Times’ reporter, if I cooperated with prosecutors I would put him at greater risk of being shot the next time he approached some warlord with his press tags dangling, saying, “I just want to tell your story.”

On the other side was Maass, who had reported from Bosnia as a stringer for The Washington Post and also written a book about the war. Asked to testify in the tribunal’s first genocide trial, he had weighed and ultimately discounted arguments like Kifner’s. The only reason he had not taken the stand was that the defendant had died of a heart attack first.

“I was a freelancer in the end,” Maass told me, explaining why a newspaper’s reputation for impartiality was not really at stake in his case. “These days I’m a magazine writer, and there isn’t the same demand for the appearance of not being involved.” He added: “The rules that they teach you in journalism school, when you’re in a war zone they just don’t apply, whatever the nice ideas are back home about objectivity.”

For my former translator, Stanojlovic, a journalist for the dissident magazine Vreme in Belgrade who had also worked for Gutman and Randal, the stakes were even more personal. “I felt responsible for every-

thing as a Serb,” she said later, explaining why she had spent three days talking to the investigator and sent her on to me.

Legal advice was also mixed. Since I had reported from Bosnia before I joined the Times, whether and how to cooperate was my call, said Adam Liptak, then working for the Times as a lawyer, now its legal affairs correspondent. He said the Times never shares its unpublished information with prosecutors, defendants or others involved in legal proceedings. But hearing my ambivalence, he suggested informal, limited, off-the-record help might be justified and even prudent in this case.

Newsday lawyers took a hard line, worked out years earlier with the editor, Anthony Marro, when tribunal prosecutors were pressing for Gutman’s testimony. “We told Roy we didn’t want him to do it and told investigators we’d fight any subpoena,” said Stephanie Abrutyn, the lawyer advising Newsday then. “Tony’s position is it confuses things when a reporter sides with a prosecutor, no matter how sensible and logical it might seem and how good the cause is.”

Newsday maintained that there was no way to confidentially provide informal cooperation and strongly preferred that I not meet with the investigator at all. In theory, Abrutyn added, Newsday could try to stop me, by claiming that anything I had gathered in Bosnia was the paper’s property. In practice, she added, “Tony’s view is we cannot compel you.” Her most telling point was the simplest. “If you turn over the document,” she asked, “who would give it to you the next time around?”

What was at stake was not a smoking gun, not an eyewitness account of atrocity, but the glue of newsgathering. And this was typical, I found. From Maass, for example, prosecutors did not need testimony about the notorious Omarska camp, but evidence that the defendant had authorized his tour there. From Randal they did not need an account of ethnic cleansing in Banja Luka, but his interview about it with the town’s Bosnian Serb boss.

For prosecutors, such details can be legal links in a chain of evidence to

prove that an official had “command and control responsibility” of crimes committed on the ground. But did the prosecution really need journalists to supply such nuts and bolts, or was it a matter of convenience? As Liptak asked, “Do we want these people going out and gathering their own information, or just freeloading on the reporters?”

## Deciding What to Do

Where would I draw the line? At best, the pass Plavsic signed was meaningless without my explanations—which a defense lawyer would of course want to cross-examine. What about my notes? Maass said he had refused to give prosecutors his notebook. But the British correspondent Ed Vulliamy, who actually took the stand in the same case, had to turn over his notebooks to the defense on order of the court and was grilled for days about “context” and numbers culled from the margins.

“We often have these murky relationships with our sources where we trade information, so it seems very natural to talk,” Tom Gjelten of National Public Radio told me later. “You have to stop and think through whether it compromises principles that protect us in other situations.”

Such concerns can seem petty in comparison to the enormity of the crimes being prosecuted, or to the noblest aspirations of international justice. But Diane Orentlicher, a law professor at American University, reminded me that in operation the tribunals are no less fallible than other institutions. And it was the glue of newsgathering that had made them possible, by bringing the crimes to light in the first place.

Richard Goldstone, the tribunal’s first chief prosecutor, agreed. “I appreciate the importance of the media in uncovering human rights abuses, and I don’t think anything should be done to imperil that,” he said, adding that newspaper policy alone should not determine whether a journalist provides evidence. “You have to deal with each case on its merits. Ultimately, I think it should be left to the journalist.”

Vulliamy and other British journal-

ists who testified tend to frame the choice as a contest between professional rules and personal conscience, or journalism vs. justice. But I saw no justice without journalism, and my conscience was engaged on both sides. It was Gutman, sharing his experience of divided conscience, who helped me formulate an answer I could live with when the investigator came. [See Roy Gutman’s story on page 74.]

Soon after September 11th, I met briefly in the Times cafeteria with the investigator. I said I was willing to listen, but that prosecutors would have to persuade me that I had evidence crucial to their case, which seemed highly unlikely. I never heard back.

## Reflecting on Varying Perspectives

Months later, in the Randal case, the First Amendment lawyer Floyd Abrams argued for a similar balancing test. The decision itself set a somewhat less stringent standard: To compel a reporter’s testimony, the evidence sought must be “of direct and important value in determining a core issue in the case” and “cannot reasonably be obtained elsewhere.”

Revisiting the issue recently in a story I wrote for the Times (“Should War Reporters Testify, Too? A Recent Court Decision Helps Clarify the Issue but Does Not End the Debate”), I found divisions among reporters growing bitter. Europeans were quick to link the Randal position to U.S. opposition to the International Criminal Court, or to the unilateral behavior of the world’s sole superpower. Some treated a refusal to testify as a failure of personal courage or integrity, even when they knew better, while some Americans discounted British claims of conscience as self-promotion.

At stake, I realized, were differing expectations of journalism itself, shaped both by the role of the press in the reporter’s home country and by the changing demands of individual careers. Journalism is not sacrosanct in Britain, Lindsey Hilsum notes. [See Hilsum’s story on page 78.] The British historian Piers Brendon has put it more

critically. “Most [British] journalists do not take their role as part of the fourth estate seriously,” he wrote, pointing to an array of curbs and gags in a system lacking the protection of a First Amendment. “The British press holds itself in such low esteem because it lacks a proper constitutional function.”

This helps explain why Vulliamy wrote proudly that journalists who testified could now have “an impact beyond mere ‘reporting.’” Or how Jacky Rowland, a BBC correspondent, could breezily report on her own cross-examination by Milosevic. Complaints by retired BBC editors that her testifying compromised the BBC’s reputation for independence seem like the exception that proves the rule.

On the other side of the transAtlantic divide is Bill Berkeley, who had agreed to testify at the Rwanda tribunal when he was a freelancer writing a book, but had changed his mind by the time the case went to trial, when he was writing editorials about the tribunal for *The New York Times*. [See Berkeley’s story on page 83.] Of course, from the British perspective, the *Times* and *Newsday* might also be seen as exceptions that prove the rule—the rule that in an age of Internet bloggers and media conglomerates, expecting the best from journalism might be no less delusional than expecting it from the tribunal.

And yet, without having turned a press pass into criminal evidence, I can rejoice that reporting and prosecution have now accomplished something beyond many people’s expectations: Plavsic, expressing deep remorse, pleaded guilty to crimes against humanity. On February 27th, Plavsic, now 72, was sentenced to 11 years in prison. ■

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## Journalists Should Not Be Compelled to Testify

*In an amici curiae brief filed in support of Washington Post reporter Jonathan Randal's appeal of a decision to compel him to testify at the U.N. International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, 34 news organizations and associations from around the world explained why journalists should not be forced to testify. In December 2002, the tribunal handed down its ruling that said that reporters cannot be subpoenaed to testify before this court unless the testimony "is of direct and important value to determining a core issue in the case," and it must be demonstrated that the evidence cannot be reasonably obtained elsewhere. Journalists can, however, testify voluntarily, which some have chosen to do. What follows are excerpts from this brief.*

Journalists' work frequently aids the investigation of war crimes by uncovering evidence that war-crimes investigators themselves have yet to uncover. To cite only a few of countless examples, war correspondent Elizabeth Neuffer of The Boston Globe led investigators in Bosnia on the Srebrenica case to a trail of skeletons she and a colleague discovered, the bodies of which were those men who marched out of Srebrenica. Similarly, in 1997, journalists who reported from Rwanda and Zaire found themselves in possession of vital information (including plans of imminent attacks) that tribunal investigators could not have uncovered because they had not received permission to cross into Zaire. It was the reporters who retrieved this information and made it available to tribunal investigators. In Northern Ireland, evidence collected by journalists significantly aided the judicial inquiry into the killings on Bloody Sunday in 1972. This critical reporting both serves as an early warning system *against the commission* of crimes, and the critical step in gathering crucial evidence in *investigating*

*investigating crimes* and apprehending its perpetrators.

The Trial Chamber also did not question that these benefits can only occur if journalists are provided continual access to war zones to conduct interviews and observe crimes. What it failed to appreciate, however, is that forced disclosure of the fruits of journalists' newsgathering activities or the production of investigative materials or the compelled testimony of journalists against those very sources they used, would seriously frustrate the newsgathering and reporting functions of war correspondents. Quite simply, compelling reporters to testify will inevitably reduce their access to potential sources for news....

The hazards of forcing reporters to testify at war crimes tribunals exist at many levels. First, compelling journalists to testify about their newsgathering would fundamentally curtail their ability to access information. To take just one example, Ms. Neuffer broke a story in 1996 about the chain of command in the Srebrenica massacre, identifying for the first time the links between the men on the ground and their commander, Radislav Krstic. A second story, which appeared a few days later, described a subsequent campaign to conceal the evidence of the mass graves. Ms. Neuffer states unequivocally in her affidavit that she "never would have been able to systematically piece together either story" if she had not been able to assure her sources that they would be protected and that she would not find herself forced to give evidence about them to the tribunal....

Similarly, journalists will have less access to information if they lose their independence, or if others conclude that journalists are not independent. At their very best, journalists are objective reporters of the news. They are not tools of the prosecution or investigative arms of governments or courts—and it is important to honor this dis-

inction. By compelling reporters to testify whenever the tribunal determines that they might have pertinent testimony, the tribunal will rob war correspondents of their status as observers and transform them into participants, thus undermining their credibility and independence.

If war correspondents are perceived as betraying confidences or as later aiding in criminal prosecutions, they will be viewed with a higher level of suspicion and will not be given opportunities to interview, observe or report from war-torn regions. As one observer queried: "Might [the tribunal seek] ... the effective conscription of war reporters as the court's agents, observers and therefore its unarmed foot soldiers? Such a policy would be counterproductive, since a dead witness is of no use to any tribunal." ....

The result is certain: The clear benefits journalists provide—and which both the Office of the Prosecutor and tribunal acknowledge—will be severely undermined by routinely or too easily compelling reporters' testimony. Even when findings are published and sources are known, the link between the forced disclosure and the loss of journalists' independence is compelling, as it significantly changes the tone of journalists' work and the willingness of sources to comply with reporters' requests for interviews....

We do not urge that the journalists' privilege with regard to nonconfidential materials should be absolute. Nobody before this Court has argued for an absolute privilege. While the protection of journalistic interests—and the interests of the public that are served by journalists—is of the greatest import, the need for justice in the prosecution of war criminals is also one of the highest order. A qualified privilege strikes the right balance between protecting journalists in most cases, without fatally compromising in any case the important work of the tribunal. ■

## WATCHDOG

# Consequences Occur When Reporters Testify

A reporter urges journalists to be better watchdogs of the war crimes tribunal process.

By Roy Gutman

In its decision to quash the bizarre order that former Washington Post reporter Jonathan Randal testify to the veracity of an interview he had done 10 years earlier, The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia was attempting to curb the powers of the prosecutor in an area in which they were undefined and expanding without check.

Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte chose, however, not to yield, and two months after the appeal's ruling she renewed her demand for Randal's testimony.

The Randal case has thus turned into a test, not only of the relationship of journalists to international justice, but also of the functioning of the first U.N. criminal tribunal set up since the Nuremberg trials. Moreover, it has been a wake-up call to our profession, which put aside its usual anarchy and rallied behind the notion that journalists deserve procedural protection before this court.

Now it is time for a more rigorous discussion about journalists and the court, particularly in light of the creation of the U.N.'s permanent International Criminal Court (ICC). It is vital that this permanent court adopt the protections implicit in The Hague court's ruling regarding journalists' testimony and that it recognize the unique role journalists play in exposing war crimes.

The Randal case presented a special challenge to the lawyers for the Post, for they were well aware that in summoning this most accomplished of reporters, the tribunal was following through on Randal's own written agreement to appear. This was, on the surface, a pretty weak

case; it is tough arguing your way out of a signed commitment.

In fact, Randal's case was inherently stronger than it appeared, for the underlying question is how did the prosecutor's staff obtain his signature in the first place? Having spoken at length to another reporter who signed a similar statement, I would posit that the prosecutor's office has developed a routine in approaching journalists that leads at the end of an interview to a form of entrapment. I base this on a small sample—of two. But the method

in both cases was identical.

And therein lies the story behind the story. This important new United Nations' institution has been purring along with scarcely any oversight from the news media. Until the Post mounted its challenge, the major journalistic organizations had shown minimal interest in whether reporters testify or not. Let us hope the journalistic organizations will remain engaged. At the same time, reporters have to be more aware of what they are dealing with in talking with tribunal prosecutors. Whether the

United States continues the Bush administration boycott or eventually agrees to join, the ICC is a reality, and news media should begin focusing on it. And, finally, news organizations should cover these proceedings with more skepticism.

## The Prosecutor and the Journalist

This is not a jeremiad against The Hague tribunal, for any reporter who covered the crimes of the four Balkan wars from 1991 to 1999 has to view justice after such suffering as an advance for civilization. Between the closing of the Nuremberg Tribunals and the opening of The Hague, international justice existed largely in theory. The failure to prosecute no doubt was viewed by violators as a green light. Although The Hague tribunal and its Arusha branch for Rwanda were established by Western leaders partly to compensate for their fecklessness in Yugoslavia and Rwanda, these tribunals have taken on a life of their own. Their proceedings have helped



At her home in Tuzla, Bosnia, Zehta Mujic, a survivor of the Srebrenica massacre in 1995, in which 7,000 Bosnian Muslims died, is reflective during a live broadcast of the first day of ex-Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic's trial.

*Photo by Amel Emric/The Associated Press.*

not only to bring some justice where there had been genocide, but also to strengthen the law, set precedents and, one hopes, deter future such crimes.

Nevertheless, like any other institution, these courts need watchdogging. And they are not getting it. I reported (in *Newsweek*) in August 2001 that one of The Hague tribunal's indictments against a Croatian general stated charges that were 180 degrees at variance with what I and even the spokeswoman for the tribunal, Florence Hartmann, had reported (for *Le Monde*) at the time and knew to be the case. I never saw a follow-up or a rigor-

ous examination by Hague-based reporters of this flawed indictment. I must presume this is not the only case like this. The tribunal has also had to drop other charges and cases, and its prosecution of the highest profile case, of Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic, is far from airtight.

Randal's case illustrates the problematic side of international justice. Unbeknownst to him and to his lawyers, the prosecutor's office had developed a system for interviewing reporters that ends up with a signed agreement to appear in court. To understand the method, you have to un-

derstand the psychology. Given our tools of the trade, it is amazing that a journalist can, with a notepad and ballpoint, expose the worst criminals of our time and see them land in the dock. Now imagine that a member of the prosecutor's staff asks for an appointment and holds a long interview in which the journalist—who is now being regarded as a witness—recounts the context, content and significance of his/her coverage.

In the case of Dusan Tadic, it was a German reporter who uncovered both his role and whereabouts with the result being the arrest and prosecution of the first defendant before The Hague tribunal. But there were so many witnesses in Western Europe that the prosecutors never debriefed this journalist. Late last year, the prosecutors discovered their lapse, made contact with this journalist, and did about 12 hours of interviews during several days.

During their interviews, prosecutors pushed these journalists to relive those hours of history-making reporting, to recount their roles, and try to recreate the context in which they operated. If their emotions were not engaged, they are not human. Next, the prosecution staff wrote up a memo on what the journalists said and asked them to sign it with an agreement that should there be a challenge to its content, the journalists would address the court. My German reporter friend signed. So did Randal. There was no discussion about the implications, and both Randal, a retired Post staffer, and my German colleague, a freelance journalist, saw no obvious conflict—nor were they warned of any. A staff reporter might have had a different reaction, as have I, namely to check with my editors before committing myself to anything.

### Consequences of Journalists' Testimony

Let us hope that practices like this will end given the recent decision in the Randal case. But I would like to see the prosecutor's office draw back from its use of reporters' testimony in general. There seems to be an underlying view, even among the first-rate U.S. Justice

## Roy Gutman's Witness Statement

*What follows are excerpts from a witness statement that Roy Gutman, diplomatic correspondent for Newsweek, filed in the motion on behalf of Jonathan Randal to set aside his confidential subpoena to give evidence.*

The role reporters played in bringing the crimes to light puts the journalistic profession in a difficult position when the tribunal follows up on news media leads. The objective of our profession is to make public the best material we have and to do it quickly, accurately, and in a way that compels credibility. Professionalism obliges us to protect our sources, to be responsible for our judgment, to correct our errors, and in general to operate in a manner that permits us to return to the scene and carry on with reporting. A journalist must be able to claim he or she has not taken sides or become partisan, but has simply reported the facts. Returning to the scene and reporting further is an assertion of that claim.

Anyone who believes justice must be done will want to cooperate at least informally with investigators, and that is the practice of journalists the world over. But there is serious

debate within the profession when it comes to testifying before the U.N. International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) or International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). Based on my own experience and that of my colleagues, and after thinking about this issue long and hard, I believe testifying puts the above stated professional obligations in jeopardy.

In a recent book on humanitarian law entitled "Crimes of War" that I coedited, Richard Goldstone, former chief prosecutor at ICTY, recommended that reporters be given protection similar to that afforded aid workers. "Like aid workers and Red Cross or Red Crescent delegates, if reporters become identified as would-be witnesses, their safety and future ability to be present at a field of battle will be compromised," Justice Goldstone wrote. "I would therefore support a rule of law to protect journalists from becoming unwilling witnesses in situations that would place them or their colleagues in future jeopardy.... They should not be compelled to testify lest they give up their ability to work in the field, but they may of course testify voluntarily." I wholly endorse Justice Goldstone's comments. ■

Department and military prosecutors sent from Washington to The Hague and Arusha tribunals, that reporters should take the stand to reaffirm their coverage. This view has been encouraged by the tendency, particularly among British reporters, to submit to every request and provide everything they have to the tribunal.

Here is what can result. In the Dusan Tadic case, Britain's ITN television provided not only the televised tapes, but also the untelevised film of their famous visit to Omarska and Trnopolje camps in August 1992. The defense made the material available to a supposed "expert" witness. Based on these outtakes, this witness subsequently published articles alleging that ITN had "set up," i.e., staged, its famous images of starving detainees. ITN sued the magazine that published these assertions for defamation and, after a long and costly battle, won in court. This was an improper use of discovered or disclosed journalistic material with consequent chilling effects on free

speech.

The second example involved Ed Vulliamy, formerly with The (London) Guardian. When he testified in the case of Milan Kovacevic, on trial for his role in running the Omarska death camp, Vulliamy was subjected to cross-examination that went far beyond the charges. No surprise, for the defense attorney had told a New York Times reporter, "We're going to roast him alive." After he testified for a half day about his interviews with Kovacevic, Vulliamy was cross-examined for three-and-a-half days by the defense, who demanded access to his shorthand notes. The judge so ordered. The defense attorney then started examining the original notebooks, found the names and numbers of contacts unrelated to the case, and began asking more detailed questions. This was a classic fishing expedition. Vulliamy cooperated. He would do it again.

Make no mistake: Many reporters, myself included, feel a moral obligation to assist the tribunal, as reporters

frequently do with local district attorneys and prosecutors in domestic settings. The question is whether one should take the stand to attest to the veracity of an article one wrote years earlier. My own standard is that if my testimony would make the difference between conviction and release of a person I know was a killer or the planner of killings, I would testify out of conscience. Short of that substantive role, it seems to me I am either there to self-advertise my role in nailing the culprit, being used as window dressing for a weak case, or being made vulnerable to a perfectly legal demand for discovery by the defense and, where that ends, heaven only knows. I would not, as Vulliamy did, make my notes available to the court.

But there is another reason for suggesting the prosecution alter its attitude. International humanitarian law is utterly different from domestic criminal law. These big crimes—repeated violations of the laws of armed conflict (war crimes), the massive and system-

## Elizabeth Neuffer's Affidavit

*Elizabeth Neuffer has reported for The Boston Globe for more than 14 years, including reporting on war crimes in Bosnia and Rwanda. She is also the author of "The Key to My Neighbor's House: Seeking Justice in Bosnia and Rwanda," published by Picador in 2002, which chronicles the development of the war crimes tribunals and tells the story of several families who sought justice before them. What follows are excerpts from an affidavit she filed in support of the amici curiae brief filed by various news organizations in support of Jonathan Randal's appeal to set aside the confidential subpoena to give evidence before the tribunal.*

My path often crossed in the field with that of the war-crimes investigators and prosecutors, as we were often chasing the same information. On several occa-

sions, when I found I had general information that was of no particular use to my stories but related to war crimes cases, I passed it along to staff from The Hague. For example, investigators on the Srebrenica case will remember that my translator and I led them to the trail of skeletons we discovered on Mt. Kamenica—the bodies of those in the column of men who marched out of Srebrenica.

I think this is an important point to make to underscore the informal cooperation many journalists, including myself, have shown to the tribunal. In these instances, we journalists were neither asked to cooperate, nor were we compelled to do so. Similarly, journalists who reported in 1997 from Rwanda and Zaire found ourselves in possession of information that tribunal investigators could not physically retrieve. Investigators then had not

received permission to cross into Zaire, where retreating Hutu Interahamwe had left piles of documents detailing everything from gun smuggling to plans to attack Rwanda in their wake. While I was not one of the journalists who retrieved such evidence, I know those who did and willingly made it available to tribunal investigators anxiously waiting in Rwanda.

Such examples, I believe, show that journalists in good faith try to cooperate with the tribunal when they can. It is the nature of journalism, however, that such cases are often the exception rather than the rule. Reporting on war crimes—particularly breaking news about someone's involvement in an alleged crime—often requires a degree of confidence placed by sources in the reporter. That confidence often includes a belief that their identities will not be revealed, even to war crimes

atic acts against civilians (crimes against humanity), and attempts to eliminate a people or nation in whole or in part (genocide)—are crimes committed by and on behalf of the State. The State acts not as prosecutor, but conspirator. Its top legal authority does not investigate, prosecute and incarcerate, but covers up and conceals. This is why war crimes have been beyond the reach of justice for most of the 20th century. Tribunals, at most, will punish a token number of top criminals and extensive trials will be staged only if there is a complete military takeover.

### Journalists' Broader Role

It is in this context that journalists play a much broader role than in domestic justice. At times journalism can have the same impact as a tribunal and a lot faster. A timely, well-documented, irrefutable exposé can pack such a wallop that the mere shining of additional multiple spotlights on a scene can change the behavior of the culprit. In

this sense of exposing the truth, identifying the culprits, and most of all bringing the violation to a halt, the fourth estate at times can be a coequal branch with the third.

My own stories exposing concentration camps such as Omarska were followed a few days later by their closure. Elizabeth Neuffer's courageous exposés in *The Boston Globe* of indictees running around with impunity led to arrests and a change of policy. Neuffer said in her affidavit that her ability to report this and other stunning stories would have been greatly hampered if she knew she would have to testify later. My own argument was that I want to be able to assert my nonpartisanship on a story, and to do that I have to feel free to return to the scene and carry on reporting. If I testify, I think I will be identified with the prosecution. [See accompanying boxes for excerpts from Neuffer and Gutman's statements to the court.]

My point is not special pleading or self-advertising, rather to relate that

journalists often play a unique role in exposing war crimes, and it is in everyone's interest that they continue doing that. The existing tribunals—and the new ICC as well—would be foolish to jeopardize this rare, almost magical, power of journalism, for it is in our common aim to see these crimes stopped. Thus, the media and the courts are effectively allies. So I am glad the tribunal made the right decision; now I would like to see journalists start covering the tribunal more rigorously. ■

*Roy Gutman has reported on foreign affairs for Reuters, Newsday and Newsweek and was coeditor with David Rieff of "Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know," published in 1999 by W.W. Norton & Company. He is currently a senior fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace, researching a book on the Afghanistan civil war.*

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investigators who pose them no harm.

That was particularly true in Bosnia in 1996, when peace was so fragile and hatreds so deep many feared to tell the truth. There were times I found I could report a story only on the condition that I would not reveal a source's name and, sometimes, their location to anyone. Such reporting would have been impossible had I then known that someday I might be compelled to testify in front of the tribunal. Had that been the case, I would not have been able to break several stories that, ironically, aided the tribunal in several of its cases. For example, in 1996 I broke a story that outlined the chain of command among the Bosnian Serbs in the Srebrenica massacre, identifying for the first time the links between men on the ground and their commander, Radislav Krstic. A second story, which appeared several days later, outlined how the

Bosnian Serbs embarked on a campaign of disturbing mass graves from Srebrenica, so that the evidence would be compromised.

Both stories were later faxed to tribunal investigators at their request. I would never have been able to systematically piece together either story had I not been able, in good faith, to give my word that my sources would be protected and that I would not find myself forced to give evidence about them to the tribunal. The latter is a key point: Many witnesses insisted I *not* pass on any information to investigators, fearful they would be killed if they were compelled to testify .... If the tribunal were to establish a legal precedent that journalists could be compelled to testify before a war crimes court—about either confidential or nonconfidential sources—I sincerely believe much of the reporting I did and

continue to do on war crimes would not have been possible .... Covering stories about wartime situations can be dangerous business. Potential war criminals might see journalists as potential enemies if they knew that journalists could be compelled at some later time to testify against them at the tribunal.

In order to provide journalists with the independence they need to effectively gather the news, journalists who do not wish to or cannot testify should be protected from doing so unless there is a showing that the evidence is absolutely essential to the case and that it cannot be obtained from other sources. Without such a privilege, I fear that both the public and the tribunal will suffer greatly as the number of stories—and the amount of public information—pertaining to war crimes will likely diminish significantly. ■

# Deciding to Testify About Rwanda

‘As a journalist, I might argue against testifying but, as a human being, I could not.’

*In 1997, British journalist Lindsey Hilsum testified before the International Criminal Tribunal on Rwanda about events she'd witnessed while working in that country as a freelance journalist in 1994, primarily for the British Broadcasting Corporation. In this article, she describes why she agreed to testify.*

By Lindsey Hilsum

The accused, dressed in a dark jacket, sat impassively staring ahead, just a few yards from me in the sweltering courtroom. The allegations: genocide and crimes against humanity. Jean-Paul Akayesu had been mayor of Taba, in central Rwanda, while villagers and militia under his control slaughtered thousands of people with machetes and nail-studded clubs. His was the first case to be heard by the International Criminal Tribunal on Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania. On January 20, 1997, I took the stand as a witness for the prosecution.

Emmanuel Rudasingwa was planning to testify, too, but he was murdered before he could do so. His widow, Godlieve Mukarasasi, thought she knew why. Akayesu's defenders were determined that anyone who knew anything about the campaign to wipe out the Tutsi people in his area would not make it to court in Arusha. Rudasingwa ran a small shop in Taba and was brave enough to talk to the tribunal investigators who visited the area. That is why he died. "Everyone knew Emmanuel was talking because they saw such a big car outside the door," said Mukarasasi.

## Deciding to Testify

American journalists argue that if we testify in war crimes tribunals we put our colleagues and ourselves at risk



Rwandan refugee children plead with Zairean soldiers to allow them across a bridge separating Rwanda and Zaire where their mothers had crossed moments earlier before the soldiers closed the border in August 1994. *Photo by Jean-Marc Bouju/The Associated Press.*

and might compromise our integrity and impartiality. British journalists—several of whom have testified at the tribunals on Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia—tend to take a less rigid stance, leaving the decision more to individual conscience. These stances seem to emerge out of differing experiences and perspectives: American journalists believe they have enormous influence on governments, but in Britain we rarely feel we make a difference. Journalism is not considered sacrosanct and, therefore, we should not exaggerate our own importance. In normal circumstances, journalists in Britain do not appear as witnesses for the prosecution or defense. But wars and the crimes that take place during them are anything but normal circumstances. Reporting matters, but sometimes justice matters more. The horror

of what I saw in Rwanda was so great, normal rules no longer applied.

I believe that the United Nations was right to set up a special tribunal for Rwanda as a way of bringing justice to the perpetrators of a mass crime that ranks alongside the Holocaust and what happened in Cambodia. Who am I to say Emmanuel Rudasingwa should testify, but I should not? Hundreds of Rwandan peasants have risked everything to go to Arusha and tell the truth about what happened. Some have subsequently fled into exile, knowing the tribunal's witness protection program cannot save them. Others have returned to their villages to be threatened or treated as outcasts. By contrast, I have continued my work as a journalist covering conflict, and I do not see any evidence that my actions have put other journalists in danger. A war correspon-



dent's job is more dangerous than it used to be because 24-hour satellite television has made combatants aware of the media, not because a handful of us have testified at these tribunals.

### Testifying About Rwanda

I testified because, by accident of history, I witnessed one of the worst mass crimes of the 20th century. In April 1994, I was living in the Rwandan capital, Kigali. After the killing started, I was in constant touch by phone with the U.N. and with endangered Rwandan friends who sobbed as they described how bands of militia were combing their neighborhoods and slaughtering any Tutsis they could find. At night I listened to the rocket fire, but I grew to fear the silent times most because I learned that was when the armed gangs moved freely. While other journalists were still struggling to get into the country, I ventured onto the streets of Kigali. I will never forget the red-eyed drunken soldiers and militia at checkpoints, the hundreds of hacked bodies piled on trucks and buzzing with flies, nor the baby at the hospital whose severed leg was hanging by a tendon. I said in my testimony that I had thought

the phrase "rivers of blood" was a metaphor, but in Kigali I saw gutters literally streaming red.

I was not asked to testify against Akayesu personally, but to provide evidence that his alleged crimes took place in a situation of war and that the killings were "widespread and systematic." It could be argued that others might testify similarly or that my writing and broadcasting at the time would provide the same information. But the prosecution felt that I was a credible eyewitness, and the system requires that witnesses appear in person.

To my mind, the tribunal is not there solely to provide justice, but also to set down as definitive a record as possible of what happened. Already revisionists say that what happened in Rwanda was not really genocide, that somehow the main victims, the Tutsis, brought it on themselves. I wanted my account to be part of the historical record. Rwanda was not just another story, like dozens of others I have covered. As a journalist, I might argue against testifying but, as a human being, I could not. I did it because I believed it was the right thing to do.

In 2001, Jean Paul Akayesu was found guilty of genocide and crimes against

humanity and sentenced to life imprisonment. Most of the alleged ringleaders of Rwanda's genocide are now being tried or are awaiting trial in Arusha. These days, I try not to think about what I saw in Rwanda too much. But while researching this article, I read some recent testimony of a peasant woman from the southern Rwandan town of Butare, identified only by her initials, S.U., who wept in the courtroom as she described how her baby was hacked to death on her back, her four other children were also killed, and she, badly injured, was partly buried and left for dead. I reported as best I could in Rwanda. I did not change the course of history. I did not save anyone's life. And then I returned home to my family and friends and career. I think the least I could do was to testify alongside the Rwandans who lost everyone and everything. ■

*Lindsey Hilsum is diplomatic correspondent for Britain's Channel 4 news, an hour-long nightly TV news program. Prior to this, she was a freelance journalist reporting mainly for the BBC.*

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## Objectivity Without Neutrality

A Bosnian journalist reflects on the value of testifying about the crimes of genocide.

By Kemal Kurspahic

Last year I was approached by a member of one of the 34 news organizations that were campaigning against the ability of the war crimes tribunal to compel journalists to testify at The Hague tribunal. I was asked to sign the petition supporting the refusal by veteran Washington Post reporter Jonathan Randal to appear in court. "We will understand if you can't sign it as someone now working for the United Nations," the friend told me.

I did not sign the petition. And I made my decision not because of my recent association with the United Nations (as a spokesman for the Office on Drugs and Crime in Vienna, a position that has nothing to do with this debate), but because of my conflicted feelings about the issue.

As a longtime journalist, I understand the concerns of news organizations—maintaining professional impartiality, avoiding increased risks to

journalists in future conflicts if they are perceived as potential witnesses in prosecution of war crimes, and protecting sources' and reporters' access to war zones. But as someone who practiced journalism under fire—running a daily from the atomic-bomb shelter at the frontline of the besieged Bosnian capital of Sarajevo—I have a great admiration for colleagues who decided to testify in order to help bring to justice those responsible for genocide.

## Acting on the Facts

I agree with the court's decision not to compel journalists to testify unless the information they have is essential to the trial or it cannot be obtained in any other way. I also strongly support those who went to The Hague as witnesses for the prosecution, and I have reasons—both personal and professional—for feeling the way I do.

There are some things in this world that a person simply can't be neutral about. Genocide is certainly one of them. In the Freedom Forum's Media Studies Journal (Fall 1995), I published an article, "Neutrality vs. Objectivity," in which I set forth my views. I used the war in Bosnia and reporting on genocide to argue that journalists can be perfectly objective without necessarily being neutral.

The reporting of some brave individuals in American and British media such as Roy Gutman (then with Newsday), John Burns (The New York Times), Peter Jennings (ABC documentaries), Christiane Amanpour (CNN), David Rhode (then The Christian Science Monitor), Ed Vulliamy and Maggie O'Kane (The Guardian), to mention just those few, provide examples of this combination of objective fact-gathering used to tell stories that made a positive difference. Their reporting was based on facts, yet the stories they told were instrumental in moving governments into action in the face of genocidal atrocities in the last decade of the "never again" century.

Gutman and Vulliamy, with their firsthand reports about the existence of concentration camps in Bosnia, helped to save thousands of lives. Once their stories and pictures of starving inmates reached the public, the Red Cross entered those areas, put together lists of camps and prisoners, and brought an end to torture and execution. Gutman and Vulliamy emerged from their professional experiences with different feelings

about journalists serving as witnesses in the court. While Gutman believes reporters do their part by exposing atrocities to the public [See Gutman's story on page 74.], Vulliamy argues that it is an extension of journalists' mission to help bring to justice those responsible for genocide.

The search for "neutrality at any cost"—to the point of looking for balance in reporting on war where there is no balance on the ground—distorts reality. A case in point was the massacre in Srebrenica. In July 1995, Serbian forces under command of general Ratko Mladic took over that supposedly "safe zone," and in a matter of days killed almost the entire male population of the town, some 8,000 people.

Some television networks—practicing that art of perfect neutrality, which has value in debates in civil societies but not in the case of massive slaughter of innocent civilians—brought to their studios a "representative of the other side," a young lady speaking for those responsible for the slaughter. She shrugged off the story of the massacre with a favorite line of ultranationalist

propaganda, "This is only the [Bosnian] Muslim government trying to blame Serbs, nothing else." It is in situations such as this one that neutrality works against objectivity.

## Memory and the Power of Testimony

On a personal level, I can't think about the question of journalists testifying about war crimes without thinking about our two slain colleagues, Kjasif Smajlovic and Daniel Pearl. Kjasif was a small-town (Zvornik) correspondent for my paper—the Sarajevo daily, *Oslobodjenje*. He was the first of 51 journalists killed in three-and-a-half years of war in Bosnia. He died because his town was on the Bosnian bank of the Drina River. This river separated Serbia from Bosnia, and his was the first town to be "ethnically cleansed" to connect Serbia proper with the Serb-inhabited territories in Croatia as part of the grand plan of creating "Greater Serbia."

Kjasif knew he faced a death threat: Serbian artillery was pounding his town in order to discourage any defense. This brave man put his family on one of the trucks full of refugees escaping the imminent fall of Zvornik while he continued to report. In his last call to our regional office, announcing his daily work plan, he said, "If I manage, I will report on the attack on Zvornik, and then you won't hear from me again." He did not manage. Serbian paramilitary fighters found him in his correspondent's office behind his old-fashioned typewriter, writing his last report. They tortured and killed him. He was buried in a mass grave along with about 100 of his fellow citizens, marked only by a number tied to his toe. Daniel Pearl's death is a more recent and well-known story of The Wall Street Journal reporter brutally murdered by Islamic militants in Pakistan.

Neither of these reporters



British Broadcasting Corporation's former Belgrade correspondent, Jacky Rowland, gives evidence in August 2002 against ex-Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. *Photo courtesy of Reuters/ICTY TV.*

are here to participate in debates about journalists as potential witnesses to the war crimes. And dozens of other journalists were killed in the Bosnian war long before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia was even created. “Press” signs, visibly displayed on their cars, served as one of the favorite targets for Serb snipers. My colleagues at *Oslobodjenje* in Sarajevo risked their lives daily to keep their newspaper alive, but I always felt we only shared the terror of our city. We risked no more than Sarajevo’s children, some 1,800 of whom were killed by snipers and artillery surrounding the city.

After living in a besieged European capital, terrorized for three-and-a-half years and deprived of the most basic human needs—no running water or heating in windowless apartments with

subfreezing temperatures, no electricity nor food—I feel strongly that bringing those most responsible to justice is a much needed symbolic first step towards reconciliation among the innocent on all sides.

I have a special respect for Serbian journalists who recently went to The Hague to testify against the man accused of presiding over a “joint criminal enterprise,” long-time Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic. Dejan Anastasijevic, who reports for Belgrade’s *Vreme*, was one of those brave men who were not afraid to give televised testimony about war crimes about which they had reported. He wrote about his experience for *Time*, a magazine to which he also contributes reporting. “It may have been the most important thing I will ever do,” Anastasijevic wrote. “After my testimony

was over I felt as if a great burden had been lifted. For me, the Balkan wars were finally over. Now I could go home.” ■

*Kemal Kurspahic, a 1995 Nieman Fellow, is a former editor in chief of the Sarajevo daily Oslobodjenje, 1988-94. For keeping his paper alive during the siege of Sarajevo, he was named the 1993 International Editor of the Year (World Press Review-New York) and a World Press Freedom Hero (IPI-Vienna). He has published two books in the United States, “As Long As Sarajevo Exists” (Pamphleteers Press, 1997), and “Prime Time Crime: Balkan Media in War and Peace” (United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003).*

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## The Roles Journalists Played During the Balkan War

‘... this book is a welcomed reminder of how journalism can be a noble calling, but also a foul profession.’

### Prime Time Crime: Balkan Media in War and Peace

Kemal Kurspahic

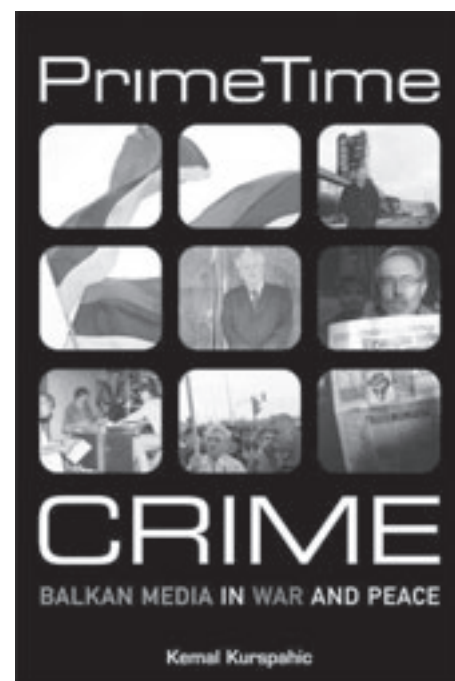
United States Institute of Peace Press. 261 Pages. \$19.95 (pb).

By Senad Pecanin

Before the Balkan war, my parents, my sisters and I lived in one country: They were in Montenegro, and I was in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Our country’s collapse came with the assault of the Yugoslav Peoples’ Army, first on Slovenia, then on Croatia and, in April 1992, on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I still live in Sarajevo, but for 11 years my parents and sisters have lived in Sweden. They had to leave their homeland because of the hurricane of nationalistic frenzy that was launched from Belgrade under the command of Slobodan Milosevic. Their “sin”—just like the sin of thousands of other people

who sought refuge and salvation throughout Europe and in the United States—was being Muslims. Some of their neighbors decided, despite the murders and various forms of pressure, to remain in Montenegro. My parents and sisters were advised to leave—because of me. Why? Because *Politika Ekspres*, Belgrade’s daily newspaper, published on several occasions that I was in the group of famous Sarajevo artists, athletes, journalists and public figures who were (in this city that was besieged by Serb guns) “murdering and slaughtering Serbs, raping Serb women, and throwing Serb children into the lion cage in the city zoo.”



My family's destiny is not as tragic as is that of millions of citizens who lost their beloved ones in the wars that ravaged what was once Yugoslavia during the last decade of the 20th century. However, what links these tragedies is the crucial, dirty and indecent role that has been played by the great majority of the media organizations and journalists.

### **The Media's Role in Yugoslavia's Collapse**

The warlords of the former Yugoslavia, led by Milosevic, would not have succeeded in using the lethal mechanism of their army unless a nationalist euphoria had not been generated in the first place. Even the most superficial analysis of post-World War II bloody European wars leads to this conclusion. A key player—besides the nationalist elites, churches and religious communities—in the creation of an environment in which the country's collapse occurred is the media. Simply put, every bullet and artillery shell fired, every fallen civilian, every concentration camp prisoner, and every destroyed cultural and historical monument was preceded by careful media preparation.

The recently published book, "Prime Time Crime: Balkan Media in War and Peace," by distinguished Sarajevo journalist Kemal Kurspahic, provides excellent testimony of the devastating things that happen to journalists when they fall under the control of authoritarian leaders. And what happened was especially harmful because this was a society in which decade-long Communist rule had been replaced by the rule of ultranationalists.

Serbia foremost, but also Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose media Kurspahic analyzes in his book, became paradigmatic models of societies in which professional immorality and irresponsibility paved the road to hell for millions. As Kurspahic writes, "Once the demons of the Balkans' myths and history had been unleashed, flooding the newspaper pages and radio and television programs with hor-

rifying stories of once-good neighbors as dangerous enemies, the nationalist-controlled media became instigators—not just witnesses—of terror, killings and exodus of genocidal proportions. The front pages of newspapers and evening television newscasts churned out a nightmarish years-long prime time crime."

Kurspahic's book is divided into seven chapters. The first, "The Yugoslav Media in Tito's Time," compares the development of the media during the 35-year-long rule of Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito to what happened in other Communist countries of Eastern Europe. In "Manufacturing Enemies," his next chapter, he offers a detailed analysis of the key role played by the media in Milosevic's rise to power in the League of Communists. In his chapter "Serbo-Croatian War: Lying for the Homeland," Kurspahic analyses the role of the media in strengthening the rule of the nationalist president of Croatia, the late Franjo Tudjman, and in their attempts to hide the crimes committed by Croatian military forces in both their defensive war for Croatia and their aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina. The fourth chapter, "Bosnia: Ground Zero" describes the role of the media in the nationalist destruction of the multiethnic structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Here, alongside imported Serbians and Croatians, yet another extremism emerged—that of Bosniak, which represented the Muslims.

In "Balkan Media Post-Dayton: Missed Opportunities," one learns about how media developed in the post-war period, from 1995 to 2000. Through positive and negative examples of international "media interventions," the author points to weaknesses that can arise when international support for the media ignores local capacities and, by doing so, can undermine the process of building civil society. "The Year 2000: The Beginning of Change" deals with dramatic events surrounding the end of Milosevic's era in Serbia and of Tudjman's in Croatia and the strengthening of the antinationalist Bosniak alternative in

Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the book's final chapter, "Policy Recommendations," Kurspahic helps readers understand what the international community could have done better in its efforts to help the development of the free media in the Balkans.

This book benefits by the fact that Kurspahic is one of the most prominent and highly respected journalists in the Balkans and also because of the comprehensive interviews he did with 30 journalists from Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. These journalists, like him, refused to betray the principles of professional ethics for the sake of serving nationalist leaders in their regions. By offering readers numerous examples of journalistic dishonesty on one hand and impressive cases of heroic servitude to truth on the other, he shows us the opposing faces of what journalism looked like in the Balkans during the last part of the 20th century.

"Prime Time Crime: Balkan Media in War and Peace" is an extraordinary and important book that should be must reading for a wide circle of readers. For both students and professors of journalism, as well as working journalists throughout the world, this book is a welcomed reminder of how journalism can be a noble calling, but also a foul profession. Also, from experts of Balkan history to those who find this region too complicated to grasp, this book helps to make clearer the picture of what has been and is now the Balkans.

I will send this book to my parents and sisters in Sweden. I am certain it will give them a much clearer understanding of why they were forced to leave our home and live thousands of miles away in the other, much happier part of Europe. ■

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# A Reporter Decides to Testify, Then Decides Against It

## Students ask him, 'Is a journalist not a human being?'

By Bill Berkeley

In June 1994, I was in Rwanda reporting on the genocide that would claim the lives of half a million ethnic Tutsis in three months of concentrated slaughter. In a rubble-strewn, rebel-held town called Kabuga, on the outskirts of Kigali, the Rwandan capital, I met a group of admitted members of the Interahamwe militia—"those who attack together"—the Hutu death squads that had stabbed, clubbed and hacked to death their friends, neighbors and even relatives in the weeks just prior to our meeting.

The massacres were still unfolding in the south. Hundreds of dazed survivors, some of them wrapped in gauze that barely concealed their hideous machete wounds, loitered amid the wreckage of their lives in the looted and gutted ruins nearby. The young militiamen had just recently been de-

tained by the Tutsi-led rebel army known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which now controlled the area.

Why did they do it, I asked? How could ordinary men like these participate in such a monstrous crime?

"The government always told us that the RPF was Tutsi, and if it wins the war, all the Hutus will be killed," one of them replied. His name was Emmanuel, 18 years old. Sullen and withdrawn, he wore a mangy purple corduroy jacket, blue jeans, and plastic high-top sneakers. "At the time," he said, "because it was the government saying so, using the radio and, because I had not known the RPF before, I believed that the government was telling the truth."

Another added, "They were always telling people that if the RPF comes, it will return Rwanda to feudalism, that they would bring oppression."

A third put it this way: "I did not believe the Tutsis were coming to kill us and take our land, but when the government radio continued to broadcast that the RPF is coming to take our land, is coming to kill the Hutus—when this was repeated over and over, I began to feel some kind of fear."

### Telling What One Has Seen

Five years after this encounter, in 1999, a prosecutor for the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda visited me in New York. He asked if I would be willing to testify against Colonel Theoneste Bagesora, by most accounts the top conspirator in the genocide—Rwanda's Himmler. He told me that the article I produced from those interviews in 1994, which appeared in *The New Republic*, was the only piece ever published that quoted admitted participants in the genocide blaming the government's radio propaganda for their conduct. My testimony, the prosecutor told me, could provide an indispensable link between Colonel Bagesora's military regime and the actual perpetrators of the genocide.

I was flattered to be asked to testify and to be told I could help to convict a war criminal of such magnitude. After years of reporting on ethnic conflict in Africa, I was convinced that a culture of impunity for political crimes was a fundamental problem that brought out the worst in the continent's leaders and selected far the worst among them, making huge-scale mass slaughter possible. Bringing men like Colonel Bagesora to justice, I believed, could have a major impact, not least by illuminating how Africa's ruinous conflicts were the product not of ancient, exotic hatreds but of calculated tyranny.



Refugees carrying water containers make their way back to their huts at the Benaco Refugee Camp in Tanzania near the Rwandan border in May 1994. *Photo by Karsten Thielker/The Associated Press.*

And, too, it occurred to me that participating in such a trial could provide a fascinating inside look at a historic proceeding, perhaps well worth writing about at some point. I was a freelance writer at the time, completing a book about Africa that concludes with a chapter on the Rwanda tribunal. I didn't feel bound by the constraints that might properly apply to newspaper correspondents. So I agreed to testify.

But it would be three more years before Bagosora's trial began. Meantime, the prosecutor who wanted me to testify left the tribunal, and I moved to *The New York Times* as an editorial writer. For reasons that were never clear, the matter of my testimony was eventually dropped. Had the new prosecutors really wanted me to testify, by then I would probably have declined.

One reason is that I was now in a position to be writing editorials about the tribunal, and in fact I did write a number of editorials that were critical of the tribunal on procedural grounds. Even aside from the *Times*'s institutional concerns, which I respect, I couldn't see participating in a trial and maintaining the kind of journalistic detachment required even of an editorial writer. By that I don't mean detachment in response to genocide. I mean

detachment with regard to a judicial proceeding that might or might not represent an adequate international response to genocide, depending on the quality of justice it provides.

Moreover, as I have talked to other journalists and followed the burgeoning debate on this problem—there was virtually no debate underway when I was first approached—I have begun to take more seriously the responsibilities even of a freelance author toward his or her colleagues and the profession as a whole. I believe that the perception of journalists as potential arms of a criminal prosecution should be avoided at all costs, not least for the safety of future war correspondents and for their ability to do work that ultimately is as essential to the pursuit of truth as any criminal proceeding is likely to be.

It is important to stress that I was not subpoenaed to testify, as *The Washington Post*'s Jonathan Randal was. I was simply invited. I would have contested a subpoena. I believe there might be extraordinary circumstances in which a journalist could well be persuaded to testify if he or she has unique and invaluable evidence that can be gotten nowhere else. But that should be the exceptional case, and the decision should be the journalist's own.

I teach a master's-level writing seminar at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. Each year we have a lively discussion of this issue. My students are often dumfounded by my assertion of a journalist's allegiance to a necessarily independent calling. Many abhor the notion of a writer who, in a crisis, adheres to Ruskin's seemingly cynical injunction: "Does a man die at your feet, your business is not to help him, but to note the color of his lips."

"Is a journalist not a human being?" my students ask.

My answer is that journalism, my life's work, is an expression of my humanity and the best contribution I have to make to justice as well as truth. ■

*Bill Berkeley is a reporter for The New York Times and the author of "The Graves Are Not Yet Full: Race, Tribe and Power in the Heart of Africa" (Basic Books, 2002). He was previously an editorial writer for the Times, and for more than a decade he reported on African affairs for The Atlantic Monthly, The New Republic, The New York Times Magazine, and The Washington Post.*

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## Balancing Journalism and Justice

A journalist proposes what might be a workable solution.

*Current Nieman Fellow Russell Mills, former publisher of the Ottawa Citizen, explored the issues involved in journalists testifying before war crimes tribunals for a course he was taking at the Kennedy School of Government. His research led him to propose another way in which decisions about whether journalists will testify might be reached. His ideas are presented in the following excerpt from the paper he wrote for this class.*

### By Russell Mills

**I**n December the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia ruled in the Jonathan Randal case that the reporters may not be routinely subpoenaed to testify in war crimes cases before the court. This was a huge breakthrough in recognizing the vital role that journalists play in reporting on conflicts and the particular dangers they face in war

zones. If this is accepted as a precedent by other international courts, much of the agonizing about whether war correspondents should testify against those they have reported on should disappear.

There is no guarantee of this, however, and it is sure to be strongly resisted by defense attorneys. If an international court still decides that it needs

the evidence of a journalist in the future, it might be wise to set up a process to involve the international journalistic community at an early stage—before a subpoena has been issued—in a case-by-case review of the need for evidence from a journalist. Currently, there is no journalistic organization with either a sufficiently broad membership or mandate to perform such a task. But such an organization could be created; its title could be the Journalists Committee on International Justice (JCIJ).

The JCIJ could be created by and made accountable to a coalition of international journalistic organizations such as the Committee to Protect Journalists, International Federation of Journalists, Reporters Sans Frontières, and the International Press Institute. This new organization's role would be to develop and oversee a review process. It would be imperative that this review committee be regarded by journalists as an internal watchdog group whose goal is to protect journalists from unnecessary snooping by international tribunals. Although its legitimacy would not be accepted by journalists who would refuse as a matter of principle to testify under any circumstances, it would gain considerable support from many journalists if it took strong positions against identification of sources and revealing of unpublished material.

There would be some U.S. news organizations that might not support this process on strict First Amendment grounds. However, the U.S. Supreme Court's many decisions that support press freedom while not granting absolute privilege could be helpful in guiding this committee's work. And even without full U.S. participation, the committee could put in place a useful process to protect most of the world's journalists who are from countries that support the International

Criminal Court.

The process might work as follows: If an international tribunal decides that the evidence of a journalist is necessary in a particular case, court officials would approach that person and ask for voluntary participation. If the journalist refuses, the matter would be referred to the review committee (rather than a subpoena being issued). The journalist would be free to refuse the services of the committee, but if the journalist wanted the committee to review the request, then committee members would consult with all relevant parties and try to reach a decision.

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This decision could be a statement of support for the refusal of the journalist to testify; a suggestion for other ways for the court to get the evidence it needs; a suggestion for a compromise on the scope or nature of the request; or, perhaps in rare cases, support for the position of the court. All of this would be advisory and nonbinding. The court would remain free to reject any compromise and issue a subpoena. The journalist would also be free to reject a compromise and mount a legal challenge.

There are, of course, several possible barriers to establishing such a review committee and process. International courts could refuse to accept it because of possible delays and adverse publicity. Then there is the internecine rivalry of international press freedom organizations that might each want to control it. And there is the anticipated low participation by U.S.

news organizations because of strict views of First Amendment rights. To ease some of these concerns, the committee might be established for a trial period of two to three years to test its usefulness and to work out problems. Since requests for evidence from journalists have been relatively rare, the review committee could also be a virtual one that would only come together when required.

For the sake of its legitimacy, the initiative to establish such a process must come from the international journalistic community, not from courts. And, if the relevant press organizations

can't agree on the makeup of a review committee, an organization already exists that could serve as the committee on an interim or even a permanent basis. The UNESCO Advisory Group for Press Freedom was formed in 1995 and now includes 16 distinguished journalists from many parts of the world. Many of them

belong to other press freedom organizations. That this advisory group is attached to but not part of an international organization like UNESCO might help to make it more acceptable to the international tribunals.

There are no easy answers to resolving this conflict of rights—the right of reporters to protect their sources (and themselves) and the right of courts to request citizens to present relevant evidence. Resistance to the establishment of such a process might be substantial and, in certain cases, might fail to bridge the gap between journalism and justice. In some cases, however, such a process might provide a useful route to assisting international courts that does not do damage to the continued access and safety of journalists. ■

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# Coverage of War

## The Unseen Gulf War

A photographer portrays human suffering in war.

*In December 2002, Peter Turnley's words and images entitled "The Unseen Gulf War" were featured on The Digital Journalist, an interactive Web magazine featuring work of leading photojournalists (www.digitaljournalist.org).*

*Turnley's essay that follows is adapted from a letter he wrote to Dirck Halstead, the editor and publisher of The Digital Journalist, as United Nations' inspectors were in Iraq and the Bush administration was developing plans for a possible war with Iraq.*

By Peter Turnley

As we approach the likelihood of a new Gulf War, I want to explore an idea, and it occurs to me that The Digital Journalist might be the place to do it. As we all know, the military pool system created then was meant to be—and was—a major impediment for photojournalists in their quest to communicate the realities of war. This fact does not diminish the great effort and courage and the important images created by many of my colleagues who participated in these pools. However, you would have a very difficult time today finding an editor of an American publication who doesn't condemn this pool system and its restrictions, even though most publications and television entities more or less accepted the idea before the war began. This reality has been discussed far less than critiques of the pools themselves.

During the Gulf War, I refused to participate in the pool system. I was in the Gulf for many weeks as the build-

up of troops took place, then sat out the "air war." I flew from my home in Paris to Riyadh when the ground war began and arrived at the "mile of death" very early in the morning on the day the war stopped. Few other journalists were there when I arrived at this incredible scene, with carnage that was strewn all over. On this mile stretch were cars and trucks with wheels still turning and radios still playing. Bodies were scattered along the road. Many have asked how many people died during the war with Iraq, and the question has never been well answered. That first morning, I saw and photographed a U.S. military "graves detail" burying many bodies in large graves. I don't recall seeing many television images of these human consequences. Nor do I remember many photographs of these casualties being published.

The next day I came across another scene on an obscure road further northeast in the middle of the desert. I found a convoy of lorries transporting Iraqi soldiers back to Baghdad. As the convoy passed through this area, it was clear that massive firepower had been dropped; everyone who'd been here had been carbonized. Most of the photographs I made of this scene have never been published anywhere, and this has always troubled me.

As we approach the looming possibility of another war, a thought comes to mind. These photographs I took immediately after the war don't represent a personal point of view or political judgment about the Gulf War. But they do represent missing parts of an accurate picture of what happens in war and in that war, in particular. I've always hoped that true images of conflict give people an opportunity to re-

flect more fully on the realities of war. American citizens have the right to see these photographs so they can make an informed decision about going to war again, and part of my role as a photojournalist is to enable viewers to draw from as much information as possible in developing their judgments.

This past war has often been portrayed as something akin to a Nintendo game. This view conveniently obscures the vivid and often grotesque realities apparent to those involved in war. As a witness to the results of that war, the televised, aerial and technological version of the conflict is not what I saw, and I would like to present some images that represent a more complete picture of what this conflict looked like.

At best, war is a necessary evil. Anyone who feels differently has never experienced or been in one. After covering many conflicts around the world during the past 20 years and witnessing much human suffering, I feel a responsibility to use my photographs to ensure that no one who sees the brutal realities of armed conflict can ever feel that war is comfortable or convenient. ■

*Peter Turnley, a 2001 Nieman Fellow, has covered most of the major international news stories of the past two decades. He is very familiar with conflict, having covered as a photojournalist the wars and civil strife in Somalia, Chechnya, Bosnia, Kosovo, Israel's occupied territories, the Gulf War, South Africa, Haiti and Northern Ireland.*

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A few days after the end of the Gulf War's ground battles, a beheaded Iraqi soldier lies in the desert where his convoy of vehicles was bombed and strafed by allied aircraft on its retreat from Kuwait on an obscure road northeast of Kuwait City. *Photo by Peter Turnley.*



Iraqi prisoners are guarded in the desert north of Kuwait City.



A U.S. soldier helps support an injured Iraqi soldier as a large group of Iraqi soldiers are taken prisoner by the allied forces. This scene was very near the “mile of death” north of Kuwait City.

*Photos by Peter Turnley.*



Using a bulldozer, a U.S. military graves detail buries in a mass grave the bodies of Iraqi soldiers killed along the “mile of death” between Kuwait City and Basra. Few images of this scene have been published.



Iraqi prisoners are guarded in the desert north of Kuwait City.

*Photos by Peter Turnley.*

Soon after Iraq invaded Kuwait, thousands of immigrants working in Kuwait became refugees in the desert between Iraq and Amman, Jordan.



At the end of the Gulf War, about 450,000 Kurdish refugees fled from northern Iraq into the mountains of southern Turkey, including this woman and child.



After the Gulf War, an American soldier looks at a dead Iraqi soldier lying in the desert. Allied bombing left most of the Iraqis in this soldier's convoy carbonized, and their bodies were quickly buried by allied forces.



*Photos by Peter Turnley.*

# War Reporting: How Should Civilian Casualties Be Reported?

A veteran journalist looks at other wars to help journalists understand the value of this reporting and how best to cover them.

By Bob Zelnick

Less than a month after U.S. forces began military operations in Afghanistan, Walter Isaacson, then the editorial boss at CNN, issued a memo warning against overly credulous, simplistic reporting of civilian casualties. As reported by Howard Kurtz of *The Washington Post*, Isaacson wrote: "As we get good reports from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, we must redouble our efforts to make sure we do not seem to be simply reporting from their vantage and perspective. We must talk about how the Taliban are using civilian shields and how the Taliban have harbored the terrorists responsible for killing close to 5,000 people." As Isaacson later explained to *The New York Times*, "It seems perverse to focus too much on the casualties or hardship in Afghanistan."

Reaction to Isaacson's directive drew comment along more or less predictable philosophical lines. Brit Hume, the Fox News anchor, supported the notion that such casualties should not be overplayed, because "Civilian casualties are historically, by definition, a part of war." On the same Fox program, National Public Radio White House correspondent Mara Liasson agreed, saying, "War is about killing people; civilian casualties are unavoidable."

Opponents of military intervention in Afghanistan did not share the equanimity about civilian deaths of their more hawkish colleagues. The very fact that such deaths are inevitable, argued a young Canadian journalist who uses the pen name Dru Oja JAY on the leftist Weblog, "Monkeyfist," makes it imperative for journalists to assign them some

weight before a country decides to do battle. "Very few commentators publicly considered whether starvation, ruined lives, increased infant mortality, depressed economies, and the more countable civilian deaths were an acceptable part of war," he complained.

## Journalism's Tensions in War Reporting

Isaacson's move reflected the general state of confusion among the news media following September 11th regarding their proper role as potential molders of public opinion. The *New York Times* that November reported that, "television images of Afghan bombing victims are fleeting, cushioned between anchors or American officials explaining that such sights are only one side of the story." During the same period, the White House successfully lobbied the networks against playing unedited Osama bin Laden tapes because it might inspire his followers, or even covertly trigger new al-Qaeda acts of terrorism. And for months following the attack one could rarely see a local news anchor's lapel unadorned by an American flag.

Now, as the combat phase of the Afghanistan operation has wound down, the United States is building its forces in the Persian Gulf for what has the makings of round two with Saddam Hussein. This time—rather than the desert campaign of 1991—the objective is "regime change," with the consequent risk of urban warfare and high civilian casualties. Reporters are already flooding Baghdad at the regime's invitation, covering the work of United Nations' arms inspectors to be sure,

but also serving as carriers for whatever message Saddam seeks to convey.

During the first Gulf War, Western reporters in Baghdad found themselves accused of doing Saddam's bidding by paying excessive attention to the few incidents involving significant civilian casualties, while most residents of Iraq's capital went routinely about their business confident that the highly accurate U.S. missiles and bombs were not targeted at them. Will reporters in the next Gulf War, or subsequent conflicts, face the same dilemma? Will they be forced to choose between coverage that is perceived as aiding the "enemy" vs. injecting a mechanical "balance" in response to domestic political pressure or the dictates of editors far from the scene?

This should not happen if reporters and correspondents resist demands that detract from their professionalism and instead apply the principles and techniques of sound journalism to their work in the field.

## The Case for Reporting Civilian Casualties

Journalists ought to begin by examining the superficial fact that civilian casualties are a part of every war. Sure they are, but their number and causes differ materially from war to war. In World War II, for example, Edward R. Murrow could look down from the B-17 bomber in which he was flying and describe Berlin as "an orchestrated hell." Murrow's description was accurate because the Allies deliberately targeted civilians in German cities for purposes of undermining enemy morale. This strategy had its most grue-

some application in the firebombing of Dresden, where the civilian death toll exceeded 50,000. Ironically, the strategic bombing survey commissioned at war's end concluded that targeting civilians had the perverse psychological impact of rallying Germans behind their government.

In retrospect, the American public might have been better served if reporters had taken a more skeptical look at the deliberate targeting of civilians, even in a transcendently just war against Nazi Germany.

In Korea, during the first weeks of panicky retreat following the June 1950 invasion, U.S. forces sought to prevent advancing North Korean troops—some disguised as civilians—from overrunning them. They bombed or dynamited bridges bulging with fleeing South Korean civilians, extracting a fearsome toll in “friendly” civilian lives. One can argue the civilian deaths were a necessary price, since U.S. forces barely managed to establish a line of defense at Pusan. But clearly the civilian deaths were an integral part of the war story.

Vietnam saw the first substantial reporting of civilian casualties inflicted by Americans by print and television correspondents. Terms like “tactical evacuation,” and “harassment and interdiction” fire, entered our lexicon, and a little girl running naked down a highway—her clothes having been scorched from her body by napalm—and a marine using his cigarette lighter to set fire to a thatched peasant hut became emblems of the war's human toll. Books have been written about the alleged media bias in coverage of Vietnam, and to this day there are military veterans who argue that by undermining public support for the war, the media effectively limited military options that might have produced victory.

Perhaps more context was needed, particularly regarding Vietcong and North Vietnamese atrocities. But no reasonable case can be made for temporizing reports of the war's impact on the civilians that U.S. forces were fighting to “save.”

The 1989 Panama invasion involved

the overwhelming application of U.S. force against a regime with no army. The purpose was to remove a single troublesome strongman, Manuel Noriega, from power. The operation reflected the military doctrine of the new chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell. In addition to the presence of vital interests, public support, mileposts and exit strategies, Powell insisted on missions that could be resolved with military hammerblows. A Vietnam veteran, he wanted nothing resembling gradual vice-tightening. Nearly 1,000 Panamanians died in the action, most of them noncombatants. Few journalists questioned the proportionality of the effort.

During the Persian Gulf War the reporting of CNN correspondent Peter Arnett from Baghdad became a microcosm for many complaints about reporters permitting themselves to become conduits for enemy propaganda. Arnett reported on the results of U.S. bombing raids: The first was against a factory that the Iraqis claimed produced instant milk formula and that the United States said manufactured chemical agents; the other was against a bunker that intelligence had described as an important command facility but that turned out to be a shelter for well-connected Iraqi civilians. Hundreds were killed in the latter attack.

To many observers, Arnett's reporting conveyed a credulous acceptance of the Iraqi line on the factory and uncritical reporting of Iraqi assertions that the bunker attack had deliberately targeted civilians. The conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer was moved to suggest that Saddam had only three cards left: “his Republican guards, his chemical weapons, and Peter Arnett.”

The 1999 NATO campaign to oust Serbian troops from Kosovo involved nearly 80 days of intensive bombing of Belgrade and other Serbian cities, plus missions flown against Serbian forces in Kosovo. With shaky domestic support, President Bill Clinton was anxious to avoid U.S. military casualties and committed no ground forces to the operation, while aircraft in both

Kosovo and the remainder of Serbia flew high enough to stay out of the range of Serb gunners. Because of these tactics, Serbian air defenses were not completely neutralized, and Serb forces inflicted far more damage inside Kosovo than would have been the case with more effective U.S. air power. Several “friendlies” were inadvertently hit from the air, and the Serb forces operating in Kosovo suffered relatively little battle damage. The press reported extensively on civilian casualties, and Clinton's approach remained controversial throughout the war. No U.S. forces were killed in the operation.

### **Covering the Consequences of Economic Sanctions**

Not all civilian casualties result from direct military attack. Following its invasion of Kuwait, for example, the United Nations, with a strong push from the United States, imposed a comprehensive regime of economic sanctions against Iraq. These sanctions were extended after the war pending Saddam's compliance with an assortment of Security Council resolutions. During the late 1990's, a UNICEF study concluded that more than 500,000 Iraqi children had died as a result of the sanctions. Confronted with a question about the report, Secretary of State Madeline Albright replied, “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price—we think the price is worth it.”

The issue of civilian consequences of economic sanctions against Iraq has to this date received far less analytical coverage than one would expect for one of its magnitude.

The question of coverage of civilian casualties has often arisen in connection with the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Israel has been confronting an intense campaign by suicide bombers and other terrorists for more than two years, suffering in excess of 700 fatalities, often at the hands of people disguised as workers, students, orthodox Jews, waiters and even members of the Israeli military. Suicide bombers have passed through checkpoints, scaled walls and fences, blended into sympathetic

crowds, hidden in the homes of confederates, and barged into markets, discos and restaurants. In response the Israelis have restricted travel, closed their borders to Palestinian workers, assassinated key terrorist leaders, dismantled the security structure of the Palestinian Authority, and swept through and reoccupied cities and towns where trouble has occurred, arresting hundreds of “suspected terrorists.” Israel has killed more than 1,700 Palestinian “civilians” during the current cycle of conflict, often to the accompaniment of some of the most noncontextual journalism of recent times.

Unless one scanned both the print and electronic coverage with exquisite care, the reader or viewer would have little inkling of the hundreds of terrorist attacks pre-empted by Israel’s reoccupation of lands placed under control of the Palestinian Authority by the Oslo accords, or the lack of any realistic alternative to that action. Nor would he or she have much sense that the entire intifada would never have occurred had Palestinian Authority leader Yasir Arafat not insisted at Camp David and Taba on the right of Palestinian refugees to return to pre-1967 Israel, a formula for functional termination of the Jewish state. Viewers or listeners would have little notion that most of the settlements the Palestinians complain about would have been dismantled under the Clinton peace plan accepted by Israel or of the strategic alliance forged by Arafat with the Hamas and Islamic Jihad organizations dedicated to Israel’s destruction.

Similarly, the press has provided scant inkling of the disaffection of much of the Palestinian intelligentsia from the current intifada, their disgust with the suicide bombing campaign, and the feeling of betrayal by many veterans of the first intifada (1987-90) as regards the “Tunisians” who returned with Arafat and imposed a corrupt and brutal dictatorship on the West Bank and Gaza, long before the Israelis reoc-

cupied PA-administered lands. On the other hand, citizens following events in the media would have had a surfeit of stories on the matriculation of suicide bombers, the support of their families, and their heroic status as martyrs in their communities, important stuff to be sure, but usually presented in a way that conveyed a sense of moral equivalence between victim and killer.

### **Reporting Well on Civilian Casualties**

Civilian casualties are intrinsic to most military campaigns. So are military casualties, bombing sorties, the movements of armored units, artillery clashes, efforts to suppress enemy air defenses, operations designed to interrupt the other side’s lines of com-

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### **Covering civilian casualties usually carries the additional challenge of operating at the sufferance of the other side, usually in its own territory.**

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munication, and battle damage assessments offered by military intelligence. During a war, journalists try to cover all of these things, given the vagaries of military access, logistical problems, and the availability of reliable sources. Covering civilian casualties usually carries the additional challenge of operating at the sufferance of the other side, usually in its own territory. Journalists gain entry when the enemy believes they will be useful to its cause. If officials conclude they are not, they will be restricted, expelled or worse.

Still, good journalism involves acquiring relevant information and putting it into context. How many civilians died in the incident? What was the proximate cause? What is the relationship between the strategy and tactics of the party inflicting the casualties and the incident itself? How about the strategy and tactics of the other party and their role in generating civilian casual-

ties? Apart from physical damage, is there any political impact of the incident in the immediate area or elsewhere? To what propaganda use is the host country putting the incident?

If questions such as these are kept in mind by reporters and editors, the story defines itself, and there should be no need for arbitrary formulas and condescending reminders of why the war is being fought. An errant bomb that kills a score or so civilians might, for example, require only short mention or brief footage. Events that reveal more about each side’s strategy or tactics might demand more time or space to tell the story. Rarely, if ever, should a particular story’s impact on domestic morale influence the report, even were that elusive concept capable of precise measurement.

The United States is, after all, a country committed to democratic values. It thrives on robust debate and the informed consent of the governed. It is a nation that brought low two totalitarian systems during the past century, not by aping their values but by asserting its own. When this nation begins to run on the theory that truth is the enemy, it will have suffered a self-inflicted wound more grievous than any adversary is likely to inflict. ■

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# International Journalism

The December election of South Korea's new president, Roh Moo-hyun, writes **In-Yong Rhee**, a news commentator for Seoul's Munwha Broadcasting Corporation and current Nieman Fellow, was a "victory of the Internet, where the driving force of the young generation is bringing a shift in media power, creating what can be described as a 'cyber Acropolis.'" He describes how online news services emerged as an important source of information for younger voters who are more distrustful of newspapers. "... frustrated young voters saw the Internet as an outlet where they could spill out their diverse views and create a counteragenda forum against the conservative papers," he writes. In this election's wake, the influence of major conservative newspapers is waning, and the Internet has emerged as a powerful media force.

In her story about the life of former Chinese journalist and author Peter Liu, **Yvonne van der Heijden**, a Beijing-based correspondent with the Netherlands Press Association and the Financial Economic Times of Belgium during the 1990's, describes the reporting help he gave her by putting developments in China into a broader perspective. She also provides glimpses of the harsh life he experienced under Mao's rule, as told through his recently published autobiography, "Mirror: A Loss of Innocence in Mao's China."

**Nicholas Daniloff** teaches journalism at Northeastern University in Boston and at the Uzbek State World Languages University in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. It is his Uzbek experience that Daniloff writes about, as he explains what it is like to lecture (in English) to students majoring in international journalism on "the virtues of independent media" when they live in a country with "a miserable human rights record, including Soviet-style censorship." Uzbekistan's president created this Center for International Journalism in 1999 where several American professors teach. When Daniloff asked the former rector what he hoped the program would accomplish, he replied: "I want them to encourage the students to tell the truth. We must plant the seeds of free discussion. I'm not sure we'll see the fruits in our lifetime, but we must plant now."

**Watson Sims**, who was a foreign correspondent for The Associated Press and editor of newspapers in Michigan and New Jersey, describes how between 1984 and 1990—in visits arranged under the auspices of the American Society of Newspaper Editors and the Union of Soviet Journalists—115 American and Soviet editors learned from and about each other as various delegations assembled in the two countries. "The hundreds of articles published as a result of the exchanges undoubtedly had an impact on public opinion in both countries," writes Sims, who was a participant. As one editor commented after his visit to the Soviet Union in 1987, "Americans don't really understand Russians, and they don't understand us." At the start of the 21st century, Sims worries about whether Russian journalists—given the nation's economic and political circumstances—will remain able to ask questions they need to ask. ■



# The Korean Election Shows a Shift in Media Power

Young voters create a 'cyber Acropolis' and help to elect the president.

By In-Yong Rhee

December's presidential election in Korea resulted in a victory for Roh Moo-hyun, who was the candidate for the Millennium Democratic Party (MDP). As the first post-war generation politician to head the nation, his emergence as the country's new president can be interpreted as a victory of reform, post-cold-war sentiment, and antiregionalism. But it was also a victory of the Internet, where the driving force of the young generation is bringing a shift in media power, creating what can be described as a "cyber Acropolis."

Riding on the crest of "netizens" support, the high-school graduate turned lawyer beat the odds to become president. Roh is unique in his political roots in Korean politics, in which deep-rooted regionalism traditionally pits the southeastern Gyeongsang Province against the southwestern Cholla Province. The Gyeongsang Province (from which Roh is a native) has been the stronghold of Korean politics for the past 40 years and became the base of the opposition Grand National Party (GNP) during the recent Kim Dae-Jung administration, when the Cholla Province served for the first time as the ruling party's political turf. Regionalism in Korea has been manifested by voters' strong preference for a presidential or parliamentary candidate representing a political party based in that region. Roh, who vowed to abolish regionalism, represents a party that is based in the Cholla Province, so it was not surprising that he failed in mayoral and parliamen-

tary elections four times in his hometown in Gyeongsang Province, because the party he belonged to was not based there.

Roh was often dubbed as an "unrealistic, foolhardy" politician, but he held firm during the rough times he faced in politics. His repeated failure to win political office, in the end, strengthened him as a presidential candidate, in part because of the reaction and work of his young supporters. Immediately after Roh's loss in the parliamentary election in 2000, his supporters, mostly people in their 20's and 30's, voluntarily gathered to form an online support group by the name of "Nosamo," which is the Korean acronym for "people who love Roh Moo-

hyun." This action marked the beginning of what became one of Roh's strongest political assets.

## The Internet Replaces Newspapers

No one will dispute that Roh owes his victory to the Internet, which provided a reliable source of news and an outlet for people to voice their opinions. As his election polls showed, his support mostly came from reform-minded young voters. Sixty percent of voters in their 20's and 30's cast ballots for Roh. In a highly technological country, where its people spend more time surfing online than any other place in the world, the Internet served as a window

through which the younger generation could see the world and create a forum for their political debates.

What also happened is that online news services began to emerge as an important source of news for this online generation who are more distrustful about the news they read in the newspapers. The outcome of the Korean presidential election clearly points to a decline of influence in the nation's big three newspapers: Chosun, JoongAng and Donga. These right-wing newspapers, which were all fervent supporters of Lee Hoi-chang, the opposition's presidential nominee, failed to wield significant influence in this election. Comprising 70 percent of the newspaper market share,



A South Korean man surfs the Web at an Internet cafe in Seoul. *Photo by Rhee Dong-Min/Reuters.*

these papers have consistently criticized the Kim administration's sunshine policy of engaging North Korea and advocated the opposition party's hard-line approach. They also have been critical of the liberal Roh, since Roh declared he would embrace Kim's policy toward North Korea.

But what was most problematic for readers during the election was the ways in which these newspapers misinformed the public through biased reporting and distortion of facts, while claiming that their papers do not endorse any candidate. These conservative papers, which have always represented the mainstream public and politicians, continually shunned the liberal and minority parties. For example, Roh's MDP, which is a ruling party yet a minority in the National Assembly, has continued to be treated as a minority party by the major newspapers.

Amid such stifling circumstances, frustrated young voters saw the Internet as an outlet where they could spill out their diverse views and create a counteragenda forum against the conservative papers.

During previous elections, news and editorial strategies employed by the big three newspapers would have been very effective in influencing voters' opinion. There are sayings in Korea that "these newspapers make the president," and "the power of the media exceeds the political power." But, in this election, this power didn't work.

A couple of days before election day, when a North Korean ship carrying missile export cargo was stopped by the United States, the North Korean issue was exacerbated. Roh was nailed to a corner. (In fact, there was speculation that the Bush administration intentionally stopped the North Korean vessel to help the conservative candidate Lee Hoi-chang. Koreans would call this "North Wind from the U.S." "North Wind" refers to North Korean factors in South Korean elections.) Conventional wisdom is that heightened



Members of president-elect Roh Moo-hyun's Internet-based support group, "Nosamo," celebrate his victory. Photo by Jin Seong-cheol/Yonhap News Agency.

tensions on the Korean peninsula during election times tend to favor the conservative candidate. The big three quickly capitalized on their chance to sway the public support for Lee and played up this news. It didn't work.

This time, the Internet—acting as a news provider—was where younger voters, in particular, went to find the news and posted messages on the bulletin boards. And Roh quickly recognized the enormous potential of the Internet long before other presidential candidates. He noted, "The vast numbers of cyber communities can be highly effective in drumming up voter's support." As he predicted, the Internet played a decisive role on election day.

On the night before election day, multimillionaire politician Jung Mong-joon, who had unified a single candidacy with Roh a few weeks before the election, suddenly withdrew his support. Speculation was rampant that this tremendous blow to Roh would cause him to lose the election. Young voters went to the Internet early on the

morning of Election Day and posted messages such as "Let's go vote!" With these, they appealed to young netizens to go to the polls. According to exit polls, Roh was behind Lee by a margin of one to two percent in the morning. However, a large influx of young voters poured into the voting booths in the afternoon. As the online media Pressian put it, "a great drama emerged from 2 p.m." From then on, exit polls reversed and Roh began to take the lead.

Without this driving force of the young voters, the outcome of the election would have been reversed. National Assemblyman Kim Hyong-oh of the opposition GNP said, "The key player of the Korean presidential election was the Internet, the winners were the netizens. The power of 'Internet democracy' has been rising in Korea for the first time in the world."

However, it cannot be said that the Internet was totally responsible for Roh's victory. According to an opinion poll taken after the election, the media that most decisively influenced the public's choice of candidate was television. It is worth mentioning that, unlike the major newspapers, TV news coverage and on-air debates were relatively fair and non-partisan during the campaign.

This Korean presidential election resulted in several changes in the media environment. There is the waning influence of the major conservative newspapers and, in its place, voters rely more on TV news for more objective and fair reporting. But most important is the dramatic emergence of the Internet. In essence, Korea's young voters created a cyber acropolis, a modern day adaptation to the ancient Greek's direct democracy. ■

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# Reflecting the Life of China in the Mirror of His Life

A Chinese scholar and one-time journalist describes what happened to him during the Cultural Revolution.

By Yvonne van der Heijden

“My story is the unhappy experience of my country,” says Chinese scholar and one-time journalist Peter Liu, who is 78 years old. During an interview on a hot autumn day, however, his fierce eyes and firm voice hardly betray his ordeal. Liu Naiyuan, by his Chinese name, spent 21 years in Chinese labor camps, the *laogai*. Only in 1979, when Deng Xiaoping consolidated power after ousting the leaders of the chaotic Cultural Revolution, was Liu released and fully rehabilitated. Liu wrote a book in English about his tempestuous life, “*Mirror: A Loss of Innocence in Mao’s China*,” which was published in the United States in 2001. “Like a mirror, my tragic life reflects the life of the nation,” Liu observed.

Peter Liu, good-humored and brimming with optimism, spoke at length in his apartment in Beijing, explaining the circumstances that made his life a living hell for so many years. “The misfortune that befell my country in the ’50’s lasted three decades. I was a victim of the crackdown on so called ‘bourgeois rightists.’ Mao Zedong planted a booby trap, which he called a good plot.”

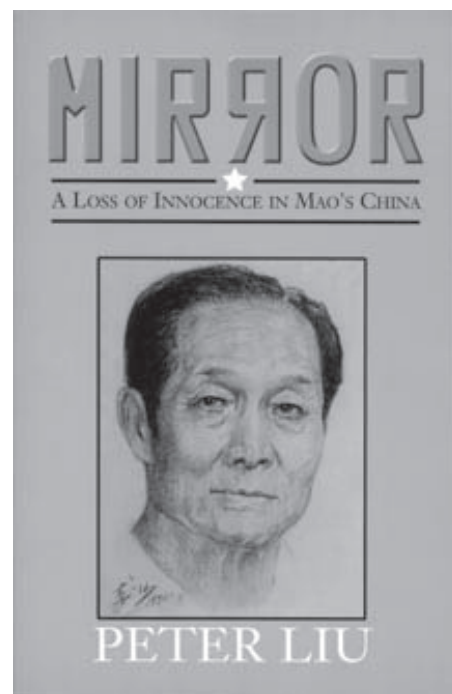
That “good plot” was the political campaign, “Let a hundred flowers bloom,” which got into full swing in April 1957. Mao and other Communist leaders, including late Premier Zhou Enlai, felt the party’s work since the start of the People’s Republic in 1949 had been so successful that it could take a little criticism. A general appeal for critical comments went out, and intellectuals around the country responded with unprecedented enthusiasm. Complaints poured in on every issue, from corruption within the party to control of artistic expression, from the unavailability of foreign literature to low standards of living. But, most of

all, criticism focused on the monopoly of power of the Communist Party and the abuses that went with it. Very soon the party had second thoughts on the “hundred flowers” campaign and instead unleashed an anti-rightist campaign.

“I was one of the flowers. I spoke up,” Liu said. “A lot of things regarding the government I did not like eight years after the Communists took power. I touched a raw nerve in suggesting that the political leaders, most of them peasants before they enlisted in the People’s Liberation Army, should get a proper education. A good guerrilla commander was not going to make a good leader of a university or a government institution. If they refused to be educated, they should step down. China had to be rebuilt and was in need of capable leaders. Well, after I had reported a lot of shortcomings—mind you, I was invited to do so—I was called a criminal, a bourgeois. In French this word means citizen, but in Mao’s China it meant enemy of the people. Of course, I was not the only one. Because Mao very frequently gave instructions that five percent of the people were bad, by the end of 1958 some 550,000 Chinese were picked out to be labeled rightists.”

## Trained as a Journalist

I got to know Peter Liu, who speaks English fluently, in the early 1990’s when I was a correspondent in Beijing for Dutch-language newspapers. The situation a decade ago in China was harsher than it is today. Chinese people, especially intellectuals, still had to be careful in their contacts with foreigners. Foreign journalists had to keep in mind that the Chinese they talked to might get into trouble. This was espe-



cially true after the dramatic developments in Tiananmen Square in June 1989. Nevertheless, Peter and I got along well. During my eight-year stay, Peter frequently helped me to put developments in China into a broader perspective.

His “lectures” gave me a unique insight into several aspects of the country’s long history and the way Communist China was ruled. Having this independent knowledge available was a gift to me because, during the early 1990’s, the only information foreign correspondents would get was from rare press conferences by government officials or from the state-run media. It was very difficult to get facts and even harder to interpret developments. A lot of foreign correspondents also had fixed ideas about what was wrong with China and its rulers.

Peter Liu provided a well-considered countervailing power to all of this

by giving me the pros and cons on all kinds of issues from domestic politics to Sino-foreign relations and China's one-child policy. In talking about copyrights, for example, Liu explained that the Chinese attitude on this reached back to Imperial times when a painter or calligrapher became a master only when he was able to copy exactly the works of famous predecessors. In the Chinese mind, to copy is a quite honorable thing to do.

Peter Liu is an erudite man, a scion of a family of scholars. He and his three brothers were educated at a missionary school from the American Presbyterian Church. Liu went on to study English literature at St. John's University in Shanghai.

In 1945 China was at the brink of civil war. The United States sided with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) and sent General George Marshall to take part in a tripartite Mediation Committee. The American army employed Peter Liu as a translator in the mediation executive headquarters. A year later the civil war broke out and the executive headquarters was disbanded.

But Liu was lucky. Seymour Topping, a reporter in the Nanking bureau

of International News Service (INS, one of the forerunners of UPI), needed a translator and hired him. "Later I became his assistant," Liu told me. "He trained me to become a journalist. This was the critical period of the civil war. I principally reported on the progress of the ongoing struggle between the Nationalists and the Communists." Liu also reported on the presidential elections which, according to Liu, were manipulated by Chiang Kai-shek, the Nationalist military and political leader. "Reporting was especially intense at the outbreak of emergent events, like the maneuver by Chiang Kai-shek over his feigned resignation and the struggle of General Li Tsung-jen as acting president," Liu says.

In May 1949, on the eve of the Communist takeover, Liu quit his INS reporting job. "The reason was that the Communists were very hostile to Americans because the massive military aid for the Nationalist government contributed to the loss of Communist lives. On the whole, brief as it was, mine was a turbulent and interesting journalistic career."

Peter Liu favored the Communist takeover. He could have chosen to go to the United States. Or he could have cast his lot with the Nationalist government that fled to Taiwan. His life would have been quite different. "Since childhood, I was very patriotic. I loved my country, not the Nationalist Party, though, which was corrupt to the bone. I was convinced the Communists would change politics, eradicate corruption and poverty, and govern in the interest of the Chinese people. So I did stay on and welcomed the Communists with open arms. My country would have a bright future under Communist rule, I thought."

He was enrolled as a student at a so-called revolutionary university. "In six months I finished with bad grades. They did not like me. I asked too many questions. Western journalists described these classes organized by the Communists as brainwashing institutions. It was the initial stage of the reeducation of Chinese intellectuals." After he got his "revolutionary degree," Liu had to study Russian and became a

translator for Soviet experts in the army. In 1954 he asked to be demobilized. He was stationed as an education official in a poor district near Peking. In the momentous year 1957, when the "hundred flowers" campaign began, he was transferred to Xinhua, the New China News Agency.

## Criticisms and Consequences

Peter Liu did not fit in with those who wanted to control ideology and constantly he was criticized. His independent mind, his "American" history, and his family background all worked against him. In the summer of 1957—like all intellectuals and government functionaries—Liu was encouraged to tell what he thought were shortfalls of the Communist Party. He complied, but a fortnight later the wind changed, and those who were outspoken about the Communist Party's shortcomings were denounced and labeled "bourgeois rightists."

"I did everything to try to prove that I did not want to harm the party. But I ended up as a rightist of the worst category, which meant expulsion from work unit and loss of all rights of a citizen." For 16 years, Peter Liu had to do manual labor—farm work such as tilling the earth, planting rice and other crops, digging canals and lakes. "In the end I was a grape care expert." In 1974, he became a teacher at a labor camp middle school for the children of camp officers, and his life improved.

Liu recalls times of great despair. At some point he seriously considered taking his own life. In the end, he did not because he would die as a political prisoner and his relatives, his mother and his only daughter, Jane, would suffer the rest of their lives. He decided not to die as a coward and to bear the hardship. Now he is happy he lived on.

Peter Liu's autobiography, with its very detailed account of harsh life in China under Mao's rule, ends with his release in 1979. In the early 1980's, his life took another dramatic turn, this time in a welcomed direction. He met his current wife, Yu Qin, a middle-school teacher of English who also suffered untold harassment at the hands

### *Seeking Help in the Search for Peter Liu's Articles*

Peter Liu worked as a journalist for International News Service (INS), a forerunner of United Press International. One of the things he regrets most is that he handed over all the clippings of his articles to party officials. He could not make copies. It would be very nice to dig up articles with his byline from American archives. I would like to ask anybody who has an idea how to unearth Liu's articles to contact Peter Liu at [pam98@sina.com](mailto:pam98@sina.com) or Yvonne van der Heijden at [yv.heijden@planet.nl](mailto:yv.heijden@planet.nl).

of the Communist Party. They started a new life together. Listening to Peter Liu is not like listening to a bitter man. His humor and optimism were probably the keys to his survival. He credits Yu Qin for the renewed zest for life he has acquired. "Some of my friends tell me my turbulent life is unfortunate. I agree that my life has had its bitter days. And I suffered a lot. I did. But

nothing can be done about it. And it is better to experience misfortune in the beginning of your life and fortune later, then the other way around." ■

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## Creating a Different Approach to Telling the News

An American journalism professor teaches students about free speech in authoritarian Uzbekistan.

By Nicholas Daniloff

I am standing in room 44 of the Uzbek State World Languages University in Tashkent, lecturing again on the virtues of independent media to my international journalism majors. The atmosphere is awkward because Uzbekistan is a Central Asian republic with a miserable human rights record, including Soviet-style censorship.

"President Karimov is going to Washington," I tell the class of third-year students who are of Uzbek, Russian, Uigur and other assorted nationalities. "He is going to be peppered with difficult questions about his authoritarian policies. I want you to pretend you are his advisors and develop answers for him." This exercise requires students to consider criticisms of the top leadership—something not tolerated in public discourse here.

A young man stands up. Like the other male students, he is conservatively dressed in a dark suit, white shirt, and tie. "I suppose President Karimov will be attacked for suppressing dissent and for abuse of police power."

"Correct," I respond. "How do you know that and, even more important, what will you advise him to answer if he gets such questions from the American press?"

"I go to an Internet café," the stu-

dent replies. "I can see what is written on EurasiaNet, Human Rights Watch, and other groups about Uzbekistan. I guess I would tell the president to minimize charges."

Other students propose different approaches. Our give-and-take includes acknowledging the charges of police brutality and intolerance of extremists, but offering justifying explanations. We seek parallels in which American authorities have announced tough responses to terrorism after September 11th. We finally agree on something along these lines of advice for President Karimov on his trip to the White House in March 2002:

"You must understand, Uzbekistan lives in a troubled neighborhood. As president, I was the subject of an assassination attempt in 1999 in which more than 100 people were killed. It is essential for Uzbekistan to have stability for the moment so we can build up our economy. So we sometimes have to take strong measures. We, like you Americans, are in the forefront of the struggle against Osama bin Laden and international terrorism."

I tell the students that President Karimov would do well to avoid getting rattled and to try to deliver the message with a smile if and when he addresses the American press.

### Teaching About Freedom of Speech

Since the students in the international journalism major are supposed to be learning about the United States, we work almost entirely in English. I occasionally clarify issues in Russian when something is unclear. Although I am studying Uzbek, I am nowhere near able to teach in that Turkic language. The students, who are very curious about the West, seem to enjoy the role-playing. It gives them a chance to express in the relative privacy of the classroom many different points of view that don't show up in the Uzbek media. Usually they know English better than their Soviet-educated professors and are much better at using the Internet.

Teaching democratic values in an authoritarian country might seem paradoxical. It is one aspect of the \$200,000 grant I received from the U.S. State Department for a three-year partnership between the School of Journalism at Northeastern University, where I teach, and the Uzbek university. Although there are many problems in Uzbekistan, I have come to believe that the future of freedom of speech in Uzbekistan, though problematical, is not hopeless.

President Karimov, who created the

Center for International Journalism at the university by decree in 1999, has frequently said he wants to encourage a more professional media. But his Soviet-trained underlings seem to put obstacles in the way. “The president’s words go out and seem to float in the air. They hit a concrete cloud and there is no change underneath it,” said one American professor at World Languages recently. I asked Jamalladin Buranov, before he retired as rector last year, what he hoped the presence of American professors would do for the university and ultimately for Uzbekistan. He replied, “I want them to encourage the students to tell the truth. We must plant the seeds of free discussion. I’m not sure we’ll see the fruits in our lifetime, but we must plant now.”

Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed. It wrote into its new constitution that there should be no prior restraint—no censorship—of media. In flagrant violation of this constitutional assurance, Uzbekistan continued Soviet-style censorship on the grounds that military secrets had to be protected. Here everything hinges on definition. What affects national security? Should discussion of public issues really be secret? Uzbekistan continued to use the Soviet manual of forbidden topics, which was extremely broad. The manual itself was classified secret. No mention was to be made in the media about the censorship office, which was located in room 316 at 32 Matbuotchilar Street. The chief censor’s name was Erkin Kamilov.

On July 3, 2002, President Karimov made a dramatic decision. By decree he abolished censorship, eliminated the censor’s office, dismissed Kamilov, and declared that henceforth editors would be fully responsible for what was published or broadcast. If information was inaccurate or caused social turmoil, editors would find themselves out of a job. To show that he meant business, editor in chief Abdukayum Yuldashev of the newspaper *Mohiyat* (Essence) was dismissed July 19, 2002 for publishing an article by an author who had previously been blacklisted.

## Censorship in Uzbek Media

To make sure that formal censorship was really dead, I visited room 316 during my most recent visit to Tashkent in November 2002. Sure enough, the censorship apparatus was gone. The space has been taken over by the newspaper *Marifat* (Enlightenment). Editor Khalimjon Saidov, who showed me the rooms, commented, “You see, all that is left are the iron door jambs.”

So what difference has the end of censorship made?

In television, which any ruler knows is the crucial medium when it comes to governing, very little has changed. Official Uzbek TV continues to glorify the president and downplay the country’s difficulties. Russian TV, which is available in the capital, gives a richer diet of international and Russian news, as well as entertainment. Occasionally, however, Uzbekistan jams critical broadcasts by the BBC and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

To protect themselves, some newspaper editors have hired unemployed censors to act as consultants. That amounts to the privatization of censorship. Other editors are careful to exercise self-censorship. “You must understand,” says journalism professor Akbar Normatov, “when you yoke a horse to a pump and have him walk in circles for decades, there is no great change when the chains come off. The horse continues to walk in circles.”

Yet there are some subtle developments that we should not overlook. The Committee to Protect Journalists, a monitoring group based in New York, reports that a small group of reporters in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, have quit official media to send reports to Internews, an American organization that tries to promote independent television stations in provincial cities.

Some newspapers have begun pushing the envelope, too. *Yash Kuch* (Young Power), for example, recently published an article about media being the fourth estate of government, the implication being that independent media was more truthful than official media were. The independent news-

paper *Hurriyet* (Liberty) published an article titled “It Is Better to Light One Candle,” about a September 2002 conference dedicated to freedom of speech. “Before you never found such articles,” one of my students told me. “Yes, these articles are not so critical but they *were* published.”

The atmosphere in the classroom has lightened up since I engaged the students in playing “presidential advisor.” Restraints at the university are softening. We can discuss issues such as AIDS, poverty, unemployment, prostitution, environmental pollution, health and the status of women openly. I don’t doubt that this worries some of the older professors who grew up under the Soviet system. On the other hand, the career of journalism seems more attractive now to the students. They are beginning to see it as a way to help Uzbekistan modernize, not just as a career that would allow them to travel out to the West (and possibly not return).

One curious issue arose last fall when a student wrote an article in a wall newspaper—an unofficial publication that doesn’t require official approval because it doesn’t circulate and is pasted to a wall—asserting America’s Statue of Liberty would break into tears if she came to Uzbekistan and saw the poor state of free discussion. At first the university administration tried to dismiss the student on grounds of poor academic performance. But, when the issue was described on the Internet, that initial decision was reviewed. The student was offered the chance to take a test, which he passed, and he was readmitted.

I tell the students that a major task before them now will be to develop a journalistic code of professional ethics. We discuss the usual issues that must be included—verification of facts, access to governmental information, protection of confidential sources, and so forth. “Unless you develop such a code, you’ll probably find that the government will develop a code for you,” I tell the students. “And you won’t like that.” They get the point.

The end of censorship has ener-

gized journalism professors, too. The joint American-Uzbek manual on independent journalism that I have been promoting for the past two years now has a reasonable chance of being accepted by the Ministry of Education and eventually being published. The Soviet-educated professors, wary of too much freedom of speech, seem willing to give the American approach a try.

### The Future of Free Speech

Does any of this mean that Uzbekistan, a secular Muslim state, is moving towards free speech or democracy? Is the U.S. State Department succeeding in extending Western concepts to this far-flung region of Central Asia where Russia's influence is felt more strongly than America's?

I would not get over-excited yet.

Students who are lucky enough to win scholarships to the United States and study journalism find that when they return home they are looked upon as upstarts by their elders and do well to keep their foreign ideas to themselves. Furthermore, Uzbek society is organized along clan lines where personal influence, family ties, and bribery have a long history. Central Asia is an area where people are generally unwilling to wash dirty linen in public. Nevertheless, I do believe that freer discussion is important for identifying problems and examining a variety of solutions for dealing with them, even in an authoritarian state.

In June 2003, the Uzbek State World Languages University will graduate its first students in international journalism. Many of them know English well; some have visited the United States. All

are curious about the world beyond Uzbekistan's borders, and many are comfortable with the Internet. In the next three decades, these students might bring changes in Uzbekistan as the country strives to find its place in the world community. I am sure this will not be fast enough to satisfy the U.S. Congress, which finances my grant, but at least the logjam of free speech is groaning. ■

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## Journalists Built a Bridge of Understanding Between East and West

During the cold war, Soviet and American editors learned from one another.

*From 1983 until 1991, Watson Sims chaired a committee of the American Society of Newspaper Editors on Soviet exchanges, traveling with five Soviet delegations in the United States and five ASNE delegations in the Soviet Union. He was also a moderator for journalism conferences in Moscow in 1988 and 1995 and directed a 1992 Gallup Institute survey on Russian attitudes toward freedom of expression. In this article, he describes the value of those exchanges and the evolving state of journalism in Russia.*

By Watson Sims

A Russian journalist fell in love with a girl whose father, thinking her too young to marry, sent her to live with a distant relative. Years

later, they met again, and the journalist learned that the girl had borne his son. "Why didn't you tell me?" he asked. "Father wouldn't let me," she replied. "He would rather have a bastard grandson than a journalist son-in-law."

I heard the story from Vitaly Chukseev, foreign editor of Tass News Agency, as we returned from dinner at the home of Edward Bloustein, president of Rutgers University, in February 1987. I told Chukseev it reminded me of William Tecumseh Sherman's reaction when the general was told three journalists had been killed during the siege of Vicksburg: "Good! Now we'll have news from hell before breakfast."

Chukseev was a member of the third delegation of Soviet journalists with whom I traveled during the cold war in exchanges between the American Society of Newspaper Editors [ASNE] and

the Union of Soviet Journalists. For us to be able to laugh together in this way was quite remarkable, given the high level of tension between Moscow and Washington and the fact that our exchanges began in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion. But as we came to know one another, it became clear that despite harsh rhetoric between our governments, as journalists we could communicate with one another. And I believe that these journalistic exchanges, in part, helped to end the cold war.

We shared a number of concerns. Among them was the perception and reception our reporting received from our respective audiences. Public image is a concern for all whose work reaches an audience. But it offers a special challenge for journalists, who rarely own the organizations for which they

work and are often subject to guidance in their presentation of news. Publishers may demand excessive profits or special treatment for advertisers or sponsors. Governments may restrict reporting on grounds of security. Consumers generally prefer good news to bad news and can resent those who bring unwelcome messages.

With many masters to serve, it is not surprising that journalists often score poorly in public esteem. A November 2002 study by the Gallup Organization found only 26 percent of Americans surveyed rated U.S. journalists “high or very high” in honesty and ethical standards. (Nurses, by comparison, scored 79 percent and high school teachers 64 percent). A somewhat comparable poll by Professor Iosif Dzyaloshinsky of Moscow State University found only 13 percent of Russians willing to trust journalists.

### **Melting the East-West Chill**

When ASNE suggested in 1969 that delegations meet to discuss their profession, the Union of Soviet Journalists replied, “We have nothing to exchange in that area.” A.M. Rosenthal of *The New York Times* was among American editors who held a similar view when a meeting was next discussed in 1983. In a letter to ASNE President Creed Black, Rosenthal wrote, “These are not simply journalists—in some cases not journalists at all—but officials of a society devoted to the repression of any form of free expression, particularly the press. I doubt that this gains us much respect even from the Soviet guests, who are far too sophisticated to feel that they and the American editors have anything in common.” Others disagreed, including Tom Winship, editor of *The Boston Globe*, who wrote: “I see nothing to lose by communicating at every level with our adversaries. We learn from whomever we communicate with, no matter what the circumstances are.”

After a divided ASNE board agreed on an exchange in 1984, many U.S. officials refused to receive the Soviet journalists. “Who’s going to be watch-

ing these people?” asked Tom Driscoll, press secretary to Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker. “There’s no way the speaker will see these guys,” said Christopher Matthews, assistant to House Speaker Tip O’Neill. “There are no journalists in the Soviet Union. If they find journalists over there, they lock them up.”

The 1984 exchange did little to improve understanding. In Washington, the Soviet delegation cancelled a meeting with Secretary of State George Shultz after a speech in which the secretary criticized Soviet policies. A Moscow roundtable ended with ASNE President Richard Smyser telling his hosts, “You are apples and we are oranges. It might have been better for you to have had an exchange with spokesmen for the White House or State Department.” It is doubtful that more exchanges would have occurred, had not Mikhail Gorbachev become president and instituted a policy of glasnost, or openness, which led to laws guaranteeing newspapers the right to publish and permitting journalists greater freedom to travel and report news.

Between 1984 and 1990, ASNE and the Union of Soviet Journalists exchanged five delegations, in which 63 American editors visited the Soviet Union and 52 Soviets came to America. Doors were opened to an extent unimaginable at the height of the cold war. Whereas few U.S. officials would receive the Soviets in 1984, on a single day in 1989 a Soviet delegation met with Vice President Dan Quayle, Secretary of State Jim Baker, House Speaker Tom Foley, House Minority Leader Newt Gingrich, and National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft. Soviet delegations visited hospitals, newspapers, universities, space research centers, television networks, polling organizations, and the National Organization for Women. They interviewed mayors of a dozen cities, attended Broadway theaters, the San Francisco ballet and services at Atlanta’s Ebenezer Baptist Church, and rode horses in Texas. ASNE delegations were exposed to a spectrum of Soviet life through visits to Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Tblisi, Riga,

Tallin, Tashkent, Samarkand and several smaller cities.

### **Portraying Life on the Other Side**

The hundreds of articles published as a result of the exchanges undoubtedly had an impact on public opinion in both countries. Not only in Moscow and Washington, but also in outposts such as Port Huron, Michigan and Almaty, Kazakhstan, readers saw familiar bylines from the other side of the Iron Curtain, often bringing unexpected views of life under capitalism or Communism.

“I am impressed by how little we Americans know about the Soviet Union,” Editor John Emmerich wrote in *The Greenwood, Mississippi Commonwealth* in 1987. “Much of our information is inaccurate or out-of-date. Americans don’t really understand Russians, and they don’t understand us. The Soviet people are cordial and friendly. Our group of 12 editors was well received everywhere we went. I encountered not a single incident of hostility or meanness. We met and talked with hundreds of people. Virtually all indicated they would like to be better friends with the United States.”

“An attentive, respectful attitude toward the client, worrying about whether he is comfortable, whether he is satisfied—this is in the blood of the American service industry,” Nadezjda Garifullina wrote in *Lights of the Alatau*, a newspaper published in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in 1988. “We were not asked for documents in a single hotel, which is done so unceremoniously in our own country. I hope readers will not accuse me of lack of patriotism, but why can they and why can’t we? Why is it that in any American store you can examine goods and no one demands to look into your purse when you walk out? Why are such things possible over there and not here?”

At roundtables and in many smaller conversations, Soviet and American journalists discussed problems—and contrasting styles—in covering news. During a 1987 meeting, Viktor



Afanasyev, editor in chief of Pravda and chairman of the Union of Soviet Journalists, boasted that a telephone on his desk led directly to President Gorbachev. Boris Yeltsin, then Moscow city boss, had criticized the party's leadership, and Jim Gannon, editor of The Des Moines Register, had a suggestion: "Pick up the phone and ask Gorbachev what he's going to do with Yeltsin."

In a discussion of personnel, Afanasyev said, "I had a reporter who was useless. I talked with him many times and finally removed him from his job. He has sued in one court after another. Paper has flooded my office. Sometimes I think it would have been easier to keep him on the job."

"We've been there," said Gannon.

## Freedom Confronts Economic Realities

Always there was the question of access to news. When John Driscoll of The Boston Globe told a Leningrad meeting in 1987 that both nations should allow reporters greater freedom to travel, the editor of Leningrad Pravda declared, "We vote 'aye' with both hands."

Cautiously at first, some Soviet visitors acknowledged they were expected to serve an ideological purpose. "If we see a beggar in America, we make a big deal of it," one visitor said in 1984. As the exchanges progressed, the Soviets increasingly diverged from their traditional role. When laws were passed to guarantee newspapers the right to publish, Soviet journalists were quick to exercise their freedom.

"We once did not write about such things as crime or earthquakes," Pravda Editor Afanasyev told an ASNE delegation in 1987, "but now we have no taboos." In Leningrad an ASNE delegation found Pravda campaigning against the sale of stale bread in city bakeries and failure of the city's streetcars to operate on schedule. In Samarkand, a delegation found the newspaper Lenin's Path under fire for publishing an article on suicide among young Muslim women. Boris Shegolikhin, the

newspaper's editor, said complaints came not only from the city council, but also from displeased readers. "Editors sit at different tables, but they eat the same bread," said Shegolikhin. "An editor's bread is tough to eat."

After the Soviet Union collapsed into smaller states the bread grew tougher. Although Russia's newspapers remained free to publish, there was no stream of advertising or comparable income to replace subsidies that supported the official media under Communism. Thousands of newspapers were launched, only to fail for lack of support. In 1995, Vsevolod Bogdanov, chairman of the Union of Russian Journalists, successor to the Union of Soviet Journalists, reported that Russian journalists earned only \$30 to \$40 per month. "The economy is poor, and most journalists know their papers can close at any time," said Bogdanov. "When they work, it is under very dangerous conditions, with too many being attacked and murdered. Many journalists say they cannot live without subsidies." He noted that much of the media's support came from individuals, political parties, or criminal elements seeking to manipulate public opinion.


Although individual Russian journalists have won international acclaim for courageous reporting, their image at home has declined in recent years. A study by Moscow State University Professor Dzyaloshinsky reported in 1990 that 70 percent of Russians were willing to trust journalists, but by 2001 only 13 percent were willing to do so. The Russian government, equally distrustful, imposed stern limits on coverage of what it considers terrorist activities. And it uses financial pressure to punish media organizations of which it disapproves. The International Press Institute has placed Russia on its watch list for press endangerment, and the Committee to Protect Journalists added President Vladimir Putin to its list of 10 greatest enemies of a free press.

The Glasnost Foundation in Moscow said 17 journalists were killed in Russia during 2001 and about 100 were assaulted. Notable among casualties

was Artyom Borovik, whose father led a delegation of Soviet journalists to America in 1984. Artyom Borovik won acclaim for reporting Soviet Army reverses in Afghanistan and exposing corruption among government officials before being killed in a suspicious aircraft crash. In an article published by the International Press Institute, Genrikh Borovik wrote that his son died in a losing battle for press freedom and concluded, "The plan to put the press in order is working." The grieving father found small comfort in the creation by The Overseas Press Club of America of an annual Artyom Borovik Award for courageous reporting.

Looking back on the exchanges and their aftermath, I believe the decline of press freedom in Russia stems not from absence of brave and able journalists, but from history and economics. Lacking a sound financial base on which to practice freedom, too many newspapers and too many journalists supplement their income by performing favors for sponsors. This damages their product and weakens their support in a society long accustomed to authoritative rule and where officials are unlikely to welcome public scrutiny of their performance. In 1987, a sarcastic mayor of Leningrad asked his American visitors, "Can the editor of Pravda make the trains run on time or see that only fresh bread is sold in our bakeries?" The answer, of course, was no, but had not the issue been raised by a brave editor, the trains might have become slower and the bread more stale. Whether journalists remain free to ask such questions is by no means assured in Russia today. ■

*Watson Sims, a 1953 Nieman Fellow, was a foreign correspondent for The Associated Press, editor of newspapers in Battle Creek, Michigan and New Brunswick, New Jersey, and is now a scholar in communications at the George H. Gallup International Institute, Princeton, New Jersey. He lives in Asheville, North Carolina.*

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# Nieman Notes

Compiled by Lois Fiore

## Courageous Zimbabwean Editor Becomes a Nieman Fellow

‘Like a recurring nightmare, Nyarota became a frequent occupant of Harare’s police cells.’

By Shyaka Kanuma

**A**t no point in his career did Zimbabwean journalist Geoffrey Nyarota imagine, as he tried to contribute to a better society in his country by being a freethinking journalist, that his road would be anything but rocky. However, little had prepared him for the fact that along the way his offices would be bombed, there would be arbitrary weekly arrests and threats of physical violence, and death. In short, the gamut of skullduggery only a thoroughly repressive system is capable of.

For Nyarota, the final obstacle was put in his path when the board of directors of his newspaper, the Daily News, sacked him a few months ago. He learned of his firing by unconventional means—a radio news bulletin, which is one of the surest indications in Africa that a job has been lost at the instigation of forces in “high places.” Nyarota, who arrived at Harvard in January for his Nieman Fellowship, explains, “In effect, when I lost my job it meant I no longer had the institutional protection the newspaper had afforded me. Also, I suddenly found out that all my friends had abandoned me and that the police were looking for me.”

He knew then that it was time to leave what he had been trying to do in Zimbabwe. With nothing more than a few belongings hastily thrown in a suitcase, he slipped into neighboring South Africa, where he was soon joined by his

wife, Virginia, and two of their three children.

Soon afterwards, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) alerted the Nieman Foundation of Nyarota’s plight. The foundation took emergency steps to appoint him a Nieman Fellow and to get him and his family to the United States. “It is with a feeling of great relief that I am here, and it is my fervent hope that what I gain as a Nieman Fellow I will use to benefit independent journalism in Zimbabwe,” Nyarota tells me as he reclines on a settee in the apartment that is his family’s new home in Cambridge.

Nyarota becomes a Nieman after devoting more than two decades of his life to journalism in Africa. He is among that continent’s most prominent newspaper editors. During his career, he displayed extraordinary levels of courage in exposing graft, larceny and all kinds of unethical behavior by the powerful interests in his country. He founded the Daily News in 1999 upon his return from Mozambique, where he had gone into exile because of reporting that exposed a vehicle-dealing scam involving some of the highest-ranking government officials.

The Zimbabwean editor’s stature and that of the Daily News in African journalism were firmly established by the resolve and courage with which they undertook the highly risky venture of fighting President Robert

Mugabe’s ruinous land-grab policy and the violence this policy unleashed on both white and black citizens. After all, Mugabe’s government thinks nothing of arresting, detaining and badly torturing journalists as a way of trying to control what is published, as Zimbabwean journalists Ray Choto and the late Mark Chavunduka, a 2000 Nieman Fellow, discovered to their peril.

For his work, Nyarota has won a string of international journalism awards, among them a CPJ award in 2001 in New York City and the World Association of Newspapers’ Golden Pen last year. But these came with a very heavy price. What the state and its hired thugs had in store for the Daily News and its journalists was an unprecedented campaign of violence and intimidation. A year after the Daily News first was published, a bomb blast went off underneath the newspaper’s building. No serious investigation into the cause nor arrests were made. Not long after, an even more powerful blast destroyed the paper’s presses. Confronted by all of these problems, the publication began to hemorrhage money.

Like a recurring nightmare, Nyarota became a frequent occupant of Harare’s police cells. He was charged under the country’s draconian press laws on widely interpretable charges such as criminal defamation against the president. When a state security operative casually informed Nyarota in an eleva-

tor that he had been instructed to assassinate him and then tried to extort him and a colleague of a large sum of money, it did little for badly frayed nerves at the Daily News. Nerves were already stretched by the abduction by hired thugs of some of the newspaper's writers and the fact that Mugabe's Information Minister Jonathan Moyo had told one journalist to her face that they would begin targeting individual journalists with the paper.

By the time he got sacked, Nyarota's departure from Zimbabwe was well overdue.

His story is one lived daily by courageous journalists all over Africa, albeit with varying degrees of severity. As in Zimbabwe, journalists often lock horns against more powerful and ruthless forces. But then they also have to contend against factors not directly related to reportorial work, but that are no less a hindrance to the development of a free press, including very poor facilities, economies so weak that advertisement markets hardly exist, ever dimin-

ishing readerships due to economic hardships, and other demoralizing effects on journalists.

For such journalists at Nyarota, being granted a Nieman fellowship seems a godsend. ■

*Shyaka Kanuma, a 2003 Nieman Fellow, is a freelance contributor to The Mail and Guardian in Johannesburg, South Africa. Kanuma began his journalism career as a reporter in Rwanda for a government-owned weekly, The New Times. Having a long-time passion for journalism and a strong desire to contribute to the rebuilding of Rwanda through his work as a reporter, Kanuma was seriously disappointed by the lack of independent journalism he found at The New Times. He felt that truth was sacrificed for political expediency and blatant corruption was ignored. Within seven months of starting his work at The New Times, he resigned. Kanuma then became a stringer for*

*The New Vision, a Ugandan daily, and The East African, a regional weekly. While working for those papers, he and a few other journalists developed plans for an investigative weekly, Rwanda Newline. The idea, Kanuma said, was to "expose corruption and incompetence in high places, helping to create a vibrant civil society." However, the new weekly was up against the strength and determination of those in power, who wanted to drive Rwanda Newline out of business. After barely two years, the weekly was forced to close because of government harassment and interference with the paper's advertisers. Although the paper closed, it had set the journalistic standard in Rwanda, and Kanuma was the first reporter in the country to win a continental award—CNN's Free Press Africa Award in Johannesburg, South Africa*

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#### —1941—

**George Chaplin** died on February 17, 2003 in McLean, Virginia, from complications after a fall in which he broke his shoulder. He was 88.

Chaplin served as editor of The Honolulu Advertiser, the largest newspaper in Hawaii, for 28 years, retiring in 1986. Before he went to The Advertiser, Chaplin was the editor of the New Orleans Item, the largest paper in Louisiana. Among Chaplin's favorite editorial topics was statehood for Hawaii and, through a series of pro-Hawaii statehood editorials in the Item, Chaplin caught the attention of publisher Lorrin P. Thurston, who was looking for someone to take over the news operation of The Advertiser.

When Chaplin started at The Advertiser in 1958, "he immediately set about breaking down the barrier between what was seen as an aristocratic, haole [Hawaiian for a white person], anti-labor institution and the various ethnic

communities," a reporter at The Advertiser wrote in Chaplin's obituary.

Chaplin's passionate work on the editorial page and in the community, the obituary continued, stemmed from "his dream for Hawaii to build a truly pluralistic society where class, race and religion didn't matter." Thurston Twigg-Smith, former owner of the Advertiser and long-time friend of Chaplin's, said, "He helped bring the whole community together and was the first editor of The Advertiser to actively try to bring all racial groups together and move forward with the growth of the state."

Chaplin's wife, **Esta**, died in 2001. He is survived by his son, Steve Chaplin; his daughter, Jerri Chaplin; a sister, Kay Greene, and four grandsons.

#### —1947—

**Gilbert W. "Pete" Stewart, Jr.** died on January 21, 2003 in Knoxville, Tennessee. He was 90.

Stewart began his career in journalism as a reporter for United Press and later for Newsweek, covering the U.S. Senate and the Supreme Court. He also wrote the column "Washington Week" for The Wall Street Journal. Stewart continued on to work with the U.S. State Department at its mission to the United Nations in New York as a liaison between the U.S. delegation and the media. He also worked personally with former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt when she was developing the United Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations.

As an avid student of American history, Stewart also wrote many articles about American history and recently finished a book, "George Washington and the French in the American Revolution." Prior to his retirement, Stewart was the assistant director of information at the Tennessee Valley Authority in Knoxville for 20 years.

His wife, **Laura Denton Stewart**,

writes, "I have many happy memories of attending Nieman reunions with my husband, the last being the reunion of 2000." He is also survived by his son, Gilbert W. Stewart and his daughter, Mary Jo Jaqua.

—1949—

**Grady Clay**, one of Louisville's most significant urban analysts, is set to be the honorary chairman for "Creating a City: A Symposium To Examine How Architecture and the Built Environment Affect Our Lives," to be held in March 2003 at The Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky.

—1968—

**Jerome Aumente** writes: "After sampling the Virginia mountains for nearly two decades with a vacation house, **Mary** [Aumente's wife] and I decided to become full-time mountaineers and built a retirement home on Long Mountain, surrounded by the Blue Ridge and Massanutten mountains and the Shenandoah Valley down below. I continue as special counsel to the dean at the School of Communication, Information and Library Studies at Rutgers University, but have time for other work. This included two trips to Russia last spring, a human rights workshop in Croatia for Balkan journalists, and an investigative reporting workshop for Montenegrin journalists in Washington and New York. I am writing modules for a CD to train journalists in health reporting and just finished one focused on reproductive health care and family planning in Africa. I signed a contract with the New Jersey Press Association to write a book on newspapers for their 150th anniversary in 2007, and I am designing a series of workshops to help journalists in covering childhood development issues in New Jersey with a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded project, Children's Futures.

"In the spring of 2003, I will do a workshop for Bosnian journalists on economics reporting and go to Bosnia-Herzegovina in June for our Rutgers-SCILS-University of Sarajevo project. I

will start a program with Moscow State University and University of Missouri soon. Human rights issues and problems with trafficking of women and children are the focus of some state department projects and may also involve a trip to Greece this year for training. Some Middle Eastern projects have emerged for attention this year as well.

"Repotting instead of retirement seems to work if you don't run out of pots. We are two hours from Washington and 10 minutes from Browntown, Virginia (one general store, no traffic lights). If you are in the area, give us a call: 540-635-6395 or e-mail: [aumente@scils.rutgers.edu](mailto:aumente@scils.rutgers.edu). Mailing address: Long Mountain, 617 Seven Oaks Drive, Bentonville, Virginia 22610.

—1981—

**Fleur deVilliers** brings us up to date on her work since her Nieman year: "I returned to South Africa to be made assistant editor of the Sunday Times—at the time South Africa's biggest circulation paper—with special responsibility for overseeing its political coverage, leader writing, and editing the op-ed pages. By 1985, however, with the political landscape growing ever darker and with no gleam of light in sight (how wrong I was), I felt the need for some academic detachment and refreshment. I was offered and took up a Visiting Fellowship at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London. I had just arrived when the Times (of London) invited me to write its editorials on Southern African issues, something I continued to do until the mid-90's. I also found myself doing a great deal of political consultancy, commenting and analysis for various British TV networks as the South African story was seldom out of the news. One thing led to another and my initial London "sabbatical" became permanent, and I made my home in the UK.

"I subsequently joined the London office of the global diamond mining and marketing group, De Beers, and its then-sister company, Anglo American Corporation, as public affairs consult-

ant, chairing a joint public affairs committee and reporting directly to the Group chairman. When the two mining giants separated organizationally, I remained with De Beers until my retirement at the end of 2002, although I will continue to act as personal consultant, particularly on political issues, to De Beers Chairman Nicky Oppenheimer.

"After my two-year fellowship at the IISS (1986-87), I remained a member of the Institute, and in the mid-90's was invited to join its council. I am now vice chairman of the IISS and chairman of its executive committee.

"Although I have—since leaving Harvard—contributed to or edited a number of books, I have yet to emulate some of my fellow Niemans and produce one myself. Perhaps the greater freedom of the retired state will finally deprive me of all excuses. At the moment, however, I am enjoying the lazy peace and quiet of South Africa's Cape coast where I bought a holiday home in 1992 (when the longed-for light began to beckon at the end of South Africa's long dark political tunnel.) The house is conveniently situated on the shore of Walker Bay (a world famous whale-watching spot) near some very good wine estates and makes a wonderful bolthole from the dreariness of a London winter. London is, however, now my home and I will return there in late March."

Fleur can be reached at: [fleur.devilliers@eason.co.uk](mailto:fleur.devilliers@eason.co.uk).

—1983—

**Huntly Collins**, former reporter at The Philadelphia Inquirer, has taken a new job as director of science communication and advocacy at the AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition (AVAC) in New York. The coalition aims to provide accurate and unbiased information about experimental AIDS vaccines and their ethical testing in clinical trials in both the West and developing countries. It is financed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and several other philanthropies and accepts no government or industry funding.

Collins, who covered AIDS for the past decade at the *Inquirer*, left the paper in July 2001 to mentor reporters covering AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. [See her story on page 35.] She conducted journalism workshops in Botswana and Kenya and spent the first six months of 2002 living and working in South Africa, which has five million people living with HIV, more than any other country in the world. Her work has been funded by the Harvard School of Public Health, the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative, and the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Collins, who spent her Nieman year studying labor economics at Harvard and MIT, was a reporter at *The Oregonian* in Portland for nine years before moving to the *Inquirer* in 1983. She and her life partner, **Esther Miller**, a public-interest lawyer representing physically disabled people, now live in Philadelphia's Mount Airy section with their eight-year-old daughter, Mia Qian Miller Collins. Contact: [HuntlyCollins@att.net](mailto:HuntlyCollins@att.net).

—1985—

**Phil Hiltz** is now in Botswana. He writes: "I'm working on a book on AIDS in Southern Africa, in particular following the national experiment in Botswana, in which the government is hoping to deliver sophisticated three-drug AIDS treatments to all in the country who need it, free. Donors have supplied the money and sent some experts to help out. But the real question is, can the slow, inefficient government of a developing nation gear up to become an efficient deliverer of medicines that require sophisticated technical monitoring? And can they help those with HIV who are still in denial change their attitudes? Botswana currently has the worst burden of AIDS in the world; about 38 percent of the adult population is infected.

"My wife, **Carisa**, is working on HIV here as well, in public health communications, and our daughter is in school here in the equivalent of fourth grade.

"We are living out here for a year to two years, in a pleasant little house in the capital, Gaborone. The weather at

this time of year (summer here) is hot, running between 90F and 105F daily. The people are pleasant and open. What is most interesting is to see the culture here—it is caught with one foot in the 1700's and one foot in the 21st century. There are great numbers of cell phones, more than land lines, but at the same time donkey carts are in the street and you must watch out for goats and cows while driving. Traditional healers using spirit medicine and consultation with ancestors are the chief form of treatment, but there are some sophisticated medical laboratories and top-notch Western doctors as well. There are no independent daily newspapers and, until this year, no journalism school. I hope to teach journalism at the first journalism program later this year."

—1991—

**Tim Giago**, owner, publisher and editor of the *Lakota Journal*, the largest independent American Indian newspaper in the nation, has purchased the *King Press* from the *Durango Herald* in Durango, Colorado. Giago says, "There's an old adage—'Freedom of the press belongs to those who own the press'—and I've always felt that to control the quality of the newspaper and the timeliness of it, you need to own your press. Otherwise, you're at the mercy of the printer." The press will enable the *Lakota Journal* to print different quantities of a large variety of publications: "My goal is to see the



Apprentice printers Dave Charging, Bryan "Kelly" Charging Cloud, press foreman Paul Mousseau, and Tim Giago, publisher, stand in front of the new *King Press* purchased by the *Lakota Journal*.

point where we are printing many other Indian newspapers and other commercial print jobs along with books, maps, brochures and catalogs," Giago says. "We will produce quality printing at competitive prices but, best of all, all of my printers will be Lakota. The press has opened up several career opportunities for the Indian people and, in the end, that's what it's all about."

—1993—

**Terry Tang**, former editor of *The New York Times's* op-ed page, has joined the paper's technology news desk as deputy editor.

Having worked as a lawyer for a firm in Seattle and for a Seattle weekly, Tang joined the *Times's* editorial page in 1997 after eight years as a columnist and editorial writer with *The Seattle Times*.

**Andrew (Sandy) Tolan** is a teaching fellow at the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley. He writes, "I have a two-semester appointment as a visiting fellow cosponsored by the Graduate School of Journalism and the Center for Latin American Studies at UC Berkeley. In the fall I was the I.F. Stone Fellow at the J-School. I am teaching a two-semester class called 'Politics and Petroleum,' which will culminate in about 10 students traveling to Venezuela, Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil and Peru to report on the effects of oil production in the region that the United States currently relies on most for its oil imports. (Latin America supplies about one-third of foreign oil to the United States, more than all Mideast countries combined.)

"Also, I am at work on a book, 'The Lemon Tree,' the story of a Palestinian and an Israeli who lived in the same house at different times, before and after July 1948, in what is now Ramle, Israel. The book will be published by Bloomsbury USA."

Tolan is cofounder of *Homelands Productions*, a public interest journalism organization covering the environment, the global economy, and indigenous affairs. *Homelands Productions*

specializes in documentary work for NPR.

—1994—

**Larry Tye**, director of the Health Coverage Fellowships and former reporter for *The Boston Globe*, is the recipient of an Alicia Patterson Foundation fellowship, the nation's oldest journalism writing fellowship. The one-year grants of \$35,000 are awarded to print journalists to "pursue independent projects of significant interest."

He writes, "The Alicia Patterson fellowship will help support my travels around the country to talk to Pullman porters, most of whom are in their late 80's or older (the last one I talked to was 102), and nearly all of whom are in precarious enough health that I try and get to them as soon as I find them."

"My book is tentatively titled, 'Rising from the Rails: Pullman Porters and the Birth of the Black Middle Class,' and I am writing it under contract to Henry Holt publishers. It, like so many good things in my life, was inspired during my Nieman year, when I took John Stilgoe's great course at the Graduate School of Design.

"I also have a Rockefeller Foundation media fellowship for this book, one that will let me spend the month of February reading/writing at the wonderful Bellagio Study and Conference Center on Lake Cuomo, Italy."

—1997—

**Verónica López** has been appointed Counselor of Cultural Affairs at the Embassy of Chile in Washington, D.C. Prior to her appointment, López was the editor of the Saturday magazine of *El Mercurio*, Chile's main newspaper. She writes, "that has been my job for over 30 years, founding and launching magazines, mostly feature magazines, except *Seman*, in Colombia, which was a news magazine.

"The main issues in the last magazine I had worked with were focused on emphasizing the importance of cultural and social topics in the comeback of democracy in Chile. In the 1990's, theater was back, literature was back,

### *Honoring Mark Chavunduka Through 'Distress Fund'*

Many of Mark Chavunduka's friends are memorializing him through the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). CPJ maintains a "distress fund" for journalists that offers emergency help to those whose work puts them at risk. When he needed help a year ago, Mark himself got money from this fund. Contributions in Mark's name can be sent to:

Joel Simon  
Committee to Protect Journalists  
330 7th Ave.  
12th Floor  
New York, NY 10001

Please earmark any contribution for the distress fund and make checks out to CPJ. ■

and women's issues were back. At some point, the government thought I could contribute in the United States, in this field, to the new free trade agreement between Chile and the United States that will be signed soon. Even though tariffs, production, imports and exports, and jobs are the main issues, there is also a big area to look into in cultural and education interchange. I am doing my best to spread Chilean idiosyncrasies through forums, conferences and cultural events."

—1999—

**Mary Williams Walsh**, a reporter at *The New York Times*, received the George Polk Journalism Award in the health care reporting category along with Walt Bogdanich and Barry Meier.

Bogdanich, Meier and Walsh won the award for a series that "showed how two private companies cornered the market on the sale of drugs, medical devices, and other supplies to many hospitals, inflating costs while distributing inferior products," according to *The Associated Press* news release.

The Polk awards were created by Long Island University in 1949 to honor the CBS reporter killed while covering the Greek civil war.

—2000—

**Mary Kay Magistad** writes, "As of January 2003, I am the Beijing-based Northeast Asia correspondent for the Public Radio International/BBC program 'The World.' That means that North and South Korea are most definitely part of my patch (and have, not surprisingly, been taking up most of my time since I arrived).

"Before this, I opened National Public Radio's (NPR) Beijing bureau and was NPR's China correspondent, 1995-99. I had also been NPR's Southeast Asia correspondent, 1993-95, and a regular Bangkok-based stringer for *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, and NPR in Southeast Asia, 1988-92."

**Thrity Umrigar's** memoir, "First Darling of the Morning," will be published by HarperCollins, India, this summer. The book tells the story of Umrigar's childhood in postcolonial Bombay, India, and ends with her leaving for the United States at age 21 to continue her education. Both a lament and a valentine to the city of her birth, the book shows how the political and the personal converge in the life of one middle-class Indian girl.

Umrigar, currently a visiting professor of creative writing at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, is also the author of the novel, "Bombay Time" (PicadorUSA, 2001).

—2001—

**Mark Pothier** is now senior assistant metro editor for *The Boston Globe*. He had been assistant metro editor. His responsibilities now include *Globe South*, a zoned twice-weekly edition of the paper that covers 48 cities and towns. He also writes regularly for *The Boston Globe Magazine*, which is published on Sundays.

**Ron Stodghill**, a senior writer and former Midwest bureau chief at *Time*, has been named the new editor in chief of *Savoy*, a *Vanity Fair*-inspired, 325,000-circulation, 10-times-yearly magazine serving African Americans.

Vanguard chairman/CEO Keith

Clinkscales, one of the founders of Savoy along with the magazine's visionary and former editor in chief, Roy S. Johnson, expressed his confidence that Stodghill is the right person for the post: "Because the publication is African American-oriented, I felt it was important that it have an African-American editor."

"I would have limited the talent pool greatly if I had said that [editor in chief experience] was a requirement," Clinkscales says. "Ron has a great management ability, a great journalistic curiosity, a sense of news, and the right cultural sensitivities."

Stodghill plans on picking up where Johnson left off: "[Keith] and Roy were

successful in starting an energetic dialogue with readers," he says. "My role will be to refine and continue this relationship."

—2002—

**Agnes Nindorera**, a producer at Studio Ijambo in Bujumbura, Burundi, at the time of her Nieman Fellowship, is now a research fellow at the Center for Human Rights & Conflict Resolution at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. She writes, "[The fellowship] provides support ... for a year. As a research fellow, I am expected to write a paper related to community-based leadership for

more peace and stability in Burundi. Also, I have to participate in the intellectual life of the university and attend meetings with other fellows hosted by other universities of the greater Boston area. I am also auditing classes related to my work at Fletcher and the John F. Kennedy School of Government this spring term."

Nindorera's fellowship is funded by the Boston Consortium for Gender, Security and Human Rights, a group of five leading academic centers and programs "dedicated to research on issues of gender and security, human rights, conflict resolution and prevention." ■

## College the Second Time Around

By Morgan Baker

In the fall of 2001, I met Dejan, Lidija and Madka from Serbia. I met Agnes from Burundi, Wasiri from Nigeria, Owasi, Amra and their children from Pakistan, and the Schofields from Missouri.

My husband was the Nieman, I was the affiliate—the term for spouses and significant others. I knew the year would be good for Matt. What I didn't know was that the year would profoundly affect me, too.

I tried new things. I took courses in psychology and human development and sat in on lectures and seminars about politics and journalism. I went Salsa dancing and made pottery. I watched and admired Yuan stand by her husband quietly and protectively as he died of cancer at Brigham and Women's Hospital. I watched the Greens debate whether to return to Israel at the end of the year. I listened to Middle Eastern journalists explain why so many dislike America.

I also learned how much we take our free press for granted. U.S. journalists might get hate mail, even death threats, but they're just threats. Journalists in other countries are often in a

more precarious position: threatened and chased and, if caught, beaten or killed to keep them silent. I met some of those journalists. One planned to stay here for another year and others were anxious about what they would be returning to.

Our kids' worlds also expanded. They celebrated Chinese New Year with Yuan. They played international soccer. Ellie's new best friend Sana is from Pakistan, and Maggie's ready to live somewhere else, "bored" with the United States. One day, some of the kids decided to play basketball at a nearby playground, and I watched as a group of 15 kids aged six to 14 walked down the street together speaking in different accents.

We had a party for Greek Easter in the spring. A local friend came and said it felt like college, except everyone was middle-aged. That's what's made this year so inexplicably great. We've had the opportunity to be college students sharing common interests again, but with maturity as our gift.

Our family went to our first Bar Mitzvah in May at the only synagogue in Cambridge, for Avishai. I didn't un-

derstand the whole service, but I saw how hard this young boy/man had studied and how well he did. Not only were his parents and family from Israel proud of him but so were the children from America, Costa Rica, South Africa, Pakistan, and Serbia.

I admire the Nieman families who left their lives behind and moved to Cambridge, where they made new friends and lived a different lifestyle. I watched families navigate a new city and grapple with a foreign language. I saw how exciting it could be to try something new and a bit scary.

Our Nieman year came to a close. Our new friends returned to Washington, D.C., Seattle, New York, New Delhi, Costa Rica, Johannesburg and Beijing. We stayed here, left behind. I'm afraid of driving around Cambridge, afraid I'm going to see the back of someone's head, a gait, a ring of cigarette smoke and do a double take before I realize it's not Zoran or Giannina or Dave. ■

*Morgan Baker is a Nieman affiliate from the class of 2002. She teaches at Emerson College in Boston and is a freelance writer.*

## Letter to the Editor

Although I admire Peter Lord as a reporter and have for two decades supported his work, it is impossible to let his opinions of *The Providence Journal* go unchallenged.

In his article about environment coverage (*Nieman Reports*, Winter 2002), Mr. Lord wrote that “we haven’t had pay raises for three years.” First, it should be pointed out that the newspaper’s management and the newspaper guild, representing about 450 news, advertising and janitorial employees, have been in contentious negotiations for three years and have not agreed on a contract and that Mr. Lord is a member of the union. Therefore, I view it as a failure on his part and on the part of *Nieman Reports* to point out that the lack of a contract accounts for the lack of a pay raise. In fact, more than 700 other *Journal* employees, including members of the Teamsters’ and Pressman’s unions, have received raises because of contracts signed since *Belo* Companies acquired the newspaper.

He also contends that staff buyouts and departures have resulted in a loss of institutional knowledge. While it is true that 25 news people voluntarily left the paper when buyouts were offered in the fall of 2001, there are currently 80 news employees (out of a full and part-time news staff of 248) who have worked here more than 20 years, among them 25 reporters.

Sincerely,

*Joel P. Rawson  
Senior Vice President  
and Executive Editor  
The Providence Journal  
Company*

# End Note

## ‘News to Images’

Painter Melora Kuhn first saw a photograph of Canada’s Dionne quintuplets in *The Boston Globe* in 1998 in an article about their success suing their government because of the separation from their parents while they were young children. The article included a history of the exploitation of the quintuplets by their parents and others, and Kuhn said she was “compelled by the fear and sadness in their expressions, and the story struck me as tragic and obscene.” She did a painting reflecting her reaction to that photo and article. In 2001, she read about the death of one of the quintuplets in *The New York Times*. The photo accompanying the *Times* article showed them, at least on the surface, to be happy, well-adjusted children. Kuhn painted their portrait again.

In July of 2000, painter Jose Santos read a letter to the editor of *The New York Times*. He was struck by the line, “Since 1980 we have produced more prison cells than low-income housing units. And most new prisons are in rural Congressional districts—in other words, a jobs program for rural, white residents who overwhelmingly vote Republican....” Troubled by the information in the letter, he read more news articles about prisons. Then he spent painstaking months working on paintings to reflect his feelings about the U.S. prison system, exploring “the physical space of being imprisoned, treating it as a subject that is disturbing and beautiful at the same time.”

These are two of 11 artists whose work was a part of “News to Images,” a show about how visual artists absorb what they see and read in the press and turn the mix of information and emotion into art.

“News to Images” was presented in the fall of 2002 in the gallery of the Brickbottom Artist Building in Somerville, Massachusetts. The germ of the show began in the summer of 2000, while I was looking for images to use in a section of *Nieman Reports* focusing on photojournalism and war. One photo I found from Sierra Leone was of a boy without a hand. It had been cut off by a group of young rebels. An image came to mind of what it might have been like at the moment the hand was cut off: the boy lying flat on the ground, his face in the dirt, his wrists in pain. He starts to lift his head to see what happened and realizes that his arms have moved, but his hands are dead still. For years that image stayed with me until, finally, the idea of creating a show made up of artists similarly haunted by a newspaper article or photograph gave me the context to act, and I was able to paint my images, “The Moment It Happened.”

In working with the artists who were part of this show, I was moved by the surprising and often profound effect journalism can have on its readers. ■ —L.F.

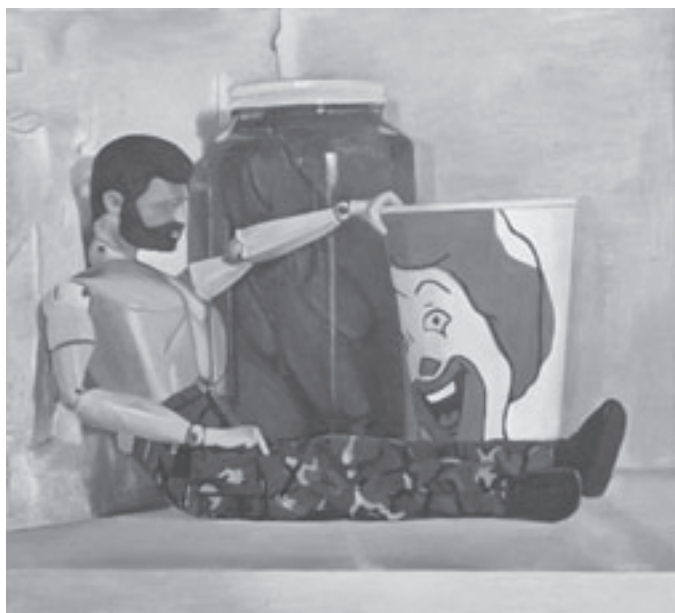




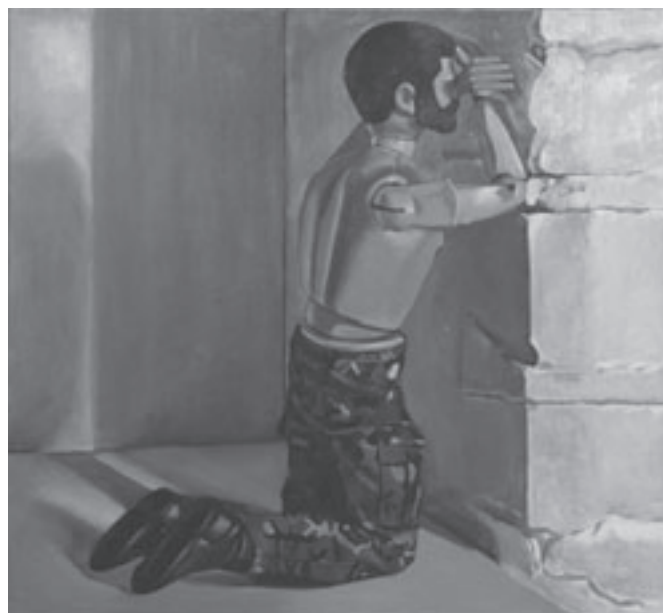
“Dionne Quintuplets I”  
Oil on canvas, 41" x 35"  
Melora Kuhn



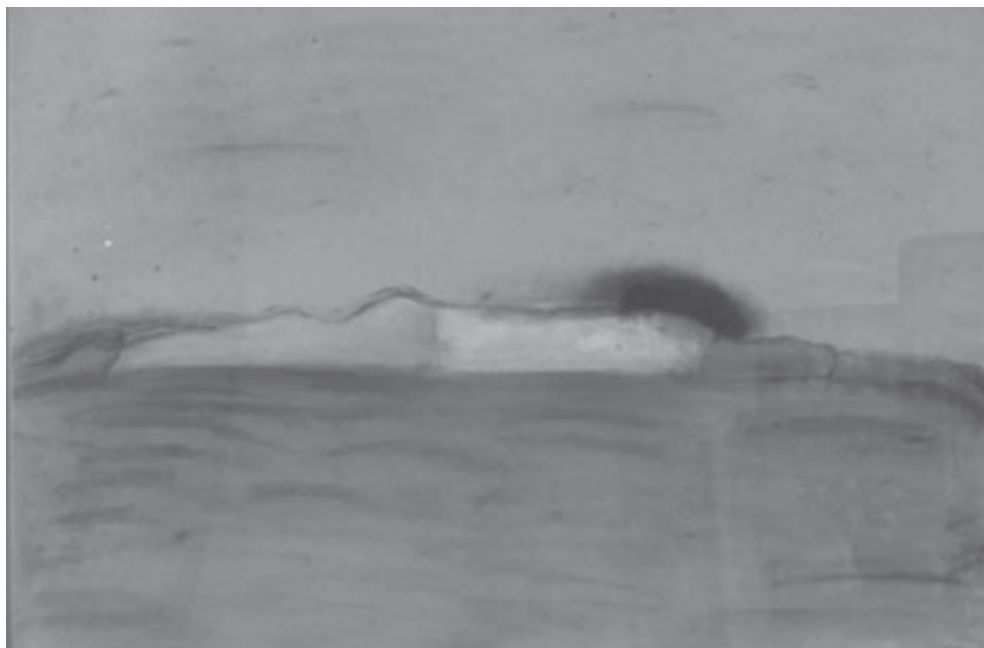
“Dionne Quintuplets II”  
Oil on canvas, 47" x 54"  
Melora Kuhn



“American Pie”  
Oil on canvas, 38" x 40"  
Jose Santos



“Wailing”  
Oil on canvas, 38" x 40"  
Jose Santos



“The Moment It Happened” I and II  
Pastel on paper, 29" x 43"  
Lois Fiore