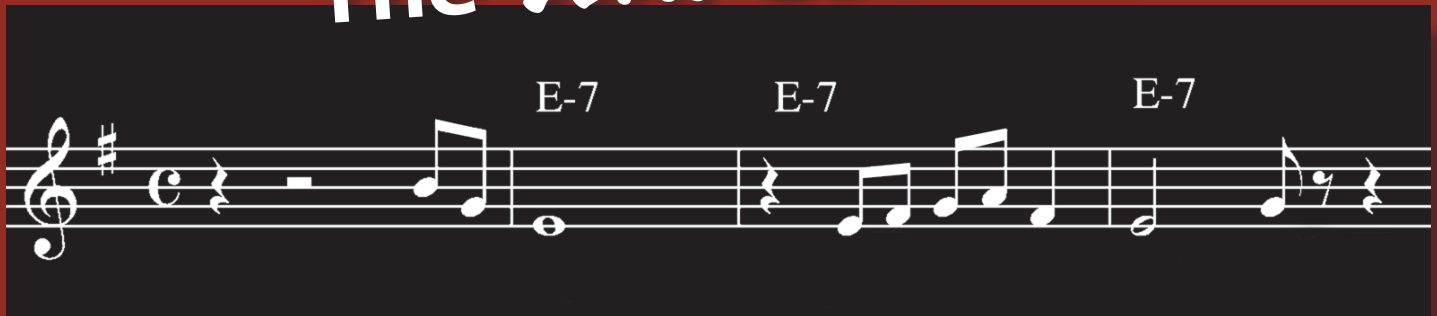


Nieman Reports

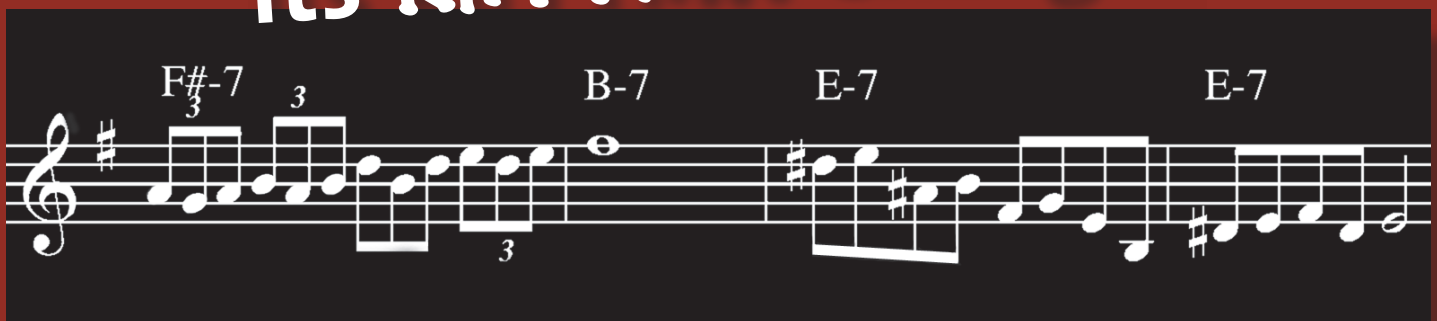
THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

VOL. 64 NO. 4 WINTER 2010

The BEAT Goes On



Its RHYTHM Changes



‘to promote and elevate the standards of journalism’

Agnes Wahl Nieman
the benefactor of the Nieman Foundation

Vol. 64 No. 4 Winter 2010
Nieman Reports
The Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University

Bob Giles | Publisher
Melissa Ludtke | Editor
Jan Gardner | Assistant Editor
Jonathan Seitz | Editorial Assistant
Diane Novetsky | Design Editor

Nieman Reports (USPS #430-650) is published in March, June, September and December by the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University, One Francis Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138-2098.

Subscriptions/Business
Telephone: 617-496-6299
E-mail Address:
nreports@harvard.edu

Subscription \$25 a year, \$40 for two years; add \$10 per year for foreign airmail. Single copies \$7.50. Back copies are available from the Nieman office.

Please address all subscription correspondence to One Francis Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138-2098 and change of address information to P.O. Box 4951, Manchester, NH 03108. ISSN Number 0028-9817

Editorial
Telephone: 617-496-6308
E-mail Address:
nreditor@harvard.edu

Internet Address:
www.niemanreports.org

Copyright 2010 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Periodicals postage paid at Boston, Massachusetts and additional entries.

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to
Nieman Reports
P.O. Box 4951
Manchester, NH 03108

4 The Beat Goes On—Its Rhythm Changes

The Beat: The Building Block

- 5 The Capriciousness of Beats | *By Kate Galbraith*
- 7 It's Scary Out There in Reporting Land | *By David Cay Johnston*
- 9 The Blog as Beat | *By Juanita León*
- 11 A Journalistic Vanishing Act | *By Elizabeth Maupin*
- 13 From Newsroom to Nursery—The Beat Goes On | *By Diana K. Sugg*
- 15 Family Beat: Stories We Tell Around the Kitchen Table | *By Beth Macy*

The Beat: The Watchful Eye

- 17 It's Expertise That Matters | *By Michael Riley*
- 19 When Local Eyes Were Watching Their Lawmakers | *By George E. Condon, Jr.*
- 22 Statehouse Beat Woes Portend Bad News for Good Government | *By Gene Gibbons*
- 26 Investigative Reporting About Secrecy | *By Ted Gup*

The Beat: The Science Angle

- 28 There's Something to Be Said for Longevity | *By Craig Welch*
- 31 The Science Beat: Riding a Wave, Going Somewhere | *By Charles Petit*
- 35 Eclectic, Entertaining and Educational—The 21st Century Science Beat | *By Paul Rogers*

The Beat: The Topic as Target

- 38 Modern-Day Slavery: A Necessary Beat—With Different Challenges
| *By E. Benjamin Skinner*
- 41 Visual Stories of Human Trafficking's Victims | *An Essay in Words and Photographs by
Melanie Hamman*
- 46 Geographic Fortunes—and Misfortunes—Define This New Midwest Beat
| *By Micheline Maynard*
- 48 Community Host: An Emerging Newsroom 'Beat' Without a Guide
| *By TBD's Community Engagement Team*

The Beat: The Sports Reporter

- 51 The Sports Beat: A Digital Reporting Mix—With Exhaustion Built In | *By Dave Kindred*
- 54 Frank Deford: Sports Writing in the Internet Age | *Excerpt from a speech by Frank Deford*
- 56 The Sports Tweet: New Routines on an Old Beat | *By Lindsay Jones*
- 58 The Sportswriter as Fan: Me and My Blog | *By Jason Fry*
- 60 It's a Brand-New Ballgame—For Sports Reporters | *By Malcolm Moran*
- 63 A Shrinking Sports Beat: Women's Teams, Athletes | *By Marie Hardin*

Words & Reflections

- 65 From Journalism to Self-Publishing Books | *By Fons Tuinstra*
- 67 Figuring Out What a 21st Century Book Can Be | *By Dan Gillmor*
- 69 Creating a Navigational Guide to New Media | *Excerpt from a book by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel*
- 71 Measuring Progress: Women as Journalists | *By Kay Mills*

- 3 **Curator's Corner: Expanding the Vision of the Nieman Foundation** | *By Bob Giles*

- 73 **Nieman Notes** | *Compiled by Jan Gardner*
- 73 Returning Home to Sri Lanka to Face Difficult and Delicate Questions in Perilous Times | *By Suwendrini Kakuchi*
- 75 Class Notes
- 86 Letters to the Editor
- 88 End Note: Unforgettable Characters Encountered in Covering the Civil Rights Movement | *By Wayne Greenhaw*



Teaching Journalism?

Turn to Professor's Corner—Nieman Reports's companion website. Here we combine stories from our pages with fresh articles and useful links. We bundle these resources in ways that provide ease of access to ideas for planning curriculum with content that works well for classroom teaching. Here are two highlights:

- **J-School Partnerships: Engaging Students in Producing News:** This is a collection of resources and stories about universities that are partnering with media outlets; students' coverage of news is published and broadcast to an audience far beyond the campus.
- **Visual Journalism:** Here we offer a valuable combination of insights from photographers, multimedia producers, and professors about ways to teach photojournalism and the production of multimedia reports.

Expanding the Vision of the Nieman Foundation

‘Ten years later, as I prepare to retire in June, the foundation has a respected voice in the vibrant conversations about the future of journalism.’

BY BOB GILES

When I arrived at Lippmann House in early August 2000 to begin my tenure as curator, I had only an inkling of the sweeping changes that would wash over journalism and mainstream news organizations during the coming decade.

My predecessor, Bill Kovach, in announcing his retirement, had a clearer picture of what the Nieman Foundation needed: a leader who was closer to the technological revolution sweeping the profession because of the Internet.

Instead of a curator with a Web 1.0 grasp of the new digital world at that moment, Harvard hired a man who was, at best, a Web 0.0. Ten years later, as I prepare to retire in June, the foundation has a respected voice in the vibrant conversations about the future of journalism. Its online presence has built a large and growing audience while enriching the experience of Nieman Fellows.

In my last years as a newspaper editor, I understood that an emerging culture of innovation and experimentation would reshape journalism. I pushed my staff at The Detroit News to launch detnews.com in 1995. I couldn't tell you how they did it, but I loved what my role as editor empowered me to do: Hire talented people, give them freedom to carry out their responsibilities, encourage creativity, and enable them to bring the best ideas to life.

Meeting with the Nieman staff on that first day, I recognized that change wouldn't come quickly but that new thinking had to begin. Nieman Reports (niemanreports.org) existed on the foundation's website, though in rudimentary form. Through the years, the magazine's digital footprint has grown considerably—with slideshows, audio and curated links supplementing its content—and its global audience continues to expand via social media. Editor Melissa Ludtke, NF '92, and her staff serve journalism educators through Professor's Corner, where original content is paired online with stories from the magazine for use by faculty and students.

The first major innovation was establishing the Nieman Narrative Journalism Program. Mark Kramer came from Boston University in 2001 to build an annual conference that drew many hundreds and associated the Nieman Foundation with the best in journalistic storytelling. His successor, Constance Hale, brought the narrative experience onto the foundation's website, and when financial cutbacks in 2009 forced us to suspend the conference, Andrea Pitzer, an '08 affiliate, stepped in to create Nieman Storyboard (niemanstoryboard.us), which sustains the foundation's

presence in the world of narrative.

In 2004, Barry Sussman, who edited coverage of Watergate at The Washington Post, joined us to create the Nieman Watchdog Project (niemanwatchdog.org). It strengthens reporters' ability to ask insightful questions by publishing essays by experts with a deep knowledge of pertinent issues—a process similar to the learning experience of Nieman Fellows in Harvard's classrooms.

In the fall of 2007, I told the Nieman Foundation Advisory Board that it was important for the foundation to find its place in the critical discussions about how technology was changing journalism. We spent a year investigating the idea before deciding to launch a project that became the Nieman Journalism Lab (niemanlab.org). Joshua Benton, who was just completing his Nieman year, was hired as director. Through a mixture of original reporting and research, analysis and commentary, and the input of a vibrant community of innovators and thinkers, the lab has become a core resource for those who are trying to figure out how quality journalism can thrive and survive in the Internet age. By its second anniversary this October, the lab had generated 2.4 million page views.

The expansion of Walter Lippmann House in 2003 enabled the foundation to introduce an era of Nieman conferences. Fellows meet for seminars with policymakers, scholars and other journalists in this enlarged space, which is where we host dinners, soundings, workshops and conferences. In her role as special projects manager, Stefanie Friedhoff, NF '01, organizes a range of events for fellows, the Harvard community, and targeted audiences where reporters and potential sources meet in an environment that lessens tensions and misunderstandings and where they are exposed to authoritative knowledge and fresh ideas.

The Nieman Foundation's capacity for change and growth has been supported by a solid financial base built on an endowment that has grown substantially as part of the university's investment portfolio. Over the past decade, the foundation itself has raised \$9 million from grant givers to underwrite fellowships and programs and from friends and alumni whose gifts helped pay off the investment in enlarging and renovating Lippmann House.

I have come to deeply appreciate two of the Nieman Foundation's many blessings: its special role as an independent part of a university community that is welcoming to its fellows and a universe of journalists around the world proud to say they are Nieman Fellows. ■

The Beat Goes On—Its Rhythm Changes

Beats are the newsroom’s skeletal structure. Assigned to cover specific topics, reporters employ laser-like attention to deliver depth, dimension and context in their stories. Time translates into expertise—and after a while, the reporter is able to offer the level of judgment that an editor needs to rely on.

Now, as newsrooms shrink and blogs multiply, news and information gets absorbed in different ways by a more fragmented audience. For bloggers, the backbone of what they publish resembles the beats of older media with regular digging into a topic or tapping into what makes a locale click—creating a gaggle of expertise within an interactive community.

Economic circumstances and digital opportunities now dictate the demise of some familiar beats: Foreign bureaus have shut down, as have some bureaus in Washington, D.C. and other U.S. cities, leaving some reporters who covered federal agencies, statehouses and city halls without a beat; longtime arts critics who see their job descriptions change decide to move on, some to the Web; and as the space for science reporting shrinks in traditional media outlets, digital venues feature subdivided beats.

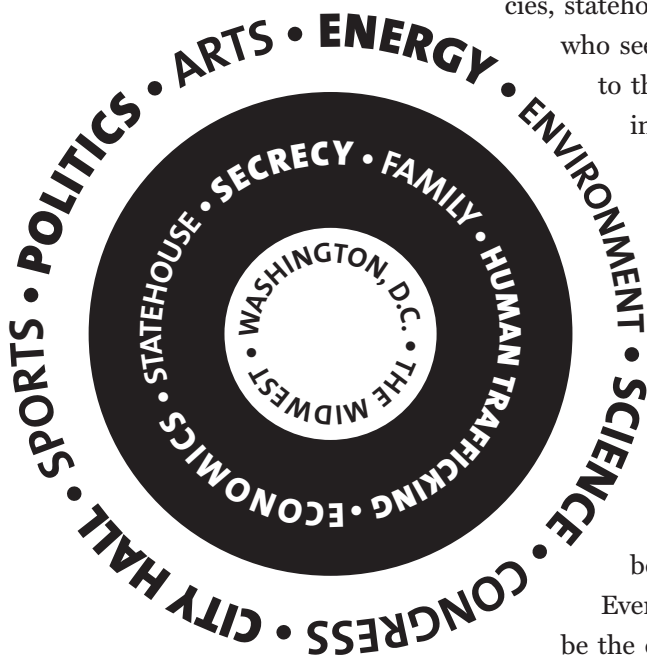
At this time, too, new beats emerge. At “Changing Gears,” a public media project, the future of the industrial Midwest is a collaborative beat; at the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism an earmarked gift supports E. Benjamin Skinner’s reporting beat on modern-day slavery; and at TBD, the “community host” job is a “beat” of social media and aggregation.

In sports coverage, hometown teams—women’s teams being a lingering exception—still garner beat attention. Even so, the pace of the sports reporters’ daily grind could be the canary in journalism’s coal mine given their care and feeding of a hungry audience empowered by social media. Lindsay

Jones, who covers the NFL Broncos for The Denver Post, writes that: “I don’t get much sleep. My thumbs get tired. And I’ve figured out that if I am going to half-walk, half-run to tweet breaking news, I need to wear sneakers.”

Sneakers keep her moving until exhaustion sets in. On top of regular reporting duties, the beat reporter tracks innumerable team-related blogs and Twitter feeds, tweets constantly, writes blog posts, live-blogs the game, and then files and updates stories at a pace unimagined even a few years ago. “From the time I get to the ballpark, four hours before a game, until I’m done two hours or so after, I’m writing constantly,” says Wallace Matthews, a veteran reporter who covered the New York Yankees as a beat reporter for the first time this past season with ESPNNewYork.com.

In this Winter 2010 issue of Nieman Reports, our gaze stretches from what was the beat to what it is becoming. ■—Melissa Ludtke



The Capriciousness of Beats

‘Sometimes the overlooked topics may be more important than the ones that dominate the headlines.’

BY KATE GALBRAITH



Wind power consumes a lot of space on the energy beat, yet coal—powering close to half of our nation’s electricity—gets scant coverage. *Image courtesy of SeaEnergy PLC.*

This may sound sacrilegious, but I have always found the concept of beat reporting rather odd. Don’t get me wrong: I can’t think of a better way to divvy up the labor of getting out the daily news—or up-to-the-minute news, as the case may be. Beats help reporters define their roles and ensure minimal overlap. That’s efficient. But beats also strike me as potentially limiting.

Imagine the news as a pie. There is a wedge for the automotive industry, a wedge for the airline industry, a wedge for energy, a wedge for Wall Street, one for personal finance, and so on. Actually, that’s just for business news, but you get the idea.

Add up all the wedges, and there’s plenty of unclaimed pie left over. When do news organizations ever shine a light on timber companies, for example—or private prison operators or railroads or plumbing conglomerates (if such things exist)? Chemical companies? Laundromats? Funeral parlors?

Sometimes the overlooked topics may be more important than the ones that dominate the headlines. Take the industry I cover: energy. From the amount of television, newspaper and new media coverage—and I’m as guilty as anyone—you would think the world is flooded with solar panels and wind turbines. Not true: Combined, those two sources of energy provide only 2 percent of our electricity in this country. Coal—which generates close to half of our electricity—gets scant coverage, except of course when there is an accident. (Ken Ward, Jr.’s terrific *Coal Tattoo* blog for the Charleston (W. Va.) *Gazette* is an honorable exception.)

There’s a reason for this, of course. Reporters by definition like to cover “new” stuff. A century ago, the oil

beat was a plum assignment, with wildcatters converging on Texas. But nowadays who wants to dwell on the coal, oil and gas industries when there are new problems in new industries to be discovered. Will wind power companies get stymied by complaints over noise and ruined views? When will solar panels get cheaper? How do you store the energy produced by sources like the wind or sun, which work only in accordance with nature's whim? These are some of the cutting-edge questions of the modern day.

Similarly, I'm struck by the amount of coverage devoted to the proliferation of social media. I like Twitter as much as the next person, but it accounts for a total of about 10 minutes of my day (well, maybe 20). And I'm far from fluent in FourSquare, reddit, and some of the other Very Important Inventions that, judging from the coverage they get, are about to revolutionize the world. Privately, I enjoy the irony that daily newspapers—the dinosaur print type—devote columns of space to these trends, when their pre-Baby Boomer readers probably have less of a clue about this stuff than I do. I also am tickled by the fact that the one old-industry beat that the media *never* neglect is ... newspapers.

Coverage of new technologies is natural and important. Times and habits are changing, and I don't mean to suggest otherwise. News must be forward-looking. But there's also a danger of neglecting traditional industries.

There's no better illustration of this than the BP oil spill. Day after day this past summer, new and extraordinary revelations tumbled out about the offshore oil drilling business, as journalists and investigators turned their full attention to the Gulf. Who knew there was such a thing as blow-out preventers, and that the United States (unlike Norway or Brazil) didn't require remote-control switches that could activate them if all else failed?

Who knew that industry regulators sometimes waived big environmental reviews for deepwater projects? Who had ever heard of Transocean—a company that even after the spill has a market capital of \$21 billion, far more than a recent guess at Twitter's valuation (\$1.6 billion). Frankly, it terrifies me to think about what industries—nuclear waste storage, anyone?—we're neglecting, especially given current financial pressures on media outlets.

Take the industry I cover, energy. From the amount of television, newspaper and new media coverage—and I'm as guilty as anyone—you would think the world is flooded with solar panels and wind turbines. Not true: Combined, those two sources of energy provide only 2 percent of our electricity in this country.

There is so much more to cover. I sometimes feel that if only time, money and talent allowed, there could be five New York Times's worth of news every day, with (in theory) no sacrifice of quality. There would be room to cover the wedges that fall outside of traditional beats and room to delve into the neglected corners of existing beats.

The Randomness of News

This leads me to my final theory, which is that the nature of news is essentially random. Sure, any media outlet has things it must cover—the economy, elections and so forth. But because far more news exists than any single media outlet can handle, it's up to the reporters' (and editors') discretion as to where their interests lie. For example, when I served as the Austin-based Southwest correspondent

for *The Economist* from 2005 to 2007, I became fascinated by alternative energy so I wrote about the wind turbines proliferating in West Texas and the green initiatives of Wal-Mart. My successor has done more immigration stories. The balance is probably good for readers.

Local media has less discretion because its coverage has stricter geographical bounds. These days, I cover energy and the environment for *The Texas Tribune*, an online start-up and a job I truly love. There are certain subjects I can't skip—battles between Texas and the Environmental Protection Agency over air pollution permits, for example, and controversy over a natural gas drilling technique known as hydraulic fracturing. And I have pages of ideas, many of which will never see the light of day because I just don't have time.

The proliferation of new media is actually helping to solve the problem of too much news. The nonprofit *Texas Tribune* sees itself as a complement to other media, not a competitor. So if I see a story from a Texas paper that touches on an area I haven't covered, I tweet it out to my followers and put a link on TribWire—our homepage feed for interesting stories about Texas from around the Web. Unless I have something meaningful to add, I happily cross the topic off my list.

Twitter and Google, in other words, help knock off more wedges from the collective news pie, by bringing readers into contact with stories they might not have seen otherwise. Even still, there is a lot to cover—and there's less reason than ever to wall oneself off into a silo. A beat functions best as a starting point, not a boundary. ■

Kate Galbraith, a 2008 Nieman Fellow, covers energy and the environment for The Texas Tribune.

It's Scary Out There in Reporting Land

'Beats are fundamental to journalism, but our foundation is crumbling.'

BY DAVID CAY JOHNSTON

To understand how badly we're doing the most basic work of journalism in covering the law enforcement beat, try sitting in a barbershop. When I was getting my last haircut, the noon news on the television—positioned to be impossible to avoid watching—began with a grisly murder. The well-educated man in the chair next to me started ranting about how crime is out of control.

But it isn't. I told Frank, a regular, that crime isn't running wild and his chance of being burglarized today is less than one quarter what it was in 1980.¹ The shop turned so quiet you could have heard a hair fall to the floor had the scissors not stopped. The barbers and clients listened intently as I next told them about how the number of murders in America peaked back in the early 1990's at a bit south of 25,000 and fell to fewer than 16,000 in 2009. When we take population growth into account, this means your chance of being murdered has almost been cut in half.

"So why is there so much crime on the news every day?" Diane, who was cutting Frank's hair, asked.

"Because it's cheap," I replied. "And with crime news you only have to get the cops' side of the story. There is no ethical duty to ask the arrested for their side of the story."

Cheap news is a major reason that every day we are failing in our core mission of providing people with the knowledge they need for our democracy to function. Barry Glassner, in an important book every journalist should read, tells us how cheap news badly done spreads false beliefs and racial distrust. It's been a decade since he came out with "The Culture

of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things." By my sights, the problems Glassner described have gotten worse, much worse.

Does Anybody Care?

Beats are fundamental to journalism, but our foundation is crumbling. Whole huge agencies of the federal government and, for many news organizations, the entirety of state government go uncovered. There are school boards and city councils and planning commissions that have not seen a reporter in years. The outrageous salaries that were paid to Bell, California city officials—close to \$800,000 to the city manager, for example—would not have happened if just one competent reporter had been covering that city hall in Southern California. But no one was, and it took an accidental set of circumstances for two reporters from the Los Angeles Times to reveal this scandal. [See box about the Bell, California story on page 23.]

Four decades ago when I covered local government meetings in Silicon Valley for the San Jose Mercury, I always asked for copies of the agency budget. In those days, before spreadsheets or the first pocket calculator had been invented, I did long division in the margins to figure out trends and how the taxpayers' money was being spent. It not only relieved the tedium of the meetings I sat through, but it produced story after story after story that engaged readers and at times infuriated officials while protecting the public purse.

Increasingly what I see are news reports evidencing a basic lack of knowledge about government. And

this isn't happening just with beat reporters but with the assignment and copy editors who are supposed to review stories before they get into print or on the air.

In the first 10 months of this year, a Nexis database search shows, newspapers and wire services reported more than 1,700 times that juries, grand or petite, handed *down* indictments and verdicts.

Sometimes I pick up the phone and call reporters whose stories contain this incredibly dumb mistake and politely try to educate them. Perhaps it's obnoxious, but somebody needs to do it. Some reporters ask me what difference it makes. A few have insisted that *down* is correct. Really, I ask. Even if people have never been in the courtroom, they would know from movies and television that the judge sits in the highest position and therefore juries hand *up* while judges hand *down*. When I've asked reporters and some editors how many votes are needed for a jury to convict, I've sometimes gotten back cautious, slow or wrong answers. And it's not a trick question. If any reporter doesn't instantly know this answer, then alarms should sound and training should promptly commence.

Far too much of journalism consists of quoting what police, prosecutors, politicians and publicists say—and this is especially the case with beat reporters. It's news on the cheap and most of it isn't worth the time it takes to read, hear or watch. Don't take my word for it. Instead look at declining circulation figures. People know value and they know when what they're getting is worth their time or worth the steadily rising cost of a subscription.

¹ Upon further checking, I learned that the chance of getting burglarized today is actually 42.5 percent of what it was in 1980.

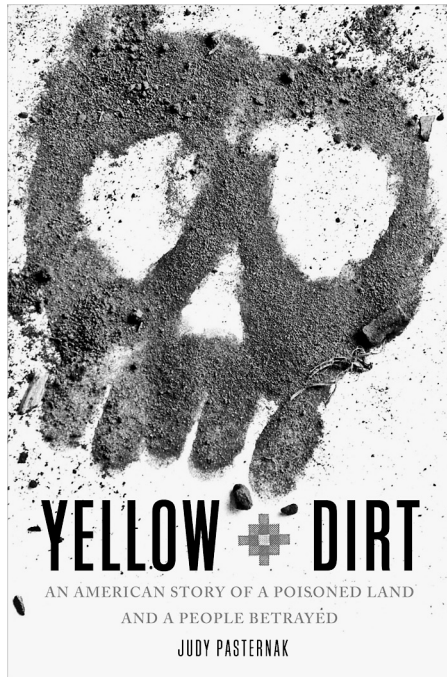
Books From the Beat: A More Complicated Equation

By Jan Gardner

Judy Pasternak, a former reporter at the Los Angeles Times, drew on expertise she developed covering the environment, science and other beats to write her first book. “Yellow Dirt: An American Story of a Poisoned Land and a People Betrayed,” published this past fall by the Free Press, builds on her series in the Times which focused on private companies that mined uranium on Navajo land for decades and failed to protect their workers or the environment.

At the time of the series, Pasternak was a member of the paper’s Washington-based national investigative team. The series and the book represent what Pasternak called a “harmonic convergence” of subjects, including ethnic and race relations, she covered during her 24 years at the Times.

In her book’s acknowledgements Pasternak credits the essential role that a newspaper can play in enabling a reporter to become an author. “Without the Los Angeles



Times, there would have been no book,” she writes. Now, the Times, like so many other papers, has had to cut back on its ambitions to take on sprawling, complex stories at the

same time that thin staffing and increased workloads make it more difficult for reporters to transform daily assignments into books.

Two years ago the journalism department at Boston University’s College of Communication convened a conference called “The Nonfiction Book as the Last Best Home for Journalism.” Ron Suskind, who had left his job as senior national affairs writer for The Wall Street Journal to pursue book-writing full time, identified the challenge of building a “strategic model” so that journalists who develop deep expertise on their beats will have the resources to sustain themselves while they write books. “The audience is hungry for such stories,” Suskind said. “But who will be paid to tell them and by whom?”

As book publishers in an era of e-books face their own set of economic challenges—and smaller advances are being paid to reporters-turned-authors—Suskind’s question takes on a new level of urgency. ■

Less for More

I also am board chairman and part owner of a very small business—we manage a small hotel—that follows a different customer policy than newspapers do. Every year the three papers I subscribe to cut quality and raise prices. When we charge our guests more, we give them something more—nicer shampoo, fluffier towels—and we tell them about the new benefit. Why should we think people would pay more for less and do so repeatedly?

One day a decade or so ago when Amtrak said my Metroliner would be delayed at 30th Street Station in Philadelphia, I ran upstairs and bought The Philadelphia Inquirer, where I worked for seven years. Buried inside I found a half column about the new

budget for Montgomery County, the wealthiest and most important county for the newspaper’s financial success. The story was mostly about the three commissioners yelling at each other. The total budget was mentioned, almost in passing, with no hint of whether it meant property taxes would go up or down, more money would be spent on roads or less, or any of the other basics that readers want to know.

For this I paid money? I could only imagine the reaction of the residents of Montgomery County.

This problem is not with the breakdown in the centuries-old economic model, a simple model that many journalists do not really understand. Connecting buyers and sellers who are in search of one another pays the bills. What draws them is a desire to

find out that which is important but that they did not know. We call this information the *news*.

Far too much of what we produce today is already widely known. We fill so many pages with rehashed or known information that on many days these publications could properly be called *oldspapers*. It’s not like there isn’t important and revealing news all around us. There is. It’s just that we seem swept up in a herd mentality with too narrow a focus and too much eagerness to rely on what sources tell us rather than asking these same people to address important facts that lie in plain sight in the public record.

Much of what passes for reporting about government these days is not only information that is useless, it is laughable nonsense, and I have the

coffee stains on my robe to prove it. Every morning I read “Beat the Press” on the Center for Economic and Policy Research website, which is liberal economist Dean Baker’s critique of the economic theory, policy and “facts” he finds on the front pages of The New York Times, The Washington Post, and other media outlets. Baker routinely picks apart articles that are as far from reality as a weather story that says the sun rose in the West.

Sometimes I send these criticisms on to the ombudsman or top editors of the offending publications. I have even put together packages showing from the newspaper’s own clips that what was printed is utterly false. But I rarely see any corrections made nor any insistence that writers actually know what they are writing about when it comes to government policy, economic policy, taxes or treaties.

During the past 15 years as I focused my reporting on how the American economy works and the role of government in shaping how the benefits and burdens of the economy are distributed, I’ve grown increasingly dismayed at the superficial and often dead wrong assumptions permeating the news. Every day in highly respected newspapers I read well-crafted stories with information that in years past I would have embraced but now know is nonsense, displaying a lack of understanding of economic theory and the regulation of business. The stories even lack readily available official data on the economy and knowledge of the language and principles in the law, including the Constitution.

What these stories have in common is a reliance on what sources *say* rather than what the official record shows. If covering a beat means finding sources

and sniffing out news, then a firm foundation of knowledge about the topic is essential, though not sufficient. Combine this with a curiosity to dig deeply into the myriad of documents that are in the public record—and then ask sources about what the documents show. ■

David Cay Johnston, while working at The New York Times, won the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for Beat Reporting for his coverage of loopholes and inequities in the U.S. tax code. He is a columnist for Tax Analysts and teaches the law of the ancient world at Syracuse University’s law and graduate business schools. “The Fine Print,” the third book in his series about the American economy, is scheduled to be published in 2011 by Penguin.

The Blog as Beat

‘... the Internet changes the concept of the beat: A blog such as ours becomes a valued partner of political reporters offering them additional sources and fresh angles for stories.’”

BY JUANITA LEÓN

I am convinced that the Internet is changing journalism in ways we never could have imagined only a few years ago. The idea of the reported story as being the basic unit of journalism is being shaken by the Web’s way of sharing information, and along with this change comes a rethinking about the concept of the beat itself.

A year and a half ago I set up an investigative political blog called La Silla Vacía (“The Empty Seat”). It is a website dedicated to covering how power is exercised in Colombia and, as such, it serves as a discussion platform about public issues in my country. With a staff of seven—and about 60 unpaid contributors—La Silla Vacía publishes stories that before we existed were not

being told. They are the stories that lie behind the news media’s typical daily political reporting.

In the United States, political blogs are too numerous to count. But in Colombia, La Silla Vacía is the first such experiment with sustainable independent journalism. Here, news organizations are concentrated among a few business conglomerates and families with political backgrounds so a news reporting outlet set up by journalists is truly innovative.

Although blogs are usually considered alternative media, I wanted La Silla Vacía to be regarded as a mainstream publication—to reside in the center of the political debate in Colombia, not on the fringes. It was

not an easy task. Fewer than 40 percent of the people who live in Colombia have Internet access. And although the Internet enables a multitude of voices to be heard, it doesn’t guarantee that everyone will be heard.

The Digital Political Beat

As happens with any new enterprise—digital or otherwise—it takes time to truly know what the audience has made of it. It also takes time for those directing it to understand what it is really about. Since launching the website in March 2009, one thing I have observed is that La Silla Vacía has been converted into a new—and influential—political beat. What we

The screenshot shows the website 'La Silla Vacía' with a header containing the site name and navigation links like 'Nosotros', 'Regístrate', and 'Nombre'. Below the header is a date 'Lunes 1 de Noviembre, 2010' and a menu with categories like 'PORTADA', 'HISTORIAS', 'LA MOVIDA', 'EL BLOGUEO', 'LA BUTACA', 'QUIÉN ES QUIÉN', 'USUARIOS', and 'QUERIDO DIARIO'. The main content area features a large image of a tombstone with the text 'R.I.P. POLÍTICO' and a list of 'HISTORIAS DE LA SEMANA' with various article titles. A sidebar on the right contains a 'VER' button and a view count of '845'. At the bottom, there is a section for 'EL BLOGUEO'.

La Silla Vacía (“The Empty Seat”) is changing the political beat in Colombia.

publish gets quoted each week by mainstream media like the newspaper *El Espectador*, Caracol radio, or *Semana* magazine.

I increasingly believe that the role of specialized blogs is to create beats for journalists. Typically, newspaper and TV reporters rely on tips from sources for their stories. Now blogs and journalistic websites like *La Silla Vacía* are starting to be significant forces in our media ecosystem. With an investigative blog like ours, we have four or five reporters covering one topic in-depth while the traditional beat reporter is expected to cover many issues at once. This means that the reporting we do often becomes a first stop for many newspaper and broadcast political reporters. By gathering expert opinion, inside information, and high-level analysis, we’ve created a hub from which can emerge new angles on news stories.

It’s in this way that the Internet changes the concept of the beat: A blog such as ours becomes a valued partner of political reporters offering

them additional sources and fresh angles for stories. And we in turn increase their capacity to broaden and improve their coverage.

This emerging role for specialized blogs as beats became evident to me when I was the editor of *flypmedia.com* in New York, a multimedia general interest magazine that unfortunately folded recently. The Iraq war was not going well and I was discussing with my boss whether we should send a reporter to cover it. The intern overheard us talking and she suggested another approach: Follow the soldiers’ and Iraq victims’ blogs instead of going there. We did just that; soon, several blogs were selected and we made them our Iraq beat.

I understand that is controversial in the minds of some journalists—and that there is nothing like being *there*, reporting with the five senses as the legendary Polish reporter Ryszard Kapuscinski would say. But many bloggers reveal details that they could hardly begin to tell a journalist in a brief interview. Even if they did, it is

unlikely that the complexity of their circumstance would be told with any sense of completeness in the correspondent’s story. Unless you stay in a place for a long time, as Kapuscinski did, it is not possible to aggregate as many voices as you can when, as an editor, you curate what is being produced on the Web.

That experience in New York changed my understanding of the concept of the “beat” in two ways that became apparent as I went about creating *La Silla Vacía*. We did not set out to cover traditional political beats. Instead we cover issues that emerge as political events occur, and we feed our site with content from social networks at the same time that we feed social networks with what we produce. Given the hypertextual nature of the Web, it is more important to offer context than it is to follow stories.

As Internet guru Jean-François Fogel has observed, news is no longer what a powerful person wants people to be prevented from knowing but what can be salvaged from the sea of information.

Political News

We have only four staff reporters so we know we can’t possibly cover all of the political news, especially in a country such as Colombia where big stories break every day—and sometimes twice a day. So we’ve compiled a list of Colombia’s most pressing political matters—a transitional justice process, the legal issues involving politicians with links to the paramilitary, the mining boom, land reform, and our nation’s wiretapping scandal. Each of our reporters is assigned to cover two of these macro issues and writes about them in a contextualized way. As our reporting is proceeding, we supply our audience with information about where the story is going. This is something they’ve told us that they appreciate a lot.

To give thorough coverage and provide context to these issues, we increasingly rely on social networks to supply information—at the same time we depend on our reporters.

For example, until four years ago abortion was illegal in Colombia in all circumstances. After an intense fight by women's organizations, the Constitutional Court ruled that abortion is permitted when the woman's life or health, including mental health, is in danger, when the fetus has severe malformations, or when the woman had been raped.

Although the ruling was a huge victory for women, its implementation in a country that is still Catholic has not been easy. But women's groups are following the process closely, and this means that they have a lot of information about it. At La Silla Vacía,

we watch closely what these women's groups report; they give us tips and information that we investigate further, and once we publish the story we post it in their Facebook groups to feed them with information. We follow the same process with advocacy networks involved with other topics we cover.

So while the topic becomes our beat, our stories are as much about what our reporters find as what we curate from the Web. It's our job to select the best information produced by the audience and make it more easily available for other users. This means that part of a reporter's time spent covering a beat is devoted to scanning

the Web; we have set up a schedule for our reporters to navigate the Web all day long and to tweet about what we see happening in the Colombian political blogosphere in real time.

This strategy for beat reporting pays off. Despite our tiny staff and small budget, La Silla Vacía has become a mandatory stop for political junkies in this country. We are the beat reporters they turn to when they are looking for news. ■

Juanita León, a 2007 Nieman Fellow, is the founder and editor of La Silla Vacía, a political news website in Colombia.

A Journalistic Vanishing Act

'As a refugee from daily newspapering, I'm one of thousands of arts journalists who in the past couple of years have found themselves footloose.'

BY ELIZABETH MAUPIN

Like most reporters, theater critics are not generally accused of being discreet. Granted, most of us don't actually use those notorious pens that light up in the dark. But we're still sitting there, scratching away on our reporters' notebooks, while audience members all around us are trying to concentrate on the play.

As a shy person, I used to cringe at intermission when people asked me, "Why are you taking notes?"

Now I dislike it even more—because I don't know what to say.

In February I quit my job after more than 26 years as the Orlando Sentinel's theater critic. Used to be I had an answer when people asked me what I did. Now I'm not so sure.

As a refugee from daily newspapering, I'm one of thousands of arts journalists who in the past couple of years have found themselves footloose. Douglas McLennan, the founder and editor of ArtsJournal.com (and himself a former classical music

critic for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer) estimates that in 2005 there may have been about 5,000 people covering various arts beats for American newspapers—critics, feature writers, cultural news reporters, and many who did all three.

Now, because of layoffs, cutbacks and the death of several major newspapers, McLennan says, that number has been cut in half. And that's a radical reduction, even in an industry that, according to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, has lost more than one newsroom job in four since 2001. Even if arts journalists were



American newspapers have sharply reduced coverage of the arts while the number of blogs covering this beat is on the rise.

not specifically targeted—and the nature of buyouts may mean that they weren't—half of all arts staff positions is still a pretty big bite.

Arts journalists have watched in wonder as the carnage has taken

place. In 2007 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution eliminated many of its critics' jobs; four more of its arts writers took buyouts in 2009. Earlier this year Variety laid off four arts writers, including its chief film and theater critics. Movie critics have lost their jobs in Tampa, Fort Lauderdale, Dallas and Denver, among other cities, and their copy has been replaced by wire. This summer the Orange County Register eliminated its highly regarded Arts Blog and reassigned its classical music critic and reporter to the celebrity beat.

My own circle of theater-critic friends has been caught in the same wave. In the past few years senior theater critics have taken buyouts at the (Newark) Star-Ledger, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, the Detroit Free Press, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, and The San Diego Union-Tribune. Others have left newspapers to take on more secure jobs outside journalism.

And my former colleagues at the Orlando Sentinel have felt their share of the turbulence—the TV critic reassigned to blog about media, celebrities and crime; the pop music critic split between music and a Florida travel column; the movie critic reduced to reviewing only the films that aren't covered by a sister paper, the Chicago Tribune.

Changing Notions

I was lucky, mostly. For most of my 26 years, three months, two weeks, and six days at the Sentinel, I was privileged to do exactly what I wanted to do—to write in depth about theater both local and national, to review plays, and to build bridges between theater companies and the audiences they serve. I loved using the process of writing to figure out what I thought and felt, and I loved being a conduit to readers for that feeling. I loved the fact that the more light I was able to shed on theater in the Orlando area, the stronger it grew.

My job felt like a partnership between me, the theaters, and the audience, and all of us blossomed along the way.

Over the past few years, though, that situation changed. A couple of new editors had less interest in reviews. I was reassigned half-time to write news stories about arts groups as institutions; most of those stories were about budgets, not about art. I was expected to count how many of my stories were about the so-called “business of the arts” and how many about theater, and I had to make sure the latter never took the majority of my time.

A sympathetic arts editor shielded me. But when she quit (to take a less anxiety-producing job outside daily newspapers), the stresses of what has happened to newspapering got the best of me. I was sad about the failing state of journalism. I was sad about the direction of the Sentinel. I was sad that I no longer was allowed to do what I loved to do.

Others have written (a lot) about why all this has happened. Many blame the Internet, and certainly the rise of the Internet has made new critical voices easier to hear. In the old days of print supremacy, a medium-sized city like Orlando, Florida would have had a theater critic at the daily newspaper and a couple of freelance critics at an alternative weekly. Nowadays the same city might still have somebody writing about theater at the daily paper (although that person is much more likely to be a freelancer), and the alternative paper still manages to pay a critic or two. But the rise of bloggers means that any performance I go to in Orlando is likely to have four or five reviewers sitting in the audience, and most of those people have been vetted for credentials by nobody but themselves.

Many audience members don't know or care about the difference, and that's a key point. Today, in America, we're schooled to believe that one person's opinion is just as good as another's. That's democracy in action, many people think, and they're tone-deaf to the differences between someone who's dashing off a personal opinion and someone who has spent years seeing, listening to, studying and writing about a particular form of art.

We also live in a society in which “elite” and “intellectual” have become dirty words. Many newspaper editors seem to have fallen for the idea that covering NASCAR is egalitarian but covering a gallery opening is not. In its rush to embrace whatever sells, the newspaper industry has jumped on the back of celebrity culture, and covering Lindsay Lohan's latest bust—or a sordid and perennial child-murder case here in Orlando—has been judged to sell papers.

Newspapers no longer lead; they follow wherever a fickle public decides to go. And they follow the advertising bucks, even if editors say that advertising and editorial do not mix. Sports sections get plenty of advertising money. Automobile sections and travel sections still exist largely because they are backed by the car and travel industries. Arts sections suffer because many or most local arts groups are nonprofits, and they had little money for ads even before the economy turned sour.

Filling the Void

So does any of this matter, except to those of us who are no longer doing the jobs we loved? In the short term, yes—especially to arts groups and the audiences they are trying to reach. Older people, especially, often have no access to the Internet, and they still make up a large percentage of the audience for the arts. Almost every time I go to a play, an art opening, or a cocktail party, an elderly arts lover approaches me and talks about how she misses what I used to do.

And arts organizations are scrambling to figure out how to get the word out in cities where newspaper criticism has all but died. Many groups have used mass e-mails to their advantage, jumped on the Facebook bandwagon, and reveled in the fact that there's now no gatekeeper between them and the ticket buyer. Others, especially smaller, less sophisticated groups, have struggled to get their word out and to find people to fill their seats.

At the same time, though, intelligent Internet journalists are taking up the

slack, at least in some cities. In south Florida, Lawrence A. Johnson, the former classical music critic for The Miami Herald, started South Florida Classical Review in 2008 after the region's three major dailies reduced their coverage. Now it has a sister site, South Florida Theater Review, whose lead critic, Bill Hirschman, came from the (South Florida) Sun-Sentinel.

Other similar websites exist for theater, books, art, dance and other kinds of music, and more are springing up all the time. Yet many of those sites don't pay their writers, and most struggle to make ends meet. In many cities, especially smaller ones, substan-

tive blogging has not sprung up to replace what has been lost.

As for me, after I quit the Sentinel I felt both grief and emancipation. Actually, I had been grieving for the state of journalism for a couple of years so deciding to leave mainly filled me with relief. I sleep better. I eat better. I write on the back porch and listen to the squirrels taunt my cats.

I have scaled back some grand plans to start an arts blog to cover everything artistic that moves in central Florida. Instead, I review plays and cover theater news for my own website and am gratified when theater people refer to me favorably. When somebody

called me "Orlando's critic of record," I was thrilled.

I have no problem filling my time. But I still worry how to answer when somebody turns to me at intermission and asks why I'm taking notes.

"I have a blog," I say.

Yeah, me and 96,000 other people—give or take a few million. ■

Elizabeth Maupin left her job earlier this year after 26 years as the Orlando Sentinel's theater critic. Her blog—Orlandotheater.com—is where she now writes about theater.

From Newsroom to Nursery—The Beat Goes On

'That is when I had the epiphany: These early years of motherhood were like being a rookie reporter on the beat.'

BY DIANA K. SUGG

I couldn't sleep that night. It was 3 a.m. The house was quiet and dark. I slipped out of bed and walked back through the house to the guest room, the room that would be the nursery. Sitting down on the rug, I hugged my knees to my chest and breathed in. I knew that from this night on, everything would be different. I was pregnant, and I was going to be a mother.

For years, I'd been the career gal. As a young reporter, I was handed the police beat, and I quickly got addicted. In the buzzing newsroom, under fluorescent lights late into the night, I cranked out story after story. Then I took on the medical beat, and I found myself even more enthralled. I once described it as the journalistic equivalent of the emergency room, with too many stories, too little time, but a lot of responsibility for getting it right. [See accompanying box for an excerpt from Sugg's article about beat reporting.] Not too different from a lot



Diana K. Sugg finds new rhythms in her life as the mother of Oliver, left, and Sam. Photo by Monica Lopossay.

of other newsroom beats. For any story published, I'd be tracking five others, fielding 10 wacky calls, and letting go

of as many as 20 other ideas.

From newspaper to newspaper, I kept up that pace. Many of my friends,

Advice About Beats

After Diana K. Sugg had been The (Baltimore) Sun's medical reporter for six years, she wrote an enduring article about beat reporting for the Poynter Institute. In "Turn the Beat Around," Sugg brought her experiences at the Sun and other newspapers to life as a way of offering guidance to other reporters about ways to structure and handle beat assignments. This was in 2001, and though technology has brought changes in how beat reporters work—as Twitter and other social media tools supplant those messages on voice mail—her advice stands the test of time. An excerpt follows:

When you are a beat reporter, the kingdom of journalism is at your feet: investigative pieces, features, profiles, news analyses. It's all there for the taking. But working too hard for too

many days will lead to burnout. At The Sacramento Bee, I remember feeling so busy that I couldn't leave the newsroom to walk one floor up to the well-stocked cafeteria. I was living on Diet Cokes and Snickers bars. I toted the police scanner in the bathroom with me. I even landed in the cardiac unit twice.

And if you stay at a frenetic, cranking pace all the time, you'll never free yourself to do the great pieces everyone will remember. You are a farmer, but one field should be left fallow. What an editor deletes from a story is sometimes as important as what he or she leaves in. The same goes for you: What you choose to let go of can be as important as the stories you go after. These are among your toughest decisions. It helps to articulate a vision for your beat. As

a health reporter in Sacramento, I honed in on the changes shaking the country's health care system, and I let go of many of the stories that didn't fit into that theme.

So you must be decisive. Be organized, and be ruthless. You have to learn to quickly sift through that voice mail and all the potential stories on your desk; otherwise, all your time to do other stories will get swallowed up. It may go against every cell in your body, but you have to acknowledge up front that you won't get to many of the stories on your beat. This isn't like college or other jobs you've had, where you tackled and finished all the work. This is a new country, where the clock is ticking. Your time is limited. ■—D.K.S.

meanwhile, were getting married. One by one, they had a child, then a second. I cheered them on, and then I went back to the newsroom I loved. Never had I felt more myself than when I was at my desk, finding my way through a story, or with a stranger, doing an interview. On the beat, I was at home.

Motherhood as a Beat

But for all of the ways it felt like reporting came naturally, motherhood didn't. I didn't know how to change a diaper. I couldn't get the infant car seat installed properly. I'd traded in the messenger bag I had slung so easily over my shoulder for a diaper bag that wasn't any bigger, but I carried it awkwardly. And when I tried to get my son Sam to sleep, he stayed awake.

That first week my baby boy lay on a soft blanket on our big bed, his fists clenched. He looked up at me with his serious, brown eyes. It suddenly occurred to me that I couldn't remember any nursery rhymes or even a lullaby. On instinct, I began to sing my own off-pitch version of Abba's

"Dancing Queen." He laughed at me.

It turned out to be easier to write about other people's lives than to live my own. It seemed as though the very qualities that had wired me for journalism made it tougher for me to be a mother. On crime and medical stories, being sensitive gave me a better feel for what people had endured. But now, when I tried to let Sam cry so he would supposedly fall asleep on his own, all that empathy just didn't help. Seeking guidance from other parents, experts or studies—my instinct from the medical beat—also backfired. As in so many child-rearing issues, there were far too many conflicting opinions, and little science to support any of them.

What I didn't know yet was that much of motherhood turns out to rely on trial and error. I didn't realize that as long as Sam skipped naps and woke up at night, I wouldn't be able to do any part-time work. I would need every minute of babysitting time just to get some sleep. But I missed reporting and writing. I found myself crawling into bed at night with a flashlight to read newspapers. I gulped down the

stories like they were water.

The work I cherished was slipping away and so was the confidence I'd had as a reporter. Things about my life as a mother and my former life as a journalist got even more complicated when we moved to Switzerland for my husband's work, and our second son was born.

Then one night as I emptied the diaper genie, I had a flashback. I saw myself in the wire room at The (Baltimore) Sun, grabbing the stack of faxes. At first, I'd hated slogging through those press releases. But as I got more experienced, I could whip through them like a pro. Occasionally my eye would land on one detail, the clue to a great story.

That is when I had the epiphany: These early years of motherhood were like being a rookie reporter on the beat. I recalled how, early on, each beat felt like some big unbroken country—its territory too vast to embrace. But in time, some of the paths became familiar. I discovered that there were diamonds buried in the routine faxes and briefs. Soon I was finding my way.

I thought about those early news-room experiences. I remembered how I'd kept up a furious pace on the crime beat, finding too many stories and feeling compelled to pursue every one. Now without realizing it, I'd fallen into that same trap as a mother. Just when Sam fell asleep, instead of getting some rest, I was like a cops reporter on deadline. I seized the time to try to cram in laundry, e-mail, house repairs, and work.

On the beat and as a mother, I was so busy getting everything done that I had forgotten to stand up and look around. Where was I? What track was I heading down? What was on the horizon? Being on a beat, it turned out, meant not only digging in every day, but also having a command of your territory, a sense of the bigger picture.

One by one, these lessons came back to me. They were solid and familiar,

like smooth stones I could rub my fingers on. Follow my instincts. Put in the time. Learn which sources to listen to and which to tune out. Figure out what really matters. And perhaps the biggest of all: To get some things, you must let go of others.

I knew what I had to do. Just as I'd reluctantly set aside many stories, I had to ruthlessly pare down my life. I still carried a notebook everywhere I went. I still wrote ledes in my head. But for now, my beat had changed, and I had to make it my own. I became expert at hoisting my chubby toddlers into their double stroller with one arm and running with them through the hills of a sprawling park. I regaled Sammy and Oliver with elaborate tales, told by characters in funny accents. We crawl-raced around the apartment until my knees were calloused. When I was too tired, I didn't need to do anything more than lie down on the

floor, and the boys would climb all over me like puppies.

One winter night, when Sammy kept waking up, I walked back and forth in the dark, his body sagging against mine. I began to sing "Shenandoah." My voice came out strong and clear, in a way it never had. The melody was bitter and sweet, and the world was hushed. Whatever had been, whatever was to come, I could do it. I'd found my lullaby. ■

Diana K. Sugg worked for 18 years as a newspaper reporter and won national awards for her crime and medical stories, including the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for Beat Reporting at The (Baltimore) Sun. Now living in Baltimore, Sugg is raising two young sons and plans to do freelance writing.

Family Beat: Stories We Tell Around the Kitchen Table

'If we tell them well, it won't matter what medium we use. They can be our saving grace.'

BY BETH MACY

Notes from a recent week on the family beat at The Roanoke (Va.) Times, the 88,000-circulation paper where I've spent most of my career:

- Made calls for a possible story on a truck driver who reunited with his daughter in Germany via Skype after being apart for nine years.
- Followed a story tip from my 16-year-old who announced recently that he wanted to go to the Seven Gates of Hell, an allegedly haunted farm that turns out to be scary for reasons unrelated to the paranormal.
- Used a video camera and old-fashioned note taking to interview teens, police and farm owners,

including the wife of the alleged "coke-snorting ax murderer," who is actually just an angry landowner sick to death of trespassing teens. (Favorite quote: "No, no. He does not threaten them with an ax. He carries a shotgun.")

- Prepped for an upcoming trip to Haiti to report on a local mission worker who's been instrumental in post-earthquake recovery.
- Finished fact checking 300 inches of copy for a three-part series I wrote on the controversy engulfing Lyme disease, which is newly endemic in our region.
- Spent 12 hours editing the Seven Gates video (my first) and six hours writing the story, only to learn from

a much younger colleague that the video wasn't good enough to post but the story is running on the front page.

- Attended a mandatory training session on libel where the takeaway was don't write anything bad about a source in a personal e-mail, ever.

Then I spent the rest of the week worrying about the following: mean e-mails I've written about sources, the recent cholera outbreak in Haiti, and God-knows-how-many ticks I just picked up tromping around the Seven Gates of Hell.

Things on the family beat were infinitely easier back in the good old days, right?

The Family Beat

When I came to The Roanoke Times in 1989, I was a generalist. I gravitated toward features about funny things—Southerners' enduring fixation with tomato sandwiches, for instance. Or teenage Dumpster divers. Or a 9-year-old boy who was obsessed with vacuum cleaners. But most of the time I wrote about serious stuff—teen pregnancy,

When I took over the family beat in 2007, it finally stood on its own. Our staff size had shrunk considerably, like everyone else's, and remaining staffers were challenged to juggle more things than ever while also learning all things online.

But my editor didn't cut family coverage at our paper; she gave it a promotion. Clearly, this wasn't happening everywhere. When I judged

the Motherlode, Michelle Slatalla on what it was like to be a Wife/Mother/Worker/Spy, and Paula Span on the challenges of caregiving in The New Old Age. These are promising developments, according to this middle-aged feminist who remembers when most newspapers rarely deigned to cover family life—you know, that thing we spend 80 percent of our lives thinking, planning and fretting about.

In a midsized market like ours, I'm privileged to be able to continue to tell in-depth and intimate stories about real people and their joys and struggles—from a 10-part series on caregiving to a feature on teen pranksters who set out chasing ghosts in a cow pasture, only to run up against a shotgun-wielding farmer. They are enterprising local stories that people won't find anywhere else—except in living rooms and around kitchen tables. If we tell them well, it won't matter what medium we use. They can be our saving grace.

Covering families at a mid-sized newspaper is a lot like mothering. You laugh. You cry. You never know what will happen next. This week I found myself doing a dozen things

I never planned on doing—climbing over cattle gates (in a skirt), detaching audio from a video clip, interviewing a Yale researcher about the mating habits of ticks. Then I cashed another paycheck and wondered for the millionth time: Really? They pay me for this? ■

Beth Macy, a 2010 Nieman Fellow, is the family beat reporter at The Roanoke (Va.) Times. In 2007 and 2009 she won awards in the Casey Medals contest for her coverage of children and families.



Beth Macy documented the struggles of family members and paid helpers caring for the frail elderly in her 10-part series, "Age of Uncertainty." Photo by Josh Meltzer/The Roanoke Times.

race relations, a lawyer with stage four melanoma who bucked doctors' advice to get her affairs in order and took up marathon running instead.

When I moved from features to news to become the family beat reporter, editor Carole Tarrant said she wanted to elevate such stories to the front page. In the past the beat had lingered at our paper, often tasked to reporters who were busy covering other things—this, in a slow-news city that's constantly touted as a great place to raise kids.

In the 1980's and 1990's, the family beat was lumped in with coverage of social services—adoption issues, foster care, welfare and the like. Then it became part of our health care beat.

the Casey Medals competition at the Journalism Center on Children & Families in 2008 and again in 2010, I wasn't the only person who noticed a decrease in both the quantity and quality of the entries, especially from smaller markets like ours.

The family beat wasn't just an afterthought anymore; it seemed to be altogether estranged from the newspaper.

The Family Blog

Meanwhile, "mom" blogs and columns emerged to pick up some of this reporting slack. At The New York Times, Lisa Belkin filled us in on

It's Expertise That Matters

'The next wave of journalistic progress will channel its power from the underlying principle of the reporter's beat ...'

By MICHAEL RILEY

Bloomberg GOVERNMENT
IN DEVELOPMENT

41° WASHINGTON, D.C.

HOME NEWS LEGISLATION REGULATION SPEND INDUSTRIES PLACES RESOURCES

WELCOME, Kathleen
Sign Out
Edit Account
What's New

MY HOME
ALERTS
SEARCHES
REPORTS
CLIPBOARD
HELP

HEADLINES

Health Law Critic as Governor Is Win for WellPoint
Rick Scott, Florida's Republican Governor-elect, was an early critic of President Barack Obama's health-care overhaul, founding a group last year to fight what he called a bid for "socialized medicine."

Poisonous Paper Clips Escalate Dispute at CPSC

Revised Deficit Plan Presented to Reluctant Panel

Boeing Sees 'More Adding' for Defense Business

Doctors, Hospitals Will Get Antitrust Advice From Agency

CFTC Refers Forged Letters to Justice Department

Social Security, Income Tax Cuts Part of Debt Plan

More News »

FINANCIAL MARKETS

DOW 11254.11 +248.09 +2.25%

S&P 500 1205.42 +24.87 +2.11%

NASDAQ 2552.17 +53.94 +2.16%

INDUSTRY HIGHLIGHTS

HEALTH CARE DEFENSE ENERGY TECHNOLOGY TRANSPORTATION

ENERGY NEWS

Hedge Funds Short Clean Energy as Goldman Pares Stakes

Datang's Renewable Energy Unit Said to Start IPO Sale

U.S. Senators Urge Colleagues to Eliminate Ethanol Tax Credit

NRC Tightens Rules to Avoid Billions in Decommissioning Costs

More Energy News »

ENERGY LEGISLATION

House Committee Actions - H.R. 6101: Amends the Energy Conservation and Production Act to Determine Systemic Impediments to Carrying Out Weatherization

House Committee Actions - H.R. 6094: Establishes the National Commission on Outer Continental Shelf Oil Spill Prevention

More Energy Legislation »

ENERGY REGULATION

Dept. of Energy Notice: Notice of Availability of the Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Magnum Storage Project and Proposed Pony Express Resource Management Plan Amendment for the Bureau of Land Management

Dept. of Energy Notice: Central Oregon Irrigation District, Notice of Competing Preliminary Permit Application Accepted for Filing and Soliciting Comments and Interventions

More Energy Regulation »

TOP ENERGY AWARDS

Dept. of Defense: Leland Bowman Lock and Calcasieu Lock Electrical Rewiring and Generator Installation
Contractor: Blackhawk Constructors
Amount: \$2,031,000

Dept. of Homeland Security: Hydraulic Flush for CGC Gallatin
Contractor: Commissioning Solutions Global
Amount: \$48,427.20

More Energy Awards »

TODAY IN DATA

BBG AMER ENERGY IX
5 Day Performance as of 12/01/2010 14:20PM ET

View Industries »

250
248
246
244
242

23 24 26 29 30 1
Nov
12/01/10 | Bloomberg

Federal Register Proposed Rules & Notices
Past 5 Business Days by Agency
View Federal Register »

25% Department Of Energy
22% Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
11% Department Of The Interior
10% Environmental Protection Agency
5% Nuclear Regulatory Commission
27% Other

Top 3 Awarded Energy Contractors
Fiscal Year 2009
View Contractors »

\$3.65 B
\$2.63 B
\$2.48 B

\$4 B
\$3 B
\$2 B
\$1 B

Bechtel Group, Inc. Lockheed Martin Corp. Los Alamos National

CALENDAR

WHITE HOUSE
December 01, 2010 - All Day Event
HHS Secretary Kathleen

SENATE
December 01, 2010 - All Day Event
Senate in session

HOUSE
December 01, 2010 - All Day Event
House meets at 10 a

JOINT
December 03, 2010 09:30AM
Joint Economic Committee -

AGENCY
December 02, 2010 08:00AM
National Science Foundation (NSF)

GENERAL
December 01, 2010 03:00PM
The Heritage Foundation - Book

One of the enduring mysteries for an editor lies in trying to divine what readers really want. There are almost as many answers to that question as there are readers, and the more editors try to meet everyone's needs, the less they are able to meet anyone's. Breadth trumps depth and coverage loses its focus. The idea of a reporter covering any single beat—with anything approaching the level of expertise that gives readers a value-added dimension—becomes a quaint anachronism.

In recent years, the beat has become the Rodney Dangerfield of journalism: It just doesn't get the respect it deserves. That approach, however, is about to undergo a radical transformation as journalism, searching desperately for its future, begins to discover, once again, the profound value of expertise, exclusivity and depth. Those are the elements, it turns out, that imbue content with value, a process, I would argue, that holds the key to journalism's future success.

The next wave of journalistic progress will channel its power from the underlying principle of the reporter's beat: the creation by an expert of valuable content that readers need and can't find anywhere else. This proper emphasis on expertise promises to give rise to a subscription-based business model in which people will pay for exclusive content they value. It's a way to resolve the question dogging journalists as they search for resources to fund reporting. Unless readers recognize value in what they are getting, they are unwilling to pay for its production.

Right now I'm fortunate to be involved in helping to build a venture

Bloomberg Government's beat is where industry and lawmaking intersect.

founded upon that premise. It's called Bloomberg Government (BGOV), and it may hold some important lessons for the future of journalism. This online service, launched as a private beta website in July 2010, focuses on the business implications of government actions, namely legislation, regulation and spending. When BGOV launches in January 2011, it will offer exclusive news, data and analysis targeted at government and business leaders. Our goal: to give our subscribers—at a cost of \$5,700 a year—the detailed information they need to help them make timely and effective decisions.

Expertise as a Bridge

A central premise of BGOV is that there is a need in Washington and across corporate America for in-depth information about the intersection of business and government. The impact government decisions have on business has increased dramatically in recent years and so has the desire to better understand one another. BGOV bridges that gap, in large part, by building an editorial model that adopts the best of a beat-reporting approach. Here are thumbnail descriptions of some aspects of Bloomberg Government that replicate the focus, expertise, exclusivity and depth of a beat:

A Laser-Like Mission: BGOV is all about the business impact of government actions, which fosters a sharp focus and a reassuring clarity. We won't try to be all things to all people; we will favor depth over breadth.

A Well-Defined Audience: It will be decision-makers in Washington, from Capitol Hill to K Street, and leaders of corporate America outside the Beltway. Knowing who is in your audience makes it easier to know what they need—and to give it to them.

Deep Niches: BGOV is designed to target certain subject areas: health care, energy, defense, technology, transportation, finance, trade, taxation, labor and government contracting. We understand what's important to subscribers about those issues, and by diving deeply into those niches we'll distinguish our content offering.

Exclusivity: Our goal is to produce exclusive content—i.e., high-value reporting—that subscribers won't find elsewhere. We'll zig while others zag.

costs and retreating from beats, BGOV is embracing the expertise that comes from them. Most of the journalists we're hiring arrive with years of experience covering beats such as health care policy, technology and defense. Similarly, many of the analysts we're signing on—whether they are academics with PhDs or industry veterans—bring with them the deep knowledge that comes with study and direct experience. Of course, these experts will also act as mentors to younger reporters as they learn these beats.

Online Innovation: BGOV will, of course, provide an array of online features to amplify our reporters' and analysts' expertise. There will be data visualization, ranging from in-depth graphics and charts to interactive displays, and tools such as a report builder, online directories, and mapping capabilities.

Bloomberg Government, a part of Bloomberg News, is a natural outgrowth of Bloomberg LP, created by Michael Bloomberg, now the New York City mayor, almost 30 years ago. He launched Bloomberg News for financial professionals, and the company has been continuously enhancing the database-driven product.

Back then, Bloomberg identified a market need, created a unique product based on deep expertise, and built an immensely successful business.

In the landscape of 21st century journalism, it makes perfect sense to take this model as our foundation and build on it a reporting strategy—designed around the 20th century notion of expertise emerging from dedicated beat reporting—to fit an evident need. ■

Mike Riley, a 1995 Nieman Fellow, is managing editor of Bloomberg Government.

A central premise of BGOV [Bloomberg Government] is that there is a need in Washington and across corporate America for in-depth information about the intersection of business and government. The impact government decisions have on business has increased dramatically in recent years and so has the desire to better understand one another. BGOV bridges that gap, in large part, by building an editorial model that adopts the best of a beat-reporting approach.

A Unique Editorial Model: We are melding teams of journalists and analysts to create a hybrid editorial model. The analysts will include economists, financial experts, former Congressional and regulatory staffers, and industry veterans, who will convey a different blend of perspectives and enable us to produce original research along with financial and economic models to quantify the impact of various government actions.

Expertise: The value we place on experts undergirds this effort—and aligns it with the concept of journalistic beats. While other publications are cutting

When Local Eyes Were Watching Their Lawmakers

‘As beat writers know, it’s in doing these routine stories that they sniff out situations worthy of deeper digging.’

BY GEORGE E. CONDON, JR.

Copley News Service, my professional home for 30 years, sadly has become the poster child for the fate of regional news bureaus in Washington in the 21st century, having soared to the highest peaks of our profession only to crash ignominiously less than two years later. It was our D.C. bureau that uncovered the worst Congressional corruption ever documented that sent a war hero congressman to prison—reporting that garnered a Pulitzer Prize for the bureau and The San Diego Union-Tribune, then a Copley paper—only to be shut down as a victim of the profession’s new economic realities.

Those realities mean that today only the biggest news organizations can maintain anything resembling a Washington, D.C. bureau. The victims in recent years all carried respected and established names in journalism—Copley, Cox, Newhouse, Media General. Others, like Gannett, Hearst, Scripps and The Des Moines Register survive, with good reporters fighting the good fight to keep alive bureaus that are mere shadows of what they once were.

But the real victims are the citizens of major cities like San Diego, who after they lost Copley have had no reporters in D.C. watching out for them—journalists who know which issues they care about and will ask tough questions for them. [See accompanying box about the San Diego-based Watchdog Institute’s recent hiring of a full-time Washington, D.C. correspondent.] This



Republican Congressman Randy “Duke” Cunningham spoke about his resignation in 2005 after pleading guilty to bribery charges revealed by reporters from Copley News Service. *Photo by Lenny Ignelzi/The Associated Press.*

is why when I think about the closing of the Copley bureau, my first thought is not of the Pulitzer Prize and the corruption of Randy “Duke” Cunningham, but of cut flowers and the border with Mexico, steel dumping and museum earmarks, and Osprey testing and closures of Veterans Administration (VA) hospitals.

Too many editors think all that is missed when a Washington bureau shuts down is the absence of somebody to watch local members of Congress, tabulate their votes, and make sure they explain their actions. But regional

bureaus do much more than that. These are stories that might not even make the front page and almost certainly aren’t going to win journalism awards. But the little-noticed routine coverage that regional bureaus provide is what has stayed in my mind, and this means that I think of roses and carnations and chrysanthemums—cut flowers.

Following the Flowers

Regional reporters on the federal government beat find themselves becoming experts on strange topics. I became an expert on cut flowers because San Diego County is the cut flower capital of the United States. In fact, the city of Encinitas in northern San Diego County calls itself the “flower capital” and boasts of introducing the poinsettia to this country.

For the almost 60,000 residents of Encinitas, we were their watchdog reporters in Washington. So when President George H.W. Bush went to Cartagena, Colombia on February 15, 1990, I went with him. (During my tenure in D.C., I traveled with presidents to 88 countries.) But I did not write only about the drug summit that drew Bush to Colombia. Rather, I covered my beat—which meant the issues of concern to residents of Southern California. Unlike my colleagues—and to the amusement of several of them—I wrote stories about the president’s talks with his Colombian counterpart about the trade ramifications of Colombia’s effort to

A Changing of the Guard in Washington, D.C. News Bureaus

By Jan Gardner

It was on a hunch that Marcus Stern, a reporter in the Washington, D.C. bureau of the Copley News Service, launched the investigation that brought down California Congressman Randy “Duke” Cunningham.

When Cunningham was asked why he had taken two trips to Saudi Arabia in 2004, the representative said he wanted to improve U.S. relations with the Saudis. Stern didn’t believe him. He wondered if Cunningham’s lifestyle had benefited from the trips. While searching property records, he learned that Cunningham had sold his house at an inflated price to the owner of a fast-growing defense company and had bought a rather expensive mansion.

More reporters joined the investigation, which resulted in stories published in the San Diego Union-Tribune, then a Copley paper. Months later Cunningham resigned from the House, pleaded guilty to taking \$2.4 million in bribes, and was sent to prison. The paper and news service shared a Pulitzer Prize in National Reporting.

Today Copley News Service no longer exists. The Union-Tribune has no Washington bureau and neither do many other news organizations and daily papers across the country. As a result, fewer reporters are holding Congressional delegations accountable to voters back home. Now there are faint stirrings of a reversal. Among the regional nonprofit online news organizations established in recent years, there is a growing sense that thorough coverage requires a presence in the nation’s capital. Two sites, in particular, have committed new resources to D.C.-based reporting. Perhaps it’s no coincidence that the leaders of both are veterans of newspapers that once had bureaus in Washington.

Margaret Wolf Freivogel, editor of the St. Louis Beacon, an online regional news site, explained on the site’s blog her rationale for hiring a D.C.-based reporter: “Like it or not, what happens in Washington matters to us in St. Louis. ... A good Washington correspondent explains what role St. Louis area officials and interests play in creating and implementing that policy, how St. Louisans are affected, who gains and loses and what problems remain unsolved.”

Freivogel was one of eight reporters when she worked in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch’s Washington bureau, which is now down to one reporter. In October, the Beacon hired Robert Koenig, a St. Louis native and a veteran of the Post-Dispatch bureau, to report from D.C.

Lorie Hearn, executive director of the Watchdog Institute in San Diego, is pleased to revive coverage of the local Congressional delegation. Brooke Williams, an investigative reporter for the institute, a nonprofit investigative center at San Diego State University, opened the bureau at the

National Press Club on September 7. Williams began her career at the Center for Public Integrity in D.C. so she returns to the nation’s capital with sophisticated database skills and years of experience in investigative journalism.

Hearn, a former senior editor at The San Diego Union-Tribune, wants to establish D.C. coverage as a signature of the institute. Williams provides accountability reporting for the institute’s media partners. In addition, the institute’s website devotes a page to each U.S. representative for the San Diego area so constituents have at their fingertips up-to-date information about the sponsorship of bills, lobbying activities, campaign contributions, and other financial disclosures.

“While essential, data alone cannot tell a story of how well local delegations are doing their jobs,” Hearn said. “Even in today’s digital world, nothing can replace a reporter on the scene who has sources, who can connect dots, and who can literally run down leads.” ■

seize a big part of the American cut flower market.

It's probably safe to say I am the only reporter on that trip who wrote as much about cut flowers as I did about the drug summit. I admit that I did not expect to find it fulfilling to research this trade dispute, but doing so was a reminder of how the element of surprise is one benefit of working this beat. It turned out to be a fascinating story—in part because, in its particulars, it wove its way into familiar political zones.

The shorthand version is that American growers were a little slow in adapting to the marketplace. In the 1980's, they saw little reason to sell flowers in grocery stores. This provided an opening to growers in Colombia and Ecuador and they seized it. And before domestic growers knew what had happened, a big chunk of the marketplace was gone.

So what did the U.S. growers do, having misread the market? Demand protection from the government. So on this presidential trip, flowers became a point of discussion between two presidents with a real-life impact on hundreds of acres in San Diego County and thousands of jobs, as Bush pushed policies to get Colombians to switch from drug production to flower growing despite the hardship this would impose on American growers.

No national publication was writing this story. Ever since technology made it feasible for newspapers across the country to open bureaus in Washington, though, it is exactly the kind of story that these regional beat reporters have specialized in. And such stories are still being done; it's just that there are fewer of them.

Diminishing Coverage

The Des Moines Register still watches the Department of Agriculture, but with only one reporter. Gone is the larger bureau that won Pulitzers for its coverage of the intersection of government and farming. Gone, too, is intensive coverage of NASA by Media General and the larger Houston Chronicle bureau or the old

Houston Post bureau. Gone as well is the exhaustive coverage of border and immigration issues by Copley. Marcus Stern is best remembered for breaking the Cunningham story, but he would tell you he is proudest of the stories he broke on the border. In early 1995, Stern was a lonely voice challenging the Clinton administration's claims of great success in Operation Gatekeeper, its crackdown on illegal immigrants crossing at the San Diego sector of the border. "The administration launched a PR campaign to convince the public that the crackdown was working," recalled Stern recently. "We were the only ones that didn't bite and we were right."

Andrew Alexander has similar memories of the regional coverage he oversaw as chief of the Cox bureau. He did what all bureau chiefs of regional papers did—made frequent trips to the newspapers and returned with a long list of Washington stories they could not report on their own. "We frequently dug into the Washington bureaucracy to report on problems or plans involving local issues and projects," he said. "We did this often with stories about plans to close or cut VA centers in some of our circulation areas. Or we uncovered political roadblocks to highway funding projects. Whenever people from our local areas testified before Congress, we were there. In many cases, these were local officials from smaller Cox communities. That's a pretty big story for a local paper."

Business coverage—like the cut flower story—often gets overlooked as an important service of regional bureaus. Alexander remembers stories Cox reporters did about government investigations or inquiries involving big Atlanta employers like Coca-Cola, Delta Air Lines, or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cox specialized in air industry issues involving routes, mergers and investigations of Delta—critical stories in Atlanta with one of the world's busiest airports.

Deeper Digging

As beat writers know, it's in doing these routine stories that they sniff

out situations worthy of deeper digging. Stern only got the Congressional corruption story because he knew Cunningham well and because the Copley bureau was working on a routine story about the congressman. Like the other regional bureaus, we were following up on a study of privately funded Congressional travel released by Northwestern University's Medill News Service, the Center for Public Integrity, and American Public Media. Cunningham was by no means the biggest traveler. He had taken only six trips. But two of the trips intrigued Stern. Both were to Saudi Arabia, a country the congressman had previously shown little interest in, and both were paid for by a Saudi native who lived in his district.

In another reporter's story, Cunningham said the trips were "to promote discourse and better relations between the two nations." Because Stern knew Cunningham so well—and knew his attitude toward Arab nations—his reaction was: "I don't believe it."

Stern launched an exhaustive search of records to try to find the real reason for the trips. He looked at everything about the man who paid for the trips, everything that could shed light on connections between Cunningham and Saudi Arabia. He found nothing.

Finally, in frustration, he launched what he called a "lifestyle audit" of Cunningham. That meant checking all available databases to see whether the congressman was showing any upgrades in his lifestyle. It was during that "audit" that he uncovered the purchase of Cunningham's house for a wildly inflated price by a Washington-based defense contractor. It was the first—but certainly not the last—bribe we found.

He won a Pulitzer for that story along with his primary reporting partner Jerry Kammer, who broadened the coverage with a groundbreaking look at how the earmark system worked as demonstrated by the role of lobbyist and former San Diego Representative Bill Lowery. But even on the day we stood on the stage at Columbia University accepting that award, Stern told me only half in jest

that his effort had been a failure. After all, he said, he never did nail down just why Cunningham took those two trips to Saudi Arabia.

That is the kind of success—and failure—that keeps this kind of beat reporting at these regional bureaus going. A hardy few still look at agencies

and track votes and do lifestyle audits. There just aren't enough of them, and the ones still there are stretched very thin. So place some flowers—cut ones, please—on the grave of the old, big regional bureau—the ones that carved out these vital beats and served constituents well. ■

George E. Condon, Jr. joined CongressDaily and National Journal as a White House correspondent when Copley News Service closed its Washington, D.C. bureau in 2008.

Statehouse Beat Woes Portend Bad News for Good Government

'There's an analogy between statehouse beat reporters—well, beat reporters in general—and cops on the beat who know the neighborhood and everyone in it.'

BY GENE GIBBONS

Florida politician Rod Smith once described Lucy Morgan of the St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times as the state's "biggest pain in the ass." But he added that his legislative colleagues in Tallahassee were grateful for her because otherwise "we would probably steal the silverware." Smith was being facetious, of course; the silverware wouldn't even begin to satisfy the kind of sticky-fingered politicians Morgan delights in exposing and the special interests with whom they're usually in cahoots.

As the digital revolution devastates and reshapes the news media, I fear what's likely to be lost in the shuffle is a next generation of statehouse beat reporters who will follow in the footsteps of people like the Pulitzer Prize-winning Morgan, the Chicago Tribune's Ray Long, Steve Walters of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, and George Skelton of the Los Angeles Times. With their institutional knowledge, gigantic Rolodexes, and unending determination to afflict the comfortable and hold the powerful to account, these four outstanding journalists and others like them have been an awesome force for good government.

In the brave new world of informa-

tion delivery—a world increasingly driven by rapid-fire tweeting and the inane cacophony of American television—there seems to be less and less room for people who want to make a career of covering the statehouse and earn a decent living doing it. There are now fewer than 500 professional journalists covering state government full time—and that includes those who work for The Associated Press, which still staffs this essential beat in every state. Press rooms once filled with reporters are now quiet relics of a bygone era.

A survey conducted by American Journalism Review (AJR) found that in 44 states there were fewer statehouse reporters in 2009 than there were six years earlier. The numbers in four states were unchanged from the 2003 AJR survey. In only two states—Rhode Island and Oregon—was there an increase.

It's a damn shame because what happens at the state level affects our lives a whole lot more than what happens in Washington, D.C. Health care, education, business regulation—just name it and chances are that state regulations and policies have a lot more impact than what happens on

the federal level. And the steadily dwindling number of statehouse beat reporters is likely to give rise to far more political flimflammy than the stealing of silverware in Florida.

Filling the Gap

Why do I think it's important to have a flourishing statehouse press corps composed of beat reporters like the people I've mentioned?

Certainly, some will say, there are alternatives such as some of the online start-ups rising to fill the gap. And it's true that there are dozens of news websites and hundreds of blogs devoted to covering state government, but there are few I've seen that can really do the job. Outfits like The Texas Tribune and The Connecticut Mirror are making an admirable effort. But I think even they would admit it will take some doing to become as known, respected and, yes, as feared as someone like Morgan. Her mere presence in Tallahassee encouraged the politicians to try to do better. Smith put his finger on it. Why succumb to a moral or ethical lapse if your family, friends and supporters are probably going to read all about

Uncovering an Un-Covered Story in Bell, California

By Jonathan Seitz

This past summer two reporters from the Los Angeles Times broke a major story in a place that doesn't usually figure into its coverage—or any other new organization's. Imminent bankruptcy had forced the city of Maywood to lay off all of its employees and outsource its management to the neighboring city of Bell, an unprecedented move even in the cash-strapped state of California.

Facing budget cuts of its own, the Times was no longer covering smaller cities on a day-to-day basis but when reporters Jeff Gottlieb and Ruben Vives looked into the new arrangement, they found that things in Bell weren't exactly financially sound.

The city manager of Bell (pop. 40,000), was making close to \$800,000 a year while the police chief was paid more than \$400,000 and four of the city's part-time council members made close to \$100,000 each, largely for serving on boards and

committees that never met. Salaries that high would raise concern in any big city (as the Times noted, Bell's manager was making more than twice what the chief executive of Los Angeles County makes), but in Bell, nobody was keeping watch. Only after the Times started investigating was this compensation scandal brought to light, prompting enough community outrage to force the city officials' resignations.

As journalist Conor Friedersdorf wrote in a column on Forbes.com titled "Why Every City Needs a Beat Reporter," "had its [Bell's] residents banded together five years ago to hire a top-notch beat reporter, even paying him the handsome salary of \$200,000 per year, the return on their value would've been immense." In fact, it would not have taken a top-notch beat reporter to notice that something was amiss—under California law, government salaries

are a matter of public record. "All anyone had to do was look at the paperwork on file at city hall—and any halfway decent beat reporter assigned to the city would've known to do exactly that as a matter of course," he concluded.

The only other coverage of the city comes from a chain of community newspapers, which covers Bell and 14 other communities with a single reporter who hasn't been to a Bell City Council meeting in 17 years, according to Times media critic James Rainey.

As newsrooms slash their budgets and limit their coverage, courthouses and city halls across the country left uncovered may fall prey to such unscrupulous behavior by officials. What happened in Bell is a reminder that watchdog reporters, like their canine counterparts, are better to have and not need than to need and not have. ■



Bell's public officials went from having no coverage to an onslaught of media attention after the Los Angeles Times uncovered officials' outsized pay. Here, reporters interview the only City Council member who received the standard salary. Photo by Chris Pizzello/The Associated Press.

it in the St. Petersburg Times sooner rather than later?

There's an analogy between statehouse beat reporters—well, beat reporters in general—and cops on the beat who know the neighborhood and everyone in it. They get a sixth sense when something's out of order, something's not right, and by sniffing around they would find the story.

Today, many of the would-be replacements for statehouse beat reporters are interested first and foremost in investigative journalism. Investigative News Network (INN), a consortium of small to midsize online news organizations scattered throughout the country, is probably the outfit that I'm most familiar with. I'm glad it and other investigative sites such as ProPublica are out there, but I think about their role as I do about the FBI's. Only the worst miscreants are likely to come under their scrutiny, and the chances of that happening even for the really bad guys are roughly equivalent to being struck by lightning.

"The beat reporter is the backbone of investigative journalism," says Andy Hall of WisconsinWatch.org, a member of INN. "You look across history, and most of the big stories didn't start off as projects. They started off with a beat reporter asking a few questions or checking a few records."

There's also another problem. Even the best of the online organizations have shoestring budgets and nowhere near the editorial, legal and business acumen of most traditional news operations, and by that I mean newspapers. Taking on powerful political interests is not a job for the weak or fainthearted, as many journalists can attest. It often requires an infrastructure that most of the start-ups lack.

Partisan Reporting

The decline of the statehouse beat is bad enough. What I find even worse is the influx of agenda-driven state "news" organizations, some with a leftist orientation but most of the newer entries tilted far to the right. They claim their sole reason for being is to inform the people and hold

public officials accountable, filling a vacuum caused by the downsizing of the news industry. Their mission statements actually say they're rushing to fill the gap.

Don't believe it for a moment. Do what reporters should do: Check them out, as I have done. For the most part, the people in charge of these would-be watchdog operations are political hacks out to subvert journalism in their quest to grab and keep power using whatever means they have to do so. Good luck on finding out where they get their money; the IRS disclosure forms required of organizations that claim nonprofit status are singularly uninformative.

At the forefront of an effort to blur the distinction between statehouse reporting and political advocacy is the Franklin Center for Government & Public Integrity, which finances a network of websites that focus on state government. This center has ties to a number of conservative organizations, including the Americans for Prosperity Foundation, whose founder is billionaire David Koch. He is a longtime financier of right-wing causes whose shadowy political dealings were highlighted this past summer in a New Yorker article by Jane Mayer headlined "Covert Operations."

Jason Stverak, a former executive director of the North Dakota Republican Party, heads the Franklin Center. He contends that it is wrong to infer from his partisan background and that of others who work with him that their reporting skews to the right. "I ran a [state] Republican Party. We disclose that fully on our website," Stverak told me in a March 2010 interview that appears as part of "Ants at the Picnic: A Status Report on News Coverage of State Government," a paper I wrote for Harvard's Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy. "But at the end of the day it's the same standard to which you would hold Fox News, CNN, The New York Times, New York Post, Fargo Forum, from my home state of North Dakota—you will judge any news organization based upon the content that they produce."

However, four months later the

Franklin Center cosponsored and played an active role in a two-day conference organized by the Americans for Prosperity Foundation. The Right Online Agenda conference included such breakout sessions as "Intro to Online Activism" and "Killing the Death Tax" and featured speakers such as conservative U.S. Representative Michele Bachmann of Minnesota and Tea Party activist Sharron Angle, a Republican who was then running against Harry Reid in the election for U.S. Senate in Nevada. No Democratic legislators were included in the program. The finale of the Las Vegas conference was a November is Coming Rally.

Yet Franklin Center websites are seeking legitimacy by demanding to be accredited in the various statehouses where they have sprung up. They also are applying for membership in Capitolbeat, a professional association of statehouse reporters and editors, according to Tiffany Shackelford, the association's former executive director. The Illinois Legislative Correspondents Association denied membership to reporters working for the Franklin Center because the center declined to disclose information about its funding. However, a number of government offices have issued press credentials to those reporters.

"Don't complain about the media; become the media" appears to be their philosophy. It would be the ultimate indignity if the empty chairs becoming more numerous in statehouse press rooms were to be filled by political tricksters. ■

Gene Gibbons writes about state and national politics. During his 41 years in journalism, he was employed by United Press International and Reuters, and subsequently was a founding editor of Stateline, a news website that focuses on state government and is funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Argo Network: NPR's New Group of Beat-Driven Blogs

By Jonathan Seitz

Local news initiatives are blossoming online—with the rapid expansion of AOL's Patch, the launch of Allbritton Communications' Washington, D.C.-focused TBD, and the collaboration of The New York Times and New York University journalism students on the neighborhood-level Local East Village, to name a few. One of the quieter debuts this year has been NPR's Argo Network, a group of 12 staff-written blogs at some of the larger member stations in the public broadcaster's national radio network.

Each blog is pegged to a topic, and those who write for it cover the issues as a beat reporter might—by assembling information, tracking news, and telling stories, some of them quite personal. Even with this local touch, these blogs are intended to appeal as well to a national audience.

The project's director Joel Sucherman describes the content on the blogs as "high-quality, engaging, public-service journalism" that mimics NPR's usual mix of "wonk and whimsy." At Boston's WBUR, posts on CommonHealth ranged from a discussion of workplace bullies to a "special report"—video included—about a writer's quest for pain-free sex. In San Francisco, KQED's blog, MindShift, features emerging digital tools for learning with stories such as "Mashable's 7 Fantastic Free Social Media Tools." Some Argo Network members are much more location specific, such as

The Key, WXPN's blog about local underground music in Philadelphia, DCentric in Washington, D.C., and The Empire in New York.

Despite similar layouts and design, these blogs are independent of one another. But all carry a tiny "NPR Argo Network" rectangle at the top of each page, hinting at their shared connection. Part of Argo's strategy is to use a small staff to cover beats that resonate locally and nationally instead of hiring a larger team to report on these various topics. If enough Argo sites launch with a widening spectrum

of topics, then their combined effort could provide fuller coverage across more territory than any one of the stations could do on its own.

The Argo Network is funded by \$3 million from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, which will keep it running through the 2011 fiscal year. The Knight Foundation has stipulated that the technology developed for the sites must be released to the general public by 2012, presumably so more online news initiatives can take root. ■

The screenshot shows the CommonHealth website layout. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'wbur.org' and 'BOSTON'S NPR NEWS SOURCE' logo, and links for Boston, Nation, World, Politics, Election 2010, Health & Science, Hubbur, Schedule, Programs, Support, and NPR. The main header features the 'CommonHealth' logo with the tagline 'Where Reform Meets Reality'. Below this is a menu with categories: Medicine, Money, Politics, Personal Health, Insurance, and a search bar. A 'Don't miss' section lists topics like 'payment reform', 'Partners For Caritas?', 'Workplace Bullies', 'Shaken Baby Syndrome', and 'Cost of care'. The featured article is 'The Healing Wig — And The Power Of Cherished Objects' by Rachel Zimmerman, dated November 3, 2010. The article includes an image of wigs and a quote: 'Can certain special objects, like wigs, actually have healing power?' and 'Why do human beings attach such great power to objects that are given to them, especially in times of crisis? For thousands of years, civilizations have embraced the mystical possibilities in amulets and talismans. Now science is explaining how these items actually work, and why, in today's digital age, they often take on even more significance.' There are also social media icons and a 'GET IN TOUCH' button. At the bottom, there's a section for 'LATEST LINKS' with a 'Twitter list' link.

CommonHealth, produced by WBUR in Boston and part of the Argo Network, focuses on health care reform and other topics related to personal health and medicine.

Investigative Reporting About Secrecy

‘... it would be a terrific investment of reportorial resources, not to mention a valuable public service, to dedicate an entire beat to secrecy.’

BY TED GUP

The real intent [of the First Amendment] was to prevent national suicide by making it difficult for the government to operate in secret, free from the scrutiny of a watchful press.

—I.F. Stone’s Weekly, October 3, 1966

Investigative reporters are all too familiar with secrecy. They know it as the obstacle that stands between them and the object of their interest. Everything about investigative reporting reinforces the notion that secrecy is but an impediment to be overcome. We celebrate our triumphs over secrecy with prizes, promotions and public accolades. But secrecy is more than a mere roadblock to successful reporting, and the conventional treatment of secrecy may inadvertently play into the hands of those who seek to keep the public in the dark.

I recognize that the economy has thinned the reportorial ranks, but given the wild proliferation of secrets in both the public and private spheres, it would be a terrific investment of reportorial resources, not to mention a valuable public service, to dedicate an entire beat to secrecy. If nothing else, it would produce some remarkable stories, and it might just help the public grasp the wider implications of unchecked secrecy.

With some noteworthy exceptions, secrecy is rarely tackled head-on in the press. Rather, it crops up in stories as an incidental—a fleeting denial of access, a closed door, a call not returned, a stalled Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. Secrecy itself gets short shrift. It is endemic to the culture of investigative reporting to see it in terms that are defined by our own ability or inability to surmount the obstacles before us.

In so doing we have tended to



Indiscriminate secrecy is used by government “to impede scrutiny, obscure process, avoid accountability, suppress dissent, and concentrate power.”

overlook one of the more significant stories of our lifetime—an emerging “secretocracy” that threatens to transform American society and democratic institutions. Systemic or indiscriminate secrecy involves the calculated use of secrecy as a principle instrument of governance, a way to impede scrutiny, obscure process, avoid accountability, suppress dissent, and concentrate power. The tendency to abuse secrecy is as old as power itself, but prior to 9/11 it was usually checked, and even its abuses were cyclical.

Too often today this broader use of secrecy escapes our attention, or at least our reporting—especially when as reporters we fail to prevail and obtain the information sought. On the rare occasion that secrecy itself is granted center stage, it is often so closely tied to the particulars of a given story that the context is lost. Readers encounter the subject of secrecy almost always in

isolated settings—this official refused to disclose, that official declined to comment.

Our own reportorial frustrations have sometimes been allowed to color our judgment and blind us to the news; we personalize secrecy. Because we are stymied in our quest for information, we view the story as a dry hole. There is a professional reluctance to write about secrecy per se, in part because it is seen as self-serving or whining, an admission of our own shortcomings as reporters. Writing about intact secrets somehow smacks of defeatism. Great reporters, we might imagine, would not stoop to carping about such conditions, equating secrecy with professional adversity; they would rise above them, or so the argument goes. Watergate and the Pentagon Papers remain the template, stories steeped in secrecy, but in which the reporters emerged triumphant. The closest we

come to recognizing secrecy as an integral element of the story is when it is cast as a cover-up.

Obstacles to Reporting on Secrecy

There are other reasons why secrecy is rarely taken on directly. To expose broad patterns of secrecy requires reporters to cooperate across beats and to subordinate sensitivities over turf to news values. There is also the fear that an examination of secrecy is for policy wonks and political scientists, not journalists, and that it is too abstract to be of much interest to readers. But it is no more so than a host of other topics we routinely cover as beats, including economics, science, health or politics (and secrecy involves them all—and more).

The key, here as elsewhere, is to show who benefits and who suffers and how secrecy is the lubricant for all manner of chicanery. Nothing so discredits legitimate secrets as the profusion of counterfeit secrets. Most importantly, we should be detailing how indiscriminate secrecy threatens to profoundly alter our entire system of governance, neutering oversight efforts and marginalizing citizens. Secrecy writ large can hijack democracy itself.

Finally, while journalistic enterprises have targeted secrecy at the publishers' and trade association level, individual papers are often squeamish about working in concert with one another, eschewing campaigns out of fear that they compromise objectivity. One week a year, a coalition takes up the subject and spotlights individual states' compliance or lack of compliance with sunshine provisions, but otherwise it is a topic left to ad hoc efforts linked to specific reporting challenges.

Historically, reporters have indulged themselves in reporting almost exclusively on those secrets that they have penetrated. Everyone reports on a leak, but too few notice the dam looming behind them. The sense of accomplishment that comes with cutting through resistance and secrecy is undeniable. But cumulatively, such breakthrough

stories may have left readers/citizens with the dangerous misimpression that few secrets can withstand our reportorial onslaught, that the republic still enjoys a robust albeit begrudging transparency, and that the government's or industry's feeble attempts to ward us off and conceal their actions are ultimately to no avail. In short, we have telegraphed to the electorate, the consumer, the patient, and the litigant, that they are in possession of all the vital information they need to make informed choices.

That does not comport with my experience as a reporter. Nor does it, I believe, reflect the reality of America in 2010. Silly as it might sound, we also do the nation a service when we admit what important information we do not possess and cannot acquire because it has been denied us.

Secrets Not Shared

In truth, secrecy has migrated well beyond the historic reservoirs of national security as the nation's entire infrastructure has been considered a potential terrorist target. All the state, county and metropolitan authorities that intersect with those sites—as well as the private industries that operate them—have increasingly come under the mantle of secrecy. Communications intercepts have brought the telecommunications companies into the security fold.

Formal secrecy, as all investigative reporters know firsthand, is only a fragment of the problem. Hundreds of thousands of officials, senior and junior, as well as contractors, possess the ability—without any formal training or authorization—to scribble “Sensitive But Unclassified,” or “Official Use Only,” or any one of many other designations on documents, thereby removing them from public scrutiny even as they admit them to be unclassified. Those labels have brought about a sea change in the availability of materials and in our ability to track the policies and practices of government and industry. It is a subject familiar to the coalition of interest groups and journalists who care so deeply about such affairs, but

it remains widely unknown to most Americans.

Secrecy is increasingly a problem in the courts as well, as fewer cases are adjudicated in open court and more and more cases go the way of alternative dispute resolution and are sealed. In the federal courts, fewer than 2 percent of cases go to a full and open trial. This might sound like an arcane subject, but it has very real public implications as tort litigation over potentially dangerous products—autos, tires, medications, machinery—medical malpractice, gender, age and race discrimination, and a slew of other topics that directly affect the public's safety and well-being, are increasingly settled out of sight.

In my book on secrecy, “Nation of Secrets: The Threat to Democracy and the American Way of Life,” I reported that the software system used in all federal courts is designed to spit out “No Such Case Exists” when anyone queries cases that have been sealed. But outside of lawyerly publications, such matters rarely receive notice in any systemic context.

When I began working on my secrecy book, I asked a ridiculously simple question that produced some extraordinary responses. The question: “May I have a list of everything I am not allowed to see?” At least it was a good start, and one that would work well for anyone covering secrecy as a beat. ■

Ted Gup is the author of “Nation of Secrets: The Threat to Democracy and the American Way of Life” (Doubleday, 2007) and directs the department of journalism at Emerson College in Boston. This article appeared in our Spring 2008 issue in a collection of stories about 21st century muckraking; its discussion of secrecy as a beat convinced us to reprint it in this issue with only a few updates and word changes.

There's Something to Be Said for Longevity

'... the hardest part of my job often isn't getting people to talk. It's sifting through the streaming fire hose of news to figure out which stories truly warrant more attention—and deciding how best to tell them.'

BY CRAIG WELCH

On a June morning in 2009, I stood in the mud on a Pacific Ocean beach watching a work crew gathering oysters. These shellfish had been held in reserve by the state of Washington for those odd years when wild oyster production faltered. But shellfish growers had now been forced to pluck these oysters for several straight years. That's because

the oysters in Washington state's Willapa Bay—the heart of the West Coast's wild oyster industry—had not reproduced in five years. I was here to understand why.

That there were problems with shellfish in the Pacific Northwest wasn't news. Many stories had been published about the phenomenon, including a few in my own newspaper,

The Seattle Times. But I had recently returned to the paper after a book leave and had been spending time on the phone catching up with sources. And the scientists I spoke with who had followed this issue suggested that new evidence pointed to a disturbing possibility. They suspected that the oysters were struggling in part because changes in ocean chemistry



As an environment beat reporter, Craig Welch recognized the potential significance of oysters being in trouble because of changes in ocean chemistry. Their failure to reproduce is resulting in more harvesting from state preserves. *Photo by Steve Ringman/The Seattle Times.*

were affecting oyster larvae.

As The Seattle Times's beat reporter for coverage of the environment, I recognized immediately how significant that would be. Climate scientists for years had talked about a major side effect of carbon dioxide emissions: ocean acidification. Unlike the complex science of global warming, ocean acidification is simply basic chemistry: Carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere eventually gets absorbed by the sea, and sooner or later that carbon dioxide was expected to begin making marine waters more acidic. That change, when it began, would likely have a corrosive effect on marine life—especially sea creatures with calcium carbonate shells, like oysters. Most scientists had not expected to see such changes until sometime around the year 2100. But now some of the world's leading experts on ocean chemistry suspected the West Coast was already seeing signs of it.

It was hard to overstate how important this story could be. But telling it posed significant challenges. It was complicated, for starters, and the scientists were frank about the fact that evidence was anecdotal. In other words, they knew they could be wrong. But the implications, if they were correct, were huge. The story had to be done right.

The Gift of Time

I've worked on this beat at the Times for a decade. In that time I've learned that the hardest part of my job often isn't getting people to talk. It's sifting through the streaming fire hose of news to figure out which stories truly warrant more attention—and deciding how best to tell them. For that reason, covering the environment as a beat can at times feel haphazard and a bit messy. Unlike traditional beats—city hall, say, or crime—there isn't one or even a handful of central sources of information. I don't make morning cop calls or swing by for daily rounds at the courthouse. I rarely visit with the same people or office twice in the same week, let alone catch up with any of them every day. There is no routine.

Instead I try to keep tabs on a daunting array of issues and institutions, from the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to the National Marine Fisheries Service, the Forest Service, and the National Park Service. And those are just a few of the federal agencies.

None of this is to complain. I love my job and where I get to do it. My editors believe that environmental reporting is important, and this means they don't just pay lip service to it. Even in today's economic climate, they will put me or one of my colleagues on a plane the moment we make the case that a story matters. And while reporters at other news organizations are expected to update their blogs and Twitter feeds several times a day, at the Times we operate under a different philosophy.

When it comes to writing about the environment, the editors agree with the adage—most often attributed to the longtime and much respected Philadelphia Inquirer editor Gene Roberts—that the most important stories frequently don't break, they ooze. In other words, the very significance of a complex story can sometimes get lost in the churning drumbeat of breaking news updates. For those stories it's often wiser to step back and put all the pieces together.

Not that we're allergic to breaking news. Far from it. The Times seems to have grown more nimble with age. Earlier this year the newsroom won a Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News Reporting when editors blanketed the city with reporters and photographers during a manhunt for an ex-con who had shot and killed four police officers. The staff posted video to the Web and tweeted updates into the wee hours for several days on end.

But the editors also recognize that every story is different, and environmental stories ooze more than others. That means that I, more than some, often have the luxury of time. In exchange, I feel a great responsibility to choose stories wisely and tell them fully. I want readers who might not care about the environment to at least understand why the story matters.

Stories on the Beat

It's tempting sometimes to narrow my focus, to drill down on only one or two issues. It would be so much easier to become expert only on the ecological implications of population growth or efforts to clean up Puget Sound. But the diversity of environmental stories in the Pacific Northwest is astounding, and consequently the breadth of my beat widens as the years go by.

There are ocean stories and mountain stories and international trade stories. One day I might write about the world's most expensive environmental remediation project—the multibillion-dollar effort to clean up radioactive waste produced by the Manhattan Project at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. Another day I'll report on an oil spill in Alaska or the battle to clean up asbestos in a small farming community. There are fights over freshwater, needed by both the Northwest's largest industry—agriculture—and the region's threatened runs of Pacific salmon. There are the pollution issues—the lead and arsenic from mine tailings in communities around the West, the mercury and long-lived PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) now found everywhere. (One former boss called these the “parts per billion” stories.) I could write news about climate change—the politics, the economic impacts, or its ecological effects—every week.

But I feel it's important to give readers a taste of it all, which means I have to try and keep abreast of everything. And, of course, it would be a mistake to say I actually do. I fail every day to keep on top of it all. But making the effort is what matters. Because that's the only way that I will hear an alarm bell in my head when I'm on the phone with a scientist who is talking excitedly about the minutiae of oyster larvae.

That's how I found myself in Willapa Bay, talking to third-generation oyster growers about what was happening to their shellfish. I'd spent a few days there with a photographer and rushed back to the office to write a lengthy piece. Trusting my judgment, honed through

the years of staying on this beat, my editors didn't try to downplay the story even as I made clear that there was a lot that remained unknown. The story landed on the front page on Sunday.

This story—published in 2009—echoed around the world. I got calls from radio stations in New York, and I was interviewed by Korean television. The story seemed to strike a chord. People grasped the implications even as they understood that the science was still in flux. Some raised questions about researchers' findings. Some questioned the way I told the story. But in the year since the piece ran, the link between ocean acidification and oyster trouble appears to have just grown stronger.

Wild oysters along Washington's coast failed again to reproduce in 2010.

Shellfish hatcheries that use water from the sea improved production by installing sophisticated water-chemistry monitors that allowed them to draw in seawater only when its acidity was normal. (The chemistry of the marine waters entering northwest estuaries shifts with wind and tidal events.) New peer-reviewed research published this fall by scientists with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration suggested that ocean acidification was at least partially responsible for changes in the chemical balance of Washington's Puget Sound.

I've written more stories about changing ocean chemistry. But I'm also still writing about fights over water for salmon and about the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. I find it no more appropriate to focus on just one or

two issues than it ever was. There's no telling where the next important story will come from; often it will grow out of a casual conversation about a topic I'm only beginning to understand. It's by staying active on this beat—digging in, drilling down, widening out—that I will find these leads. That's the only way I will know which paths are the most worthwhile to travel down. ■

Craig Welch, a 2007 Nieman Fellow, is the environment reporter at The Seattle Times and a two-time winner of the Society of Environmental Journalists' top prize for beat reporting, most recently in 2010. His book "Shell Games: Rogues, Smugglers, and the Hunt for Nature's Bounty" was published in April by HarperCollins.



Third-generation shellfish farmer Brian Sheldon has turned to oysters started in hatcheries because Pacific oysters haven't successfully reproduced in the wild since 2004. *Photo by Steve Ringman/The Seattle Times.*

The Science Beat: Riding a Wave, Going Somewhere

‘While I can’t figure out who is paying a lot of these science reporters, the quantity of what they produce does not seem to have fallen off nearly as much as the cratering of traditional U.S. news media would predict.’

BY CHARLES PETIT

As things change rapidly in mass media, the science beat keeps on providing the purest news. At least that’s how I see things. It never has been the most prestigious or glamorous beat in a newsroom, but no one can accuse us of merely plugging new names and places into familiar tales of crime, corruption, political maneuvers, celebrity canoodling, and moments of catastrophe.

When done well, our reporting is about things new to human experience: discoveries about the nature of the universe and of game-changing technologies, the unknown past, and potential treatments for disease. And while there is the occasional scandal or disaster to investigate and report, what the science beat reporter unearths tends to be a tonic to the bad tidings that dominate daily news. Besides, we get to talk to smart people who do their jobs well. Most of our stories are about achievement. They may include peril but not so often failure or crime.

Other than that almost nothing is as it was just a few years ago. Nor were things quite as exciting as they are on this beat today. Never have I observed colleagues who are as collectively innovative, vital, multitalented—performing on multiple platforms—and aggressive as now. But the reason is not jolly.

Desperation motivates action, and the newspaper science writer, once a mainstay of our tribe, is an endangered species. Pay rates at magazines have stagnated. A typical science journalist’s reporting day is fractured by demands to exercise multiple skills—audio, video, photography and text while

The Science Gig

Stephen Leahy is an enterprising and crusading Canadian environmental reporter, whose website rises to the top of a Google search with his name and “science writing.” Climate change policy and science energizes much of his writing. He has a regular gig with Inter Press Service and has had pieces in *New Scientist*, *Wired News*, *Audubon*, *Maclean’s* and other sterling outlets. But contracts are becoming harder to get.

So Leahy is turning to crowdfunding techniques to augment his erratic income through a one-man community-supported journalism shop, which was launched when he asked followers of his website for donations to help him cover the Copenhagen climate conference in 2009. He got enough for airfare and a few nights of lodging. At a subsequent conference he found himself in the company of a platoon of freelancers, not a single one of whom had been

able to get his or her usual outlets to foot the bill. “No one had any money,” he recalled. “And I need to feed my family. My hope is that community-supported journalism will fill this gap.”

Now a large share of his articles—the ones not written under standard freelance arrangement—go online at



Graphic by Diane Novetsky.

tweeting and blogging away. There is a dizzying array of opportunities to publish online but few pay a handsome rate. A few independent science writers are doing fabulously. But as a group, we’re running and scrapping along as fast as we can with little idea of a destination.

The Guardian Brings Scientists as Bloggers Into the Mix

By Jonathan Seitz

Early this fall The Guardian took an innovative approach to expanding its coverage of the science beat. The British newspaper debuted a slate of bloggers that includes experts in evolution and climate change, a former politician, and a physics professor, each of whom writes about their area of expertise. Dubbed “Guardian Science Blogs,” the lineup includes a dedicated group of four bloggers.¹ It will also feature other science writers from around the Web in the Notes & Theories blog, moderated by two of The Guardian’s science reporters.

The most adventurous part of The Guardian’s endeavor might be what it lacks: the pre-publication scrutiny of professional journalists. The postings on the blogs appear on The Guardian’s website without passing by an editor’s eye—and as such, each carries the somewhat equivocal tagline “Hosted by the Guardian.” As Guardian science and environment correspondent, Alok Jha, who came up with this idea of adding bloggers to the beat, explained to Megan Garber of the Nieman Journalism Lab, “It’s is a completely new model for us ... nothing here is unedited.”

In a posting introducing this website feature, Jha described the rationale for enlisting these bloggers. “[T]housands of scientists, journalists, hobbyists and numerous other interested folk write about and create lively discussions around paleontology, astronomy, viruses and other bugs, chemistry, pharmaceuticals, evolutionary biology, extraterrestrial life or bad science. ... The Guardian’s science blogs network is an attempt

GUARDIANSCIENCE BLOGS

Latest

Win a million dollars with maths, No. 1: The Riemann Hypothesis
In the first of his series on the seven Millennium Prize Problems – the most intractable problems in mathematics – Matt Parker introduces the Riemann Hypothesis
4 comments


Science saved my soul
This uplifting video captures how grand and beautiful scientific explanations for the universe, the world and life really are
15 comments

Mystery Bird: Yellow-billed oxpecker, *Buphagus africanus*
This lovely African bird is placed into the same family as a common European bird species
Post your comment

Today's Mystery Bird For You To Identify
This beautiful and tiny North American bird belongs to an avian group that was given its name in honor of the sort of nest they build.
5 comments


This week's science and medical blog carnivals
Just like a magazine (only better), this is a weekly listing of the latest carnival publications in the science.

Editor's picks




Why it's vital to protect science funding
An open letter to George Osborne from Dr Evan Harris on the eve of the Science is Vital rally in London
28 comments

The Lay Scientist



The Mystery of the Disappearing Planet
29 Oct 2010, 14:17 BST:
 As humans peer into the galaxy in search of interstellar friends, media narratives fail to give a realistic picture of scientific progress.
9 comments

Where are the women in the 'population control' debate?
25 Oct 2010, 13:23 BST
10 comments



Science bloggers on Twitter

alokjha: RT @CasperMelville: SHUDDER RT @JamesDelingpole: Tea Party: now for the presidency 2012 http://fs.gd/gFINr
about 11 minutes ago

alokjha: Science blog www.frogblog.ie nominated for an Eircom Spider Award (Ireland's major web awards): http://bit.ly/c0XmkU
about 11 minutes ago

mjrobbins: RT @JennyRohn: Invisible ranks: on the scarcity of female science ambassadors & pundits, and why it might matter http://bit.ly/kz2iCC
about 25 minutes ago

Follow our science bloggers on a Twitter list

Bloggers' profiles

The Lay Scientist
Martin Robbins is a Berkshire-based researcher and science writer. He edits The Lay Scientist, a community blog about science, pseudoscience and evidence-based politics

Life and Physics
Jon Butterworth is a physics professor at UCL. He is a member of the High Energy Physics group on the Atlas experiment at the Large Hadron Collider at Cern.

Political science

to bring some of the expertise and these discussions to our readers.” He added that research in 2009 by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism revealed that science stories make up 10 percent of all blog posts, but only 1 percent of mainstream news.

The Guardian’s blogging corps tends to rely more on humor and their own experiences than on actual reporting, thereby injecting fresh voices and a decidedly different tone into the newspaper’s typical coverage of science. In offering this alternative voice, The Guardian may have found a low-cost, high-value way to keep

the science beat afloat financially; as compensation, the bloggers receive the exposure that The Guardian’s prestige and global reach affords them and a 50/50 revenue share from the advertisements displayed on their blogs, Jha explained to the Nieman Lab.

As Garber noted, The Guardian is not the first to debut a network of amateur science bloggers; The Public Library of Science and Wired magazine each has its own lineup. But such collaboration is rarely seen in major newspapers—and how well this experiment will work remains to be seen. ■

¹ “Life and Physics” by Jon Butterworth, a physics professor at University College; “Political Science” by former MP Dr. Evan Harris; “Punctuated Equilibrium” by the evolutionary biologist known as GrrlScientist; and “The Lay Scientist” by researcher Martin Robbins. [Read about Robbins’s spoof of science journalism on page 34.]

his site. He also sends them directly to registered readers by e-mail. In return, he asks but does not demand of them: Please send money. His site has no ads, just that plea. He suggests a \$50 or \$100 contribution.

I asked him this fall how the arrangement is working. “Too soon to tell, less than a year in,” he replied. Contributions come from all over but mainly North America and Europe. “At first it was people who sort of know me—met at some meeting—but more now come from out of the blue.” He also gets verbal support, ideas for news stories, and offers of assistance, which he appreciates, such as an offer of “a bed if I am in their city,” he told me, then added that “I have availed myself of that offer many times.” But at times he feels like he’s panhandling and he has had less than \$5,000 donated this year, which is only about a third of what he needs to make such direct-access journalism worth his while.

Good luck, Mr. Leahy.

Tracking Science Journalism

I’ve been through my own career crisis. About four and a half years ago I became a different kind of science writer. My beat went from writing about science to writing about other science writers. Monday through Friday I’m up before dawn, blogging by about 7 a.m., and at around noon I send off from my home in California a compilation of impressions of what I’ve found in breaking news and occasionally in feature writing. In the afternoons I do some freelance writing or chase grandchildren.

I am fortunate. It comes with a paycheck and benefits. Former Washington Post reporter Boyce Rensberger made me an offer. We ran into each other in early 2005 at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He was then director of the Knight Science Journalism Fellowships at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). I was long ago a fellow in the program. He knew I’d been bought out at the end of 2004 by U.S. News & World Report. Not long after that, the magazine closed down

its entire, non-medical science writing group. Rensberger told me he wanted somebody to work for the program part time, surveying the day’s science news online and blogging with links and commentary. “Sort of a Romenesko for science writing,” he said, alluding to the Poynter Institute’s must-read daily journalism blog.

At first, I didn’t want to do it. I felt as though I would be chained to a desk at home. But the lure of benefits was high since the anxiety of a freelancer’s life did not suit me. In April 2006 we launched the Knight Science Journalism Tracker—known as KSJ Tracker online—and today we have an e-mail newsletter option. I assembled a huge list of RSS feeds, heavily focused on traditional outlets including wires, a few online sites, and nearly 200 North American and overseas English-language newspapers and broadcasters. I would churn through as many as possible and chase specific, popular news via search engines. I found I could get in 10 or so posts a day, encompassing dozens of stories, many of them covering the same news.

Since then, I have filed more than 6,000 posts, most of them linked to several stories. In the past year or so the site has added other contract, per-piece part-time trackers to follow medical science, as well as news media that publish in Spanish and German, nearly all of which, like the U.S. press, give their content away for free on the Web.

Several times during the early years I posted about the departure of old standbys in the business as conventional media lost ad revenue. Such attrition helped to force a change in the way I covered my beat. Within two years the systematic searches yielded less and less. I stopped going through the original RSS food line every day, and I took to writing fewer, longer, more analytical items, which often meant rounding up the dozen or (many) more outlets that had jumped to cover the same basic news. Plus, more readers—many and probably most of whom are science journalists—suggested a growing stream of articles to check, sometimes their own.

Expanding Coverage

Now here’s the catch, the one I can’t really explain. While I can’t figure out who is paying a lot of these science reporters, the quantity of what they produce does not seem to have fallen off nearly as much as the cratering of traditional U.S. news media would predict. (United Kingdom and Canadian media have not suffered losses quite as big as U.S. news organizations, and in much of the developing world newspapers and science coverage seem to be expanding rapidly.) In fact, what I’ve been witnessing is an explosive increase in the number of websites providing science news worldwide, and that includes those originating in the United States.

The diversity of this news reporting is illuminated by a post I did on September 29, when a team of astronomers said they had discovered another planet circling the small, reddish star Gliese 581. The star is 20 light-years away—close by astronomical standards—and has several offspring, but press releases dubbed this latest one a “Goldilocks planet.” Not too close or too far from its star, it is just right for liquid water. No one could know what its surface is like but the orbital dimensions alone struck a chord with reporters and editors. (Two weeks after this story broke, reports began to surface that perhaps this planet doesn’t exist. Maybe it’s a figment of data analysis—certainly news for another day.)

My initial KSJ Tracker post (<http://tinyurl.com/23j3qew>) had a discussion of the artist who did an impression of the planet—catnip to art editors—and links to 28 versions of the news, most of them bylined stories. I could have listed many more. I had found stories by searching the old standbys—outfits that would have covered similar news 20 years ago, including The New York Times, USA Today, Reuters, The Associated Press, Voice of America, Time magazine, BBC, NPR, Maclean’s, The Washington Post, plus a few regional newspapers such as the San Jose Mercury News in the United States, and The Telegraph, The Guardian, The

Register, Mirror, and The Independent and Mail in the United Kingdom, as well as outlets in Australia such as The Age.

Then there were the links to what I call the new old media—found online for the most part but affiliated

with established news organizations. These digital destinations are now fixtures among science reporters, regarded as places that still practice journalism. There were blogs posted by staff reporters on websites such as The Washington Post's and on the

SeattlePI.com, a newspaper turned website. CNN had a story online, as did the tech outlet CNET. I found more at Discover magazine in the form of the so-named Bad Astronomy site operated by prolix astronomer-blogger Phil Plait and at Discovery News. The world's foremost general science journals, Nature and Science, also covered the Goldilocks planet.

In addition, the story was covered by outlets such as Slate, PC Magazine, Wired News, National Geographic, Scientific American, the biweekly Science News magazine in Washington, D.C., which had its story also published on the US News & World Report site, and Popular Science.

I found one story from a sort of mashup called "The Takeaway," which describes itself as a national morning news program produced in partnership with The New York Times, BBC World Service, WNYC, Public Radio International, and WGBH Boston. What it is exactly, I am still not sure.

Then there is a new category of online news outlets that I can't begin to classify; it's an inchoate sea of outlets that I seldom track simply because there are too many of them. Presumably these writers are receiving some sort of pay, and some of them might well be ethical journalism outlets, but I didn't include them in my post that day. (Here are a few of the sites' names: Gizmodo, Wikinews, Gossip Jackal, dBTechno, DailyTech, Softpedia, Stop Press! News, eWorld Post, Gather.com, Helium which had at least two bylined accounts, Newsopi, Spreadit, Allvoices, Tonic.com, Ars Technica, First Post, TopNews ... I could go on.) Some of these sites merely aggregate others' work, but some have distinctive pieces that carry bylines.

Press Releases: Reborn as News Stories

Another kind of science writer, if not science journalist, writes the press releases that tumble out of government-funded labs or universities. The Goldilocks planet story was born out of at least five press releases sent by the University of California at Santa

Guardian Blogger Spoofs Science Journalism

By Jonathan Seitz

Prompted by dismay at the dearth of evidence-based policymaking, Martin Robbins, a researcher and science writer, created a community blog called The Lay Scientist. This fall The Guardian hired him to be one of its four science bloggers. It didn't take long for a post he wrote—with the headline "This is a news website article about a scientific paper"—to go viral.

In it, he satirized what he sees as the too-frequently formulaic approach to reporting on scientific discoveries in which journalists fail to provide informed guidance as part of their coverage. Robbins used the BBC as his example of science coverage being done with "robotic impartiality," with headlines written in ways that are designed to "distance themselves [the journalists] from the words inside."

Here is how Robbins began his post:

In this paragraph I will state the main claim that the research makes, making appropriate use of "scare quotes" to ensure that it's clear that I have no opinion about this research whatsoever.

His commentary-as-spoof struck a chord with other bloggers and became The Guardian's most read story that week. But rather than stop at writing this cheeky send-up of science writing, Robbins returned the following week with constructive

criticism. This one he headlined "Why I spoofed science journalism, and how to fix it."

One of his chief complaints is the tendency for science reporters to ignore the many small, daily milestones of scientific research while they overemphasize—by the sheer weight and force of the onslaught of their reporting—the importance of particular findings. His example was the widespread coverage that followed the discovery announced earlier this year of "the most massive star ever found."

Again, Robbins's words:

The result was a self-propelling explosion of journalistic effort that resulted in hundreds of virtually identical articles scattered across the face of the Internet like some sort of fast-growing weed. What did all this effort and expense achieve? Hundreds of interesting things happen in science every week, and yet journalists from all over the media seem driven by a herd mentality that ensures only a handful of stories are covered.

Is it any surprise that his critique, couched in satire, traveled far and wide via social media—garnering readers and stirring up comment on The Guardian's website? ■

Read about The Guardian's decision to hire science bloggers on page 32.

Cruz, University of Hawaii Institute for Astronomy, the Carnegie Institution for Science, NASA and the National Science Foundation. And no longer are press releases targeted exclusively at the press; each of these was written in journalistic style, if not with a journalistic edge, and was piped to the public via in-house websites and through the many “news” outlets that lightly rewrite and on occasion relabel releases as news stories.

When I first started at the KSJ Tracker, I regarded my inclusion of press releases as brilliantly subversive. Have them there for readers and they’d reveal how much spoon feeding goes into the generation of a lot of news and make transparent which writers tend to lift quotes rather than making

their own calls. That was when I still thought of them as inside information. Now the work of press agent—and isn’t that an old-time sounding name?—is simply a routine part of the flow of information directly to the public, with the journalist as intermediary regarded as a bit of a quaint notion.

Journalism professors tell me that programs to train science journalists are still seeing their graduates get jobs. Though I live in the territory where the work of the science beat writers resides, I couldn’t tell you where these jobs are. Nor do I know when or whether a business model will come along to provide the competent ones with a reasonable wage. Nor do I know when or whether any more than a small fraction of the reading public

will—or still does—include science journalism in its daily diet.

This much I do know when I go to my computer each morning: Something exciting is simmering in the stew of old media, online, smartphone and tablet-borne news streams. And science journalists are stirring the pot. ■

Charles Petit is the lead writer for the MIT Knight Science Journalism Tracker. He also does freelance reporting and was for 26 years a science writer for the San Francisco Chronicle and spent six years at U.S. News & World Report. He is the past president of the National Association of Science Writers and serves on the board of the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing.

Eclectic, Entertaining and Educational—The 21st Century Science Beat

‘While the science beat is old—dating back to even before Sputnik—the approach we take is new.’

BY PAUL ROGERS

“Giant, hippie-hating, cannibalistic squids attack SF Bay Area.”

It’s not exactly the kind of headline normally associated with PBS or NPR. But when our TV story about giant Humboldt Squid spreading up the California coast was featured a couple of years ago on Boing Boing—the irreverent, wildly popular blog of tech, culture and games—we cheered. We knew we had arrived, especially when 48 hours later, more than 200,000 people had watched the piece online—roughly three times as many as watched on TV a few nights earlier.

Think about science journalists, and clichés are abundant. The science reporter is the rumpled, socially inept character in the corner cubicle, sur-

rounded by stacks of papers, busily reading journals and pitching stories that editors and executive producers don’t understand. Quarks? T-cells? Can’t we do something instead on the calf with the funny birthmark?

Since 2006, KQED, the main PBS and NPR affiliate in the San Francisco Bay Area, has been working to bring the science and environment beats into the 21st century. While keeping science front and center, we’ve been experimenting with ways to expand the stories we cover and how we tell them. By using emerging media platforms, we connect with fresh audiences.

While the science beat is old—dating back to even before Sputnik—the approach we take is new. KQED had a storied 50-year history of producing

high-quality radio and TV pieces, but it didn’t have a local show focusing on the scientific and environmental wonders of Northern California, which is home to Stanford University, the University of California at Berkeley, Google, Apple, Napa Valley, the world headquarters of the Sierra Club, and countless other sources of innovation, fomentation and experimentation.

With a start-up grant from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, KQED—motivated in part by alarming statistics about students’ understanding of science—spent a year gathering input from scientists, journalists, museum curators, and science teachers. It created QUEST, a weekly series aimed at recasting science and environmental journalism for new



The QUEST team gathers sound and pictures to portray the work of Chelsey Juárez, a University of California at Santa Cruz doctoral candidate in forensic anthropology, who developed a technique to help identify the remains of migrants who die crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. *Photo courtesy of QUEST/KQED.*

audiences, using new tools and new expectations for its journalists. Now in production on its fifth season, the project has been held up nationally as a way forward for public broadcasting and other media outlets to stay relevant in an age when young people not only have given up landlines for cell phones, radios for iPods, and newspapers for blogs, but most recently, televisions for online video. “You’ve got to go where the audience is,” says QUEST executive producer Sue Ellen McCann.

As others have cut back on science and environment coverage, QUEST has assembled the largest team of journalists covering local science and environment issues of any media outlet in Northern California. Between its debut in February 2007 and the end of November 2010, QUEST has produced 414 TV, radio and Web stories. The weekly 30-minute TV show features stories from Mendocino to Monterey County, an area with about eight million residents. There is also a five-minute weekly QUEST radio story on KQED-FM and educator guides are produced

for teachers. Any of the TV or radio pieces can be found on our website, and Web visitors can follow local scientists who blog or can download Google maps embedded with photos and videos for local hikes featuring everything from earthquake faults to birding areas. Rolled out this year, a Web-only series called “Science on the SPOT” has five-minute presentations on topics such as the science of Bay Area fog and the genetics of albino redwood trees.

Distributing Science Stories

A big part of QUEST’s strategy is finding those who are frequent visitors of websites like Boing Boing. So every QUEST TV and radio story is uploaded to iTunes. The TV stories are posted on YouTube. QUEST producers put all the content, which is shot in high-definition, into a video player that can be easily embedded into any website or blog. Like dandelion seeds blown by the wind, stories spread digitally far and wide.

When the QUEST TV team put together a story about the physics of big-wave surfing, for example, producers went out to Mavericks, a famous surfing spot about an hour south of San Francisco, where the waves can reach 40 feet high. They filmed Grant Washburn, a world-class big-wave surfer. They brought physical oceanographer Toby Garfield to the beach to explain why the monster waves are so big. And after mixing in some surf music and shiny graphics, they researched the top surfing websites in the world and sent e-mails showing their proprietors how to embed the video story for free. They did the same with Bay Area newspapers. And when the waves hit their peak in the spring and an international surf contest sprung up, the newspapers and surf blogs embedded the QUEST story with their text stories online. Every time a reader clicked on the QUEST player, it registered a hit back at KQED.

Those who watched on surf blogs—who also learned about energy transfer, bathymetry and wavelength—represent younger, more diverse, and different audiences than the ones public broadcasting normally attracts. In short, they represent hope.

This distribution model works. In QUEST’s first season in 2007, 18 percent of the audience watched the TV show on a computer; in 2008, 27 percent watched on a computer, and by 2009, 50 percent or more of the audience for some QUEST episodes watched on a computer. And this growth in online audience didn’t cannibalize the TV ratings. They remained about the same.

QUEST’s stories have been distributed nationally as well. Pieces about the giant plastic garbage patch in the Pacific Ocean, the physics of baseball, and Silicon Valley’s burgeoning electric car industry were co-produced with “PBS NewsHour.” In August 2010, NPR’s “Morning Edition” aired a five-part series produced by QUEST and Climate Watch, another KQED project. It explored Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger’s ambitious plans to provide 33 percent of California’s

electricity from renewable sources by 2020—along with all the pitfalls and problems, from inadequate transmission lines to environmental concerns that big solar arrays will harm desert tortoises and other endangered species. In October, NPR aired nationally QUEST's three-part consumer guide to the surge of electric cars about to hit U.S. showrooms.

Collaborating on Science Reporting

QUEST also has experimented with new models of collaboration among journalists. On its first day, the staff of 15 employees was brought out of separate departments at KQED—TV, radio, education and interactive—to sit together on the third floor. Assigning editors didn't hand out story ideas. Instead a wiki—a collaborative internal website like Wikipedia—was set up where every staff member, from the newest intern to the executive producer, was encouraged to enter ideas and critique or contribute to ideas already there.

QUEST concentrates its coverage on nine topics—astronomy, biology, chemistry, engineering, environment, geology, health, physics and weather. These were chosen to be in sync with California's public school science curriculum standards. Sixteen community partners were enlisted—from the Monterey Bay Aquarium to the California Academy of Sciences, the U.S. Geological Survey to the Girl Scouts—to suggest story ideas and provide feedback. Some stories now play on flat screen TVs on the walls of Bay Area aquariums and museums. One 30-minute QUEST special about the state of science education in California schools was embedded on the National Science Teachers Association website. At some of the partner locations, QUEST producers have hosted public lectures and film festivals with scientists.

To report science and environment stories, QUEST producers have climbed inside the massive towers of the new Oakland Bay Bridge to explain its engineering, gone on expeditions for great white sharks, mapped earthquake faults, and worked in laboratories with researchers seeking to find everything from a cure for AIDS to the identities of migrant workers who die alone in the desert. David Perlman, the veteran science reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle, once said that covering science, environment and medical issues “is like attending a never-ending graduate school of unlimited

Why can't TV producers share their audio with radio reporters, for example? Why can't every station create a wiki for story ideas ... ? Why can't a station create slideshows with radio stories and work with local museums and nonprofits to distribute them in e-mail newsletters to members?

diversity, with a faculty that is most often eager to instruct and patiently explain.” And it is.

Reaching out to the community has not been without challenges. At first, we had a delicate dance with partners to ensure the project benefited from their advice but we retained our journalistic independence. We learned we needed to involve the education team early on to make sure we included key facts to help stories meet state education standards. By the third year, we realized that many schoolteachers and community partners most wanted KQED to train them how to shoot their own video, make their own interactive maps, and create their own audio pieces with slideshows for their websites. So we did.

Money also is a challenge. The show costs about \$2.5 million a year to produce. Funding comes from the National Science Foundation and an array of other donors. QUEST would love to travel farther and wider—to Lake Tahoe, the northernmost ancient redwood forests, the deserts of California—but can't afford it. Yet the project has built a significant audience on the radio, TV and the Web and has won five Northern California Emmy Awards as well as national awards from the Society of Environmental Journalists.

Now KQED has begun an effort to replicate this multimedia reporting model at other PBS and NPR affiliates around the nation. Not all of the seven stations in this initial effort—including affiliates in Seattle, Tampa, Philadelphia and Nebraska—will be able to raise the money for a full-blown TV, radio, Web and education series. But we're convinced that using even some of the QUEST techniques can help them produce more compelling stories for broader audiences. Why can't TV producers share their audio with radio reporters, for example? Why can't every station create a wiki for story ideas, including notes and experts' phone numbers

for any staff producer to see? Why can't a station create slideshows with radio stories and work with local museums and nonprofits to distribute them in e-mail newsletters to members?

QUEST might flame out like other journalism experiments. But so far—from rocket ships to giant squid—it's been a wonderful ride. ■

Paul Rogers is the managing editor of QUEST and the environment writer at the San Jose Mercury News. For more, go to www.kqed.org/quest.

Modern-Day Slavery: A Necessary Beat—With Different Challenges

The nonprofit Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism is dedicating a gift of funding to support a reporter's effort to gather and tell these stories.

BY E. BENJAMIN SKINNER

In its code of ethics, the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) lists as its first two principles: Journalists should “seek truth and report it” and “minimize harm” in the process. My beat is modern-day slavery, and for those who cover unfolding crimes against humanity, doing no harm does not mean doing nothing. I confess my

bias: I am not for slavery. In fact, I hate it, and when victims have asked me for help to get free, and when there has been a way to aid their recovery responsibly, I have gotten involved.

Perhaps it's simply the nature of this beat. Perhaps it's me.

While on assignment for Time magazine to investigate sex traffick-

ing in South Africa one freezing cold night in July 2009, I met two girls who desperately needed help. Several months earlier, a recruiter had lured the best friends out of their township, then sold them into sex slavery for \$120 and a bag of crack cocaine. The buyer was a Nigerian pimp named Jude, who kept every penny the girls earned on



Reporting stories about girls like “Elizabeth,” who stands on a corner in Bloemfontein, South Africa, can mean that a journalist becomes involved in their lives in ways that can press up against journalism's code of ethics. *Photo by Melanie Hamman.*

the streets. Jude had kicked out the older one, Sindiswa, 17, a week before I met her, as she was too sick to work.

Now Sindiswa lay alone, dying in a state-run hospice in central Bloemfontein, feverish from AIDS, tuberculosis, and a first-trimester pregnancy. As she spoke, I wiped sweat from her brow with a paper napkin. Her fever was high and her T-cell count was bottoming out. She shivered, but her pillow was soaked. Next to the rusty bed lay one small duffel bag with all of her worldly possessions: two T-shirts, pants, raggedy lambskin slippers, and her toiletries. On her side table was a half empty bottle of Sprite and a bottle of the rehydrant Pedialyte. That was all that she had left in the world.

“I’m hungry,” she said, letting me know that she couldn’t eat the food that they fed her in the clinic. She could not move so she asked me to get her Kentucky Fried Chicken, of all things. Ironically, she wanted a meal called “Street-wise Two.” I fetched it for her, and then she told me her life story in 20 halting minutes.

“Thank you for being interested in my life,” she said after she began to fade out for the night.

“It’s an honor,” I responded. “Thank you for your courage.”

Shortly afterward, at midnight, by pure coincidence, Melanie Hamman, the photographer working with me, took a picture of a young girl working on the corner of a hotel that a trafficking syndicate had overrun. The girl was “Elizabeth,” Sindiswa’s best friend. She said that she was 15, and though she had failed in two previous escape attempts, she held out hope of breaking free from Jude. Hamman and I decided to act immediately and deliberately to help her to safety. [See photo essay on page 41 by Hamman about her work documenting human trafficking.]

Setting Rules for Reporting

Since I began reporting on modern-day slavery in 2002, I have interviewed hundreds of slaves, survivors, traffickers and abolitionists in some two dozen countries. I’ve logged more than one



Reporter E. Benjamin Skinner wipes the perspiration from Sindiswa’s brow as she lies in a hospital, pregnant, HIV-infected, and ill from tuberculosis. *Photo by Melanie Hamman.*

million flight miles. And yet I have only peered through a tiny window into the world of what the International Labor Office claims are 12.3 million forced laborers. Forced to perform services under threat of violence, for no pay beyond subsistence, slaves are among the world’s most vulnerable and fragmented populations. They are hidden everywhere and nowhere, in all major countries, in all 50 states, in brick kilns and underground brothels, in fisheries and private homes. And

because slavery is a continuously unfolding crime against humanity, the SPJ’s code is particularly crucial for reporters who take on the subject.

“I only have one rule,” I typically tell slaves or survivors before an interview in which I ask them to bear honest witness about their lives. “You make the rules.”

The safety of slaves, survivors and other sources as well as fixers, translators and drivers is what matters, above all else. Informed consent of subjects can be a matter of life or death. As is true with most Western journalists reporting abroad, the dangers I face are minimal compared to those that my sources and confederates confront, and working primarily to ensure their safety normally means ensuring my own.

Such precautions extend to the editorial process as well. Of course I won’t change facts, but if a particular publication will permit it, I will change names. “Elizabeth,” for example, is not the real name of the victim mentioned above; Sindiswa insisted that I use her real name. I also will conceal certain biographical details of slaves and survivors in order to protect them from retaliation.

Most times these safety concerns dictate that it is not possible to get informed consent from criminally active traffickers before interviewing them. This means that certain

publications that I work for will not publish information that I have gathered while undercover. Yet undercover work is indispensable—and, according to the SPJ, defensible if acknowledged in the publication—to getting the truth while protecting the safety of sources and confederates. Activists often warn of immediate blowback suffered by slaves when overt journalists confront traffickers: A human rights advocate in Nebraska alleged that traffickers recently gang-raped a young victim

the night before she was scheduled for an interview.

In Romania during the summer of 2006, when interviewing a brutal pimp selling a disabled young woman out of an underground brothel, I knew that to break cover would be to risk the victim's life. But the year before in Haiti, when I spoke with a trafficker who was operating in broad daylight on the street with no victim in sight, I could interview him openly as a journalist. That "broker," as he called himself, was further emboldened by Haiti's lack of human trafficking law enforcement. In both instances, I reported my findings to local authorities before publication.

When the Story Ends

After publication, our responsibility for those that we write about and those who have helped us report remains. For Sydney Schanberg, that meant staying focused on Cambodia and working to contact Dith Pran, his reporting partner, whom Schanberg had left behind when Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge in 1975.

For me, that meant helping Bill Nathan. In 2005, Nathan, then the manager of a Port-au-Prince orphanage, told me his remarkable story of child domestic slavery and escape for my book, "A Crime So Monstrous: Face-to-Face With Modern-Day Slavery."

He also served as a guide, walking me through some of the Haitian capital's toughest neighborhoods, including the gang-controlled community, Cité Soleil. Most importantly, he was my savior when I contracted a debilitating case of malaria, and he provided me with the chloroquine, food and shelter that helped me recover.

After this year's catastrophic earthquake struck Haiti, Nathan wasn't responding to calls I made to his cell phone, and I was worried.

Miles Wright, treasurer of the North Carolina-based organization that supports Nathan's orphanage, learned that Nathan had fallen some 80 feet off of its collapsing roof, breaking his back in the process. Wright and I worked together to pull strings and charter a



Sindiswa, who was sold into prostitution, died a week after she shared her life story with reporter E. Benjamin Skinner. *Photo by Melanie Hamman.*

tiny plane to Haiti with two surgeons and 200 pounds of medical supplies. Our main mission, however, was to extract Nathan, which we did less than 72 hours after the quake.

Here we were following a different set of priorities, those of disaster triage, which dictate that injured people who have the capacity to save others—doctors and other first responders—should be the first victims assisted. Nathan, who has saved hundreds of children through his work, was first on my list.

As I write this, I am with him in Raleigh, North Carolina, where he received excellent round-the-clock medical care to save his mobility. His flexibility is still a problem, but he has made a remarkable recovery and has spent much of the last few months raising funds and rebuilding the orphanage. He and others at the home have recently added a school for recovering child domestic slaves.

Whether deliberately or not, journalists change the lives of those whose lives we cover. For Sindiswa, sadly, I was too late. I was the first and last person to hear her short life story; she died a week after our interview. Elizabeth, on the other hand, is still free and, aided by a suburban Chicago couple who heard about my investigation, is home with her disabled mother. She faces serious challenges, but she is HIV-negative, and she has another shot at life.

Too often, the 24-hour TV news cycle leaves viewers with the impression that journalists' professional detachment in covering global crises borders on misery tourism. I have rarely encountered journalists thus inclined. And as icons—Edward R. Murrow to Samantha Power to Nicholas Kristof, to name a few—have shown, journalists' reports on horrific human rights abuses don't have to be articles or essays merely "pondering over the deeds of darkness," in Henry David Thoreau's words. Their honest, detailed reporting can galvanize action to be taken against those deeds. ■

E. Benjamin Skinner is a senior fellow at the nonprofit Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism at Brandeis University, where his work is funded through a dedicated gift to support reporting on this beat.

AN ESSAY IN WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Visual Stories of Human Trafficking's Victims

BY MELANIE HAMMAN



A young woman leaves a house that police raided in Johannesburg, South Africa during the World Cup this past summer. The raid followed a tip from a girl who had been rescued by an outreach worker who helps street prostitutes and victims of trafficking.

Sometimes I wonder if I am crazy to be covering the issue of human trafficking as a photographer. That's when I realize how life can have its own way of deciding such things; it's what I've been compelled to do. Nothing about this job makes it easy—there's the photographic challenge of getting shots of criminal activity, which by its very nature is clandestine. Equally difficult is bearing the weight of absorbing and communicating the unrelenting pain of the victims.

Yet this is what I do, and so my journey brings me face to face with many victims of the global trafficking

of human beings, most of whom are women, many still children. In most cases they are helpless to escape the horror of what their lives have become, though some do. In hearing their stories and, in some cases, following their journey of recovery, I have come to understand the interwoven layers of my responsibility—as a photographer, a journalist, and a human being.

The pursuit of any documentary photographer or photojournalist is to tell a story visually—so the image conveys the story without the necessity of words. To do this, I find ways to personify the issue, to bring an abstract

subject into the realm of reality. Data about human trafficking, while horrifying to learn, can't do justice to this story: Visual images—with the capacity to draw us in to another human being's existence—have a vital role to play as powerful storytelling vehicles. Absent this personal connection, people remain detached.

The fine line between being a journalist and being someone who exploits a victim has become clear to me in my attempt to cover this story. During the past year, as I have met with women and young girls who were victims of domestic sex trafficking in South



Police broke down a security gate to gain entrance to locked rooms in this house. “Wandu,” who was addicted to drugs and had no trust in the police who’d arrested her for prostitution in the past, resisted leaving. She feared violence from the man who controlled her life and told her he would use witchcraft on her if she ever left. *Photo and text by Melanie Hamman.*

Africa and with social workers who work with victims who have escaped, I have more fully understood the human dimensions of this issue—and how it connects to our efforts to report on these lives. Merely by retelling her story, a victim can be retraumatized, severely complicating her recovery. For minors, the risk is even greater since the level of manipulation and trauma they’ve been exposed to often leaves them with severe psychological problems.

I experienced this with the first young woman I spoke to in South Africa who had been trafficked. She was 17 years old and had been entrapped in this circumstance for five years before she escaped and found refuge. Even

after she was “safe,” she suffered from psychotic spells; the effects of her trauma meant that she could not recall with any certainty the timeline of her experiences. Soon after she related her story to me, I learned that she had relapsed into a mental health crisis. Additionally, questioning victims too early (or at all) can risk jeopardizing possible police investigations, which in South Africa are frustratingly more the exception in such cases than the rule.

As a photographer I often ask myself whether what I’m doing is in the victim’s best interest. I use visual images to tell a story; it’s how I communicate a person’s humanity, how I convey their pain and anguish or their hope for and pursuit of survival. I’ve

come to accept that it is not always possible for me to remain emotionally detached, as much as I might feel this to be a journalist’s obligation.

When human trafficking surfaced as a story during the World Cup in South Africa, numerous reporters sought me out, and they asked me “Can you get me a victim?” The insensitivity of their request hit me hard, revealing the ugly side of journalism. Insensitive sensationalist reporting of human trafficking—conveying little beyond the hype of headlines based on hugely exaggerated speculation—has led to a media backlash. The surge of misinformed reporting during the World Cup resulted in small but unrealistic expectations that government



Wandi was questioned by a law enforcement officer during a raid. If it had been documented that she was under 18, the police would have been required by law to remove her from the house and place her in safe custody. Like the other females there, however, her identity documents were held by the man who controlled her, at his residence. *Photo and text by Melanie Hamman.*

or legal authorities would respond in some positive way and in the public's belief that once the World Cup left the stage, so, too, would the issue of human trafficking. It was as if South Africans convinced themselves that something foreign arrived with the sports event—and would be gone when the games were over.

Yet the truth is that human trafficking, even though it hadn't been covered by the news media, has been part of the migrant flow into South Africa for decades. Nor does it happen only to women who aren't South African. And eradicating it will not take place in a vacuum.

Similarly, reporting about it needs to be embedded in the complexities

of how this nation's poor women and children are marginalized—and yes, trafficked—as they confront obstacles in acquiring an education and in being kept healthy and safe. It should surprise no one that human trafficking is happening in this country in which two-thirds of children live in poverty and sex crimes against women and children climb year after year, and yet these crimes remain among the least of the government's priorities.

Through my photography I work to reveal the reality and horror of human trafficking. Yet in doing so I am acutely aware of the traumatic scars these experiences leave inside their victims. Being a journalist does not give me the right to invade their

lives in ways that will reignite their pain. ■

Melanie Hamman is a photographer whose work on child protection and trafficking was exhibited in late 2010 at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg, South Africa. Her photographs also accompanied a story about human trafficking by E. Benjamin Skinner in Time magazine in early 2010. She has developed a website to which journalists can go for information about covering human trafficking: www.mediamonitoringafrica.org/cpt.



A 17-year-old girl, who said she had been gang-raped the previous week, talks to a member of the raid squad. "He bought me a little pink dress and told me to go on the streets, but I didn't want to do it" she said of the man who was in charge of her life. On this day she left with an outreach worker and was brought to a safe house for victims of trafficking.

Photo and text by Melanie Hamman.



A man who was in the house during the raid evaded questioning by saying he was there visiting his “brother.” He appeared to be acting as a guard, and his papers identified him as an asylum seeker of West African origin.



This man, who claimed to be visiting his “brother,” packed his bag and left. Police found no reason to bring charges against him.

Photos and text by Melanie Hamman.

Geographic Fortunes—and Misfortunes—Define This New Midwest Beat

‘Although the challenges facing this Midwest region are primarily economic, Changing Gears’ mandate is more than to just tell business stories.’

BY MICHELINE MAYNARD

Throughout much of the 20th century, Detroit, Cleveland and Chicago were industrial boomtowns. Hundreds of thousands of people flocked to them from all over the country and all over the world in the Midwest’s equivalent of the Gold Rush. Between 1947 and 1977, the region’s heyday, the arc of many young lives seemed predestined—graduate from high school and walk across the street for a job in a factory. Sometimes it didn’t even take a diploma. All that was needed was a contact on the inside, such as a brother, a father, an uncle, or just a pal from the neighborhood.

Now, in a global economy, the region’s dynamics have shifted from building to buying, and those boomtowns are no more. Detroit and Cleveland have seen their populations drop by half, as carmakers and parts suppliers shrink. While Chicago gleams on the surface, it has an estimated 3,000 acres of abandoned and contaminated buildings largely hidden from tourists’ view. With that decline, residents of Michigan, Ohio and Illinois have to learn new skills that will lead them back to stability and perhaps prosperity someday.

Our job as journalists at Changing Gears: Remaking the Manufacturing Belt, a public media project, is to report the situation and address the region’s prospects. Although our reporting assignments focus on core issues such



The staff of Changing Gears, from left: Dan Bobkoff, Cleveland reporter; Kate Davidson, Ann Arbor reporter; Micheline Maynard, senior editor; George Nemeth, senior Web producer; and Niala Boodhoo, Chicago reporter.

as the economy and jobs, we also look to other beats—food and culture, to name just two—to tackle the breadth of issues facing the industrial Midwest.

At its core, our beat is the region from Duluth, Minnesota to Buffalo, New York and the states and towns in between, although our subject of reinvention is not limited simply by geography. That’s the wide-angle view.

Within the industrial Midwest, we decided to zoom in on five major themes, which we call mini-beats. These are jobs and job creation, community redevelopment, education, the environment (a topic of great interest to those residing near the Great Lakes), and agriculture. In addition, we are exploring cultural issues, from ethnic

diversity to the arts and food.

The mini-beats create opportunities for individual series designed to involve our listeners. They include “Still Working,” occasional reports in which we highlight older individuals still at their jobs. “Our Towns” is a series that gives us the opportunity to tackle broader issues while checking in with people who live in Sandusky, Ohio; Kenosha, Wisconsin; and Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Launching Changing Gears

Changing Gears started to broadcast its stories and publish them on its website in September. Officially called the Upper Midwest Local Journalism Center, the project is funded by the

Corporation for Public Broadcasting as part of an initiative that created a series of local journalism centers across the country.

The idea was two-fold:

- Cover topics of vital regional interest—and do so by having reporters’ stories revolve around the shared concerns of those who are experiencing a sense of disconnection and decline.
- Bring together as newsgathering partners public radio and television stations in the region, including WBEZ in Chicago, Ann Arbor-based Michigan Radio, and ideastream, which is public radio and TV in Cleveland.

In June, I left *The New York Times* to become the project’s senior editor and direct a team that includes reporters in three cities. Niala Boodhoo, formerly of *The Miami Herald*, is based in Chicago. Kate Davidson, a veteran producer for NPR, works in Ann Arbor, and Dan Bobkoff, previously with WCPN in Cleveland, remains there, along with our senior Web producer George Nemeth.

Although the challenges facing this Midwest region are primarily economic, Changing Gears’ mandate is more than to just tell business stories. We explore the daily lives of people who live here—young and old (and in between)—as we cover cultural topics, such as the food scene, which is the subject of a Web feature we call “Reinvention Recipes.” This winter, we’ll spend time on the music scene as we team up with Sound Opinions, the rock and roll show based at WBEZ, for a contest intended to discover Midwest musical talent. It will culminate in a symposium and concert at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, and

listeners will pick the winner.

Listener involvement is a key part of Changing Gears since this is conceived as a two-way conversation. On September 24, we kicked that off with a call-in show examining whether government officials should focus more on big city problems or on boosting smaller communities with fewer obstacles to overcome. There will be a number of public events in each partnership city.

Yet, in everything we do—stories, documentaries, special reports—and on every platform on which our stories appear, our focus stays fixed on this upper Midwest region, an unusual approach for both the journalists and their home stations.

To be sure, regional coverage happens at big newspapers like my former home, *The New York Times*, where it has been common for bureau reporters to cover a dozen or so states. However, at other national newspapers, such as *The Washington Post*, even some prominent domestic bureaus (such as New York City) have been shuttered, and most newsmagazine bureaus are no more. Network news organizations

long operated bureaus in different parts of the country, although many are now closed.

This method of coverage—emanating from the hub outward—has been less common at public radio. While NPR has bureaus in the United States and around the world, each of the 764 stations affiliated with NPR have often gone its own way on local news, though many issues might pique the interest of listeners in nearby states. Changing Gears is different because its reporters are asked to assume a broader perspective than their home city as they prepare their stories.

For a reporter like Bobkoff, whose previous job was to cover business in Cleveland and northeast Ohio, the shift has required adjustments as the scope of the story expands to fit its regional boundaries and its focus gets tighter on the primary topic of transition. “It’s a lot like being a national reporter in that we have to answer the question ‘Why do I care if I live more than 100 miles from here?’” he says. “Often it’s as simple as taking a step back and asking ‘What’s the bigger picture here? Is this happening in a larger way?’”



Changing Gears reporter Kate Davidson wrote a story about a homeless encampment she discovered while on a canoe trip down the Huron River. *Photo by Mark Brush.*

Regional Focus

The Changing Gears website personifies the nature of our beat. Having reporters based in three cities helps to keep the stories focused on the regional mission. “Our challenge is to make sure we don’t become too provincial and lose sight of the whole region,” Bobkoff says. “For instance, I may do a story from Cleveland, but it has to tell some truths about what’s happening in Michigan or Illinois.” On a story about the importance of fall tourism to the area’s economy, Boodhoo traced the progression of the changing autumn leaves with links to maps of Wisconsin and Michigan.

Changing Gears is not a chamber of commerce. Our job is to explore and explain, not to promote. And the rebuilding stories we tell bring with them some uncomfortable truths. On the same day that Boodhoo’s color tour story ran, Changing Gears stations also aired a feature by Davidson, who went

canoeing and discovered evidence of the poor economy:

The other day, friends and I decided to see the fall colors for ourselves. So we spent an afternoon paddling down the Huron River. It’s something both tourists and locals love to do when the weather’s fine. Crimson and yellow shone from the banks. But we noticed splashes of color that weren’t from the leaves. They were from the bright tents of homeless camps.

Even as the states are trying to put on their best face, it seems, reality can intrude. With Changing Gears, we are looking at that reality, good and bad, for a region whose identity no longer stems from the factories that fueled its boom. It’s an effort that adds to, but doesn’t replace, the job that individual news organizations are doing, both in this area and outside of it. “We can

go more in-depth and specific than a national piece might and can maybe help people who live here think more broadly about where they live,” says Bobkoff. “But we’re not going to cover the local school board. That’s why we need strong local journalism too.” ■

Micheline Maynard is the senior editor of Changing Gears. After joining the staff of The New York Times in 2004, she served as its Detroit bureau chief and aviation reporter. She became a senior business correspondent in 2008 and was a lead reporter in the paper’s coverage of the automobile industry bailout. She is the author of four books including her most recent, “The Selling of the American Economy: How Foreign Companies Are Remaking the American Dream,” published by Random House in 2009.

Community Host: An Emerging Newsroom ‘Beat’ Without a Guide

TBD’s community engagement team listens—and responds—in a city where everyone is talking: Washington, D.C.

The job of engaging with those formerly known as “the audience” is in some ways becoming a new online “beat”—one in search of a simple moniker to describe what it is, the skills required, and the tasks entailed. Four of the six members of TBD’s community engagement team describe what they do at this local news site that came to life in the summer of 2010.

Nathasha Lim:

“I’m a community host at TBD.” That’s what I say when people ask what I do. Hearing this, they smile, sort of, and

nod their heads, and then they ask again what it is I really do. By now, this routine is all too familiar—but I can appreciate why. Until I started this job, I hadn’t heard of a community host either. Unlike the previous positions I’ve held—reporter, producer, video journalist—this one was unfamiliar, with responsibilities undefined and always evolving.

While I don’t have a clear definition for my title, in the short time I’ve been doing it, one thing is certain: What I do is unpredictable and diverse. On any given day I will keep an eye on local bloggers and interact with the community via social media. I stay

on top of local news by relying on a combination of traditional and new sources. Then I use social media and digital tools to bring accurate and useful news and information to the public—quickly.

I’m also responsible for maintaining the food and dining section of our website. Every day I compile a comprehensive roundup of food, dining and restaurant news in our metropolitan area. To do this I scour a wide range of local news sources, community and food blogs, and social media sites. Those who blog about food and dining often play the role of restaurant reviewers, and they also break news

about neighborhood eateries. The news they publish—along with their commentary—is what I use to fill my restaurant blog every day.

So, in a way, food is the topic that focuses my beat. As a community host, I have a daily challenge to figure out how to keep TBD's food, dining and restaurant content fresh, relevant and satisfying for readers, which we do with original reporting. A separate though related challenge is coming up with stories that are not already being covered by one of the nearly 200 blogs that have joined our site's Community Network.

Our bloggers provide great information, but the topics they cover don't limit my selection of stories for original reporting. In fact, their stories, tweets and Facebook updates more often than not provide a foothold for TBD as we do a more in-depth story or approach a topic from a different angle. Or what I read on a blog might spur an idea for a different piece altogether.

Being a community host is about engaging bloggers in daily dialogue. But it's also about figuring out how to take what's out there on the blogs—and in the news—and create content for our site with which our readers will want to engage.

Lisa Rowan:

When I get the inevitable “what do you do?” question, I smile (while groaning inside) and reply, “I work at a TV station.” It's easier that way. Only the truly curious follow up, and then I explain that I work “on a new local news website that works alongside a local ABC affiliate.” Yet when news breaks, my job description doesn't matter. TBD isn't stuck on titles anyway so when something out of the ordinary happens, the newsroom's collective blood pressure rises, mine along with it.

In early September, the tweets came in: There was a hostage situation at the Discovery Communications Building in Silver Spring, Maryland. Reporters from TBD and our sister station WJLA-ABC7 rushed to the scene. I was fresh off a three-year stint as a media



TBD's community engagement team, from left, includes social media producer Mandy Jenkins, senior community host Jeff Sonderman, community hosts Daniel Victor, Nathasha Lim, and Lisa Rowan; and Steve Buttry, director of community engagement.

researcher in a very calm office so my first task was easy: hyperventilate. It wasn't like being at a newspaper and reporting the story and publishing it in the next day's edition. We streamed WJLA's live helicopter coverage. We tweeted updates. We added to our ongoing reverse-chronological story on TBD.com. Eventually, I took a breath.

When that crisis was over, a few followers observed that it was on this day that TBD—not even a month old at the time—joined the D.C.-area news scene.

There was no way we could have done what we did without our social media tools and our community networks. From across the Web, we culled tips and found photographs taken by eyewitnesses. Several who posted photos on Twitter were part of our blog network. Our reporters and photographers provided essential information, but we supplemented their coverage by reaching out to our audience.

When the deadline is “now or, scratch that, five minutes ago” the job of getting facts in order and stories accurately told before hitting the “save” button is stressful. Of course, the details of a breaking news story change; for us, new information arrived not only

via police scanner updates or from our reporters but also from other people who were there, some of whom had camera phones. Such tips aren't always correct. So our job is to do what we can to verify information coming to us from our news desk, and then take a step back and evaluate the information coming from our community of bloggers and followers of our website.

Though each TBD community host is assigned a niche topic or beat, in reality, at moments like this all of us end up swimming together with reporters, our users, and viewers. That's when our other “beat”—the one that's about being the host connecting to our community—kicks in.

Jeff Sonderman:

When I let people know that I have a new job at an online journalism start-up, they will often ask, “So are you a reporter?” My answer is no, but yes.

As an online news community host, my job involves reporting—but in a different sense than my previous jobs as a newspaper editor and reporter. My job is to find and filter information from sources. I don't interview people, but I am reading what they say as I comb blogs and search social networks.

Or I read comments they've left on a story or questions they've raised. Or I read a tip someone sends in.

From there, part of my job becomes helping to aggregate and geocode news from the many local blogs and news sites in the TBD Community Network. At the same time, I am listening to and responding to users. We are always trying to come up with new ways for users to interact with each other and with us. Sometimes we write, but when we do it's usually to share information that's been contributed by users. Or I might give an update about what's happening at TBD.

When I come to work each day, I can expect to do a mix of reporting, reading, headline writing, search-engine optimization, community relations, customer service, blogger coaching, viral marketing, event planning, multimedia production, and Web coding. To a large extent, my newsroom assignment reflects the shift of the media environment from scarcity to an abundance of content. My challenge is to capture and funnel information from blogs, websites, and legacy media (yes, even from our competitors) that will enhance our community's experience.

Organize it. Filter it. Present it. That's what I do. But my job doesn't stop there. In fact, in some ways, it's only a beginning. Now it's time to host the conversation that develops and invite others to join in.

Daniel Victor:

I'd been a reporter for four years before I joined TBD as a community host. Now, instead of looking for phone numbers or pounding the pavement for

sources to interview, I'm scanning the Web for sources of news and information that will interest our readers. In many ways, these two jobs aren't all that different. When I'm responding to breaking news, I'm using many of the same skills I learned as a beat

our affiliated TV station did with a surgeon.

I kept my eye out for information to fill the gaps in the story. I could see that people were speculating about what might have caused his injury. So when I found a blog by a pitching mechanics expert who had long ago raised red flags about Strasburg's throwing motion, I linked our readers to it. I didn't need to interview the expert; he had already answered the questions I had.

But when I did have additional questions for a surgeon, I called one and did an interview. "So you did actual reporting!" is what people might be tempted to say at this point. But I'd argue that I was "doing reporting" all along. With the Strasburg story, the amount of information available far exceeded what any one reporter could gather. Why should TBD ignore what's out there just because we

didn't speak to each source? I vetted each link for reliability, expertise and coherence the same way I'd vet a human source in a deadline situation. It isn't the act of speaking to a reporter that validates sources as worthwhile; it is the vetting process the reporter puts them through before and after the interviews.

So aggregation has far more value than a simple list of poached links when you apply news judgment and subject expertise. At the same time, a beat reporter who isn't linking to other sources is failing to give readers information they might want to see.

It's all about finding good sources, gathering their insights, and presenting those to readers. In essence, reporters have always been good aggregators. ■

The screenshot shows the TBD website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'News', 'Commute', 'Weather', 'Sports', 'Entertainment', 'TBD8', 'ABC7', and 'Blogs'. A search bar is on the right. Below the navigation is a header for '@TBDCommunity' with the tagline 'Our story continues'. The main content area features a community post titled 'How would you rename your Metro station?' dated September 22, 2010. The post is by Daniel Victor and includes a photo of a hand holding a Metro card. The text of the post asks for suggestions for renaming Metro stations, such as 'Navy Yard', 'Nationals Park', and 'Smithsonian'. To the right of the post is an advertisement for '2010 Camry' with a 'CLICK AND COMPARE' button. Below the post is a search bar and an archives section for September 2010.

TBD, a local news site in Washington, D.C., combines information curated from other sources—including social media—with reporting.

reporter: You need expertise in your subject to offer context to links and recognize which ones are valuable, and you need a writer's flair to present it as a readable narrative.

Such was the case on the day when Stephen Strasburg, the young star pitcher for the Washington Nationals, found out that he needed so-called Tommy John surgery on his arm and his recovery would last at least a year. As updates rapidly came to the Web, I gathered the most reliable and information-filled reports—relying on Twitter hashtags and pre-established lists to monitor baseball bloggers and beat writers—and then wove these into a story with chronological updates. Meanwhile, a reporter at TBD fed me updates from press conferences, and I embedded a video from an interview

The Sports Beat: A Digital Reporting Mix—With Exhaustion Built In

‘It’s thorough in the way a thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle is thorough; it’s all there, the consumer just has to put the pieces together.’

BY DAVE KINDRED

When New York Yankees third base coach Rob Thomson walks from the clubhouse toward his team’s dugout, he carries a small sheet of paper with which he teases the beat reporters. It’s the lineup card for that night’s game. It carries the names, positions and the batting order for the Yankees.

Routine stuff, that card. It’s always

posted on the team’s dugout wall and has been since Connie Mack was Cornelius McGillicuddy catching without a mask. Yet the assembled literati snap to attention as Thomson waves the card. They fall in line and follow the coach to the dugout. That way they’re present the second he tapes the card up.

“Then, thumbs start flying,” says

Wally Matthews, a veteran sports reporter who is new to the baseball beat.

The reporters race against one another to thumb the night’s lineup into their handheld devices. They know that if they don’t get the lineup into the ether immediately they will start to hear lamentations from their Twitter followers, their Facebook friends, and



Photographers, bloggers and beat reporters feed an insatiable appetite for sports news. Here, the media swarm around John Henry, the new owner of the Liverpool Football Club, at a press conference in October. *Photo by Stan Grossfeld/The Boston Globe.*

that crowd of fanatics who want the lineup now and know they can get it now and won't be happy until the reporters satisfy, if only momentarily, their lust for information.

"Hours before the game," Matthews says, "I'm getting tweets asking, 'Where's the lineup?' It's crazy. The beat guys, it matters if we get the lineup posted first by 45 seconds. We go around saying, 'Look at the time code, I had the lineup way before you.' It's now a world of flying thumbs. It's like those video games I used to get on my 12-year-old son for playing—I'm 53 and now I'm doing it."

Witnessing a Revolution

Matthews is a veteran New York newspaperman, long a boxing reporter and columnist, who in 2010 became a baseball beat reporter for the first time. He covers the Yankees for ESPNNewYork.com. One conclusion to draw from his experience is that the work on a sports beat today is more than an evolutionary step in the news business. It is revolutionary—with reporting routines that never existed before becoming fixtures overnight.

Maybe this revolution is a brave, necessary and visionary leap forward

into a 21st century golden age of journalism. To some dinosaurs still roaming the ink-stained earth, it feels borderline suicidal. It reminds me of a hapless husband at the wheel of the family car telling his wife, "I have no idea where we are, where we're going, or how we'll get there. But we're making good time."

I wanted to be a baseball writer until I met one. I saw him do pre-game notes. Then during games he wrote a running account of the action, inning by inning at best, at worst hitter by hitter. Afterward, he hurried to the clubhouses for quotes. Back in his

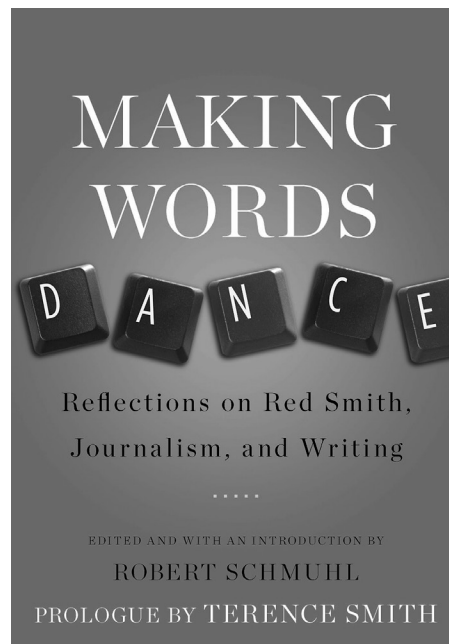
Red Smith: He Made Words Dance

By Jonathan Seitz

Of the many memorable phrases sportswriter Red Smith bestowed on the English language, the most enduring may be his description to a group of New York Herald Tribune advertising salesmen of the pleasure he found in writing a column: "All you do is sit down and open a vein and bleed it out drop by drop."

His devotion to finding the precise word is matched only by his tenacity at producing so many of them; he spent much of his 55-year career writing six or seven columns a week, plus a few articles along the way. His output only stopped with his death in 1982, but the spirit of Smith's prose lives on in the Red Smith Lecture that the University of Notre Dame, Smith's alma mater, inaugurated 27 years ago in which journalists and authors discuss the craft of writing.

In "Making Words Dance: Reflections on Red Smith, Journalism, and Writing," Robert Schmuhl, the Walter H. Annenberg-Edmund P. Joyce Chair in American Studies and Journalism at Notre Dame and the book's editor, has collected 14 of these lectures. The inaugural speaker, Smith's New York Times colleague



James "Scotty" Reston addressed the impact of sports on politics; in 2008, political journalist Tim Russert delivered the lecture just months before his death. [Excerpts from the 2010 lecture delivered by Frank Deford are on page 54.] Schmuhl weaves into these lectures discussion and comment; there is a roundtable

of sorts, for example, among Dave Kindred, who spoke in 1991, Bob Hammel, who delivered a response, and Jane Leavy, who spoke about women sportswriters within days of that lecture.

Sports serve as a unifying thread and jumping-off point for reflection. Yet at the core of these lectures and discussions resides the craft of journalism and the lessons learned by these veteran "typewriter jockeys," to use Smith's embracing euphemism.

For those uninitiated in Smith's writing, Schmuhl scatters 15 of his columns and articles throughout the book including "Miracle of Coogan's Bluff," a game story he wrote after Bobby Thomson's "shot heard 'round the world" sent the New York Giants to the 1951 World Series. It opens with Smith's only somewhat hyperbolic declaration:

Now it is done. Now the story ends. And there is no way to tell it. The art of fiction is dead. Reality has strangled invention. Only the utterly impossible, the inexpressibly fantastic, can ever be plausible again. ■

press box seat, he wrote a new story. All that work, done at speed, was counterproductive to good reporting, let alone keen observation of a game that rewarded such attention. As for writing anything of a quality much higher than a ransom note, the workload made that impossible.

That's what I thought way back in the 20th century. Now, as we hurtle through the 21st, baseball beat reporters would love to live at that leisurely pace. "From the time I get to the ballpark, four hours before a game, until I'm done two hours or so after, I'm writing constantly," Matthews says.

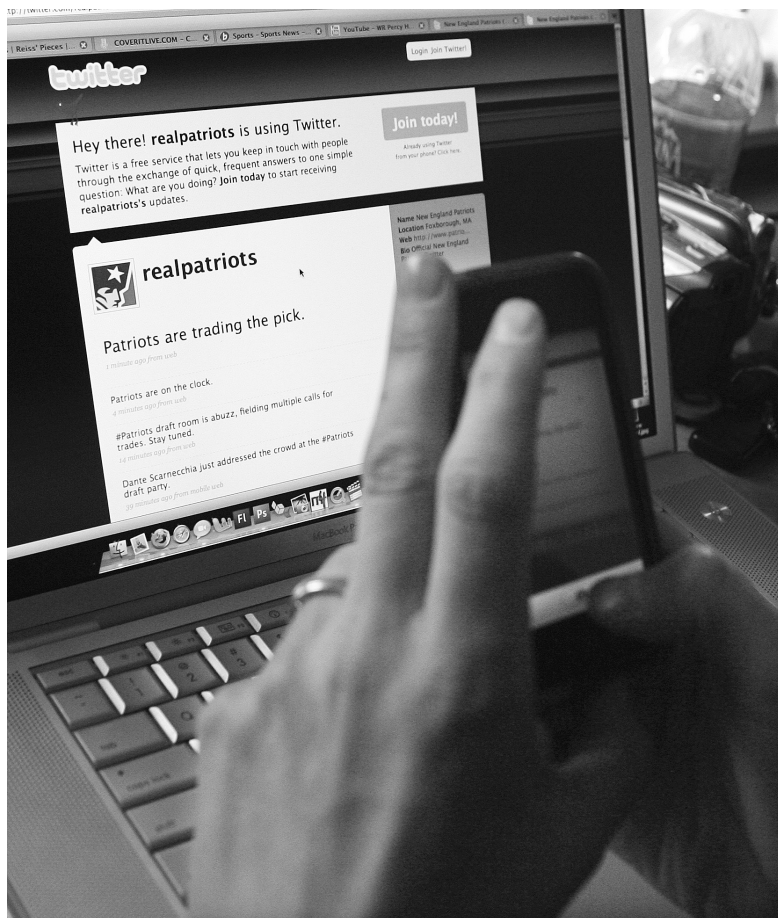
Everything he hears in the clubhouse and dugout is fodder for Twitter and his live-blogging. He records every word, transcribes the interviews, and rereads it all so if he happened to miss a "news" item while thumbing/writing, he can drop it into his next tweet. He says, "I tell my wife, after 3:30, don't call me unless it's an emergency because I don't have time to talk."

Lisa Olson, a columnist for AOL Fanhouse, has seen live-blogging in action. The process is essentially an awkward, truncated boys-at-the-bar conversation between a reporter and an audience of anonymous users. Generally, the writer offers random thoughts and answers questions. For reporters whose skills have been shaped by years of news-gathering, this work must be as much fun as playing Scrabble with a poodle.

"The running blogs are such a waste of energy," Olson says. "Wally Matthews is a great example. He's a wonderful writer, but the games I've sat near him, he's typing furious running

blogs (play-by-play), then scrambling to write a completely different story on deadline. What a waste of talent."

The best baseball beat reporters have always been perpetual motion machines. But even for them, there are physical and mental limits beyond which they lose effectiveness. Olson believes those limits have been reached.



A reporter takes a cell phone photo of his screen after learning through the @realpatriots Twitter feed that the New England Patriots traded the 23rd pick in the 2009 NFL draft. Photo by Stew Milne/The Associated Press.

"Most newspapers and some sites," she says, "are running their beat reporters into the ground way too early."

Beat reporters are not alone in typing without rest stops. In Atlanta this fall, as I went to the Braves clubhouse, Atlanta Journal-Constitution columnist Mark Bradley hustled ahead of me, head down, notebook in hand. "Been writing constantly for six hours," he said. That day he had been the paper's live-blogger. Back in the press

box at 10:30, he would then do his morning column.

Can this be good? For the paper or the website? For the reporter? For readers and users? For journalism?

To my fundamental question—"Is all this good or bad for reporting?"—Matthews responds, "Well," before he pauses. "It's certainly thorough," he concludes.

It's thorough in a way that journalists know is deadly to their work. It's thorough in that it records everything with little regard for context, perspective or narrative. It's thorough in the way a thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle is thorough; it's all there, the consumer just has to put the pieces together.

Sounds terrible, doesn't it? It is. The paradoxical truth, however, is that such thoroughness is the beating heart of the revolution that is necessary in the journalism business. Warren Buffett, who knows about making money, once said that no one ever built an audience without making money from that audience. So journalists know what they must do. Build the brand. Drive traffic. Draw an audience. And hope that someone figures out how to make the money that makes it possible to

again do real journalism.

"It's crazy," Matthews says. Then he sighs. "But it's the world we're in." ■

Dave Kindred is the author of "Morning Miracle: Inside The Washington Post, A Great Newspaper Fights for Its Life." He has written for newspapers and magazines for more than 40 years and received the Red Smith Award for his work as a sports columnist.

Frank Deford: Sports Writing in the Internet Age

In the spring of 2010 Frank Deford, a senior contributing writer at Sports Illustrated, author, and commentator on NPR's "Morning Edition," delivered the Red Smith Lecture in Journalism at the University of Notre Dame. He called his talk "Sportswriter Is One Word," an at times humorous, always insightful rendering of "the carnival I hitched a ride onto in 1962." For close to half a century he has written stories about athletes and the games they play, and now, as he assesses the technological changes in how sportswriters do their job, he provocatively states that "The end of journalism as we know it is only the beginning of better things for sports journalism. With two caveats." His talk is available at <http://images.amuniversal.com/amu/FrankDeford.pdf>. An excerpt follows:

It says something that alone in the canon, *sportswriter* is one word, as if we press box inhabitants cannot be separated from that which we professionally embrace. Everybody else in

the business is two words, modifier and noun, discreetly separated: editorial writers, foreign correspondents, movie critics, beat reporters, and even—yes—sports editors.

But sportswriters: one word. The assumption, I suppose, is that we do not stand apart and clinically observe so well as our more respected brethren who better keep their distance from their subjects and are properly, clinically *objective*. ...

In fact, to be a sportswriter today isn't nearly as engaging. The revolution is over. There are just more teams, more standings, more players, more numbers, more agate type. There's even more soccer.

Still, while it's not just nostalgia and the sappy memories of an old man to say that sports was a better canvas to paint on then, nonetheless,



Nearly a century later Twitter is the telegraph in the press box. Reporters watch the New York Giants play the Philadelphia Athletics in the 1913 World Series. Image from the George Grantham Bain Collection at the Library of Congress.

when talking about the changes in sports *journalism*, it's so hard to distill it from the rest of the discipline. That world I stumbled into in 1962 was already on the cusp of being manhandled by technology.

The late Neil Postman, who was a brilliant social observer, once suggested: Education as we know it began with the printing press and ended with television.

So now, I suppose, we could say: Journalism, as we knew it, began with the printing press. It ended with the Internet. ...

But now, of course, people in this century are growing up with a predilection only to read about what already interests them. Actually, I'm ahead of this curve, because I discovered this luxury years ago when researching novels. You only have to cherry-pick precisely what you need for your novel. You come across something you don't understand, well, you just skip it and say, "No need to put that in the novel." Because, you're making it up! It's great.

But novels are one thing, a vocational bagatelle, and being an informed citizen is quite another.

Unfortunately, you can't make up the prevailing news menu. If you avoid reading about the bad news, it's still out there, looming. You can't escape global warming and Afghanistan simply by turning over to "Access Hollywood" or "SportsCenter." Not surprisingly, every study and every bit of common sense tells you that if you give people a choice between watching news or entertainment, an awful lot of them are going to choose the fun. But, guess what? This is wonderful for my crowd. This is absolutely terrific for sports journalism. We're the winners. Because people do like sports—and in fact, especially as more and more women get involved in sports, more and more people of all stripes are

going to want to read about sports, and this link of sports leads to that link and on and on and on, and soon we know more and more and more about draft prospects and recruits and possible trades and schedules and point spreads and polls and more polls and statistics and statistics and more statistics. Who cares that it's bush? It's fun.

The end of journalism as we know it is only the beginning of better things for sports journalism.

With two caveats. First, who's gonna pay for it? Nobody's yet figured that little niggling detail out. ... And number two, what's good for sports journalism is not necessarily good for sportswriting.

The Internet—or, to be kind, the influence of the Internet—is reducing the amount of storytelling in sports journalism. The increased interest in reading and hearing about sports is all too often about minutiae: the statistics, expertise, Xs and Os, the skinny.

The feature story—the "takeout" as it is known in newspaper parlance—is being taken out of newspapers. Not enough space. Too expensive to take all that time to research and write it. People don't have the attention span to actually read paragraphs anymore. Alas, that's pretty much an article of faith now. Pitchers can suddenly only go six innings, and readers can only go six paragraphs.

The story, which was always the best of sportswriting, what sports gave so sweetly to us writers—the sports story is the victim. Sportswriting remains so popular—one word. Sports stories—two words, are disappearing.

So while we may properly bemoan the loss of newspapers and magazines, have no fear, sports fans. There will be no dearth of easy access to box scores and statistics and dugout gossip. Or celebrities walking down the red carpet or getting caught in bed

with the wrong people. And now, of course, that includes sports celebrities getting caught in bed with the wrong people.

No, no need to worry, fans: All that stuff will continue to be well covered. It is the good stories, and, even worse, the good investigative journalism, that we will lose.

It was only a few years ago that two reporters on the San Francisco Chronicle, Lance Williams and Mark Fainaru-Wada, worked for more than a year on the story—BALCO—that essentially fully exposed steroids in baseball and other sports. Phil Bronstein, who was editor of the Chronicle during that investigation, told me not long ago that today the paper surely couldn't even begin to consider such a risky expenditure of time and human resource. ...

Lost is the weight of the written word. Instead, the images that flicker before us are so ephemeral, it's hard for us to grasp much of anything—and because there are no movies of the distant past, soon there is no past. Sometimes I think that all that remains of history that anybody cares about anymore are home-run records.

So, if we have not actually regressed to illiteracy in these digital times, we are, increasingly what may be fairly called a nonliterate society. We risk becoming optionally illiterate.

Those of us in journalism love to quote ... and quote and quote again ... Thomas Jefferson's famous remark: "... were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."

Hooray for our team. Thank you, Mr. Jefferson. ■

The Sports Tweet: New Routines on an Old Beat

‘As much as possible, I adhere to the same reporting rules with social media when it comes to breaking news. Do I have a reliable source? Is this information on the record? Am I absolutely sure the information is accurate?’

BY LINDSAY JONES

My name is Lindsay Jones, and I am a Twitter-holic. OK, I admit it. I didn’t take to this Twitter revolution right away. Soon after I joined The Denver Post in the summer of 2008 to be the beat reporter for the Denver Broncos, my editor asked me to tweet as part of my routine at training camp. Twitter wasn’t well known back then, and I remember wondering why anyone would possibly want to receive a 140-character message from training camp or during a nationally televised game.

I did it anyway, and boy, was I wrong.

By the next spring, Twitter—along with other social media—was playing a huge role in my coverage. Tweets were now as big a part of my job as filing stories for the paper, just as they were for my NFL sports writing colleagues. Twitter has completely changed the way we cover football, as I’m sure it has changed all other sports beats.

The Denver Post’s Broncos Twitter account was launched during my first training camp with the team. Since then close to 14,000 tweets have been sent—the majority from me. Nearly all relate directly or indirectly to the Broncos and the NFL, a combination of breaking news from me or my Post partners, analysis (particularly during games), and some back and forth with the public. Some are auto tweets from our Broncos and NFL print and online news stories, columns and analysis.

These days breaking sports news is virally disseminated via Twitter. With everything being so competitive—and speedy—on the NFL beat, this puts slow thumbs at a distinct disadvantage. It also presents challenges for news organizations like ours. We are having constant discussions about how best to get breaking news to our readers



Lindsay Jones in the press box at Super Bowl XLIV.

while integrating our social media strategy with what we publish in print and online.

We break news first on Twitter—in Facebook posts, too—with the understanding that the beat reporter also files this news to our website. This way the link we send out gives our readers instant access to a story that takes them deeper than 140 characters allows—and we draw sought-after eyeballs to the Post’s website.

Now here’s how this approach gives my editors heartburn. What I tweet goes from my keyboard to the masses—with no filter. Of course, all the Broncos beat writers have to operate under some strange rules—ones we don’t like—that the league and team place on us. The Broncos prohibit any cell phone activity on

the practice field. No calls. No texts. No Twitter. No Facebook. Pull that phone out of your pocket and you risk expulsion from the practice field. So when something newsworthy happens on the practice field, it is a race to get outside the gate to be the first to post something. If you’ve never seen a herd of sportswriters run, well, it’s not a pretty sight.

Such an unsightly occasion happened one day in August during the first full week of training camp when the team’s star pass rusher, Elvis Dumervil, was injured during practice. I saw him pull out of a one-on-one drill so I hurried to the other side of the practice field where I could see him walk into the locker room. I was hoping to get some sense of what had happened to him—some color I

could add. I knew no comment from the coaches or from Dumervil would be forthcoming.

So there I was half-running, half-walking to outside of the practice gates and into the adjacent media room. I didn't want to be too obvious lest the herd would start to follow me. Once there I sent a tweet that said something like "Broncos OLB Elvis Dumervil left practice Wednesday evening with an apparent shoulder or chest injury." That I had to leave the field to do this is a bit ridiculous; the practice was open to the public, and none of them seemed concerned about team rules forbidding them from posting words and pictures nor was the Broncos staff concerned about enforcing those rules. Fans could simply post what they wanted from where they were sitting on the grass.

I posted what I'd seen and what I knew immediately to The Denver Post's All Things Broncos blog and from there it went to our main Web page. In subsequent tweets I told followers what Dumervil was doing when he was injured and discussed possible ramifications, depending on the severity of his injury. The next morning we learned it was very bad. Dumervil had a torn pectoral muscle that would keep him out for the duration of the season. It was devastating for the team to lose the man who last year was best in the league at tackling the quarterback.

That news also went out as soon as I heard it—virtually in real time. That's easy—a thumb here, a thumb there, and the news is out.

Speed and Accuracy

What's much tougher—and exponentially more complicated for those working with the values of traditional journalism—is when I learn news from off-the-record sources, which is increasingly common across the league. This is when I find the immediacy to be tricky because rumors often masquerade as news and are transmitted without regard for whether they have been verified. There is a noticeable lack of accountability that seems to reside in the emerging Twitter territory

as those who aren't part of a news organization can use this reporting tool recklessly.

My approach is this: I am a journalist first, reporting for a newspaper. My standards for sending something out on Twitter or Facebook remain the same as if I was going to publish the news in the print edition. As much as possible, I adhere to the same reporting rules with social media when it comes to breaking news. Do I have a reliable source? Is this information on the record? Am I absolutely sure the information is accurate?

In September, I weighed these concerns when I received a direct message on Twitter asking if I'd heard a rumor that a Broncos player had committed suicide. I immediately called my sources, and within minutes I had confirmed with an off-the-record source that Kenny McKinley, a second-year wide receiver, had killed himself.

I knew this was not the type of sourcing that would pass muster with my bosses for the newspaper. But while I was seeking additional confirmation, a competitor in the Denver market went with the story via Twitter, citing "sources." My initial reaction as a reporter was that wrenching feeling of "I just got beat." As a human being, I was fine that I had paused. Had this been a case of a sprained ankle or a free agent signing, I might have gone with what I had sooner. But there was no way—not even a tiny chance—that I was going to race to be first with the story of a player's suicide without an on-the-record source.

When the Post got confirmation from the local sheriff's department, we went with the story, both on Twitter and as a full news story on our website. As the story developed, I updated Twitter and wrote for the Web until about midnight; at that point I filed my last blog post of the day sharing personal thoughts about McKinley.

It's Game Day

Perhaps the best case for Twitter and other social media is the ability they give reporters like me to combine breaking news elements with analy-

sis—and this happens most often on game day. Thinking back two years ago, this is one of those things that I never could have anticipated.

At a late October Broncos game, I sent 108 tweets. That's pretty standard output for game day. From the time I arrived at Invesco Field at Mile High stadium—about three hours before kickoff—until I shut down my computer that evening, I was in constant tweet mode. In between, I filed several blog posts, wrote an early story for the Web, watched the game, went to the home and visiting locker rooms for interviews, filed an 18-inch sidebar and a handful of notes, along with a variety of other "candy" elements.

Back to the tweets. I sent word about what I call "news elements"—the release of the inactive list of players, a moment that fantasy football fans live and die by each week; in-game injury updates; and a minor amount of play-by-play. The majority of those tweets were my reactions to—pretty much instantaneous—and analysis—a little less spur of the moment—of what was happening on the field. Of my 12,000-plus followers, many watch the game so I don't feel any need to tweet as a play-by-play person might do.

My tweets highlight behind-the-scenes insights about what is happening on the field before and after the play, what's happening on the sidelines, or what the atmosphere of the stadium is like, along with the information I've gleaned from being around the team as it prepared for the game. Often that includes why a play worked or didn't, or I might tweet about why a certain player is being used or isn't.

It's at these moments that I can develop my voice on Twitter, though as a beat writer I am often straddling the line between news and opinion. Even if I am wary of moving too far into the realm of opinion, those on the receiving end are not. During the preseason, I was called profane names, told I was too snarky and negative about the Broncos, and informed that I clearly had an agenda against backup quarterback Tim Tebow. Of course, I was also told I was overly positive about the Broncos and that

I am obviously a big fan of Tebow. I must be doing something right.

The most amazing effect of social media is being connected directly with readers unlike what was ever possible before. Having a direct line to the fans often changes the tenor of my reporting since what they write clues me in to what they care about and want to read. Just a few seasons ago, a Broncos fan would watch the game and scream at his TV; if he was really upset, he might send an e-mail or fire off a letter to the editor. Now fans watch the game with their computers or smartphones on their lap and they fire off rants, 140 characters at a time, to my Twitter account.

My words have angered plenty of folks, but I've also amassed a fairly loyal following. While it can be infuriating to get the same questions

constantly—"Is [head coach] Josh McDaniels's job in trouble? When will Tim Tebow play? Exactly how many carries will [running back] Knowshon Moreno get today?"—during the games I have entertaining and informative dialogues, sometimes to the point where just keeping up is a challenge.

Conversations I have with fans are also an invaluable resource for my stories. This year I have posed questions and used the results as an informal poll in print. I've found people to interview and used followers as on-the-record sources for fan-based stories on a range of topics. When I'm going on a road trip, I ask for suggestions for restaurants and running routes. For my recent trip to London, where the Broncos played the San Francisco 49ers, I was able to connect with Broncos fans from

England, Scotland, the Netherlands, and Kuwait, all within a matter of hours, after sending a tweet asking international fans to let me know if they were coming to the game.

I don't get much sleep. My thumbs get tired. And I've figured out that if I am going to half-walk, half-run to tweet breaking news, I need to wear sneakers. I also need to keep a low profile. Sometimes it seems that the eyes of fellow reporters aren't on the field but scanning the sidelines—accounting for reporters lest one disappear from view. Years ago it was the rush to be first to the phone booth; now the goal is to find a place of one's own to tweet. ■

Lindsay Jones covers the Denver Broncos for The Denver Post. She tweets @PostBroncos.

The Sportswriter as Fan: Me and My Blog

'Our blog made no bones about its utter subjectivity, but we were seen as more objective than those for whom objectivity was a commandment.'

BY JASON FRY

In early 2005 as a technology columnist for The Wall Street Journal Online, I returned repeatedly to blogging as a subject. It was a rich vein to mine, but there was only one problem: I'd never been a blogger.

I decided to spend spring training blogging about the New York Mets, whose routine miseries and occasional successes I'd followed avidly since I was seven. Six weeks seemed long enough for me to learn blogging's routines and be able to talk about it authoritatively, and I thought it might be fun. So I asked my friend Greg Prince to split the writing, found a blog-hosting service that worked for both of us, and a few hours later we were the proprietors of Faith and Fear in Flushing.

I had no idea that our six-week experiment would last five years (and counting) or that I'd begun an uneasy dialogue with myself about journalism and fandom, access and independence. That conversation has grown more complicated in recent years as newspaper veterans have fled to the Web and teams have experimented with accrediting independent bloggers. Amid blurred lines, I feel simultaneously like an outsider and an insider: Are the Mets my "beat," except I write from an outsider's point of view? Am I a sportswriter, a fan, both or neither?

The Beat as Blog

One part of the blogging life was a surprise. I'd been writing for the Jour-

nal for a decade, and its name gave me a certain readership and visibility; what I wrote was taken seriously. On the blog, though, I was just Jason, with no affiliation or connections. My writing had to stand for itself.

And it did: By the end of our first year, Greg and I had a decent-sized audience, had been referenced not just by other blogs but also by newspapers, and had appeared on TV to talk about the Mets. At least one revolutionary claim about blogs had proved true: The Web really was a meritocracy, a talent show open to anyone who was willing to work at writing and building an audience. I'd seen that for myself.

I was 35 and an established editor and columnist so this unexpected success was a lark. But I wondered:

What if I'd been 22 and found success blogging about the Mets after a day working on some anonymous lower rung of the news business? Would I have kept trying to pay my dues the old-fashioned way, hoping to parlay a job at a small-town paper into another job for a regional and eventually a chance to work night cops at the major metro? Or would I have struck out on my own, trusting in my own words and my virtual printing press? I was simultaneously relieved and a little disappointed that I had no reason to find out.

Something else struck me. Some of our readers routinely rejected arguments made by the beat writers and local columnists, dismissing them because everybody knew so-and-so had it in for the Mets. The casual assumption that journalists were biased offended me—and I was puzzled that when Greg or I criticized the Mets, we seemed to get a fairer hearing than the newspaper guys.

This seemed ridiculous: Our blog made no bones about its utter subjectivity, but we were seen as more objective than those for whom objectivity was a commandment. Paradoxically, there was a power to subjectivity: Since nobody could accuse us of being anti-Mets, our criticisms of the team were taken more seriously.

It started to feel as though the foundations of sports journalism were cracking. By my reckoning, sports journalism relied on distribution, objectivity and access. Distribution was easy: I could publish my thoughts to Faith and Fear within seconds and reach a global audience. Now, our readers' reactions suggested objectivity wasn't the asset I'd assumed it was.

All that was left was access. So what was its value? Yes, there were hard-working beat writers who parlayed their access into exclusive news and insightful features. But lots and lots of game stories were little more than play-by-play and paint-by-numbers quotes. Play-by-play had clearly outlived its usefulness: My big HDTV gave me a better view than the guys in the press box had, and I could see highlights on the Web whenever I wanted. If that



Jason Fry, standing in the New York Mets dugout with notebook in hand, was among the bloggers who were invited to cover the game as credentialed press. *Photo by Kerel Cooper.*

left quotes from athletes trained to say nothing interesting, was access really such an advantage?

Columns had always been my favorite form of sports writing, but I started to notice how many of them could have been written (and probably were) without actually setting foot in the stadium. Our Faith and Fear posts were essentially columns, and often as good as the papers' efforts. After I realized that, it no longer surprised me that the most vociferous denunciations of sports bloggers came not from beat writers, but from columnists: On some level they knew the talent pool for what they did was now a lot deeper, and they didn't like it.

Blurring the Line

A lot of bloggers had come to similar conclusions, and saw themselves as part of a war between blogs and the mainstream media, or MSM. I sometimes wondered: If this were a real war, which side would be shooting at me? At the Journal I'd been a Web guy with a sideline as an independent blogger. Yet to bloggers who heard "Wall Street Journal" and learned I'd

been a beat writer, rewrite guy, copy editor, section chief, and columnist, I was thoroughly MSM. After the Journal and I parted ways, I took a gig writing columns about sports writing and new media. I had plenty to say on the subject, but sometimes struggled to address a topic from a single perspective; my challenge was deciding which one to choose.

This year things got more complicated, and my separate worlds began to merge. The Mets reached out to some of the more-established independent bloggers, including Faith and Fear, and so one day in July I found myself on the warning track at Citi Field with a pen and a pad and a credential around my neck.

That brought me back to a long-ago decision. As a teenager working on my high school paper, I knew I'd be a journalist and assumed I'd be a sportswriter. But in my early twenties I rejected that; I knew becoming a sportswriter meant you had to stop being a fan, and I wasn't willing to do that. If there was no cheering in the press box, I wouldn't go in there. I'd chosen fandom and distance.

Yet now the world had changed;

somehow I'd become a sportswriter anyway. Wasn't that what I was? After all, I was a professional journalist who had written more than half a million words about the Mets and was now standing on their field with press credentials. Yet I'd never held a microphone in a locker-room scrum, and I was still an unabashed fan. Did that disqualify me?

The Mets' media folks were there to help us if we wanted to interview players. I passed on the chance, and I'm still sorting through why. I think it's because I'd spent five years co-writing *Faith and Fear* without access and never

thought about what I might do if it were offered—or if I even wanted it. I wasn't sure where I belonged, but I also wasn't sure where I wanted to be.

Questions about access are emerging piecemeal from experiments conducted by teams and leagues and the many flavors of news organizations. Given all this tumult, I suspect I'll never find a definitive answer to where I fit—lines will continue to blur, and questions like mine will become irrelevant. That's for the best. People should be judged by the quality of their work, not their medium or their background.

Still, I'll always wonder. ■

*Jason Fry co-writes the blog *Faith and Fear in Flushing* (www.faithandfearinflushing.com) with Greg Prince and contributes a weekly column about sports writing and new media for Indiana University's National Sports Journalism Center. During his 12-year career at *The Wall Street Journal Online*, he edited and later co-wrote *The Daily Fix*, a roundup of the best sports writing online. He tweets @jasoncfry. His website is www.jasonfry.net*

It's a Brand-New Ballgame—For Sports Reporters

'This is why the advice is simple: Don't look down from that tightrope; your safety net is gone, likely forever.'

BY MALCOLM MORAN

Here was a moment that explained why a sports fan in New England would reach for *The Boston Globe* each morning. The excitement of a New England Patriots victory had become overshadowed by speculation that Randy Moss, the gifted and controversial wide receiver, was about to be traded to the Minnesota Vikings. The combustible mix had become a national story during the previous evening. In the morning, when I opened up my *Globe*, this is what I read:

The Patriots and Vikings have been in trade talks for a while, and as of last night were close to a deal if Moss and the Vikings can agree on a contract extension, Jay Glazer of Fox Sports said on WEEI's "Planet Mikey Show" last night.

That is what we are left with in the fragmented tick-tick-tick of the

21st century, a daily sprint toward the latest slice of relevant information that can transform a long-held standard—as in "the *Globe* has learned"—into reliance upon a source from another planet.

The story inspired a conversation in a sports writing class I teach at Penn State University. I confess there are times—arriving more and more often—when "tightrope walking" seems a more apt title for this class. The technology of our time and all of the ways to make use of it have accelerated the process of newsgathering to such an extent that those who graduated five years ago tell me how out of step they can sometimes feel.

So how do we prepare the next gen-



eration? When addressing prospective members of the John Curley Center for Sports Journalism several years ago, I spoke about thrills I've experienced as a reporter covering a memorable event. Kirk Gibson's ninth-inning home run in Game 1 of the 1988 World Series came to mind, the one that sent the Los Angeles Dodgers on their way to

a five-game victory over the Oakland Athletics. I'd just finished describing the wonder of clinging to a railing behind the last row of the press box at Dodger Stadium as I watched the ball clear the right field fence, when Jamey Perry, an assistant dean in Penn State's College of Communications, leaned in my direction and did me a favor.

"They weren't born yet," he whispered.

I have an artificial Christmas tree that is older than my students. Freshmen in this past fall's class might not have been alive when Christian Laettner of Duke made the last-second shot that beat Kentucky in a game for the ages and sent the Blue Devils to the 1992 Final Four. To them, Bob Knight and Lou Holtz are not coaches as much as talking heads. Need any reminders of the ephemeral nature of sports? Look no further than the blank stares in press boxes when once famous names go unrecognized.

Yet, there is so much that matters that we should be passing along to a generation that faces big journalistic challenges. The lucky ones—those students who can parlay their eagerness into something resembling a job—are being asked to produce more content and do so more quickly than any generation to precede them. They blog, they tweet, and then they blog and tweet some more, and yes, eventually they file a story, squeezing in time to watch the game. Even then, many are expected to provide instant context in real-time, bite-sized pieces—while also interacting with fans who are tweeting and blogging, too. When is there time to exhale?

It's true that they have been raised with digital technology—and thus arrive at the starting gate as digital natives. We see this in their expectation that replays will reveal every possible angle. Why watch the game, when what's important gets replayed? You can miss it and head to YouTube.

Today's sports beat reporting seems more about producing fragments of information than in shining a light on core issues of our time. That said, it's been all but impossible for any sportswriter (or fan) in recent months to avoid a few topics—Tiger Woods, steroid use, and concussions. But it's worth remembering that behind at

tion, and framing that question to gain insight as well as information. Still, there remains the essential need to develop relationships as a way of earning trust and the reliance on those relationships to gain access to a sensitive or controversial truth.

Here is what has changed—just about everything else.

When the notebook in the back pocket or the purse was replaced by who-knows-how-many toys, there was no warning label attached. Competitive pressures are rewriting the rules. Tweeting was barely in a reporter's vocabulary several years ago; now the process can border on the obsessive. A story, once read by two, three, four editors, is now a blog post read by how many? One? Maybe?

Under the old model, if a source passed along sensitive information to a reporter at noon, the reporter would have an entire day to digest

the information, determine its context, contact others, and return to the original source to confirm additional information before it was time to write a story. The entire process could take four, six, eight hours. Now this process might be compressed into minutes.

This is why the advice is simple: Don't look down from that tightrope; your safety net is gone, likely forever.

What happens when the newsroom boss is more interested in being first with the new—eager to have the publication's logo gain a spot on the scroll across the bottom of the television screen—rather than making sure that the story is accurate and fair? This is the point when I tell students about a contentious conversation from a long time ago in which I resisted an editor's preference that I rely upon a source that I neither knew nor trusted. When I asked if this was the policy of the department and whether this is something I was being instructed to do, the editor replied: "I think that makes for good reading."

As more opportunities for entry-

**Those hours spent on digital media—
from computers to smartphones—are
contributing to two deficiencies among the
beat reporters today: a lack of discernment
and a reluctance to engage. And each
deficiency can prevent sports reporters
from finding out information that their
readers and viewers deserve to know.**

least the last two of these topics was the investigative work of a few dogged reporters who refused to stop digging.

Those hours spent on digital media—from computers to smartphones—are contributing to two deficiencies among the beat reporters today: a lack of discernment and a reluctance to engage. And each deficiency can prevent sports reporters from finding out information that their readers and viewers deserve to know.

A few givens about sports writing remain as true today as when Red Smith wrote his columns on a portable typewriter. Technology doesn't change them. There is an expectation of precision and careful preparation, and the importance of arriving early and staying late. There is the payoff that results from that extra phone call—or even in making that first phone call rather than relying on texting. (I'm old-fashioned enough to believe that value still resides in the exchange of conversation.) Then there is the art of assessing a complex situation, of choosing the topic worthy of a ques-

level reporters develop in digital media, I'm concerned that they will be unprepared for that type of conversation. At the start of the semester, I write these words on a whiteboard: It's Your Name. I am not saying that their reporting should be timid, not at all. I am suggesting that in a real-time environment, when facts can—and do—shift by the hour, there are times when they should be aggressive and others that require restraint.

They don't have to listen to me. All the students have to do is sit back and watch. How many times did we read or hear reports last summer declaring

that the Big 12 conference was dead, a victim of a seismic shift in the affiliations of athletically ambitious colleges and universities? That is not what happened. How often are reports on a high-profile coaching search in error? Too many to count.

This generation has been told that an accuracy rate of 80 percent suffices—and sometimes it seems even that number is high. Perhaps 80 percent is considered good when Shaquille O'Neal stands at the foul line—sorry, Shaq—but not for a reporter when he or she clicks “send.” Students need to know that.

And there is one other thing. During the first class of the semester, I posed a question. “Who can tell me what newspapers Red Smith wrote for?” No one raised a hand.

They need to know that, too. ■

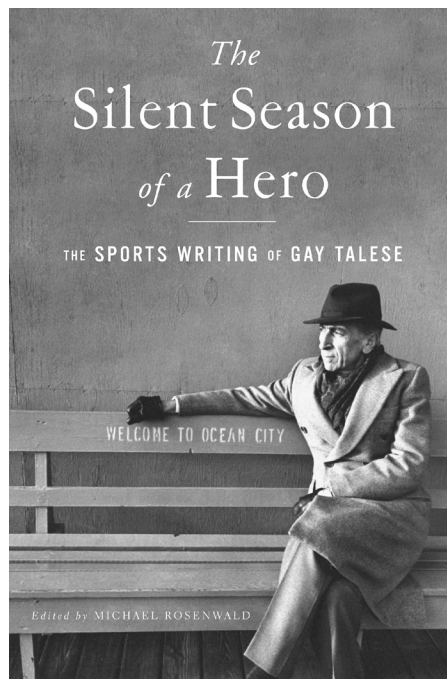
Malcolm Moran is the Knight Chair in Sports Journalism and Society at Penn State University and directs the John Curley Center for Sports Journalism. Before assuming this position, he was a sportswriter at USA Today, The New York Times, Newsday and the Chicago Tribune.

Gay Talese: On What Endures in Sports Writing Amid Change

Early in October Gay Talese came to the Boston Athenaeum to celebrate publication of “The Silent Season of a Hero: The Sports Writing of Gay Talese.” In this collection of his stories, his words span nearly five decades—beginning in 1948 with glimpses at “short shots” he penned as a teenager for his hometown newspaper, the Ocean City Sentinel-Ledger, and ending in 1996, when he wrote for Esquire about a visit that Muhammad Ali, by then rendered nearly speechless by Parkinson’s, had with Fidel Castro in Cuba.

Talese spoke about what attracted him to sports writing and his thoughts about doing the job today. Melissa Ludtke reports on what he said:

Writing about sports, Talese observed, is “understanding human nature in the raw.” As a 23-year-old junior reporter assigned to the sports beat at The New York Times, he was drawn toward athletes during their “moments of despair and failure.” He sees sports as being “a metaphor for life.” In the athlete who returns from “being a has-been” resides the struggle of human perseverance; in the star athlete’s slide into oblivion, he finds an opportunity to explore a performer’s perishability. “Forgotten



is the one who once heard cheering,” he said of these fading athletes.

Sports writing, Talese told the audience, gives those who do the job “the capacity to observe emotion.” It’s why he calls the job “a dream occupation.”

Now 78 years old, he recently went to some football games with New York Times sportswriter Greg Bishop and observed a new genera-

tion of sportswriters at work. Seeing women reporters in the locker room was the biggest reminder of how much sports writing had changed. “I thought to myself that these men should be allowed sometimes to be alone, to be dressed,” he said.

Some things don’t change, however. One is Talese’s intractable belief that the best stories come from hanging out—from being with athletes and around the game. Acknowledging his lack of familiarity with digital media—no cell phone and on e-mail for the first time this summer—Talese didn’t hesitate when someone asked him to comment on technology’s impact on the Fourth Estate.

Reporters are behind laptops too much, he replied. Nor do they “get anything they didn’t ask for” since the digital inquiry is “linear” and thereby “limiting.” By just hanging around with athletes “in their environment” he stumbled by accident on important details. “By moving around. Seeing. Observing. Sometimes being surprised,” is how he described his method. “Sometimes I think reporters should waste some time,” he said, referring to times when they might consider the value to be found in disconnecting from technology. “Good journalism is wasting time.” ■

A Shrinking Sports Beat: Women's Teams, Athletes

As newsroom staffs shrink and eyeballs measure interest, women's sports coverage is losing ground it once seemed to be gaining.

BY MARIE HARDIN

Visit the Minneapolis Star Tribune's website or pick up the paper on most days and—as with most other newspaper sports sections—you'll be hard-pressed to find news of women's sports. It's not that women aren't playing. They are, and in huge numbers. Simply put, staffers aren't assigned to cover women's sports.

At the Star Tribune, for instance, most writers are assigned to beats for men's teams at the college and pro levels. A reporter who covered women's sports regularly left the paper in 2007 and was not replaced. Another reports on home games for the WNBA Lynx during the summer but then mainly focuses on men's college hockey with an occasional story on women's college teams.

This sports beat arrangement leaves a lot of territory uncovered, including women in Olympic sports such as track and field and figure skating, and those who play tennis and golf. Women competing on a spectrum of teams for the University of Minnesota and area colleges can also be overlooked.

Rachel Blount, who has been at the Star Tribune since 1990, is the only sports reporter and columnist without an assigned beat. The only woman at the paper who covers sports, Blount said she feels obligated to try to close the gap. "I've got to cover this niche," said Blount, who describes her newspaper's coverage of women's sports as "the worst" she's seen in her 20 years there. "Things are falling through the cracks."

Women's sports coverage is shrinking—not growing—even as more women and girls are competing in sports. A recent study of ESPN found that between 1999 and 2009 the time given to coverage of women's sports on that network's "SportsCenter" dropped



Women athletes receive media attention during the Olympics, as in USA versus Finland, then fade from view. Photo by Chris O'Meara/The Associated Press.

from almost nothing to a bit less than almost nothing—from slightly more than 2 percent to less than 1.5 percent. What's happened to the coverage of women's sports during the past few years at newspapers, where there have been dramatic reductions and a reshuffling of staff as well as competitive pressures from bloggers, has not been systematically studied. But I feel safe in contending that women's coverage hasn't generally increased. Of course, exceptions are likely to occur in places where a pro or college women's team has built an unusually large fan base, such as the University of Connecticut basketball team, the University of Utah gymnastics team, or the WNBA's Seattle Storm.

In the vast majority, however, it's languishing—the victim of decisions about resources that are justified by the belief that women's sports are peripheral to readers' interests. "When sports editors are in a constant reshuffling of staff, it's often women's sports beats that take a hit," said Jerry Micco, who

is the assistant managing editor for sports at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and former president of the Associated Press Sports Editors (APSE). "Beats are set up to cover the core interests of readers, and once you get that settled, you see who you have left and what you can cover ... It's not pretty out there for newspapers when it comes to people and resources."

Following the Eyeballs

In most respects, the priorities for sports editors are nothing new. Coverage of female athletes has always been paltry, except for the occasional media sweetheart with hometown ties—such as Lynx player Lindsay Whalen or Olympian Lindsey Vonn in Minneapolis. It was once expected that coverage would increase as Title IX turned more girls and women into athletes and sports fans, but that has not happened. Instead, women's coverage remains "a luxury item," said Amy Moritz, president of the Association

for Women in Sports Media and a reporter at The Buffalo News. “When there’s the staff, space and resources to cover women’s sports, papers will do it. When those start to erode, women’s sports coverage is one of the first to get cut.”

Women’s sports leagues have always struggled to gain media attention. For instance, the WNBA in 2007 launched a short-lived campaign encouraging fans to write sports editors demanding more coverage; the campaign was largely ridiculed. The new Women’s Professional Soccer league also gets relatively little coverage. Editors traditionally cite lack of interest by fans as a reason for their decisions, a rationale that has exasperated women’s sports advocates. When asked to produce empirical evidence of this so-called “reader interest,” most editors couldn’t do it.

Today, things work a bit differently—though the result is much the same. Editors can produce the evidence, flawed as it might be. They can track where the eyeballs are going on the Web—and it’s mostly to stories about men’s professional sports or college football or basketball. Blount says that is one reason she can push stories about female athletes with her editors only “up to a point. ... I’ve been told point-blank, ‘No one is going to read that,’” she said. “The Web feeds into overkill.”

The result? More writers are being assigned to men’s professional teams—and those become the beats and coverage readers can count on. Blount remembers the days when the Vikings, for instance, had a single full-time writer. Now it’s two, at a minimum. The editors say that they can’t ignore the numbers.

The fact that fans are clicking on men’s sports stories could be, at least in part, because the sports pages on most newspapers’ websites offer little else. But it’s hard to resist the logic that if certain stories draw traffic, posting more of those stories is a smart allocation of resources.

The problem, though, and sports editors concede this, is that in sidelining women’s sports—by not carving it out

as they do other beats—some terrific stories are lost. Michael Anastasi, the managing editor for sports and features at The Salt Lake Tribune and an APSE vice president, said it’s incumbent on sports editors to set up beats in ways that these stories will be found. He has created two such beats to help staffers catch them: one he calls a “university beat,” the other is an Olympic sports beat. He also points to the University of Utah’s women’s basketball team, which is a solid performer but doesn’t have a large fan base. “Does that mean there aren’t great stories there?” he asks. “No.”

Bloggers Surface

Even with the Tribune’s two beats, it’s hard to find many female-focused sports stories on its website. The vacuum left by the Tribune and other local news organizations has given rise to a relatively small but vigilant army of bloggers who write about everything from women’s professional basketball and soccer to barrel racing and competitive surfing. The most active blogging network is Women Talk Sports, a collective of about 150 women and men who blog, post video, and tweet with women athletes in mind. Some of these sports bloggers, such as Cheryl Coward, were once print journalists. Others, such as basketball player Kelly Mazzante, are athletes who are using new media to reach out to their fan base.

Cofounder Megan Hueter started Women Talk Sports with two other bloggers in February 2009. The site (<http://womentalksports.com>) has gotten the attention of executives at ESPN. Traffic has been steadily climbing, and during events like the Olympics it has attracted a million page views in one month. Despite that, the traffic is paltry compared to SBNation or Deadspin. Research shows that the Web is dominated by blogs that are solely about men’s sports, perhaps because most of the bloggers aren’t women’s sports fans.

As resources tighten and newsroom beats continue to be clustered around big-time men’s sports, initiatives like

Hueter’s and, in newsrooms, those of reporters like Blount, may be what keeps women’s sports visible—for now. A new initiative might, in time, force editors and other media producers to rethink their priorities. This year ESPN announced plans to launch its “W” brand with a website, a project the network touts as being about and aimed at sports-focused women.

As soon as word emerged about ESPN’s plans, buzz surfaced in the blogosphere, driven primarily by skeptical female bloggers and women’s sports advocates. Perhaps this isn’t surprising given this network’s paltry track record on coverage of female athletes. And ESPN might find that its “W” brand will flounder, as well.

There is no doubt that women’s sports do have a loyal and sometimes robust following, and the fan base is growing, albeit slowly. And we know that female participation in sports has increased enormously since passage of Title IX in 1972.

The job of transforming a dedicated sliver of these much larger universes of sports fans and athletes into a profit-making enterprise in an ad-driven environment—and at a national level—is one that even ESPN might not succeed in making work. It’s possible that this attempt might turn out to buttress the tired excuse of sports editors—that women’s sports coverage doesn’t draw enough eyeballs to justify the investment of diminishing resources.

If this is the case, it returns us to asking two key questions: Why do women’s sports lag men’s so much when it comes to fan interest? And despite this gender chasm, does the news media have an obligation to cover them? In newsrooms this comes down to asking whether there should be a women’s sports beat if only because it is the right thing to do. My answer is yes. ■

Marie Hardin is associate director for research at Penn State University’s John Curley Center for Sports Journalism. Her research focuses on issues of diversity and ethics in sports coverage.

From Journalism to Self-Publishing Books

‘Our experience with print-on-demand books offers promising and challenging news.’

BY FONS TUINSTRA

Digital technology is lowering the threshold for book publishing, and it couldn't arrive at a better time given the difficulties aspiring and established authors face in getting their books into the marketplace.

So earlier this year we at the China Speakers Bureau decided to help potential authors get their words published as books. The

bureau is a venture I started a few years ago with fellow Shanghai correspondent Maria Korolov Trombly. Now in addition to arranging for speakers in China we are guiding authors through the process of publishing books on demand. Earlier this year we published our first book, “A Changing China,” a collection of essays by 17 of our speakers about how they have seen China change.

When we decided to produce “A Changing China,” we discussed briefly whether we should try to find a traditional publishing house for it. But authors who were part of our speakers bureau were telling us how much harder it was getting to find a publisher for what they had written—or wanted to write. Some turned to us for help in gaining access to a publisher, but by then we had decided not to head in that direction. For this collection of essays, we knew it would be hard to find the right publisher, and we also thought that doing so could add to our costs and not necessarily give us any benefit. In addi-

tion, if we went with a traditional publisher, it would mean that our book would not be available for sale for a year or more.

Around this time I read what Claudia Gere, a longtime author's coach, wrote after attending a book expo in New York. Her words confirmed what I was hearing from these authors. Here's an excerpt:

Book publishing has become a cutthroat business, even more so than it has been in the past. To sell a book to a publisher, a nicely written first chapter and an outline of the rest isn't enough. Even a completed book isn't enough, no matter how readable or interesting. What the publisher needs is the book's business plan. A competitive analysis, market demographics, new sales and marketing channels—and a solid platform for the author. That platform could be a television program, a radio show, a speaking circuit, or a popular blog through which the author can promote and distribute his or her own books.

It was true that in exchange for handing over a large percentage of a book's sale price, authors usually end up earning very little. Of course, we did not expect to produce a bestseller. Even so, we thought that by using digital media on both ends—producing



A CHANGING CHINA



By Zhang Lijia, Kaiser Kuo, Shaun Rein, Tom Doctoroff and other members of the China Speakers Bureau



the book and promoting it ourselves—we could do a better job than local bookstores could for this book. So we published it ourselves.

Now, if someone wants to buy our book, it's available in paperback at Amazon.com and on other sites. To the book's purchaser, things appear pretty much the same. What's different happens after the sale is made; the book is printed and mailed. The cost to us for the printing of each book is \$7, in our print on demand (POD) arrangement; the cost to the customer on Amazon.com is \$24.99 plus shipping. In the book's first 10 months, 800 copies were sold.

What We Learned

Our experience with print-on-demand books offers promising and challenging news. The good news is that anyone can get an ISBN number, publish a book, and distribute it through Amazon and other online stores. Self-publishing is now a huge industry. But to succeed requires a stiff learning curve—and time to devote to details.

We began by organizing the authors in China, and then we found editors who know how to edit books in the business style of U.S. publications. We brought in cover designers who know how to calculate the width of the spine, how to embed a bar code, and how to account for the fact that POD publishing requires an extra margin for the cover art and text. We hired layout designers and had the text formatted.

We steered this process through an ever-changing field of emerging, merging and disappearing POD firms. (For our next project, we have switched from BookSurge, now called CreateSpace, to Lightning Source, but who knows how long our new arrangement will last.) To manage all of this, to meet deadlines, and to help the authors with marketing, our backgrounds as journalists came in very handy simply because we'd done some of these things before.

So, yes, everybody can publish their own books, but there are a lot

of details to which attention much be paid so it's best not to have other distractions, which can be hard if you are a journalist these days. Most of the authors we work with do not want to fiddle with software systems, editorial processes, or even figuring out how to sell their book. What they want to do is to write books.

With the e-book marketplace showing explosive growth—spurred by the release of the iPad—the urgency to find a less expensive way to publish books is even greater. ... By self-publishing, authors lower the price even more.

Putting together our business plan and launching it took us less than six months. Then we signed our first contract within a week and published a book within nine weeks. This timetable never would have happened if we'd taken the traditional publishing route. Apart from money and convenience, journalists like speed so self-publishing worked well to satisfy that desire.

We are now preparing a set of books in five languages on China's international position. "When I do this in the traditional way my book is outdated before it is on the market," says Juan Pablo Cardenal, a Beijing-based foreign correspondent who is taking a year off to work on this project in the hope of having the book published by the end of 2010.

With the e-book marketplace showing explosive growth—spurred by the release of the iPad—the urgency to find a less expensive way to publish

books is even greater. In the increasingly competitive market, the price of e-books is certain to drop; already they frequently cost less than half what a hardcover does. By self-publishing, authors lower the price even more.

Even now, we realize that our model has to grow and change. With hardcover books likely to remain on the market, we're watching closely the developments with the iPad and Kindle as we think more about producing e-books. And we keep looking for ways to connect what we see as missing links in these emerging markets. For example, POD firms focus more on the needs of engineers than on those of authors or even readers. Certainly, this imbalance will be remedied in the next few years, and when it is many more authors—some of whom do not want to go through the process that we've gone through—will turn to on-demand publishing.

Earlier this year Amazon increased the amount it pays authors for e-books—with conditions—to 70 percent of revenue. An article in *The Wall Street Journal* quoted Richard Nash, a veteran of book publishing who has moved from a traditional publishing house into digital publishing, with the following observation about digital self-publishing:

It shows best-selling authors that there are alternatives—they can hire their own publicists, their own online marketing specialist, a freelance editor, and a distribution service ... If they already have a loyal fan base, will they want 70 percent of \$100,000 or 15 percent of \$200,000 for a hardcover?

We think we know the answer. ■

Fons Tuinstra is a cofounder of the China Speakers Bureau, new media consultant, and a former foreign correspondent based in Shanghai.

Figuring Out What a 21st Century Book Can Be

When an author's insistence on publishing under a Creative Commons license met resistance from book publishers, he decided to self-publish his book with Lulu.

BY DAN GILLMOR

I left the traditional newspaper world almost six years ago. Now I've left the traditional book publishing world, too. The publisher of my new book and website, Mediactive, is me. With the help of a company called Lulu, an enterprise that understands the changes taking place in the publishing world, I'm moving beyond traditional boundaries to figure out what a book is in this digital age.

The publisher that brought out my book, "We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People," a few years ago was planning to publish "Mediactive," a user's guide to democratized media. Early this year we parted company, and at that point my literary agent, David Miller, started looking for a new publisher. He told me that the potential field would be limited because I had a non-negotiable requirement: This book, like my first one, had to be published under a Creative Commons license that I use for my work. Under the license I've chosen for this project, anyone can make copies of the work for noncommercial use, but if they create derivative works—also only for noncommercial purposes—those works must be made available a) with credit to me and b) under the same license.

My primary goal in using this system is simple: to spread the ideas. There is no better way to achieve this than by offering the book for free downloading and remixing. The financial principle behind the Creative Commons license I'm using is also simple: While I want my work to get the widest possible distribution, if anyone is going to make money on it I'd like that to be me and the people who have worked with me on it.

It's a rare commercial publisher that would agree to such stipulations. The



publishing industry is understandably skeptical, and we're in the early days of understanding the dynamics of what happens when books are published in this way. Yet almost a decade after Creative Commons was founded, a recent small study of nonfiction book sales found some evidence to support making books freely available. Writing in the *Journal of Electronic Publishing*, John Hilton III and David Wiley asked "What happens to book sales if digital versions are given away?" The data made them "believe that free digital book distribution tends to increase print sales," but they also cautioned "this is not a universal law."

My own experience falls solidly on the side of publishing books this way. Miller explained to editors at publishing houses that the main reason I'm still getting royalty checks for "We the Media," which was published in 2004, is that the book has been available as a free download since the day it went

into bookstores. This is how word about it spreads. Had we not published it in this way, I believe the book would have sunk without a trace—especially given the indifference shown to it by American newspapers and magazines in the weeks and months immediately following publication.

Some editors took the "Mediactive" proposal to their in-house committees that decide whether to buy a book. Several asked me to write what amounted to a different book, which I wasn't willing to do, in part because the one I was writing was almost finished. And the few publishers that did understand the value of Creative Commons didn't want to publish my book. One rejection was almost amusing; this editor told my agent that his company's publicity and marketing people "felt that the major media would avoid the book because of the criticism of their techniques."

Another major New York publisher—a nearly ideal fit in any number of ways—did offer us a deal. But it came unraveled when the publisher flatly refused to agree to the Creative Commons license—even after we'd offered to drop the advance to zero dollars. With that, our search for a publisher ended. If a principle has meaning, then it meant sticking to it even when I felt tempted not to.

I'm convinced that publishers who aren't willing to head down the Creative Commons path today will eventually do so. This will happen as they appreciate how profoundly digital media are transforming the business of book publishing—and the book itself. In the current way of thinking among publishers, books are what they manufacture and send out in trucks to fill store shelves or in digital files that they rent to their customers—or,

more often, to customers of Amazon, Apple and other companies that use proprietary e-reading software to lock the work down in every possible way. In all of these scenarios, publishers still are the gatekeepers, a position they crave and stubbornly defend.

I intend for “Mediactive” to be a multifaceted project—a book plus a lot more. During the next few years I hope to experiment with the ideas I write about in the book in lots of other media formats and styles. Experimentation will also carry them into the ecosystem of ideas that is evolving at an accelerating rate.

Enter Lulu

After I gave up on the old-line publishers, I contacted Bob Young, Lulu’s founder and CEO. I’ve known him since the days when he started Red Hat, one of the first companies to prove that it was possible to make money with open-source software by providing services. He’s been an ardent supporter of ensuring that the principle of intellectual property offers as much flexibility as possible for creators and users. He’d told me about Lulu several years earlier and suggested that it would be a good fit for me someday, and now was looking like that time.

He put me in touch with Daniel Wideman, Lulu’s director of product management, who told me about the company’s VIP services for established authors making the move to this kind of publishing. He liked what I was trying to accomplish in this project so we talked more until we realized the fit was good. I’d write and then an editor of my choice would help make the text sing. For a fee, Lulu would handle most of the rest of the job, including printing, binding, distribution and some back office tasks.

Lulu isn’t alone in offering this kind of publishing opportunity. In fact, self-publishing as a business is

growing quickly, in part because of how traditional publishers are hunkering down. I like Lulu’s vision of its part in the emerging ecosystem so while our publishing partnership comes at a price, it’s worth it.

The publishing timetable works well, too. Had I signed an agreement with an old-line publisher, “Mediactive” would not have reached the marketplace for a year or more from that date. Not only that, but my editor there might not have fully understood what I was trying to say. Besides, it’s

A year from now, I hope to launch “Mediactive 2.0” in print. ... I’ve asked readers—and will continue to ask them—to be part of this updating process; I count on them to tell me what I’ve gotten wrong and what I’ve missed.

unlikely that the publisher would have spent time or money in marketing the book unless it suddenly decided it might have a big hit on its hands. With a company like Lulu, I’m well aware that the marketing is my job. Once the project was finished, the turnaround from manuscript to book was relatively quick. In a fast-moving arena like media, that’s a huge benefit.

Upgrading and Updating

In “Mediactive” I ask readers to think of what they’re looking at as version 1.0—the first major release in what I expect to be an evolving effort. A year from now, I hope to launch “Mediactive 2.0” in print, which will be a fully updated book that takes into account what I’ve learned since publishing the first edition. I’ve asked readers—and will continue to ask them—to be part of this updating process; I count on them to tell me what I’ve gotten wrong and what I’ve missed.

Updates will appear more regularly

on the Mediactive website with audio and video interviews, links to resources, and much more, including previous versions of the book’s chapters available alongside the current ones. Thus, the book becomes a subset of the larger project. Initially, the e-book edition will be little more than the printed book with hyperlinks to my source material and other information. Over time, I’ll experiment with making those versions a more immersive digital experience using other media forms.

Along the way, I’m having fun contemplating the question of what a book is—and can become—in the 21st century. I’m exploring a range of issues I had never considered before. For example, I’m still trying to figure out the best way to help people who might have cited a section from the book that’s since been revised. With nonfiction, it’s hard to imagine why an author wouldn’t want to bring new insights and information to an endeavor. We never get things exactly right so this becomes an interesting and important issue in publishing today. What is the baseline when we continue to improve and fix what we’ve written?

All of this speaks to the expanding potential of writing a book in our digital times. It can be a living document—as it should be. ■

Dan Gillmor is the director of the Knight Center for Digital Media Entrepreneurship at Arizona State University’s Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. This essay is adapted from “Mediactive,” which is copyrighted (as is this essay) under a Creative Commons license.

See Nieman Note on page 79 about Marites Dañguilan Vitug’s need to publish her controversial book online—and the method she used to do so.

Creating a Navigational Guide to New Media

Two veteran journalists illuminate the convergent paths ahead—for those who consume news and those who report it.

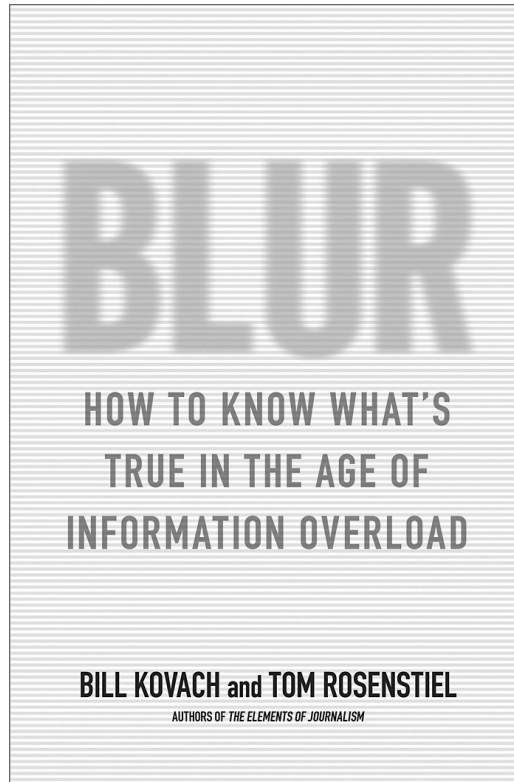
Blur: How to Know What's True in the Age of Information Overload

Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel
Bloomsbury. 227 Pages.

In their new book, “Blur: How to Know What’s True in the Age of Information Overload,” Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, who previously partnered as the authors of “The Elements of Journalism,” explore the evolving relationships, responsibilities and roles of journalists and news consumers in the digital age. In their concluding chapter—“What We Need from the Next Journalism”—Kovach and Rosenstiel describe “eight essential dimensions or functions that the new news consumer requires from journalism.” With permission, we are presenting an adapted version of their words.

The news has become unbundled from the news organization. We seek the news today, in effect, by story rather than by news organization. As we hunt for news on our own, instead of relying on what a news gatekeeper provides in a single newscast or newspaper, news consumption has become a more proactive experience. Some have even come to call it a “lean forward” experience, in which we look for things we are interested in—for answers to our questions. Getting the news is no longer a “lean back” experience, in which we put our feet up and have an anchorperson tell us what’s happening or flip through the newspaper. This shift away from relying on one news organization to be our primary news provider is the real meaning of the breakdown of the gatekeeper role.

What those who want to provide



the news must understand is that this new lean-forward consumer requires a new kind of journalism. In the broadest terms, journalism must shift from being a product—one news organization’s stories or agenda—to being more of a service that can answer the audience’s questions, offer resources, provide tools.

The important idea is this: In the future the press will derive its integrity from what kind of content it delivers and the quality of its engagement, not from its exclusive role as a sole information provider or intermediary between newsmakers and the public. To do this, newspeople must replace the singular idea of the press as a gatekeeper with a more refined and nuanced idea based on what consumers require from the news—particularly reportorial news, rather than com-

mentary and discussion. We see eight essential dimensions or functions that the new news consumer requires from journalism:

Authenticator: We will require the press to help authenticate for us what facts are true and reliable. While we will not look to journalists as our sole information provider, we will need some way of distinguishing what information we can trust and some basis in evidence for why that is the case. Playing this authenticator role, however, will require a higher level of expertise from newsrooms, particularly on their franchise subject areas. It will also require that journalists provide this information with more documentation and transparency about sources and methods than they may have in the past. The authenticator role will be a critical one at the heart of any news organization’s authority and a key element of remaining relevant when such organizations no longer have a monopoly over information or our attention.

Sense Maker: Journalism is also well suited to play the role of sense maker—to put information into context and to look for connections so that, as consumers, we can decide what the news means to us. The reason this role is becoming more important is precisely because information has become more plentiful. When information is in greater supply, knowledge becomes harder to create because we have to sift through more data to arrive at it. Confusion and uncertainty are more likely. That is why, in part, the journalism of affirmation has become more popular. But reinforcing prejudice, retreating to the familiar, is a false way of making sense, a retreat from learning. The sense-maker role is not

a commentator role necessarily. It is reportorial. It involves finding facts and information that, as good sense making does, makes the tumblers click.

Investigator: Journalists also must continue to function as public investigators, in what many call the watchdog role. Journalism that exposes what is being kept hidden or secret is so central, so essential, to a democratic government that its importance is fundamental to the new journalism as well as the old. And some elements in our media culture are less likely to provide it, precisely because it is fundamentally a reportorial function grounded in verification. We do not see much of it in the fast-paced journalism of affirmation or the interpretative and propagandistic partisan-audience-pandering of the journalism of assertion. It is less likely to come from a blogger largely offering opinion. The press stands as an independent prosecutor of sorts, and by the power of its searchlight, it shapes, not simply follows, agendas, whether it is uncovering public malfeasance in an exposé or shifting paradigms.

Witness Bearer: This is the monitoring function of journalism, which is less prosecutorial than the watchdog or investigator function. There are certain things that occur in any community that should be observed, monitored and scrutinized. In this new era, a diminished press cannot be everywhere. So a critical step, at minimum, is to identify those places in a community that must be monitored for basic civic integrity and to show up, and by having a presence, tell those in power they are being watched. If resources do not exist, then the press must find ways to create and organize networks of new technology and citizen sentinels to ensure that this monitoring occurs. Here lies a potential for the creation of new partnerships with citizens, new bonds that can energize communities. If the press does not help create these, it is possible that

more self-interested groups will fill this space to control the information flow about critical points.

Empowerer: It is about mutual empowerment—journalists and citizens. The citizen is empowered by sharing experience and knowledge that informs others—including the journalist. The journalist is empowered by tapping into experience and expertise beyond his or her formal and official sources. It starts with recognizing that the

The important idea is this: In the future the press will derive its integrity from what kind of content it delivers and the quality of its engagement, not from its exclusive role as a sole information provider or intermediary between newsmakers and the public.

consumer or citizen is a powerful partner in this process, someone to be listened to and helped, not lectured at. The end result of this is a continuing conversation.

Smart Aggregator: We need a smart aggregator that patrols the Web on our behalf and goes beyond what computer algorithms or generic aggregator websites can offer. The idea of the “walled garden,” in which a news organization offers only its own reporting, is over. Smart aggregators should share sources they rely on, the stories they find illuminating, and the information that informed them. In the same way that the press is an authenticator and a sense maker, the aggregation it engages in should save people time and steer them to trusted sources.

Forum Organizer: A community’s news institutions, new or old, can serve as public squares where we citizens can monitor voices from all sides, not just those in our own ideological affinity group. If newspeople imagine that their goal is to inspire and inform public discourse, then helping organize this discourse is a logical and appropriate function. We all have a primary vested interest, as well, in this public forum being built on a foundation of accuracy. There is little value in arguments based on pseudo-facts and rumors. Reportorial news institutions are well suited to build a public forum on reliable information.

Role Model: The new press, especially those tied to legacy brands, if they survive, will inevitably serve as a role model for those citizens who want to bear witness themselves and operate at times as citizen journalists. Inevitably people will look to journalists to see how their work is done, emulating what they see and like and altering what they do not like. Some news organizations have gone so far as to set up classes for citizen journalists and to enlist them in their newsgathering. We applaud that. But we also need something more than that. Journalists must understand that their conduct is public, not just their stories.

Virtually all of these functions have existed previously. But now they must become more dynamic. It is not enough for news operations to simply have a story each day on what they consider the most important subjects. They need to understand what purpose each story serves for the audience, what service it provides or questions it answers. If it offers no service, it is a waste of resources and time to a more demanding proactive news consumer. A story of limited or incremental value is a sign that the news operation is not offering much service.

Journalism, in other words, is not becoming obsolete. It is becoming more complex. ■

Measuring Progress: Women as Journalists

In 'The Edge of Change' the perspective is forward-looking, even if many of the challenging issues of the past endure for female reporters and editors.

BY KAY MILLS

The Edge of Change: Women in the 21st Century Press

Edited by June O. Nicholson, Pamela J. Creedon, Wanda S. Lloyd, and Pamela J. Johnson

University of Illinois Press. 321 Pages.

In reading "The Edge of Change: Women in the 21st Century Press," I found myself thinking about how much progress women have made since the mid-1960's when I was told that the Chicago Daily News wasn't hiring me "because we already have four women." And trust me—that was a lot of women in one newsroom in those days. I am almost certain they never said words like those to any man who they weren't hiring because they already had 40 others. Or there was the time when a newsmagazine bureau chief asked me what I would do if someone I was covering ducked into the men's room.

Ask any woman journalist of my generation and her stories will be much the same. Yet, with perseverance, we broke through. What comes through in this book is how many of the women we meet in its pages, along with numerous others who became newspaper editors and publishers, helped other women to progress as well.

Still, it can be disheartening to read about women's circumstances in newsrooms today, and doing so reminded me that we should be further along now than we are. In 2005, women held more than half of the nation's professional jobs. Yet in the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) employment survey in 2009, women were 34.8 percent of newsroom supervisors and 37 percent of newsroom employees, and those figures are down slightly in each



Early on, female journalists were typically limited to covering stories about women; in 1937, a group of them listened to Republican National Committee member Marion Martin outline plans for organizing Republican women. *Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

category from the previous year. In 1971, 22 percent of daily newspaper journalists were women. This doesn't seem like enough progress to have made in nearly four decades, especially at a time when there are far fewer newsroom jobs.

So what does this mean for the news business and for its consumers? Sandra Mims Rowe, former editor of The Oregonian and a past ASNE president, summed it up this way:

[Even though increasing opportunities for women] is a defining social change of the last 50 years ... many of the same questions and issues I faced 25 years ago

continue to derail career advancement. Women with children still feel great pressure to accommodate and juggle (I long ago stopped calling it balance) home and family demands. Consequently, flexibility or lack thereof in a particular boss or workplace or day-care arrangement often can be more career-defining in crucial years than any other factor. That, along with whether there is positive encouragement in the workplace and the presence of successful role models, markedly affects the number of women who stay in the pipeline for promotion.

When I wrote the book, “A Place in the News: From the Women’s Pages to the Front Page,” in the late 1980’s, I tried to spell out the different perspective that women bring to covering the news—not better, but different. Many women (not all) see stories in ways many men (not all) do not. In what topics they choose to cover, in how they decide to tell the story, and in their commentaries, men and women display different approaches. Gender can also play a role in reporters gaining access to or trust of sources. In Muslim countries, for example, women reporters have an access that men often lack—to interview women.

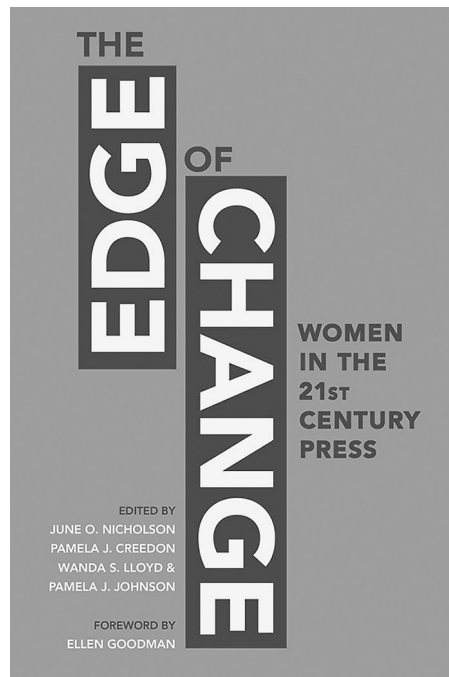
With more women in management today, they are now able to affect the style of newsroom operations. They tend to be more consultative than authoritarian—although certainly successful male publishers and editors are opening their ears to a wider range of ideas than “back in the day.” As Diane McFarlin, publisher of the Sarasota (Fla.) Herald-Tribune and also a former ASNE president, put it: “Now Gen X and Y employees expect a greater role in decision-making, so a more consultative style of leadership is required.”

In addition, blogs and online social networks have conditioned readers to expect more interaction. One way to connect, wrote Donna Reed, who is vice president for news and multimedia strategy for Media General in Richmond, Virginia, is to rely on “our own instincts.” We should do this, she said:

... not just as journalists but also as siblings, children, parents, homeowners, apartment dwellers, and grocery shoppers. We’re people, too. For years we’ve professed total neutrality about life in order to appear to be perfectly objective observers. Baloney. In the process of sticking to the strict separation of community and newspaper, we’ve abandoned important connections. We’ve lost touch with what people really want newspapers to help them

sort out. Our elitism is apparent to readers who have responded by leaving us.

Hiring more diverse newsroom staffs is an obvious way to reach more communities, but too many news organizations still don’t get it. Many women do. Among them are Sandy Close of the Pacific News Service and the New America Media



Association, and Sharon Rosenhouse, retired managing editor at the (South Florida) Sun-Sentinel. Rosenhouse, who chaired ASNE’s diversity committee, believes women assumed much of this leadership in promoting diversity because of their own history of “second-class citizenship, a history of not being listened to and of being disrespected.”

Women who are in news management today face enormous challenges as news media fracture and readership turns online or off completely. Julia Wallace, editor of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, quotes another female editor as saying, “How come when the guys were in charge, they could just put out a good newspaper? Now that we’re in these jobs, we’re supposed to save the newspaper.” It’s

a tougher job now, but somebody’s got to do it and news organizations that ignore half the talent pool by not doing what is necessary to attract and promote women make it even harder on themselves.

Generational change fascinates me, and among young people I know today I find a high level of concern for social justice. This is reflected in the pages of “The Edge of Change,” through young women who don’t give up on objectivity while also demonstrating their empathy in the stories they write and the photographs they take.

The book has some important career advice as well, including this from Pam Luecke of Washington & Lee University and a former newspaper executive:

You must always remember that your career path is for you to set. It’s not something that happens to you; it’s not something that others draw for you. When you encounter a brick wall, rather than stand there and curse at it, make a right turn and explore some other avenues.

Luecke is not saying run away from the challenges, but think about other ways you can make things work for you.

Today’s generation of women journalists faces challenges—not necessarily the ones my generation faced, though some endure, such as the demands of juggling of work and family. “Given the progress that has already been made,” asked pioneering Washington Post reporter Dorothy Gilliam, “how much further do we push? My answer: a lot further.”

We are, as the book’s title declares so aptly, still only on “the edge of change.” ■

Kay Mills is a longtime newspaper journalist and the author of several books including “Changing Channels: The Civil Rights Case That Transformed Television” and “A Place in the News: From the Women’s Pages to the Front Page.”

Returning Home to Sri Lanka to Face Difficult And Delicate Questions in Perilous Times

‘In the capital’s cafés and elegant drawing rooms open criticism of the state was soundly rejected on the funny logic that war must be won at all costs.’

BY SUVENDRINI KAKUCHI



Sri Lankan journalists display portraits of colleagues who have been killed.
 Photo by Eranga Jayawardena/The Associated Press.

After living in Japan for decades, I returned to my native Sri Lanka in 2007 for a new job. It was no ordinary homecoming. I moved to the capital city of Colombo to be director of the local office for Panos South Asia, an institute that aims to foster democratic, just and inclusive societies by working with the media. I remained there for nearly three years, working with local journalists at a time when a civil war was devastating the nation.

It is only now, months after I returned to my home in Tokyo that I have realized just how unprepared I was for my stay in Sri Lanka. At the time of my assignment, I had spent about 25 years—or more than half my life—in Japan. Yet Sri Lanka—with its natural beauty, my childhood friends, former journalist colleagues, and an army of relatives, with whom I had remained in close touch over the years—was not unfamiliar to me. No, what I’m referring to is how unprepared I was to be part of a society that was in the throes of a violent ethnic conflict spanning more than three decades. Having been out of the country for most of those years, I had been spared the horror of the military shelling and the ground battles that consumed the daily lives of civilians in the

north. And in the rest of the country, grinding uncertainty faced people who worried endlessly about falling victim to the terrorist bombs that destroyed public places from time to time.

I was not unaware of these hardships and I felt great empathy for my family, friends and fellow Sri Lankans, but the hard truth was that I had not grasped the emotional complexities that had developed during a long period of war and how they affected ordinary citizens, such as the generation born after 1983 that has never known peace. This meant acknowledging media censorship as well as self-censorship, the rising appeal of nationalism, the ugly polarization between ethnic groups, and a public wariness toward foreign entities and their local partners that were mainly civil society organizations advocating a peaceful solution.

A History of Conflict

The island of Sri Lanka lies like a delicate pearl in the Indian Ocean with just 18 miles of sea separating the northern end of the country from the Tamil Nadu state in India. Historically, Sri Lanka was ruled by three kings. A Tamil king presided over the Hindu north, and Sinhala kingdoms dominated the southern and central regions of the island. British colonization united the country for more than 100 years until Sri Lanka obtained independence in 1948 and installed a parliamentary democracy.

Sri Lanka has seen many periods of ethnic rioting, including attacks by Sinhala mobs on Tamil civilians. Seventy-five percent of the 21.5 million residents of Sri Lanka are Sinhala, 14 percent are Tamil who share cultural similarities with southern India, and 8 percent are Muslims who speak Tamil; other ethnic minorities make up the rest of the population. Under the majority rule of democracy, some elections have threatened minority aspirations for equal language and cultural rights. Several key political decisions, such as creating a Sinhala Buddhist state, have been particularly traumatic, especially for the Tamil-speaking minorities. These ethnic tensions led to a violent

armed struggle for a separate Tamil state in the north that ended with the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) militant group in May 2009 after several failed attempts at a negotiated peace. The war was bloody on both sides, with the United Nations estimating the death toll at 80,000 to 100,000.

When I arrived in Colombo, the public overwhelmingly supported the government's promise to finish off the Tamil Liberation militants militarily and as quickly as possible. Mainstream media—newspapers and television—leaned heavily toward state policy. The few media outlets that highlighted possible peaceful

Just a year into my work, I discovered that I had been labeled a “terrorist sympathizer” ...

alternatives to a military onslaught in the north or gross human rights violations were not popular. A large number of the Western-educated English-speaking elite that dominates Colombo had thrown their support behind the war. In the capital's cafés and elegant drawing rooms open criticism of the state was soundly rejected on the funny logic that war must be won at all costs.

A Question of Language

Just a year into my work, I discovered that I had been labeled a “terrorist sympathizer,” a slogan that was easily slapped on anybody considered to be opposed to the state war. One reason for this unwanted title was my sympathies, expressed openly, for a negotiated settlement. In addition, the fact that I have a Tamil name raised suspicions among the Sinhala majority. My insistence on conducting workshops and seminars for journalists

on themes such as respecting diversity and minority rights did not contribute to easing the baseless criticism. Friends cautioned me as they read stories filed by local journalists who had joined the patriotism bandwagon, and, as was the norm, portrayed any whiff of dissent against the war as a Western conspiracy. Stories suggested that international calls for a peaceful end to the war amid the rising number of fatalities were aimed at upsetting the security of the country, a viewpoint readily supported by a hard-pressed public waiting eagerly for the quick end to the war that the government promised.

I now wonder if I could have done things differently. For instance, there were endless discussions between like-minded groups on whether we should talk of “development” instead of “peace.” Which word would ease the pressure from the authorities, we wondered. Would it have been wise to stop referring to the “rights” of minorities and use the more subtle expression “expectations”? Or is it best to throw caution to the wind and face intimidation head on? Such questions are pertinent for journalists especially today when they face the prospect of toeing the line to save their jobs in paternalistic hardliner regimes or, in capitalist nations, becoming mouthpieces for wealthy owners who are taking over economically strapped news organizations. These situations demand new survival tactics and a serious debate on the crucial issues facing journalists in nations that prohibit the press from presenting evidence or controversial opinions while espousing the view that a free press is a detriment to nation-building. Against such a backdrop, determining how journalists can best meet the challenge of remaining true to the values of their profession is of utmost importance. ■

Suvendrini Kakuchi, a 1997 Nieman Fellow, is the Tokyo correspondent for Inter Press Service news agency. She spent nearly three years as the director of the Sri Lankan office of Panos South Asia.

1951

Simeon Booker received the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's 2010 Phoenix Award for lifetime achievement this past September. Booker, who was the first black reporter on the staff of *The Washington Post*, spent more than 50 years working for Johnson Publishing Company, publisher of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, during which he covered the civil rights movement. His stories about the Emmett Till murder in 1955 became a rallying point for the movement. In 1961, he joined the first contingent of Freedom Riders leaving Washington. After they were met with extreme violence in Birmingham, Alabama, Booker went to the home of a civil rights leader. When Attorney General Robert Kennedy called to check in with the leader, Booker told him what had happened. Kennedy arranged to have a plane take the riders to safety in New Orleans. "That," Booker recalled in *Ebony* magazine in 1991, "was probably the best reporting I did in my journalism career—explaining to Kennedy what had happened." Booker retired in 2007.

1954

Wayne Whitt, retired managing editor of *The (Nashville) Tennessean*, died September 15th in Nashville. He was 86.

A graduate of the University of Alabama, he worked for United Press for 14 months before joining *The Tennessean* as a reporter in 1946. He cultivated sources from all walks of life. Among the many stories he covered were moonshine whiskey raids and the floor fight at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. As a columnist, he urged that county and city government be merged into a single metropolitan system, an idea that became a reality in 1963.

In 1976, Whitt was named managing editor, serving 13 years under **John Seigenthaler**, NF '59, now chairman emeritus. "He knew the city and its

politics better than any journalist," Seigenthaler told *The Tennessean*. "He was one of the fairest yet toughest men I ever knew."

1959

Wallace Turner, a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter, died September 18th in a hospital in Springfield, Oregon. He was 89.

Raised in Missouri, Turner earned a journalism degree from the University of Missouri before moving to Oregon.

Turner and William G. Lambert, his colleague at *The Oregonian*, shared a Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting in 1957 for their exposé of vice and corruption by municipal and union leaders in Portland. The series led to investigations across the nation into organized crime; in 1957 Turner testified before a U.S. Senate committee about corruption.

He joined *The New York Times* in 1962 and worked there for 26 years, serving as bureau chief in San Francisco and Seattle. Among the stories he covered were the shootings of San Francisco Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk and the search in the Seattle area for the so-called Green River Killer.

Turner wrote extensively about the Mormon Church's ban on ordaining black priests, which was rescinded in 1978. Turner's obituary in *The New York Times* quoted **Gene Roberts**, NF '62, who covered the civil rights movement for the Times, as saying, "Wally probably did more than any single person to change the Mormon policy on race."

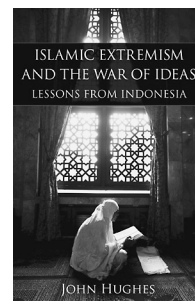
Turner was the author of two books, "Gamblers' Money: The New Force in American Life," published in 1965, and "The Mormon Establishment," published the following year.

He is survived by his wife, **Pearl**, two daughters, and a granddaughter.

1962

John Hughes discusses in his new book "Islamic Extremism and the War

of Ideas: Lessons from Indonesia" what he has learned from his experience in public diplomacy and how the United States could do a better job promoting democracy. In the book, published this summer by the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, Hughes writes that "it is the war of ideas and words that will ultimately determine whether moderate Islam, with which the United States has no quarrel, will prevail over Islamic extremism, whose perversion of Islamic faith is the problem."



His book draws on his years as a foreign correspondent in Indonesia. In 1967, Hughes won the Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting for his coverage of the 1965 coup attempt in Indonesia that led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. A professor of international communications at Brigham Young University, Hughes writes a nationally syndicated column for *The Christian Science Monitor*. He spent 24 years at the Monitor, including six years as a correspondent in Africa and nine as the paper's editor. During the Reagan administration, he directed the United States Information Agency's Voice of America.

1968

Jerome Aumente was a guest on New York public broadcaster WNET's "The Open Mind" to discuss new media, citizen journalism, and the dangers faced by international journalists. He wrote in an e-mail that he would like to hear reactions from Niemanians about "my suggestions on the program for creation of a Civilian Communication Corps similar to the CCCs of the 1930's, only focused on the opportunities to train and support citizen journalism and tap into the talent pool of seasoned journalists, retired journalism educators, etc. as trainers/mentors." His e-mail address is aumente@rutgers.edu.

Investigative Reporter Craig R. McCoy Honored With I.F. Stone Medal

Craig R. McCoy, who has exposed injustice and corruption during almost three decades as a reporter for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*; is the 2010 recipient of the I.F. Stone Medal for Journalistic Independence.

Established in 2008, the I.F. Stone Medal honors the life of investigative journalist I.F. Stone. The award, administered by the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard and its Nieman Watchdog Project, is presented annually to a journalist whose work captures the spirit of independence, integrity and courage that characterized I.F. Stone's *Weekly*, published from 1953 to 1971.

During his acceptance speech at the award ceremony in Boston in October, McCoy noted that he and his father had been faithful readers of I.F. Stone's *Weekly*. "Still today, I recall vividly my amazement at the powerful information he [Stone] would pull out of Congressional reports and other documents," he said.

McCoy remembered, too, a talk by Stone at a synagogue in Philadelphia that he and his father attended. The audience was angry about Stone's writings concerning Israel. McCoy noted, "Izzy was courtly, persuasive—and he didn't back down an inch."

The same can be said of McCoy, according to the journalist who nominated him for the award. "There are several things about Craig that bring to mind I.F. Stone," the nominator noted. "He is undaunted by a complex story. He has a strong sense of civic right and wrong. He is ingenious at penetrating the official fog. And he is very, very persistent ... America would be a more just, less corrupt country if every city had a Craig McCoy. Unfortunately, such journalists are rare."

A member of the newspaper's investigative staff for the past 12 years, McCoy most recently headed



Nieman Foundation Curator Bob Giles, NF '66, presents the I.F. Stone Medal to Craig R. McCoy, right, of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Photo by Lisa Abitbol.

a team that uncovered problems in Philadelphia's criminal justice system, including abysmal conviction rates and a massive number of fugitives. Following publication of the team's investigation, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ordered a host of reforms.

From 2003 until 2009, McCoy repeatedly dug into the activities of one of Philadelphia's most powerful politicians, state Senator Vincent J. Fumo, whose aides referred to McCoy as "the jerk." In 2009, Fumo was found guilty on 137 counts of corruption and is now in federal prison.

McCoy also participated in investigations that documented how Philadelphia's child-welfare agency had failed to protect a child who died of starvation and uncovered an arrangement in which the head of Philadelphia's largest charity for historic preservation used his position to avoid taxes.

McCoy paid tribute to the edito-

rial leadership at the *Inquirer*, his employer since 1982, for maintaining a commitment to investigative reporting in the face of financial pressures as the paper emerges from bankruptcy. Investigative reporting is, McCoy said, "expensive, time-consuming and fraught with legal risks and the possibility of reader and advertising backlash."

The 2010 I.F. Stone Medal Selection Committee was chaired by journalist and author John R. (Rick) MacArthur, president and publisher of *Harper's Magazine*. The committee also included Robert Kaiser, associate editor and senior correspondent for *The Washington Post*, and **Patricia O'Brien**, NF '74, a journalist, novelist and author. The group made their selection from recommendations presented by distinguished journalists who, by design, remain anonymous and serve for just one year. ■

He will be at Vilnius University in Lithuania as a Fulbright specialist for the fall 2011 semester, and he has been invited to do programs in Mozambique, Thailand and Poland in upcoming years.

1970

James N. Standard, the former executive editor of *The Oklahoman*, died October 12th at a hospital in Oklahoma City. He had been treated for cancer, according to the obituary in the newspaper where he worked for 35 years. He was 70.

A former Oklahoma Newsmen of the Year, Standard began his newspaper career when he was in high school as a copy boy at the *Arkansas Gazette* in Little Rock. He attended the University of Arkansas but before graduating left for a full-time job in Texas. At the age of 20, he was hired as an obituary writer by *The Oklahoman* and the afternoon *Oklahoma City Times*. During his reporting career, he covered police, courts and the statehouse. After President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963, he was sent to Dallas and found himself standing only a few feet from Jack Ruby when Ruby killed suspected assassin Lee Harvey Oswald.

In 1975 Standard was named managing editor of *The Oklahoman* and the *Oklahoma City Times*. After the two papers merged, he was named executive editor, a position he held for six years before becoming editorial page editor in 1990 and writing a weekly column called *Jim Standard's Oklahoma*. After retiring in 1995, he began a career in the ministry.

He is survived by his wife, **Jodie**, three sons, three stepchildren, and three grandchildren.

1971

Ronald Walker, a reporter and editor who worked in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico for much of his career, died on November 23rd in Florida. He was 76.

Having joined *The Virgin Islands Daily News* as a reporter in 1959, Walker was editor of the paper from 1976 to 1977. While living in Puerto Rico, he worked for *The San Juan Star* and eventually became the managing editor of that paper. He frequently wrote social and political commentary as well as stories on international travel for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and other newspapers in the U.S.

"He never masked his courage in the face of adversity, and his pen was mightier than his sword," said longtime friend Clive Banfield in an obituary posted on the St. Thomas Source website. "He earned his reputation as a gifted writer."

"More than anyone else in the class, Ron worked at keeping all of us—not just the Washington contingent—in touch with each other, an increasingly difficult task as the years rolled on and people moved about," said classmate **Dan Rapoport**.

Walker is survived by his wife, **Diane**, and two sons.

1972

John Carroll will receive the 2011 William Allen White Foundation's national citation from the University of Kansas in February. The university's William Allen White School of Journalism & Mass Communication has presented the award annually since 1950 to honor outstanding journalistic service.

During a career that began in the early 1960's when he was a reporter at the *Providence (R.I.) Journal*, Carroll has been editor of *The (Baltimore) Sun*, the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, which received 13 Pulitzer Prizes during his five-year tenure.

In e-mail correspondence with Nieman Reports, Carroll wrote, "Word of the award came out of the blue, and I was thrilled. It feels good to be recognized, of course, and it's given me occasion to marvel at the work of William Allen White. They don't make 'em like that anymore."

1977

Jose Antonio Martinez-Soler stepped down on October 1st as CEO of 20 Minutos, the publication he founded in 1999 that is now the most widely read newspaper in Spain. He will continue to serve on the board of the company, which is owned by Norwegian publisher Schibsted.

In his long career as a journalist, Martinez-Soler frequently challenged government authority and was often rebuked for his words. In 1976, he was kidnapped and tortured after writing an article critical of the Civil Guard. Twenty years later, he was fired from his position as New York bureau chief for the Spanish state television network by a newly elected prime minister who was still displeased over a question he had asked while covering him on the campaign trail.

"I also have been a journalist both in the Franco dictatorship and in democracy, before founding newspapers and companies, and I assure you that I truly appreciate how much freedom of expression is worth," Martinez-Soler said in his farewell speech, delivered to the Schibsted media directors at a meeting in Estonia. "For freedom, like oxygen, is most valued when it is lacking."

1980

Jan Collins's book "Next Steps: A Practical Guide to Planning for the Best Half of Your Life" (Quill Driver Books) won a 2010 Merit Prize in the National Mature Media Awards, an awards program for books, magazines, marketing and educational materials for older Americans. Coauthored with attorney Jan Warner, the book helps readers develop a detailed plan—and the necessary documents—for successful aging and retirement.

1981

Robert Cox has been made "an Illustrious Citizen of the Autonomous

Lewis Nkosi, the First Black South African Nieman Fellow, Dies at 73

Lewis Nkosi, one of South Africa's leading writers and the first black South African journalist to be a Nieman Fellow, died September 5th in Johannesburg after a long illness. He was 73.

As a young journalist in the 1950's, Nkosi was part of a new generation of blacks who exposed the injustices of apartheid. Writing in the legendary *Drum* magazine, Nkosi characterized his country's racial policies as "terribly sick" and its citizens as "terrorized" by security police.

His decision to accept a Nieman Fellowship in the Class of 1961 rested on a wrenching choice. The South African government would not give him a visa to come to Harvard unless he surrendered his citizenship. He decided it was worth it to escape apartheid and to study with journalists from around the world. He said later that "the pull of Harvard and the Nieman Foundation was such that I felt I had nothing to lose by coming to the United States."

Nkosi, who was orphaned as a boy, arrived in Cambridge at age 23, an especially young age for a Nieman Fellow. Recalling that time during a celebration in 2008 of the Nieman Foundation's 70th anniversary, Nkosi said, "I needed a whole lot of mothers. I was very thin and the wives of the Niemans fed me and made an enormous effort to build me up."

After his Nieman year, Nkosi established his journalistic credentials in the U.S. and in England. He taught at universities in both nations as well as in Zambia and Poland.

His 1986 debut novel "Mating Birds" was banned by the apartheid government and praised worldwide. Several critics compared its style and narrative structure to "The Stranger" by Albert Camus. During a discussion at the 70th anniversary celebration in 2008, Nkosi said the novel's penetrating psychological analysis owed a lot to his education at Harvard and classes that introduced him to the works of William Faulkner, James

Joyce, and D.H. Lawrence.

His other novels are "Underground People" and "Mandela's Ego," which was on the short list for the South African Sunday Times Fiction Prize in 2007. In addition to fiction, Nkosi wrote plays, including "We Can't All Be Martin Luther King" and "The Rhythm of Violence," as well as dozens of essays about African literature and politics published in a number of collections.

During a memorial service in Johannesburg on September 8th, Nkosi was remembered for his "laughter, naughtiness, and then, suddenly, depth." His twin daughters, Louise and Joy, 39, recalled "wild jazz records as bedtime lullabies," trying to teach their father to swim, and how he tried to teach them to speak isiZulu.

In addition to his two daughters, Nkosi is survived by his wife, **Astrid Starck**. ■



Lewis Nkosi, next to Hodding Carter III, NF '66, at the celebration of the Nieman Foundation's 70th anniversary in 2008. *Photo by Tsar Fedorsky.*

City of Buenos Aires,” in recognition of his role as editor of the English-language Buenos Aires Herald in the 1970’s. Faced with government censorship, Cox was one of the few editors willing to report on the new military dictatorship and “the disappeared”—the thousands of people, mainly young men, who were kidnapped and killed in death camps. The government briefly imprisoned Cox and he was forced to flee Argentina in 1979.

In an interview with his former paper, Cox said that, despite the threats, he always wanted to return to Buenos Aires during his exile. “I wanted to tell the world what was happening in Argentina and continue to do what the Herald was doing—saving lives,” he said. “The Herald, this newspaper, saved lives. When you are doing all these things you are not thinking about the consequences or even the effects of what you are doing. You just do what you think is right to do.” He is now writing a weekly column for his old newspaper, picking up where he left off 30 years ago.

1983

William Marimow, editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer since 2006, returned to the reporting ranks this fall to focus on investigative stories.

“There’s a purity about working on a good story—and an exhilaration, too,” Marimow wrote in an e-mail about the new position. “Being in the reporting ranks, once again, is a reminder that unearthing stories that require scrutiny is the essence of our work.”

Marimow, who joined the Inquirer staff in 1972, won two Pulitzer prizes as a reporter—the first for Public Service in 1978 and then for Investigative Reporting in 1985.

1984

Ivor Wilkins is the author of “Classic: The Revival of Classic Boating in New Zealand,” which was released in October by Random House New Zealand. The book, illustrated with



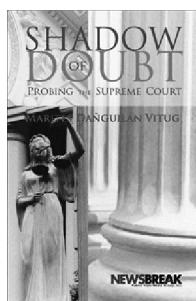
historic photographs as well as contemporary shots by Wilkins, highlights the restoration of classic yachts and the people who sail them.

1986

Gustavo Gorriti was honored by the Ibero-American New Journalism Foundation (FNPI) with the CEMEX+FNPI New Journalism Prize in recognition of his outstanding career as an investigative journalist. In a statement, FNPI praised the Peruvian journalist for “boldly tackling difficult cases of coverage, such as those relating to authoritarianism, corruption, drug dealing and conflicts” that have affected Peru.

Gorriti was forced to leave his country after being detained by the government in 1992. He moved to the United States and then to Panama where he became the deputy director of La Prensa. He has written extensively about the Shining Path guerrilla group in Peru. A former president of the Press and Society Institute, Gorriti is also the founder and director of IDL-Reporteros, a nonprofit investigative journalism team.

1987



Marites Dañguilan Vitug faced a host of challenges in getting her book, “Shadow of Doubt: Probing the Supreme Court,” published and distributed. She often tells that story when

she gives talks to various groups because it illuminates so well what is happening with independent publishing in the Philippines. At the last minute, the original publisher and distributor refused to move forward with the book because it criticizes the

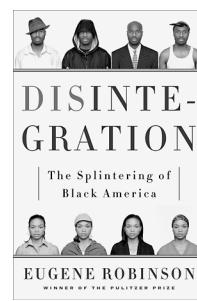
court. In addition, the nation’s leading bookstore chain refused to carry the book. One of the justices, Presbitero Velasco, Jr., sued her for libel on the eve of the book’s release.

“Shadow of Doubt” was published by Newsbreak, the online news and current affairs magazine. Vitug, who was the magazine’s editor in chief, is now chairwoman of its advisory board. She writes that, during the term of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, loyalty to the appointing power became more important than merit in the president’s selection of justices for the Supreme Court.

Alfred A. Yuson, in his review in the Philippine Star, described the book as one of the “tipping points in our national narrative brought about by heady journalism.” He added, “It had to take [Vitug], a veteran of investigative reportage, whose credibility as a journalist is beyond question, to pry open the curtains veiling a sanctum sanctorum.”

During remarks when the book was launched in March, Vitug said, “If there is any sadness I feel, it’s a tiny core of profound sadness that, in our society, we seem not to understand the meaning of independence, the value of research, and the role of journalists. There is such a thing as heeding the call of our profession—to shed light on dark corners.”

1988



Eugene Robinson’s new book is “Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America” published in October by Doubleday. It examines what he has identified as four distinct segments of the

black community, from the “Transcendent” class of wealthy blacks to the “Abandoned” class trapped in poverty. What this segmentation has done, Robinson argues, is minimize the influence and unity of blacks as a group.

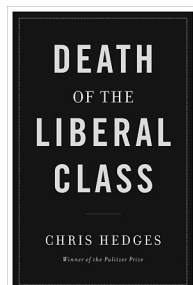
“There was a time when there were agreed-upon ‘black leaders,’ when there was a clear ‘black agenda,’ when we could talk confidently about ‘the state of black America’—but not anymore,” he writes in the book’s opening chapter. “With implications both hopeful and dispiriting, black America has undergone a process of disintegration.”

Robinson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning Washington Post columnist, is also the author of “Coal to Cream: A Black Man’s Journey Beyond Color to an Affirmation of Race” and “Last Dance in Havana: The Final Days of Fidel and the Start of the New Cuban Revolution.”

1996

Ying Chan wrote the introduction to “Investigative Journalism in China: Eight Cases of Chinese Watchdog Journalism,” published in April by Hong Kong University Press. The book tells the stories behind some of the most intensive investigations undertaken by Chinese media. They include the case of a peasant woman left disfigured by local officials and her husband’s family, the acceptance of bribes by journalists at the state-run news agency, and the government’s cover-up of SARS. In addition to introducing the case studies, Chan, the director of the University of Hong Kong’s Journalism and Media Studies Center, provides a succinct history of journalism under Communist Party rule and details some of the repercussions reporters have faced for reporting the truth.

1999



and other pillars of the liberal class

Chris Hedges argues in his new book “Death of the Liberal Class,” published in October by Nation Books, that the press, the universities, the labor movement, the Democratic Party,

no longer serve as effective counterweights to the corporate state. This leaves the poor, the working class, and even the middle class without an effective champion. Hedges, a former foreign correspondent for The New York Times, looks at Tsarist Russia, Weimar Germany, and the former Yugoslavia to offer a historical context to his analysis of what has happened in the United States. He is a columnist for Truthdig and a fellow of The Nation Institute.

2000

Deborah Schoch is a senior writer at the California HealthCare Foundation Center for Health Reporting, which recently launched a new website to showcase its reporting projects. The nonprofit center, funded by a grant from the California HealthCare Foundation and based at the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, partners with newspapers throughout the state to provide coverage of California health policy issues. In its first two years the center has produced 18 projects and almost 200 articles with 31 newspapers in the state. Schoch wrote that she is “convinced it offers a solid new model for journalism around the globe.”

2001

Don Aucoin, The Boston Globe’s new theater critic, wrote an e-mail about his new assignment: “Taking over as the Globe’s theater critic feels like I’ve come full circle in a couple of ways. When I was a 10-year-old kid in Ashland, Massachusetts, I worked as a paperboy, delivering the Globe. As I walked from house to house, I would usually have my nose buried in the paper, often because I was reading Kevin Kelly, the Globe’s superb theater critic. I learned a lot about writing and theater from reading Kevin.”

“When I got to the Globe in the late 1980’s, my first job was on the night copy desk. But on my nights off, I often

reviewed plays for the paper, usually of productions at smaller theaters or of shows Kevin wasn’t able to fit into his schedule. Our paths seldom crossed, and on the rare occasions they did I never got around to telling him how much of an influence he had on me, which I regret. (He died in 1994.)”

After stints covering politics and then TV, Aucoin was a feature writer for nearly a decade before his latest assignment. “Now that I’m reviewing theater full time,” he wrote, “I’m struck by how much stronger—and bigger—the Boston theater scene is than it was in the 1980’s. And I sometimes wonder if there’s a 10-year-old kid out there reading my reviews and maybe developing an interest in theater or writing or both. Hope so.”

2002

David J. Lynch sent an update about his job change: “I am now a senior writer for Bloomberg News in Washington, D.C., working as part of the economics team. I’ll be writing about the intersection of politics and economics for the news wire and [Bloomberg] Businessweek magazine, and I’ll be making occasional appearances on Bloomberg Television.”

“I had a great 16-year run at USA Today [USAT] and was fortunate to have some really life-changing experiences. I spent about half my time overseas, opening bureaus in London and Beijing. I covered wars, financial crises, natural disasters, and just plain old good stories in more than 50 countries. ...

“But the financial crisis took its toll on USAT. I lost three weeks of pay to involuntary furloughs in 2009 and when Gannett, despite being consistently profitable throughout the crisis, dipped into my pocket for an additional week of pay this year, I said ‘enough.’

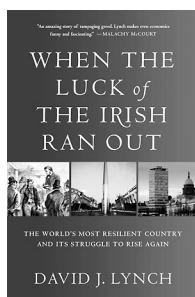
“I wasn’t really sure what to expect when I started my job search. But fortunately, it turned out that there is a market for middle-aged financial writers. Joining Bloomberg seemed like a terrific opportunity to be part of a

2003

young organization that is clearly on the upswing—as USA Today once was.

“As for the more important part of my life, my wife **Kathy** continues freelancing and working as a ghost-writer. And our sons—Jack, 14, Patrick, 11, and Declan, 9,—keep us busy and entertained.

“Also, along with starting my new job, I put out a new book in November.



It's called 'When the Luck of the Irish Ran Out' (Palgrave Macmillan) and it tells the story of how Ireland over the past quarter century went from rags to riches, and halfway back again ...”

Frank Langfitt moved from his job as an NPR business correspondent in Washington, D.C. to cover East Africa for NPR. He is filling in for current Nieman Fellow **Gwen Thompkins**. Based in Nairobi, Kenya, Langfitt is focusing on nine countries, including

Fondly Remembering Françoise Lazare, a Journalist for Le Monde Since 1988

By Thierry Cruvellier

Françoise Lazare, NF '98, died on October 15th in Paris, France, after battling a brain tumor discovered during her Nieman year. She was 45.

She had been a reporter with the French daily newspaper *Le Monde* since 1988. One of her colleagues at *Le Monde* said Lazare was wearing her Nieman class T-shirt the day before she passed away at the hospital.

Lazare's first article in *Le Monde* appeared when she was working as an intern at *The Wall Street Journal* in New York in 1987. At 22, she was already writing about the collapse of U.S. investment banks. “A passion for news, the quest for information, a taste for faraway places, her independence of mind, devastating wit, and strong character were the engine of what should have been a beautiful course, a successful personal life, and a brilliant journalistic career,” wrote her colleagues at *Le Monde* in her obituary.

In September 1993 a truck crashed into her car while she was on vacation with a journalist friend in New Iberia, Louisiana. Her friend died at the scene and Lazare spent a week in a coma. A year later, she returned to work, and a few years after that,



Françoise Lazare had an “independence of mind, a devastating wit, and strong character ...”

the tumor appeared.

Lazare graduated from the prestigious Institute of Political Sciences in Paris before studying at Johns Hopkins University in Washington, D.C. It was there that her passion for journalism was born. After six years working for the business section at *Le Monde*, she joined the foreign affairs desk for three years. This is when “she wrote her best reports, for instance foreseeing before all her colleagues the collapse of the Albanian regime due to the ‘pyramid scheme,’ or co-writing a memorable profile of ‘George Soros, a speculator and a philanthropist,” the obituary in *Le Monde* stated.

While fighting the brain tumor,

Lazare reported on lifestyle issues, “without ever giving up on what she regularly demanded: the right to ‘live normally,’” her newspaper colleagues wrote. She sailed for a month on a boat-hospital on the Amazon River and traveled deep below the earth's surface to report on copper mines in Chile.

Since 2009, she had written for *Le Monde*'s literary section, where she shared her love of foreign literature, including Korean and Albanian authors. She was still working a few days before she died, her newspaper colleagues wrote.

“Aside from her unceasing journalistic activity and a few other passions—like painting—Françoise felt a pressing need to gather her numerous friends regularly,” her obituary stated. “All those who got to know and like her, or who simply came across her, will keep the memory of an excellent journalist and a strong personality, a charming woman, warm and always curious, who never—never—stopped loving life.” ■

Thierry Cruvellier is a 2004 Nieman Fellow.

Sudan and Somalia.

He sent an e-mail in October about his new assignment: “So far, very interesting job. First trip was four days in Mogadishu, stark, fascinating and a little harrowing.

“Julie and the kids are having lots of fun. Julie gets to be a full-time mom for a change. Our neighbors include five Kenyan kids roughly the same age as Katie, 9, and Christopher, 6. They play games in the yard and converge on one house every Friday for movie night, which usually features pizza, ice cream, and the Disney Channel. On the weekends, we take our Toyota station wagon on self-driven safaris out of town.

“I am off to Egypt with the family right now for a break before what I imagine will be a long, hard slog in Sudan in advance of a referendum on secession that could spark a renewed civil war.”

2005

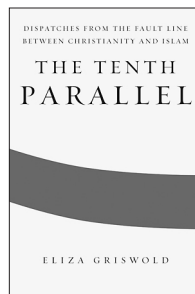
Henry Jeffreys has assumed the editorship of *The New Age*, a national English-language daily newspaper based near Johannesburg, South Africa.

Jeffreys was previously the editor of the Cape Town-based Afrikaans-language *Die Burger*. He left this position earlier in the year. While he was in between newspapers, he worked in the development field, serving as executive director of the boards of the Urban Foundation and the National Business Initiative.

Jeffreys struck an optimistic tone in the announcement of his hiring: “I am very passionate about the journalistic media. It is a cornerstone of our constitutional democracy and a custodian of the right to freedom of speech—in my view the most basic and important of entrenched rights we enjoy as citizens. It gives a voice to millions of citizens who are often ignored by the influential and powerful elites.”

He is a former deputy and political editor of the Johannesburg daily *Beeld*, where he started his career in the 1980’s.

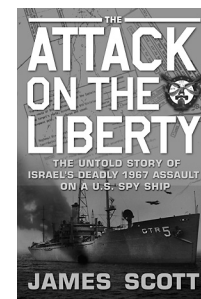
2007



Eliza Griswold’s book “The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches From the Fault Line Between Christianity and Islam” was published in August by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. The tenth parallel is the line of latitude 700 miles to the north of the equator. More than half of the world’s 1.3 billion Muslims and 60 percent of its two billion Christians live within that region. During the course of Griswold’s travels in Asia and Africa over a period of seven years, she concluded that the major force shaping the future of the world’s religions is what’s happening inside Christianity and Islam, not between them.

Cameron McWhirter left his job as an enterprise and watchdog reporter for *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* that he had held since 2003 when,

in September, he joined the Atlanta bureau of *The Wall Street Journal*. He is now a staff writer and is covering politics and breaking news across the South.



James Scott received the 2010 Rear Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison Award for Excellence in Naval Literature for his book “The Attack on the Liberty: The Untold Story of Israel’s Deadly 1967 Assault on a U.S. Spy Ship,” published in 2009 by Simon & Schuster.

The book explores the Israeli attack on the spy ship U.S.S. Liberty that killed 34 Americans and injured 171 others, an attack that remains highly controversial 43 years later. Scott attended the awards dinner in New York City on November 1st with his father, John, a damage control engineer on the Liberty who was awarded the Silver Star for his efforts to prevent the ship from sinking.



Paige Williams, NF ’97, center of back row, now teaches narrative nonfiction at the Nieman Foundation. Her students include fellows Abdul Waheed Wafa and Deb Price, and, in the front row, Florence Martin-Kessler, Rob Rose, and his affiliate, Janice Kew. Photo by Jonathan Seitz.

2009

Margie Mason was among the winners of the 2010 Science in Society Journalism Awards sponsored by the National Association of Science Writers. Mason and Martha Mendoza, who are reporters for The Associated Press, collaborated on the five-part series “When Drugs Stop Working.” It tied in the science reporting category with Charles Duhigg’s “Toxic Water” series in The New York Times.

Mason and Mendoza, who visited four continents to research the startling

growth in drug-resistant infectious diseases, were the first to report a U.S. case of extremely drug-resistant tuberculosis. “Well constructed, easy to follow, and doesn’t beat you over the head with numbers” was how one judge characterized the series. Another singled out the “worldwide coverage, multiple sourcing, and overall story arc.”

In an e-mail, Mason, who worked on the project as a Global Health Fellow at the Nieman Foundation, wrote, “The stories ran on front pages around the country and we saw at least a dozen op-ed pieces. We had

calls from members of Congress and regulatory agencies asking how to access all five parts. We know there’s legislation moving through Congress on the use of antibiotics in agriculture, and we’ve heard our series has been helpful.”

D. Parvaz has joined Al Jazeera English (AJE) as an online journalist working out of the network’s headquarters in Doha, Qatar. She was previously a columnist and editorial writer for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, which shut down during her Nieman year, and a 2010 Wolfson Press fellow at

The Nieman Foundation’s 2010 Annual Report Highlights Collaborations

The Nieman Foundation’s many partnerships and collaborations and the value these relationships bring to working journalists worldwide is the theme of the foundation’s 2010 Annual Report, now online. Highlights include:

The foundation and the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting launched a partnership to support international reporting initiatives. Nieman Reports teamed with the center on publication of “Brutal Censorship” by **Fatima Tlisova**, NF ’09, in the Fall 2010 issue. The center is underwriting fieldwork projects for the foundation’s Global Health Fellows and will help place their stories with major news organizations. It also will send journalists to Harvard for discussions on underreported international stories and provide an annual workshop for Nieman Fellows on innovative reporting strategies. The collaboration kicked off in October with a campus event titled “International Journalism 2.0: Bringing Home the Global Water Crisis.”

With a generous grant from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, the Nieman Foundation introduced a Nieman Fellowship in Business

Journalism. **Loch Adamson**, NF ’11, is the inaugural fellow. The Reynolds Foundation also renewed support for the Nieman Fellowship in Community Journalism, which has been offered at Harvard since 2005.

Thanks to the collective efforts of journalism organizations, human rights groups, and many concerned individuals, two journalists were able to join the Nieman class of 2011. **J.S. Tissainayagam** had been unjustly sentenced to 20 years in prison in Sri Lanka before international pressure

forced his early release. **Hollman Morris** of Colombia was able to obtain a visa to travel to the United States after his application had initially been denied by the U.S. State Department, causing an outcry from fellow journalists around the world.

With contributions from journalists who are innovators in all media, Nieman Reports, the Nieman Journalism Lab, Nieman Storyboard, and Nieman Watchdog Project continue to thrive and guide discussions about the future of quality journalism. ■



the University of Cambridge. Parvaz reported on her new assignment in an e-mail: “Having previously worked in print and only dabbled in online work, I was excited about getting into the Web side of things at an intriguing international network. ... My job is engaging, challenging and fun. I get to report stories, do analysis pieces, and write profiles, all while learning all there is to know about Web producing—something all reporters should know more about because learning how stories are packaged for the Web means crafting smarter pieces for Web readers. The newsroom itself, which combines TV and Web operations, has a truly amazing mix of people with a strong sense of camaraderie. ...

“The Europe-to-Gulf-state move would make a fascinating case study for anyone who has never made a major geographic and/or cultural transition. Yes, it’s hot, and boy is it different. But then, different was what I was hoping for in choosing to work here. ... It is, in some ways, a rather conservative place, and yet, I’ve never been in a city where people are so open to hearing new ideas.

“So, fellow Nieman alumni, should you find yourselves in Doha, drop me a line. I can take you to the Iranian Souq with the best Persian food this side of the Gulf, show you the buzzing hive that is the AJE newsroom and who knows, maybe we can talk each other into renting some dune buggies and hitting the sands.”

2010

Janet Heard is assistant editor, head of news, at the Cape Times in Capetown, South Africa. Prior to mid-August when she started her new job, she had been executive editor of the Weekend Argus, also published by Independent Newspapers. She wrote in an e-mail, “My brief is to also help build online and social media synergies in the newsroom and to assist with the bigger picture, training and mentoring reporters and special assignments and investigations. I also hope to continue my blog, get involved in broader jour-

The Murrey and Frances Marder Fund

The Murrey and Frances Marder Fund supports the Nieman Foundation’s Watchdog Project, which is aimed at encouraging independent, aggressive reporting on regional, national and international policy issues. The project’s website, www.niemanwatchdog.org, was launched in 2004. It includes articles by academic experts, journalists and activists in various fields, or interviews with them, pointing reporters and editors to important lines of inquiry and sources. Increasingly, mainstream news organizations and bloggers cite and link to stories on the site, and growing numbers of reporters and editors turn to it on a regular basis.

In addition to promoting better press coverage, Nieman Watchdog showcases excellent journalism and hosts a blog in which journalists take part. **Murrey Marder** is a 1950 Nieman Fellow.

The following is an accounting of expenditures for the fund from July 1, 2009—June 30, 2010:

Beginning Balance at 7/1/09	\$137,599
Income	
Endowment distribution	\$139,798
Interest	\$1,445
Total Income	\$141,243
Expenses	
Travel, lodging, meals, miscellaneous	\$228
Editors’, writers’ and interns’ fees	\$170,066
Website hosting and maintenance	\$706
Total Expenses	\$171,000
Ending Balance at 6/30/10	\$107,842

nalism issues in South Africa, and to write as much as possible.”

Gary Knight will be the director of the Program for Narrative and Documentary Studies being established in January 2011 at Tufts University’s Institute for Global Leadership. Students will learn the history and principles of documentary work and engage in fieldwork, creating visual, audio and written essays and histories. These projects will be published on the program’s website and in the media and will be housed in an archive available to scholars and the public. Students will have the opportunity to learn from working journalists, scientists, aid workers, anthropologists, politicians and other non-academics throughout the year.

In addition to Knight, who will be teaching the primary seminar and workshop, several Nieman fellows serve on the program’s advisory board: **Rodney Nordland**, NF ’89, **Terri Lichstein**, NF ’97, **Charles Sennott**, NF ’06, and **Hopewell Rugoho-Chin’ono**, NF ’10.

Hopewell Rugoho-Chin’ono was a finalist in the features category for a Rory Peck Award for his documentary film “A Violent Response,” about the post-election violence and human rights abuses that occurred in 2008 in Zimbabwe. Most of the film was shot undercover after the government barred him from reporting on the election and called him a “state security risk.”

One of the judges said, “We have to applaud Hopewell for working in

Zimbabwe during that period, when it was so difficult and so dangerous and very few people were able to get any pictures out at all.” The annual award honoring freelance camerawork in news and current affairs feature films is sponsored by the Rory Peck Trust, an organization that provides help to freelance newsgatherers and their families worldwide.

2011

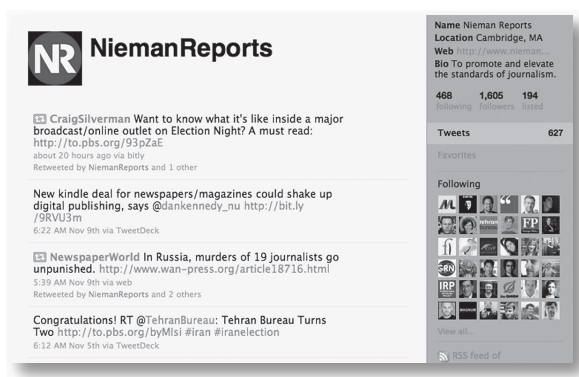
Hollman Morris is the recipient of the 2011 Nuremburg International Human Rights Award. As a documentarian and television journalist, Morris has frequently covered the violence and corruption in Colombia on his program “Contravía.” In awarding the prize, the jury wrote that Morris “has made visible the victims of the horrible armed conflict prevailing in his native country Colombia, and in his TV programs has given them a voice. In addition, some of his journalistic research has stopped impunity for horrific violations of human rights. Investigators, judges and prosecutors have used his work as evidence. He has paid a high price for his perseverance in reporting on human rights violations.” ■

Let's Talk

Nieman Reports enjoys hearing from you!

With social media, staying in touch is easy.

- Like us at [Facebook.com/NiemanReports](https://www.facebook.com/NiemanReports)
- Track us via Twitter. We tweet [@NiemanReports](https://twitter.com/NiemanReports)
- E-mail us at nreditor@harvard.edu



Share ideas about topics to cover.

Suggest stories.

Visit us online with your tablet.

www.niemanreports.org

Nieman Fellowship Application Deadline

Nieman fellowships are awarded to midcareer journalists of accomplishment and promise who come to Harvard University for a year of study, exclusive seminars, and special events. The application deadline for U.S. journalists for the 2011-2012 academic year is January 31. More information about the Nieman Fellowship program is available at www.nieman.harvard.edu/nieman-fellowships/. ■

Submissions Sought for Nieman Foundation Journalism Awards

The **Worth Bingham Prize for Investigative Journalism** honors investigative reporting on stories of national significance where the public interest is being ill-served. The application deadline is January 14. The Nieman Foundation will present the Bingham Prize, which includes a cash award of \$20,000, on April 14. For more information, visit www.nieman.harvard.edu/worth-bingham-prize/.

The **Taylor Family Award for Fairness in Newspapers** encourages fairness in news coverage by daily newspapers in the United States. The application deadline for the award is January 21. The cash prize is \$10,000 for the award recipient and \$1,000 for each of the top two finalists. The application can be downloaded at www.nieman.harvard.edu/taylor-family-award/. ■

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

VietNamNet: Responses to a Fall 2010 Nieman Reports Article

After Nieman Reports published “An American Observes a Vietnamese Approach to Newsgathering” in our Fall 2010 issue, we received several letters raising concern about the context and content of the article. After reviewing this correspondence and speaking with the article’s author, we decided to remove this story from our website and we explained why in a message that we put in its place:

Sam Butterfield portrayed his summer internship [at VietNamNet] through personal observations. However, we now believe that his experience should have been placed in a broader context. Had this been done, this story would have more fairly represented for the reader the general practices of VietNamNet and provided a truer sense of the limited vantage point out of which he wrote. Since he does not read or speak Vietnamese, he worked on VietNamNet Bridge, the news organization’s English-language website that is considerably smaller than the Vietnamese site. Due to this circumstance, he was not qualified to characterize the entire news organization in the way his story suggested.

Now we are sharing some of the words we received in response to the article.

To the Editor:

The VietNamNet described in Nieman Reports’s Fall 2010 issue bears no resemblance to the news organization that I have come to know over the past several years. VietNamNet is a pioneering news outlet. In 2006, the head of the Kennedy School’s Vietnam program urged the Joan



Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy to grant a fellowship to the editor and CEO of VietNamNet, Tuan Anh Nguyen, who was described to us as a leading voice for change in Vietnam. During the time he spent with us at the Shorenstein Center, he demonstrated his commitment to improving the quality of Vietnam’s journalism.

Tuan has nurtured his staff of 300 journalists in a variety of ways. This year and last, for example, he took more than 50 of his journalists to Europe so that they would better understand Western culture and journalism. Next year, he will bring a similar-sized group to the United States. Two years ago, the Shorenstein Center hosted a smaller group of his journalists for a week, exposing them to top U.S. reporters and editors. In Vietnam, he has hosted a large number of visiting American journalists and scholars, asking in return that they conduct workshops for his reporters.

I have observed at length the operations of VietNamNet and have had dozens of conversations with Tuan. Everyone in this news organization recognizes that it has not yet achieved the standards to which it aspires, but it has come remarkably far in its dozen years of existence. And it is using its resources to bring those standards to the rest of the country, for example, with the construction of the country’s first stand-alone graduate school of journalism that has begun in Ho Chi Minh City. It will open in 2012 with a curriculum modeled on that of U.S. graduate programs. Tuan is also planning a first-of-its-kind media research and studies institute to be located in Nha Trang, where journalists, scholars, media specialists, and policymakers can meet to share ideas.

Vietnam lacks a tradition of journalism education and does not have a fully free press. The government licenses its news outlets and monitors their activities. Nevertheless,

VietNamNet's intrepid reporting on land use, environmental degradation, foreign affairs, and other subjects has won it a large public following. Published online, VietNamNet has about six million daily readers. Some officials have criticized its reporting while others have commended VietNamNet for bringing neglected problems to light. VietNamNet has also been a proponent for a new press law that can serve as the foundation for a more independent press.

None of this information was contained in the broadside attack on VietNamNet that appeared in the last issue of Nieman Reports. It was portrayed there as trafficking in sex and news stories that originate with other news organizations. The author of that article is a college student, who described himself as being a consultant to VietNamNet, but he did not actually work on its news content. He interned for several weeks with the English-language publication of VietNamNet that is produced as a service to foreign readers. Its content is a compilation of stories that have appeared in VietNamNet and other Vietnamese news outlets. ■

Thomas Patterson

The Bradlee Professor of Government and the Press at Harvard University's Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy.

To the Editor:

First, it is necessary to make a clear distinction between VietNamNet and VietNamNet Bridge. Sam Butterfield's comments were based solely on his subjective view of VietNamNet Bridge, an English-language site that is only a very small part of our news organization. VietNamNet Bridge is a portal that collects and filters information from VietNamNet and other newspapers in Vietnam—these are then translated into English for international readers and they are

cited with clear sources.

VietNamNet is one of the most widely read online newspapers in Vietnam, and everyone who works here understands that the press serves the public interest and our content needs to be independent, accurate, objective and unbiased. All the products of VietNamNet—from news to investigative reports to the “hot topics” we raise in online discussions with legislators, researchers, business managers, and the public—must meet these standards.

Stories published on VietNamNet or VietNamNet Bridge have been double-checked, with their sources and origins clearly shown to readers. Any use of common nouns instead of specific names is a way of paraphrasing, and this practice, while certainly not encouraged, is limited on VietNamNet Bridge and does not happen on VietNamNet.

Butterfield cannot speak Vietnamese so he could not make judgments about VietNamNet. It is also clear that he misunderstood his role and duties during his internship at VietNamNet. He sought this internship and it was granted based on an introduction from a journalism professor; we did not invite him to act as a consultant or strategist. VietNamNet invites leading journalists and scholars to work as consultants and strategists—not university students. ■

Le Hai Yen and Bui Viet Lam

Le Hai Yen was Butterfield's supervisor at VietNamNet, and Bui Viet Lam is a senior editor at the news organization.

Sam Butterfield, author of “An American Observes a Vietnamese Approach to Newsgathering,” responds:

During this past summer I spent nearly two months living in Hanoi and working under contract at VietNamNet. The essay I wrote for Nieman Reports was based on my experiences; it was not meant

to be a comprehensive story about journalism in Vietnam or about this news organization. Its intent was to illustrate the great disconnect that I witnessed between my American notions of journalism and what I observed in this newsroom, and I stand by my description of how content was borrowed from other publications.

Along with two other American students, who were also under contract there as summer interns, I worked with Tuan Anh Nguyen, a senior official at VietNamNet. He asked us to help the editorial staff learn from strategies related to social networking and online publications such as The Huffington Post. For example, we were asked to analyze Huffington Post's model and present our findings to a board of editors, as well as research and explain how Twitter, Facebook and The New York Times's “Times People” help to facilitate user interaction with content, enable readers to feel more in command of their viewing experience, and bolster traffic by spreading links to content around the Internet. Based on our research, we created templates for possible use on VietNamNet's website using Adobe InDesign. We showed those templates as part of a two-hour presentation we gave to members of the editorial staff about how VietNamNet could use various social media strategies to increase traffic and enhance its visibility on the Web.

It is true that I neither speak nor read Vietnamese so my work was limited to VietNamNet Bridge, the organization's English-language division. The documents I signed describing my work there—two contracts, one when I arrived, one in mid-July, were written in Vietnamese, so I do not know what my formal title was at VietNamNet. It was always my understanding that my role there was to work on multimedia and Web strategies and that is what I did, along with editing stories at VietNamNet Bridge. ■

Unforgettable Characters Encountered in Covering the Civil Rights Movement

‘Looking back on these people who are larger than life, I wonder: In fiction, who would believe them?’

BY WAYNE GREENHAW

Throughout decades as a newspaper reporter, mostly covering the civil rights movement in the South, I have been a witness to history. I covered marches, trials, speeches and midnight gatherings with protesters on their knees singing “We Shall Overcome” in whispery

voices echoing in the night like a hymn in praise of freedom. I listened to the words of George Wallace, Martin Luther King, Jr., civil rights attorneys Morris Dees and Chuck Morgan, and Alabama Attorney General Bill Baxley.

Despite all that came after, what I remember most vividly is an image from more than 50 years ago. One picture stays with me, haunting and informing my writing about the movement that shook our nation. Days before my 16th birthday, in 1956, I was riding home one night from my part-time job at The Tuscaloosa News with a photographer when we came upon a mob on University Avenue. Whites were protesting a young woman’s attempt to become the first black student at the University of Alabama. The angry crowd stopped a car. Men beat it with sticks. They climbed on the bumpers, jumping up and down. In the darkness I saw the face of a small black boy framed in the back window. His eyes were huge with fear. Although the mob let the car pass after a few minutes, the boy’s frightened face was seared into my memory.

A Writer’s Beginnings

I had been hired by the sports editor at the News when I was 15, after undergoing spinal surgeries and being confined to a body cast for six months. Bedridden, I fought loneliness by reading Victor Hugo, Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, and others. Instead of emptiness, my world was filled with excitement: French revolutionists, boys floating down the Mississippi, and bullfighters in Spain. I was thrilled with the magic of written words.

In a magazine, I read an article about San Miguel de Allende in Mexico called “How to Live in Paradise on \$100 a Month.” At the Instituto Allende professionals taught writing. Descriptions of the Spanish colonial town put me on the narrow cobblestone streets. I pictured myself as a student there.

In my first job as a part-time sports reporter I wrote two-paragraph summaries of Friday night football games. If I wrote one word too many, my editor slashed it. If I used an unnecessary adjective, a scowl covered his face. On Saturdays I wrote headlines for sports stories going in the Sunday paper, learning the true weight of simple words.

I dreamed of writing books. Learning the art of self-discipline, I awakened early every morning and wrote for several hours. I composed a bad 150-page novel



FIGHTING THE DEVIL IN DIXIE

HOW CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS
TOOK ON THE KU KLUX KLAN IN ALABAMA

★
WAYNE GREENHAW

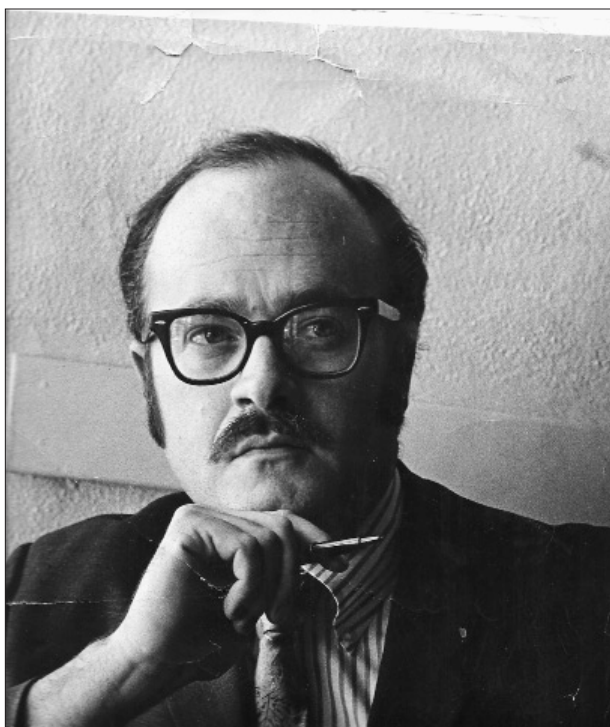


that thankfully disappeared long ago. Now and then I would unfold the article about Mexico and read it again. Finally, in the summer of 1958, after graduating from high school, I rode four trains from west Alabama to San Miguel, where I attended the writing center. In an old cantina veterans of World War II and Korea bragged about being writers, but all they did was drink and talk.

Returning to the United States, I showed my stories to professor Hudson Strode, who selected me for his illustrious creative writing class at the University of Alabama. Being admitted to his class was a prize in itself. Later I won an essay contest. The \$50 check made me believe I could be successful. In the next three years I managed to sell two stories to pulp magazines. An article about Mexico sold for \$100. It was enough positive reinforcement to keep me trying, a quality Strode called “stickability,” his top criteria for beginning writers.

A Witness to History

In 1965, after I was hired as a reporter for the Alabama Journal, Montgomery’s afternoon newspaper, by managing editor Ray Jenkins, who had just finished his Nieman year, I was soon assigned to cover civil rights. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was in and out of town, meeting with reporters at the integrated Albert Pick Motel. At Freedom City—several dozen tents in a Lowndes County pasture—Stokely Carmichael organized the Black Panthers. I wrote about the leaders and described demonstrations. Much of this reporting was done as a stringer for The New York Times or the Los Angeles Times or one of the weekly newsmagazines. All the while, I knew that some day when I wrote a book I would make use of this information, such as the way a courthouse built by slaves in Hayneville looked and smelled and felt and the six-by-six-by-six-foot



Wayne Greenhaw, in 1965, the year he began covering the civil rights movement for the Alabama Journal.

cage where defendants were once held before trials.

After a year of reporting, I began waking early to write before going to the office. Since the days of studying in Mexico and with Strode, I yearned to write fiction. In 1966, my first novel, “The Golfer,” was bought by J.B. Lippincott. In it, my protagonist, a young white professional golfer, meets a young black who has more natural talent than he. However, both realize that in the segregated world the black man will never have the opportunity to participate in the sport. After rewriting the manuscript, following suggestions of Tay Hohoff, a marvelous teacher who had been Harper Lee’s editor on “To Kill A Mockingbird,” it was published in the fall of 1967.

I continued to study the craft of writing. In my early years I thought fiction was the ultimate. Later I determined that if a writer worked hard and delved deeply into his subjects, nonfiction was equally rewarding. The creative writing techniques I learned in Mexico and from Strode could and should be used in nonfiction.

As I think back on my 22nd book,

“Fighting the Devil in Dixie: How Civil Rights Activists Took on the Ku Klux Klan in Alabama,” being published in January by Lawrence Hill Books, I realize that I finally put to use the novelistic elements of the real-life drama that I was immersed in for so many years. In my new book, the action unfolds through a cast of characters including a young man who is one of only five black lawyers in Alabama in the mid-1950’s, a white lawyer in Birmingham who becomes an ardent crusader for equal rights, a white farm boy who grows up to create the Southern Poverty Law Center, an ambitious politician who spews violent racism and later becomes a born-again progressive, and a young state attorney general who prosecutes the bomber of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham.

Looking back on these people who are larger than life, I wonder: In fiction, who would believe them? How could you create a group of courageous Harvard graduates who came South to report what was happening in civil rights? Who would believe that these young people would stay the course after they were called names and were attacked, beaten and arrested? But they did. Like the lawyers and the politician, they kept moving ahead. As American Civil Liberties Union attorney Chuck Morgan, who had toiled in the civil rights movement for years, told a group of students at Harvard in the spring of 1973, “The people who were guarding our Southern way of life said, ‘If we give ’em an inch, they will take a mile.’ ... Well, they gave us an inch, and we took a mile.” His voice and others resonate throughout the pages of “Fighting the Devil in Dixie.” ■

Wayne Greenhaw, a 1973 Nieman Fellow, now lives in Montgomery, Alabama, and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.

Nieman Reports
One Francis Avenue
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

