

# Nieman Reports

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

VOL. 62 NO. 3 FALL 2008

21st Century Muckrakers

## Staying Local, Digging Deep



School Buses Mortgage Lenders Water Bills Firefighters Hospitals Factory  
Jobs Government Agencies Toy Safety Steroids Water Bills  
School Budgets Business Scams Hospitals  
Transit Systems Water Bills Schools  
Factory Jobs Workers' Health Safety  
Congressional Earmarks  
Hospitals Factory Jobs Water  
Bills Foster Care Air Transport Chemicals  
Mortgage Lenders Water Toy Safety  
Pension Plans Business Scams Mortgage Lenders  
Workers' Health Air Transport Transit Systems Hospitals

**Congressional Earmarks**  
**Business Scams**  
**Firefighters**  
**School Buses**  
**Government Agencies**

Zimbabwe:  
Overcoming Obstacles to Get News Out

Words & Reflections:  
Essays About Books and Journalism

'to promote and elevate  
the standards of journalism'

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# Making Change While Retaining Our Core Mission

Curators have expanded the program through the years ‘to confront the challenges brought about by societal and technological changes that affect journalism.’

BY BOB GILES

Sorting through boxes and folders of Nieman history has occupied us this summer as we prepare for the foundation's 70th Anniversary Convocation this fall. It is a fascinating exercise, rediscovering long-forgotten anecdotes, reviewing critical moments in the life of the program, and getting a fresh perspective of what it has been like to be a Nieman Fellow through the years.

Nearly 20 years ago, in the spring of 1989, the foundation prepared to celebrate its 50th birthday, and Howard Simons, the curator, wrote in Nieman Reports that he “was struck by the fact that the core program has not changed in 50 years .... It is a tribute to belief in the bromide, ‘If it ain't broke, don't fix it.’”

Curators have been mindful of the imperative to continue the fellowship program as hundreds of fellows have experienced it—and about which they often speak with great affection. But they also have recognized that promoting and elevating the standards of journalism—the foundation's mission—has meant expanding its role from time to time to confront the challenges brought about by societal and technological changes that affect journalism.

The first significant expansion of the foundation's role came in the founding of Nieman Reports in 1947. The report of the Hutchins Commission on A Free and Responsible Press, published that year, deplored the absence of a forum for regular and serious criticism of the press. This inspired Louis M. Lyons, the curator, and the class to establish Nieman Reports “as a medium for discussion, appraisal and criticism of professional newspapering.” Today, under Editor Melissa Ludtke, a 1992 Nieman Fellow, its content speaks to topics far broader than its original mandate.

International fellowships were the next enlargement of the program in 1951. Lyons was eager to bring a global perspective to the program and wanted to support international journalists in strengthening their independent voices as a result of their Harvard experience.

Writing has been a subject of keen interest to Nieman Fellows since the very early years of the program, when they found an outlet in an English seminar taught by Theodore Morrison. After Morrison retired, the foundation began to offer writing instruction with Diana Thomson, the wife of Curator Jim Thomson. In more recent years, Nieman Fellows have studied and practiced the literary form under the tutelage of Anne Bernays and Rose Moss. In 1999, in response to increasing interest from fellows, the foundation expanded its writing program to include narrative nonfiction, taught first by Robert Vare, a 1997 Nieman Fellow, and then Mark Kramer. An outgrowth

of the narrative class is the annual narrative journalism conference and the online Nieman Narrative Digest, now directed by Constance Hale.

A generous gift in the mid-1990's from Murrey Marder, a 1950 Nieman Fellow, encouraged greater engagement with watchdog journalism, an idea that led to the Nieman Watchdog Web site, edited by Barry Sussman, which helps members of the press to ask probing questions.

Recently, Nieman Fellows have expressed anxiety about how the emerging digital technology is affecting the practice of journalism. In an attempt to alleviate some of their uncertainty, the foundation is offering a series of workshops throughout the year that will focus on learning how to take advantage of opportunities presented by these new tools of journalism. At the same time, the foundation saw a need to establish its own presence in this time of transformation. After much discussion and deliberation, the Nieman Journalism Lab was established this summer with Joshua Benton, a 2008 Nieman Fellow, as its editor. Its Web site, [www.niemanlab.org](http://www.niemanlab.org), will be launched this fall as a resource for learning about best new practices that support quality journalism.

In our early years, Nieman classes were populated exclusively by newspaper journalists. As television and, later, public radio came of age, broadcast journalists were selected but in far fewer numbers than their print counterparts. In spite of recent efforts we've made to encourage networks and cable news organizations to consider the value of mid-career education for their leading journalists, we remain disappointed by the relatively small number of broadcast journalists who apply each year.

Still, Nieman classes have become more diverse in recent years as documentary filmmakers and photojournalists, online journalists and freelance writers have joined their classmates who come from more traditional roles at mainstream news organizations. It is no longer rare for a fellow to be offered a buyout during the year, and this new reality in newsrooms has compelled the foundation to include journalists in transition who use the resources of Harvard to prepare themselves for new directions in their journalism careers.

Enlarging our footprint during these 70 years attests to the desire of curators and fellows to find ways to respond to the evolving challenges of improving and sustaining the craft of journalism. Yet, in thinking about the Harvard experience of fellows in 1938 and 2008, the fellowship's core idea of enabling a year of study at Harvard for working journalists has not changed. ■

# 21st Century Muckrakers: Staying Local, Digging Deep

During a July 28th conference call about A.H. Belo's sharply declining earnings (a 15 percent decline in the second quarter) and the impending round of 500 staff layoffs at its three daily newspapers, Goldman Sachs analyst Peter Appert asked Belo CEO Robert Decherd what he called an "impossible question," according to Rick Edmonds, who reported this on the Poynter Institute's Biz Blog. The question Appert posed is precisely the one that many newspaper owners, publishers and editors are asking themselves at a time of accelerating and deep staff cuts, with reductions in the news hole, and with the multilayered challenges they face in meeting the demands of the digital audience.

"How do you maintain editorial relevance and quality as you are doing such dramatic cuts in staff?" Appert wanted to know.

Decherd's response, like Appert's question, echoes through the corridors of many news organizations. While acknowledging fairly substantial changes in newsroom operations, Decherd would not concede that the Belo relevance—as conveyors of news and information in their communities—would suffer, even as the number of those available to do reporting and the financial resources to support their work continues to decrease.

Variations on this equation—pairing the known losses of input with rosy predictions of stability for the output—have gained a foothold in newspaper newsrooms. Each time more layoffs are announced, this notion rises as the mantra of those left behind. Rarely do newsroom leaders respond to cutbacks by acknowledging that fewer resources + fewer reporters + fewer photographers + fewer editors will likely result in a less appealing product for consumers. And when it comes to investigative reporting, what is required is the patience of editors, the persistence of reporters, and the deep pocketbooks and legal protection of publishers, all things that surely get depleted as newsrooms shrink.

All of this was acknowledged by none other than Google CEO Eric Schmidt, who in July at the Ad Age Madison + Vine Conference in Beverly Hills, California, wondered aloud about whether and how investigative reporting will survive as its platform shifts from print to digital media. His reasoning: the great difficulty being had in finding viable financial models to support the work of those who do this kind of labor-intensive reporting.

In this issue—our third in a year-long, four-part project exploring various aspects of the changing journalistic landscape for investigative reporting—editors and reporters from midsized newspapers with a proven reputation for investigative journalism speak of their evolving approaches to doing this kind of work. From the standpoint of readers, finding new strategies to keep investigative reporting alive and well is critical to retaining them. Ask people for ideas on what content news organizations should emphasize in this era of staff cuts, as The Miami Herald recently did, and the response is summed up well by the words one reader wrote: "What is most important to me is that the Herald survives to blow the whistle, investigate, create a community dialogue. You're the only watchdog left." ■

# Making Firm a Newspaper's Focus on Investigative Reporting

'In an age when our critics love to crow that news is an undifferentiated commodity available anywhere, investigative reporting clearly isn't.'

By DAVID BOARDMAN

It was one of those meetings in which newspaper editors spend all too much time these days: a cross-departmental conversation about how to cut our company's budget. Executives from around the operation—advertising, circulation, production, news—turned ashen in unison as we pored over another set of ugly ad-revenue returns. We adjourned with the assignment

of each squeezing more blood from our respective department's turnip.

The home-delivery director made a beeline for me, clearly wanting to share an idea for how I should cut the newsroom budget. Knowing that newspaper editors and circulation managers don't always see eye to eye, I braced myself. So I was delighted when he said, "Whatever you do, please, please, please don't cut the investigative reporting!"

He knows what I know: Investigative reporting is expensive. It's time consuming. It's risky, both in terms of digging dry wells and instigating litigation. It can anger readers and advertisers.

And he also knows this: It may be our saving grace. In an age when our critics love to crow that news is an undifferentiated commodity available anywhere, investigative reporting clearly isn't. It's something newspapers do that hardly anyone else can afford to: spending weeks, months and sometimes even years uncovering important stories that powerful people and institutions don't want the public to know.

Of course, these days, we in the newspaper industry are asking ourselves whether we can still afford to do it. It's a question we've asked ourselves even at The Seattle Times, where watchdog reporting has a long and rich tradition. Our newsroom staff is significantly smaller than it was a decade ago, while the demands of being a 24/7, multiplatform

news organization are immeasurably greater.

Our answer? We can't afford not to.

## Sustaining Our Watchful Eye

As our industry moves from a business model largely supported by classified advertising to one fueled by new and largely still elusive revenue sources, we must retain our audience and sustain our mission. We believe that now and in the future, investigative reporting is not only good journalism, it's good business—in print and online.

In Seattle, the record supports that. While the industry saw an average circulation decline of nearly 20 percent between 2000 and 2007, the Times is actually selling more newspapers than we were eight years ago. One major reason, we are certain, is our investigative reporting.

Readers love it. Nothing we do elicits more response—and these days, more Web site hits—than a provocative investigative report. When, earlier this year, we exposed the previously unreported level of criminal activity among members of the 2001 University of Washington Rose Bowl football team, newspapers flew off single-copy racks, and the story and its sidebars dominated our Web site traffic for more than a week.

It's great for our "brand." In surveys, people in the Northwest—both readers and nonread-



ers—consistently cite our watchdog approach to news as one of our attributes. They know that during the past 15 years, we have taken on our region’s biggest employer (the Boeing Company), one of our best advertisers (Seattle-based Nordstrom), our hometown airline (Alaska), and the most respected medical facility in the Northwest (the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center) in our investigations. While each of those reports has angered a segment of the readership—usually people employed at those companies—the collective result is a belief that our organization is beholden to no one and not afraid of the powers that be. Both readers and advertisers like to be associated with that strength and independence.

So nearly everyone at the Times, from our owner-publisher to the circulation and advertising directors to the troops engaged in the breaking-news battle on the Web, believe with conviction that we can’t abandon watchdog journalism and, in fact, must expand it.

But how, in these times of paucity?

We’re focused on three elements:

**1. Structure:** Certain aspects of investigative reporting, such as complex data analysis, document navigation, and difficult confrontational interviews, demand experience and expertise. For that reason, we are not disbanding our I-Team of seasoned, highly skilled investigators. But we have moved a couple of them from that largely sequestered elite group out to the middle of the newsroom to work on the metro reporting team, where they will be more visibly in the daily mix and will be powerful evangelists for the investigative ethic we’re working hard to instill across the staff.

**2. Culture:** During the past few years, we have stressed, and demonstrated, that the best ideas for investigations come not from meeting rooms but from the street. Our beat reporters—from biotech experts to art critics to high-school football reporters—are

learning that great watchdog stories are everywhere. And they know that if they find one, we will team them with expert investigators who can help them deliver the goods.

**3. Training and technology.** The same medium that has stolen away our want ads offers us new, more efficient ways to dig up information and to report it. We are striving to make optimal use of Web-based tools in collecting and collating data, experimenting in crowdsourcing techniques to gather tips and test theories. We’re using our intranet to put powerful technology tools at reporters’ fingertips and training them how to use them. And we’re using the Internet—and our Web sites—to present investigations in new, richer, more multifaceted fashion.

The result is an evolution of the investigative tradition that began in the last midcentury here when a cub reporter named Ed Guthman published the first bull’s-eye hit on McCarthyism. It’s a tradition that developed through the decades, producing a passel of Pulitzer and other investigative awards and, more importantly, changed laws, saved lives, and improved the quality of life in the Northwest.

In this decade, investigations are springing from beats like never before:

- “License to Harm,” in which medical and investigative reporters revealed that Washington State allows hundreds of medical professionals to continue to practice even after sexually abusing their patients.
- “The Art of Deception,” in which our visual art critic teamed with an investigative reporter to expose the sale of counterfeit Chinese antiquities at a respected Seattle gallery.
- “Coaches Who Prey,” in which a court reporter’s instinct based on a couple of unconnected lawsuits led to the revelation that 159 middle- and high-school coaches in this state had been reprimanded for sexual misconduct with players—and that most had been allowed to continue

to coach and teach.

- “Chief Sealth Recruiting,” in which a tip to a prep-sports reporter led to an investigation exposing illegal recruiting of players to the two-time state champion girls basketball team, which was ultimately stripped of those titles.
- “Selling Drug Secrets,” the product of pairing an investigative journalist with a biotech beat reporter, leading to the revelation that despite signing confidentiality agreements, doctors across the country were being paid by elite investors to reveal the secret details of their ongoing drug research.
- “Landslides and Logging,” an investigation that actually began with a picture by one of our photographers of a massive mudslide in the Cascade Mountains, which led one of our environmental reporters to work with our mapping expert. They proved that Weyerhaeuser’s logging practices were both destroying the landscape and putting watersheds at risk.

Every one of these investigations, and others like them, set tongues wagging in our community, and all had direct, positive results. They were good journalism. Every one of them also sold newspapers and drove Web traffic. They were good business. And every one of them was a reminder—to the newsroom, to the rest of our company, and to our community—of what newspapers still do better than anyone else. ■

*David Boardman is executive editor of The Seattle Times and a past president of the board of directors of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. (See story by Seattle Times reporter David Heath about his award-winning investigation of Congressional earmarks on page 27.)*

# Investigative Reporting: Strategies for Its Survival

New funding mechanisms and newsroom changes are needed if watchdog journalism is to thrive in small and midmarket news organizations.

BY EDWARD WASSERMAN

**T**he future of investigative reporting is linked inextricably to the general economic crisis affecting U.S. journalism. That should be obvious, and by saying that I'm not suggesting that investigative work doesn't have unique vulnerabilities: It's expensive, offers uncertain payback, ties up resources that could be used in more conventionally productive ways, fans staff jealousies, offends powerful constituencies (including touchy readers), invites litigation, and usually comes from the most endangered class in the newsroom, the senior reporters whose ranks are being thinned aggressively through forced retirement.

Still, for all its uniqueness the tottering support for investigative work needs to be understood within the larger collapse of advertising-funded journalism. The marriage between consumer advertising and news, which dates in this country from the advent of the penny press in the 1830's, is crumbling. The principal reason is less related to circulation declines—daily newspapers, for instance, still dominate their metro markets—than to the exuberant flowering of Internet sites, some devoted to information and entertainment, others simply to sales, that offer advertisers much more efficient ways to find and reach customers than riding alongside news reports into their homes.

Daily newspapers, for all their general interest posturing, had come to rely chiefly on a narrow range of business sectors—automotive, help wanted, home sales, and department stores—and these sectors have either

consolidated or are being drawn away by highly effective, narrowly targeted Web sites. (They're also being pummeled by the current macroeconomic hard times, but those will pass. Those other developments won't.)

None of this is cheery news for news operations, but the cost to them of hanging onto advertising as they migrate online isn't cause for cheer, either. Web-borne technologies enable advertisers to know, with unprecedented precision, who is reading what and where else they have been on the Internet. Hence, advertisers are, or soon will be, able to forecast the audience for certain kinds of content and to base their ad placement decisions accordingly. And what advertisers know, news managers will have to learn. That means editors are not far from being able to determine the revenue value of certain kinds of news and calibrate coverage with that in mind. That's not an appealing prospect in general for those of us who value independence in news decision-making; nor does it bode well for investigative work to be subjected to narrow, profit-and-loss arithmetic.

## Finding Investigative Resources

So journalism in this country faces a general problem replacing the advertising subsidies on which it has flourished for nearly two centuries. And investigative journalism has a particular canary-in-the-coal-mine problem of being acutely sensitive to thin financial air.

The challenge is to find new mechanisms to provide investigative journalism with the resources it needs, especially in the small and midmarket operations that are being starved of the kind of reporting that has traditionally held local political and business establishments in check.

Before we turn to some of those mechanisms, two points.

1. These resources aren't exclusively financial. They include in-kind subsidies, for instance in the form of labor that is donated outright or sold at a fraction of its value to news outlets.
2. Preserving investigative journalism may not be identical with preserving investigative journalists. The overall concern should be nurturing a communitywide capability to unearth, report and explain so as to hold major institutions accountable, address injustice, and correct wrongs. Full-time professionals will have their place, but they won't occupy it alone.

Here are some of the more promising dimensions of the emerging regime under which investigative reporting can survive and flourish. Some are more feasible than others; some are already taking shape. Each has its drawbacks, but they have in common an overall direction of marshaling support from a wider array of sources than we've seen under the ad-support model.

**Mobilize the Public:** The 2006 "crowdsourcing" project of The News-Press in

Fort Myers, Florida is frequently cited as an impressive example of a local paper serving as agent provocateur and communitywide reporting manager. The stories concerned excessive impact fees levied on residents in connection with their water utility expansion. Much of the ensuing investigation, which led to a rollback of assessments, was conducted by knowledgeable irregulars who gathered and analyzed evidence of municipal anomalies the paper reported and posted.<sup>1</sup>

There's no use dwelling on the huge supervisory challenges within a news organization that are raised by such crowdsourcing, nor on the need to make sure that those involved under-

analytical, not conceptual or political, and where the goals of the amateur newshounds—saving money—are durable. The danger is that assigning priority to projects susceptible to crowdsourcing could mean giving short shrift to highly worthwhile inquiries whose constituencies are less easily mobilized, less mainstream, and less richly skilled. In short, by institutionalizing a commitment to crowdsourcing are news organizations introducing a durable tilt toward reactive, pocket-book projects that appeal to college educated, professional readers?

Moreover, when a newsroom incorporates outsiders into the process, what they have to say has to be listened to, and an appropriate role must be found for them in shaping the coverage they contribute to. What if your amateur sleuths want to expose employers who hire illegal immigrants, or bird-dog suspiciously foreign workers back to their apartments to see who's renting to them? Do editors allow crowdsourcing to become mobsourcing, or do they roll up the carpet on the empowerment that was promised to these helpers?

That said, those are good problems to have. The potential gains from leveraging in-house investigative and supervisory staff by enlisting communitywide resources on matters that require laborious empirical work are abundant and enormously appealing.

**Relax the Full-Time Employee (FTE) Newsroom Model:** News operations aren't sustaining themselves with revenues from their own operations on anything like the scale that communities need to be covered adequately. What follows may sound heretical, but one response is to make greater resources available by encouraging the newsside to incorporate the practice pioneered by op-ed pages, which have long been dominated by

outside contributors. They'd do this by creating procedures and mechanisms to promote strong investigative work from nonjournalistic professionals who bring to bear their knowledge within the community at large.

Though similar to crowdsourcing, this takes us in a slightly different direction, toward a more nimble style of newsroom management and a more serious grant of operational autonomy to outsiders. As one source of such outsiders, consider institutions of higher education: One of the paradoxes of the current economic straits of the news business is that while news outlets are suffering, university journalism programs are booming. (Travelers are familiar with a similar paradox: every airport you use is expanding, every airline you fly is near bankruptcy.) Many of the senior journalists who are being chased from their newsroom berths are being welcomed on campuses, which are benefiting from the increasing largesse of wealthy baby boomers who view donations to educate tomorrow's journalists as highly worthwhile.

Those new academics could continue to produce journalism. A good many lawyers and accountants too have serious investigative training; some can even write. The problem is that news operations—with some exceptions, notably long-form magazines—are neither managerially suited nor culturally disposed to routinely incorporate the work of people who aren't FTEs.

That incapacity denies them a ready source of subsidy, since the potential contributor's reporting is essentially paid for by his or her day job. Naturally, that dependence may raise serious conflict of interest problems, much like those that op-ed pages traditionally handle so poorly. It also requires addressing novel quality control issues.

But given that the need now is to perform a thorough inventory of the

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**WHAT WE ARE DOING**  
news-press.com and The News-Press are investigating the expensive and controversial water, sewer and irrigation system expansion in Cape Coral and we want your help. What do you know? Tell us on our forums, or contact someone on our staff: Cape editor Tom Hodson, 239-344-4621; reporter Jeff Cull, 239-335-0225 or reporter Don Ruane, 239-344-4619.

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Details from the audit:

**LIVE UPDATES - POSTED 7/8/08**  
**Cape to stop utility work, revisit issue**  
Cape Coral City Council voted 8-0 today to stop work in the Southwest utility expansion area and revisit the resolutions on work there and residents' payments.  
| [Read the audit](#) | [Forum: Help us investigate!](#)  
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**EMBARQ**  
**THIS WAY TO**

The Fort Myers News-Press invited readers to help them investigate a story about an expansion of the water, sewer and irrigation system, in a method known as crowdsourcing.

stand basic principles of journalistic professionalism. A larger concern is whether such an approach is self-limiting in ways that aren't especially desirable.

The Fort Myers case seems to exemplify the kind of work that's ripest for crowdsourcing: where the main reporting problems are empirical and

<sup>1</sup> "Using Expertise From Outside the Newsroom," by Betty Wells, in the Spring 2008 issue of Nieman Reports, describes other efforts within The News-Press newsroom to build on this model of engaging citizens in investigative efforts. This article can be found at [www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/08-INRspring/p65-wells.html](http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/08-INRspring/p65-wells.html).

investigative resources available in a community in order to harness them so as to keep the toughest and most trenchant journalism alive, ignoring the capabilities of knowledgeable, eager and capable professionals of all kinds would be foolish.

**Endow Chairs:** Much has been written about the national nonprofit journalism outfits that either make grants to enable reporters to do major long-term projects or, in the case of ProPublica, use foundation funding to employ top-tier investigative aces and direct them onto stories of national scope.<sup>2</sup> A different approach to using nonprofit money would apply a model familiar to the academic world and be built around endowed investigative positions created on the staffs of small and midmarket news operations, which have been decimated by the declines in classified, home sales, and automotive advertising.

For example, a single national donor, giving only half the \$10 million annual stipend that enables ProPublica to employ 20-some investigative reporters in Lower Manhattan, could seed 100 newsrooms with \$50,000 apiece to partially fund investigative chairs. (Partial funding would ensure a local buy-in and enable the employer to adjust the reporter's total compensation to its newsroom pay scale.) In addition to that seed money in the provinces, some modest funding could go into creating a centralized supervisory or advisory capability, perhaps vested in ProPublica or one of the existing investigative shops. The objective would be to supplement the supervision the reporter gets on site from editors who are deeply knowledgeable about local realities with the expertise of seasoned investigative journalists.

What's important is recognizing that investigative work doesn't solely mean national stories. Fundamental to the civic role of small and midmarket news organizations has been their work on

zoning scams, courthouse favoritism, environmental degradation, political cronyism, and all manner of wrongdoing that may not register on a scale of national significance but that shapes municipal life in powerful ways. The evisceration of local newsrooms risks creating vast free-fire zones for corruption, which no amount of attention to national affairs will restrain.

**Tap Into Community Resources:** Similarly, nonprofit initiatives need not be exclusively national, either; they could take the form of citywide foundations bankrolled by local donors either to make grants for individual projects or to provide funds for a sustained journalistic operation comprising full- or part-time staff.

That fundraising effort need not be confined to soliciting big contributors. Investigative reporting produces tangible benefits to communities, even if those civic benefits can't be readily monetized through the private marketplace because they can't be priced effectively. But that doesn't mean they aren't real and valuable. What is chasing a crooked mayor from office "worth?" If asked, one citizen might say that having an independent team of skilled investigators whose mandate is to root out and expose local corruption is worth, perhaps, \$100 a year to her; another might put the figure at \$50, still another at \$1,000. But there is some value that each of us would attach to that benefit. The continuing success of listener-supported public radio suggests that audiences recognize and, under certain circumstances, are willing to pay for similar informational benefits. Some bloggers, too, have also been successful in fundraising of this sort.

The challenge is to create the funding mechanisms and position the appeals to enable community resources to be pooled reliably and effectively. Crowdsourcing should not be confined to research and report-

ing; the crowd needs to be enlisted as a source of financial support, too, which has already been happening at Minnpost.com, which was launched in November 2007. In a midsummer message, MinnPost CEO and Editor Joel Kramer reported to readers that the online publication has "932 members, people who have decided to support financially the nonprofit journalism that MinnPost.com provides."

**Create Specialized Spinoffs:** Intense scrutiny of powerful institutions and important social developments is a difficult undertaking for which some people will indeed pay quite a lot, especially if that audience gets to see the findings while they're fresh and hot. This inside-baseball model is key to the success of the newsletter business and other premium informational services

The screenshot shows the 'The New York Times STORE' website. At the top, there's a banner that says 'Get The Times delivered to your home for less than \$1 a day. Click to order.' Below this, there's a 'Shop Now' button and a list of newsbooks. The first newsbook is 'Business of Green 2007' with a price of \$2.99. The second is 'Choking on Growth' with a price of \$2.99. The third is 'The DNA Age' with a price of \$2.99. The fourth is 'NNT Publications' with a price of \$2.99. Each newsbook entry includes a small thumbnail image and a brief description of the content.

The New York Times creates newsbooks by reprinting some of the newspaper's investigative series. The newsbooks are sold through their online store.

that continue to flourish in spite of the current wisdom that the subscription model is dead. Might that be a model to enable certain areas of investigative work to continue—sell the reporting as a stand-alone publication to the people who are willing to pay for it?

Many journalists will find it distasteful to propose that a news operation might devote a portion of its resources to reporting that will be

<sup>2</sup> For articles examining various nonprofit models of investigative journalism, see the Spring 2008 issue of Nieman Reports, which includes one by ProPublica Editor Paul E. Steiger, at [www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/08-1NRspring/p23-lewis.html](http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/08-1NRspring/p23-lewis.html).

denied to readers who don't specifically subscribe to it. (The objection is ironic in view of the eagerness with which news organizations are dicing their broad-gauged audiences into vertical microslivers of neighborhood, age, profession, hobby and any other social descriptor that seems to hold appeal for advertisers. Such verticality is expressly intended to provide specific audiences with some information and withhold it from others. Perhaps because the information is innocuous, the practice isn't objectionable.) Still, if this proposal meant that important information would be kept secret, the idea would be ethically problematic.

But that's not the case. The more typical practice of specialty publications is to keep their subscribers satisfied by ensuring them a first look at important findings; the publications themselves

are eager to see their work trumpeted into the public domain, which ratifies their importance and reaffirms their subscribers' commitment.

Moreover, what's the choice? If the alternative is that the reporting won't be conducted at all, submitting to a two-step process—first to subscriber, then to general public—is plainly preferable. Having a pair of investigative sleuths prowling the statehouse and reporting on shadowy legislative maneuverings for 2,000 subscribers who pay \$500 a year may not be an ideal response, but it sure beats shutting the capital bureau or assigning a skeletal staff to knee-jerk stenography.

In sum, keeping alive the flame of investigative—or, as others prefer, accountability—journalism has never been easy, and the slow-motion col-

lapse of U.S. journalism's advertising dependency has made it harder than ever. New sources of support need to be devised, and the community's reservoirs of skill and energy, as well as money, need to be inventoried and tapped. But this is possible. And the consequence may be a richer and more fully responsive capability for investigation, exposure and reform than was possible under the vanishing old regime. ■

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## Investigative Reporting: Keeping It Relevant, Keeping It Local

'Our story selection is attuned to answering *the* question a reader might ask: How does this affect me?'

BY PAUL D'AMBROSIO

**W**hen an obscure real estate developer bounced a \$25 million check at a local bank in the spring of 2006, it was one of those stories that could easily have been deemed the "weird news" item of the day and dispatched with a front-page brief.

A projects reporter for the Asbury Park (N.J.) Press thought otherwise. He soon uncovered a massive, \$400 million real estate ploy that, in hindsight, proved to be one of the bellwethers of the 2007 subprime house market collapse. Signatures on mortgages were forged, millions of dollars were illegally shuffled, and allegations of physical threats between multimillionaires were all uncovered through painstaking research.

Could it have been a dull real estate story? Sure. But it wasn't. That topic became the most searched item on our Web site. Subsequent investigative stories in 2007 and 2008 about the subprime foreclosures in our area were consistent high-traffic generators on the Web, beating out fire and traffic accidents that traditionally drive most of the Web-based news.

The bottom line for these stories was relevance—the mantra for our four-member projects team that I have led since 1999. In the shifting sands of modern-day journalism, in which reporters and editors strive to stay current both on the Web and in print, project reporting at the Press has thrived in recent years. Gannett, which owns the Press, and Press

management have strongly stated that investigative reporting is an important First Amendment mandate for us. It is also a niche no one else can fill. Bloggers can't do it, and community Web sites don't have the resources to do it well.

### Newsroom Methods

To put theory into practice, our project team operates like most others: We look for issues that affect our readership. But how do we do this efficiently and effectively? How do we merge the benefits of the Web with the robust reporting that we prepare for print?

We avoid the "he said, she said" stories that lack conclusions.

We try to look for stories with high

impact—those that will change laws and attitudes. A story has to have a definitive feel that shows an ill that needs to be corrected.

To this end, we are highly focused on computer-assisted reporting at the Press. We vacuum up millions of records a year from local, county, state and federal governments to use as our base sources. This gives us a powerful way to look for trends, compile questions, and check information without wasting a lot of time. We are able to place at least one investigative piece in the paper each week, usually on a Sunday. This also helps keep our reporters' names in the community, which can lead to additional news tips. I also keep a log of people who call and write, which proves useful when we need sources for stories. We've also developed a rapport with our Web users, who know a lot about what's not working the way it should in their community.

We have successfully merged projects with the Web by placing a vast amount of searchable data on our Web site ([www.app.com](http://www.app.com)). The Press's most popular Web offering is our DataUniverse.com brand, which receives an average of one million page views per week. This searchable bank of government records provides everything from home assessments to public salaries to criminal records.

By having this useful resource on our Web site—for us and community members to use—we are building a good rapport with potential sources. DataUniverse provides the Press—and our projects team—with a high community profile. Citizens, government employees, and union members clamor when updates are delayed. One reader wrote these words on our forum: “DataUniverse: Fantastic tool for the ordinary citizen!” As an example of how having this resource available can work to our advantage, a state employee used our site to check the overtime payments to the agency's overtime chief. It turned out that the chief averaged \$40,000 a year in overtime pay, an amount that immediately raised suspicions. The curious employee informed the

overtime chief's superiors and then called us. The overtime chief was later suspended, and we, of course, wrote the story.

## Relevance to Readers

This all circles back to our mantra—relevance. Our story selection is attuned to answering *the* question a reader might ask: How does this affect me? We can't expect readers to wade through hundreds of inches of copy in an investigative series if we can't tell them, as part of the story, what the impact of this issue is on their lives.

Our most recent series, “Fixing New Jersey,” seeks to answer how the state's debt affects every citizen. On four successive Sundays our reporters took a close look at the winners and losers in the political battle over the debt, at the state's massive tax collection machine, at the state's addiction to runaway spending, and at the most likely solutions to the tangled issues at hand.

We avoid flopping an issue on the table and then running away, as if to say it is someone else's problem now. So we have a proactive approach to the investigative series that we publish. Through the years, we've called for a better hospital health reporting system, more openness in the lawyer and physician discipline processes, and fuller public access of government records. And we've stayed with these stories until we've seen improvements happen in one way or another.

In 2003, our eight-day “Profiting From Public Service” series exposed the outrage of lawmakers using the government as a piggy bank for themselves, their families, and their friends. The final chapter outlined the role citizens can play to fix their government, and the residents of New Jersey eagerly responded at the polls. The state Senate president, who set up a series of part-time government jobs that paid him more than \$200,000 each year, lost reelection along with others who had blurred the line between public service and private gain.

If there is a corollary to relevance,

it is this: avoid complacency. It's easy to withdraw into a comfort zone and dismiss story ideas as “been there, done that.” Like book plots, there are perhaps only seven story topics in the world. But what exists in all of our communities is an infinite combination of people, bureaucratic bungling, and ill will—more than enough to keep investigative reporters occupied for quite some time.

The lack of affordable health care for the working poor is a well-reported topic. But I felt it would be interesting to revisit it in light of the Democratic presidential primaries. My sense was that we would find some key examples of local citizens falling through the cracks and stimulate a debate about the role of government in protecting the health of all.

In one family we profiled, the father was employed, yet struggled each month to pay the bills. Should he pay the rent or buy medicine for his chronically sick child? Should his wife, who had the flu, suffer at home or seek relief at a hospital? Yet if this father earned too much money, Social Security would cut off his child's benefits, putting the family further in the hole.

What happened next surprised me, as I discovered how our story had hit community members squarely in the heart. The family received more than \$4,000 in unsolicited contributions, even though we didn't put their address in the paper. The doctors offered to treat the family for free. It was an unexpected ending to what I'd thought was a routine story. But what it reminded me is that writing about relevant issues in our community never grows stale. ■

*Paul D'Ambrosio is the investigations editor for the Asbury Park (N.J.) Press. He and his team have won the Selden Ring Award, the Farfel Prize, the National Headliner Award for Public Service, and more than a dozen other national awards in the past few years. They were a finalist for The Shorenstein Center's Goldsmith Prize in 2004 at Harvard University.*

# The Benefits of Computer-Assisted Reporting

‘... in this day of easily accessible data, computer expertise can be a great equalizer.’

BY JASON METHOD

Our projects team at the Asbury Park Press had spent five months tracking the \$300 million collapse of a local real estate tycoon in 2006. The story was interesting enough, as the 33-year-old had leveraged his prominent family connections to attract wealthy but naive investors and lull banks into lending without the usual due diligence.

But after an interview, one local banker told me about an even better story—national in scope with implications for Wall Street and the financial markets. To be certain, it was a large-scale story for a medium-sized newspaper like the Asbury Park Press to handle.

Even in our high-tech age, many editors and reporters—especially at smaller outlets with tough staffing and time constraints—will not attempt to tackle such a large story (or even a smaller one) that requires reporters doing original research, crunching numbers, and providing analysis. There are plenty of reasons to be found to avoid this kind of heavy lifting. Editors, feeling too pressed by daily deadlines, are reluctant to put reporters on such time-consuming tasks, and many reporters still balk at such undertakings, observing that they fled to journalism to avoid math. In many newsrooms, computer expertise has been left to a select few, as the rank-and-file stick to their beats.

Yet through the use of relatively basic computer-assisted reporting, the largest financial story of this decade—

the subprime mortgage crisis—was told by the Asbury Park Press. Our coverage garnered national awards

but failed, to convince customers not to refinance their homes yet again for more lifestyle expenses. And, he said, a whole new class of loans—called “subprime”—had come to dominate the market so much that a conservative bank like his could no longer compete.

At the New Jersey shore, real estate is always a hot topic. Eighty percent of the houses in the Press’s coverage area are lived in by their owners. Most of the rest serve as summer beach houses for residents around the state. The shore holds some of the most expensive property in America. Although the housing mania had not quite reached the hysterical heights of Southern California or Florida, prices at the northern Jersey shore, where the Press circulates, had gone up nearly 150 percent in the previous 10 years.

Though the banker had described a national story, I could also see how it could be intensely localized. There was no reason to shy away. As I told my editor, “Everyone in our area who owns a house cares about this story.”

I ordered the federal database of mortgage applications, known as the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act data. That prodigious computer record gave me a profile on every mortgage application in the country: the amount, the applicant’s income, their gender and race, whether the loan would be used for a purchase or a refinance, whether it was for a primary residence or other home. There was also a variable that let me know whether the



William Soodul of Allentown co-owned his own title search company but, despite his knowledge of mortgages, signed onto a \$233,000 loan with a \$10,000 prepayment penalty. “Why didn’t I know better?” said Soodul, who could no longer afford the escalating payments on his option ARM loan. *Photo by Dave May/Asbury Park Press.*

and, as importantly, won praise from local readers.

## Crunching the Numbers

It all began with that after-interview chat with a local banker. The defunct developer was only a symptom of a widespread disease, he said. Banks across the country had dramatically lowered their underwriting standards to provide money to just about anyone with a pulse. The country’s culture and attitude toward finances had changed so much that many people were refinancing their house two, three or four times to pay for Florida vacations for their kids and Hummers for their driveways. The banker said he tried,

loan was subprime because it came with a higher interest rate.

Even better for a regional paper like the Asbury Park Press, the data was coded so that I could compile results for the state, our local counties, and even for neighborhood census tracts. Instant local news. I loaded the data into a program used for advanced statistics, SPSS, and parsed off smaller data sections into Microsoft Access and Excel. Then I hunkered down to find the story. Soon, with the computer running at full speed, I had a three-inch binder full of printouts.

Meanwhile, I read Federal Reserve studies on household finance, spoke to experts, and canvassed our area to speak with local mortgage bankers, appraisers, real estate brokers, foreclosure investors, and troubled mortgage loan borrowers.

I was putting the final polish on the “Home Roulette” series just as the first subprime shudders hit Wall Street.<sup>1</sup> We published in March 2007. The package included online maps that readers could use to focus on various dimensions of this problem in their town. On one map, a deep brown cluster quickly identified areas in the state where more than 30 percent of the mortgages relied on subprime loans; on a different map, this same color indicated places where at least half of homeowners had refinanced within a two-year span of time.

Every story in this series featured local people, and photographs that ran side-by-side with our reporting showed readers how these people’s lives had been affected—people who could have been their neighbors.

The Asbury Park Press suddenly looked very smart, and if the crisis had waited just a bit to explode, we might have been hailed as geniuses.

I did not stop covering the story even as it became daily national news. I wrote about rising foreclosures, prepayment penalties, the effect of a U.S. Supreme Court decision on state regulation, and a national mortgage fraud under investigation by the FBI (which included local victims.) In the fall, my analysis of the new federal



Marie Citarella of Waretown, New Jersey, was victimized by a national mortgage fraud scam that involved 200 people in 27 states. She believed she was only refinancing her home to obtain some extra money to live on while she was unemployed. But she had, in fact, sold her house. A mortgage was taken out by principals of a company who have since been indicted in California. *Photo by Tim McCarthy/Asbury Park Press.*

mortgage data ran in our paper during the same week The Wall Street Journal reported on their examination of the same information.

It would be preposterous to think a paper like the Asbury Park Press could run with top business reporting organizations in covering the biggest financial story of the decade. But last April I felt honored to be named as a finalist in the Scripps Howard National

Journalism Awards. (The Wall Street Journal’s 14-member subprime team won the award in the business/economics reporting category. Two reporters for Bloomberg were also finalists.) Just as important as earning recognition within our profession, knowing that readers loved the mortgage stories reminded us of the value of what we’d done. The stories were top online draws on the days they ran, and we received scores of complimentary e-mails and calls.

Early this year, a group of real estate business people and bankers invited me to dinner to talk about the series. They recalled key details of stories written months earlier, such as the \$5,000 pool table purchased by one couple in debt.

### **CAR: An Essential Newsroom Tool**

The beauty of computer-assisted reporting (CAR) is that, in this day of easily accessible data, computer expertise can be a great equalizer. It can allow smart reporters at any size news organization to saw wood on national or state issues and drill the story down, sometimes to the neighborhood level. Certainly, the benefits of those efforts can be seen, especially online, as interactive databases and maps are favorites on news sites.

But many frontline reporters have not joined in the computer-assisted reporting revolution, some 15 years after its advent. Instead, they wait to ask the computer experts in their newsroom for help, if they ask at all. In recent years, CAR has, for many, evolved into a priesthood of computer specialists

<sup>1</sup> The first article in the three-part series—as well as links to interactive maps—can be read at [www.app.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070318/NEWS/70318001/0/SPECIAL](http://www.app.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070318/NEWS/70318001/0/SPECIAL).



Beth and Paul Duncan of Toms River, New Jersey, struggled to make payments on a \$327,000 subprime mortgage loan, but they admit their own spending contributed to their financial problems. The refinancing paid for a \$5,000 pool table and new addition to the house. October 2007. Photo by Bryan Ferreira/Asbury Park Press.

who have long since abandoned writing words in favor of writing code, queries and command statements as they master more and more advanced programs. As a consequence, reporters can shy away from learning how to integrate CAR into their work, and

editors caught in the crush of meetings and deadlines—especially those at smaller news organizations—can overlook the potentially powerful contributions that the CAR basics could make even in daily reporting.

Spreadsheets, databases and online services such as LexisNexis offer immediate help for even the most pressing deadline stories. Classic programs for CAR practitioners, like SPSS and the ArcView mapping program, offer so-

phisticated analysis for a relatively modest price. There is an investment of time required to learn, but it can pay immediate dividends.

Whether the story is about real estate, foster care for children, school performance, taxes, government bu-

reaucracy, or even Mother's Day, there are numbers and records that can be analyzed with tools that have been around for more than a decade. CAR gives journalists the opportunity to dig for truth in data, and the comparative analysis that a computer can do often reveals pertinent questions. What reporters are able to learn from using CAR provides readers with knowledge and insights that can cut through the clutter of opinionated noise and celebrity obsession.

It also can allow even relatively small news operations to delve into problems affecting the global community, yet speak to readers and viewers right around the block. ■

*Jason Method was an investigative/computer-assisted projects reporter at the Asbury Park Press for nine years before his promotion to bureau chief in July. He was on the Press's team for the "Profiting from Public Service" series, which won the Selden Ring Award, a National Headliner Award, and was a finalist for The Shoreline Center's Goldsmith Prize in 2004 at Harvard University.*

## Remembering the Value of Investigative Journalism

A newspaper editor describes six newsroom strategies that ensure that watchdog reporting thrives—even at news organizations where resources are limited.

BY REX SMITH

**W**henver I begin to despair about the future of journalism, and newspapers in particular, I remind myself that I've lived through worse and that my newsroom produced powerful reporting even then.

Not "worse" in the macro sense, for there hasn't been a time when the combination of a damaged economy and industry upheaval has been as daunting for mainstream journalism as

it is now and is likely to be for several more years. "Worse," rather, in what I confronted personally, for I was once the editor of a money-starved small newspaper that was part of a chain led by a bully, whose decisions squeezed both the money and the spirit out of my paper.

Back then, though, I lucked out by finding a gutsy and talented veteran reporter who had been knocked around by alcohol and wanted to redeem his

career by bringing journalism that mattered to our community. His personal agenda and my vision for our paper yielded results. One fond memory: The stories we produced prompted Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) to invite us to collaborate on a panel called "Small Town Heroes: Kicking Butt on a Budget." It almost didn't matter to us that we had to pay our own way to the conference.

My life is better nowadays, thank

you. My current newsroom's budget, though tight, affords enough resources for some high-impact reporting, and I now work for an enlightened company with smart strategic leadership and a commitment to good journalism. And, yes, I have still been lucky in hiring.

But what that hardscrabble newsroom 15 years ago cemented in my mind is the notion that where you work isn't the deciding factor when it comes to making journalism that matters. From my experience—as a reporter and editor at newspapers ranging from a 3,800-circulation Corn Belt daily to a Top 10 powerhouse in the Northeast—I've become convinced that an editor who cares about journalism that holds the mighty to account need not be held back by limited resources or a tough economic climate.

## What Our Readers Expect

Newspapers develop identities—for such attributes as, say, great narrative storytelling or fine design or best practices in generating reader involvement. All those are important. But I'm pleased that the (Albany, N.Y.) Times Union in recent years has drawn attention for its investigative work. It's not that we don't value all the other merits of a great newspaper, but I'm convinced that a focus on watchdog journalism is not only the right thing to do journalistically, but also a smart business strategy.

Readers care about watchdog reporting. A study—Building Reader Loyalty—we commissioned last year revealed that 68 percent of our readers believe it is important for a media outlet to “investigate community issues”—one of the top three attributes they're looking for. The same study reminded us that the Times Union was the most used source for that sort of news. People told us that “providing news that is up-to-date” is the most important service a newspaper provides. But clustered right behind that in our survey were values associated with watchdog reporting: providing in-depth information, alerting readers to harmful situations, and investigating community issues.

In the digital era, fewer people are turning to their local newspaper to find out what happened yesterday. Most news has become a commodity supplied by any number of sources—all readily accessible on the computer or cell phone. To thrive, our focus must be on unique content that readers consider valuable. If the newspaper's brand is identified in readers' minds as a place where they find content they can't get elsewhere and as a watchdog who is on their side when it comes to taking on powerful interests, then we'll be a welcomed—perhaps even an esteemed—guest in their homes and workplaces for years to come, in print or online.

Editors who share this devotion to a journalistic imperative that is also a smart business strategy might wish to consider six tactics that I've come to view as helpful.

**Nurture the support of key people in your organization outside the newsroom—including your publisher and other department heads.** An editor has three constituencies, really: the people in the newsroom who create our journalism; those in the community who consume what we create, and the people who lead and sustain our enterprise. The latter is often the group we fail to cultivate. If your publisher isn't committed to the sort of journalism that sometimes makes his or her job harder, and if the folks who work in your newspaper's advertising, circulation and marketing departments don't understand why watchdog journalism is important, the editor runs the risk of losing the financial backing that good journalism requires and the necessary moral support to get through difficult times.

Sober conversations need to happen with these non-newsroom colleagues about the values that drive journalism and the business benefit that arises from establishing a bond of trust with consumers. Don't assume support for all of this will be there without asking for it. And use whatever communication channels exist with the corporate overseers, too, to build the case for journalism that matters.

**Marshal resources, however limited and strained, to support journalism that makes a difference.** Long before great stories are launched, tough decisions confront an editor who wants to pay more than lip service to investigative reporting. A tradeoff will almost certainly need to occur in which something good at the newspaper gets pushed aside so the newsroom can afford to do something even better. Example: When a talented artist left our staff, we used that vacancy to create a research director position. We then cut back on other expenses to put money into acquiring databases that our research director can use to support the newsroom's investigative work. We created a new investigations team by taking reporters from other beats, even though we knew we would miss some of the daily stories those reporters would have produced. To give this sort of reporting the space it often fills, we had to cut other content—and implement story length guidelines—because the days of easily adding extra pages have vanished with the rise of newsprint costs.

**Hire tall.** Back when the Chicago Bulls dominated the NBA, I had a boss who urged us to think the way Phil Jackson would if he had to replace someone in his starting lineup. “You have to hire tall,” I was repeatedly told. “No second-stringers here.” It's especially important advice when it comes to investigative reporting because of the stakes involved. Second-rate writing is embarrassing, but flawed investigative reporting can ruin lives and affect your newspaper's bottom line. Don't settle for mediocrity or, as too many papers do, for the imitation of real investigative work. Several years ago, leaders of the Hearst Newspaper division challenged the editors of the company's five metros to hire the best investigative editors we could find; they promised that the company would fund the first-year salary of that person at each of the papers. There was no shortage of outstanding candidates in Albany, but to lure the best of the field, we had to go far beyond our usual salary package and create a position

with newsroomwide responsibilities. My great hire was Bob Port, a veteran of the New York Daily News, The Associated Press, and the St. Petersburg Times. He has not only established investigative techniques as a vital part of our work—he also oversees research and database acquisition—but also has energized our entire news report with the ethic of watchdog journalism. This is a place where an editor can make a difference. Don't fail to do so.

**Take all the help you're offered, including some that's free.** In terms of both training and content, don't turn down handouts. Reporters and editors alike need instruction and inspiration, and there's a lot of it that doesn't cost much. Send staffers to state and regional conferences or enroll them in online training from Poynter's NewsU. Seek out the flock of journalists-turned-authors stumping the countryside; when they're nearby, ask them to drop into your newsroom for a brown-bag lunch with the newsroom staff. Consider publishing content from beyond what the newspaper's staff produces—content that sets a good example for your newsroom and underscores in readers' minds how much the newspaper cares about investigative reporting.

This summer, for example, the Times Union was the first newspaper to publish work generated by ProPublica, the nonprofit investigative newsroom headed by Paul E. Steiger, the former managing editor of *The Wall Street Journal*.<sup>1</sup> A few days later, we secured permission to use a smart investigative piece relevant to our community that had been originally published in a fine newspaper a couple of hours south of us, the Times Herald-Record of Middletown, New York. Neither of those stories cost us anything. But they surely reminded readers that the Times Union is the place to look in our community for powerful reporting. Another source of cheap labor

to tap, when managed very carefully: students. Because Port is not only our investigations editor, but also an adjunct professor teaching investigative techniques at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, under his careful teaching and editing eye students have assisted in reporting and thereby extended our reach.

**Take on some big dogs, and celebrate when you beat 'em.** The leaders of the New York state legislature have for years withheld details about so-called member items—that is, local spending that individual legislators earmark for use by their constituents. With strong support from Hearst Corporation, we sued to get the information released. The general counsel of Hearst, Eve Burton, came to Albany to personally argue the case, and she won. The judge ruled that the state had wrongly denied us information clearly in the public domain and awarded Hearst attorneys' fees—which Burton promptly turned over to the Times Union to fund more investigative reporting. Her letter transmitting \$37,000 to us is on our newsroom wall, alongside other awards that we treasure. And when that reporting won an IRE medal, we announced it in the newsroom with only a bit less hoopla than a Pulitzer might have generated. We recently beat the Albany police chief on a public access case, and we have gone to court so many times as plaintiffs in recent years that I can't remember all the cases. We're quite pleased, in fact, when an official takes a stand that leaves us no option other than to sue. We want officials to know we won't back down and that we'll go after our attorneys' fees if they stand in our way.

**Let your readers know what you're doing.** If there was a time for subtlety in our business, it has passed. The first time I used the label "exclusive" on a Times Union story, the reporter

objected. "It's kind of like we're trying to draw attention to ourselves," one editor told me. Yep. Similarly, when we break a big story online, we fight the broadcasters who swipe our information by letting our print readers the next day know what time the story was first published on timesunion.com. We use house ads to remind readers of our triumphs. We partnered with our community's strongest commercial TV station on one groundbreaking investigation, and we're weighing whether to do more of that; although our overall reach is bigger, the TV newscasts touch tens of thousands of people who don't read the Times Union, so extending our brand in that way might make sense.

Most of us went into journalism to make a difference. And our role as an independent public watchdog—recognized as an essential balancing force to hold powerful interests accountable—has its roots in the founding documents of our democracy. Our hope today is that by continuing to focus resources and attention on investigative reporting we will reveal a true picture of experiences that affect people's lives. Watchdog reporting is vital to what newspapers offer readers, though in these challenging times doing this job can seem to us the hardest kind of work to sustain. Yet our readers assure us they need us to keep doing it, so when we do we send an important signal that even in tough times we recognize the value of journalism that matters. Knowing this—and demonstrating that we do—is what will keep us vital through these stormy times. ■

*Rex Smith is editor of the Times Union in Albany, New York. His commentary about what is happening at the newspaper and in the industry can be read at <http://blogs.timesunion.com/editors/?p=932>.*

<sup>1</sup> An article by Steiger about ProPublica's mission and operation was published in the Spring 2008 issue of *Nieman Reports* and can be read at [www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/08-1NRspring/p30-steiger.html](http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/08-1NRspring/p30-steiger.html).

## Finding Support for a Lengthy Mission

To do this investigative story, ‘we needed the total investment of our editors, our newspaper’s publisher and, in turn, Hearst Corporation executives.’

BY BRENDAN LYONS

It was 11 o’clock at night. I was standing in a motel room in central Florida about 1,200 miles from my newsroom near New York’s capital. A couple of Orlando TV stations were covering the story we’d broken that day, and pretty poorly. So I switched channels to CNN. They were on it. Clicked to ESPN. A couple sports-broadcast icons were discussing the latest steroids scandal to strike the sports world.

“Albany Times Union.” There, one of them said it. The words just hung there. I smiled. Not a bad national scoop for a medium-sized daily from upstate New York. CNN called to request an interview, as did another network and radio jocks across the country. But news was still breaking, and I wasn’t the story. I declined.

In the days that followed, reporters from nearly every major news organization parachuted into Orlando and also into our home base of Albany, New York. They were looking for a piece of the steroids investigation that revolved around a grand jury investigation initiated by our local district attorney.

The case was rattling the professional sports world. Wrestlers. Ballplayers. NFL stars. They all were on the customer lists of an Orlando pharmacy that investigators said had been peddling steroids to tens of thousands of customers in New York and other states. Dozens of doctors, pharmacists and wellness center operators were rounded up across Florida and hauled back to New York for arraignments on the sealed indictments.

Few of the good details were spelled out in court documents. But our investigative team at the paper had them, including names. We broke the story on our Web site (to the



Law enforcement officials bring out boxes of items seized from the Signature Compounding Pharmacy in Orlando, Florida in February 2007 during a multiagency raid of the drug company. *Photo by Paul Buckowski/Times Union.*

consternation and anger of some of the investigators) not long after the multistate task force kicked in a door or two and rocked those pharmacists’ worlds. Now readers wanted names. Who were the cheaters? Any New York Yankees on that list?

### Applying the Basics

In Albany, the local media was frothing mad and claiming favoritism had resulted in us getting this story. (Full disclosure: Early on, Sports Illustrated had a team on the story, but we pulled the trigger first.) But landing the story really came down to basics—careful sourcing and meticulous reporting, factors that have always been the cornerstone of solid investigative journalism. But for this story to happen in these times—with newsrooms

in tough shape and reporters under pressure to produce a lot of stories and do so today—another key building block had to be in place. We needed the total investment of our editors, our newspaper’s publisher and, in turn, Hearst Corporation executives. All of them had to be steadfast in their decision to dedicate resources to the work of a small investigative team and let this team spend considerable time—if needed, and to the envy of other reporters—hunting down big stories.

Our local competition, mostly some TV stations and a foundering daily, weren’t aware that this story had been quietly unfolding for months in the public courtrooms of Albany County. One of the first arrests in the case took place long before the Florida pharmacy raids. It involved

an alcoholic physician with a revoked medical license who was arrested and hauled into court in Albany because she ignored investigators' warnings to stop writing phony Internet prescriptions. (There were also three people from Houston who were indicted and brought through our local airport in handcuffs. Law enforcement officers did tip us off about the significance of these unusual arrests that if seen as separate incidents didn't seem like much.)

For us, time spent cultivating sources on this case helped to bring the broader story into focus. The more we learned, the more we realized this was a major and unprecedented case, sparked by a years-long probe within the state's Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement. Internet prescriptions. Steroids. Painkillers. Everything a pharmacy can produce was being doled out to nearly anyone with a computer and a credit card. Congress had warned about this new frontier in the war on drugs, and the Albany investigators joined forces with a Florida task force. Because New York's prescription laws were among the toughest in the country, the Florida suspects, who did millions of dollars in illicit business in New York, were going to be prosecuted here.

As our questions made it apparent how close we were to breaking this story, law enforcement sources pulled us aside and explained the consequences of exposing their investigation. They asked us for an embargo. In return, they gave us an assurance we could be on the story when they raided the pharmacies. We handled this situation in the way a news organization embedded with a military unit would deal with a request to delay reporting on a planned air strike.

Even as we reached this agreement, we were going harder on the reporting.



Kirk Calvert, marketing director of Signature Compounding Pharmacy in Orlando, Florida, is led out in handcuffs after being arrested in February 2007 during a multiagency raid of the drug company. *Photo by Paul Buckowski/Times Union.*

I flew to Florida and photographed and visited one of the Palm Beach County wellness clinics seven weeks before it was raided. We cultivated a wider net of sources, and they were the ones to help us weave the story together. It was a tense time, because Sports Illustrated had a dogged reporter on the story, Luis Fernando Llosa, and he seemed to know more about a related investigation in Alabama that had implicated heavyweight boxing champ Evander Holyfield. In the end, Sports Illustrated had greater detail in their report, but the Times Union got credit for breaking the story.

This became our first major strike for the Times Union's three-person investigative team that had been formed about a year prior. I am convinced that what put us in a position to land the story was the decade of experience I had in cultivating sources within the law enforcement community. Back then, an editor at a different newspaper—a former Marine with a storied journalism career who'd spent more time in war zone, as a journalist, than most soldiers—asked me to take on that beat.

Once on the beat, he wasted little time in teaching me how to break the mold. Too many cop reporters hang out with the cops, he said. That's understandable, since in many ways cops and

reporters share a bond: A lot of people don't trust either one of them. So this editor pulled me into his cubicle and told me the paper wanted a cop reporter who'd also focus on police corruption. We need incisive coverage, he explained, and that's how my work as an investigative reporter began.

Despite the nationwide attention with our steroids series, I find that most Times Union readers still relish the local scandals we uncover, and that's why two projects we did this year resonated with them. The first exposed real estate frauds by a former Urban League director and his partner, an iconic city detective; the second centered on the secret and illegal purchases of federally regulated machine guns by dozens of city cops and some civilians, including a prosecutor and a judge.

Both stories were confirmed, in part, by the pro se efforts our newspaper made to unseal court documents, including search warrants obtained years earlier by the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. Our attorneys let us know that the unsealing orders by this federal magistrate—based on First Amendment rights—had set a strong precedent for future unsealing requests.

Knowing we have support of management to turn to the courts when we need to—and the understanding within the newsroom that our investigative team will have the resources we need to stay with our watchdog probes—means local readers will continue to get from us what they told us they want. They value reporting that matters, and that includes stories that are unlikely to get done unless journalists trained in investigative techniques are given the opportunity to dig. ■

*Brendan Lyons is an investigative reporter at the Times Union in Albany, New York.*

## Needed: A Leader to Champion the Cause

In restructuring The Post and Courier's newsroom, the top editor strengthened the focus on investigative journalism in the newspaper and on the Web.

BY DOUG PARDUE

**T**he future of investigative reporting is bleak, unless the following circumstance exists in your newsroom: Someone close to the top has to see it as a priority. These were the very words Bill Hawkins, the top editor at my newspaper, The Post and Courier in Charleston, South Carolina, used when I asked him what it takes to keep investigative and project reporting alive in newspapers during this time of shrinking newsroom resources.

In this day of corporate ownership, many of us forget how personal the journalism remains. I have tried to specialize in investigative or project reporting for some 25 years, with varying degrees of success. It was in 1993 that I first became a full-time projects editor at The State newspaper in Columbia, South Carolina, working under then-Executive Editor Gil Thelen and Managing Editor Paula Ellis. At that time, many newspapers were retrenching, which meant cutting back coverage to their metropolitan areas. The State also was retrenching, but Thelen and Ellis wanted to add muscle to the paper's ability to make a difference and offered me the opportunity to start an I-team from scratch. I would even get to hire two additional reporters of my choice.

Wow. I couldn't turn that down. And Ellis sweetened the pot with this line: "Come to the state that's at the top of the lists you want to be at the bottom of, and at the bottom of the lists you want to be at the top of." So for the first time in my career I had a clear mandate to focus solely on breaking, short-term and long-term investigative reporting. It worked because those two

top editors wanted it to work.

Since then, I've remained a full-time investigative projects editor at three different-size newspapers, The Tampa Tribune, USA Today, and The Post and Courier. I've experienced varying degrees of success with varying structures, from an I-team with four reporters to an I-team with just me and whichever reporters I could snatch from the city desk for a project.

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**With our Web site's interactive capacity, we offer ways for people to easily let us know what they think needs fixing or investigating, whether it is dirty restaurants or corrupt officials. And we keep folks up-to-date on what we find out about their tips.**

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Common to these three jobs was the factor that the top editors wanted and pushed for an organized system for project reporting.

### Hope Springs Eternal

Though I've been among those lucky enough to stay focused full time on projects and investigative reporting, the sound of collapsing newsrooms around the industry is hard to ignore. I worry about whether investigative reporting, especially at medium and small circulation papers, is heading out the door with the stock listings.

In 2006, Arizona State University journalism students conducted a survey of investigative journalists at the nation's 100 largest newspapers. From 86 of these papers they received responses. Support for investigative reporting was superficial, the journalists said, and they get less time for it. At 37 percent of the newspapers, there was no full-time investigative reporter; 61 percent had no investigative reporting team, and 62 percent lacked an editor in charge of investigations.

Given this situation, I was somewhat fearful of what would happen here a few months ago when our top editors, Hawkins and Managing Editor Steve Mullins, called me in for a closed-door session. The conversation began with the words reporters have learned to dread: "We're restructuring the newsroom."

The last time I heard that, I lost my team's two investigative reporters. But no—this time, that wasn't happening. Instead, the editors were going to reassign two investigative reporters to work with me full time. Their core message: produce more investigative reporting and work even harder with other reporters and editors to produce more breaking watchdog reporting and middle- and long-range projects.

Okay, so I'm thinking, "What's the catch?"

### Back to the Future

To Hawkins and Mullins, the catch is the future of journalism. Not that my little I-team is the future. Rather, it's what they want us to do with it. We were told to work closely with our online folks to create a watchdog site on our Web site, which we launched

in May.<sup>1</sup> On it, we are showcasing our public service reporting—both our long-term projects as well as briefer items revolving around community issues. With our Web site's interactive capacity, we offer ways for people to easily let us know what they think needs fixing or investigating, whether it is dirty restaurants or corrupt officials. And we keep folks up-to-date on what we find out about their tips.

All of our investigative efforts can be seen there, but in addition we provide readers with information on how they can do some digging of their own on topics of interest to them. We call this DIY (Do It Yourself), and to get them started we supply them with many of the online tools of investigative reporters. These include links to Web sites and databases to help them find a person, check the background of a day care center, or the financial stability of a company. There is also a video/photo spot on the site called "Smoking Gun" where viewers can see people caught in the act of some form of waste, abuse or fraud.

We launched our watchdog Web site with a close-up look at a local problem that angers a lot of residents. Appearing first on our Web site—and followed the next day with a Page One story in the newspaper—our reporting team gave readers a front-row look at parking cheaters who abuse handicapped parking permits, stuff meters to jam them, and find all sorts of other ingenious ways to get free, convenient parking. This series was amazingly popular and demonstrated well how watchdog reporting can effectively go after some of the pet peeves many of us deal with every day.

Creating this watchdog site is part of our newspaper's effort to develop into a news organization rather than thinking of ourselves as only a newspaper.

Unabashedly, Hawkins admitted stealing this idea from other newspapers, especially Florida Today, where

Watchdog Editor Matt Reed says the site is popular with readers. With our online watchdog site, Hawkins wants to play off our success with investigative projects that have brought about positive change for the community. These changes are things our readers have noticed and they realize wouldn't have happened if not for the newspaper's efforts to shine a light on what was wrong and offer possible ways to bring about improvements.

## Watchdog Probes

Among our investigative work this year that promised change was our follow-up coverage of the June 18th Sofa Super Store fire that killed nine Charleston firefighters. Our reporting revealed how the fire department did almost everything wrong in fighting that fire.<sup>2</sup> Now, the city is upgrading the department's equipment, training and fire-scene leadership. A series we did on how the state's public school bus fleet is the oldest, most polluting, least safe in the nation caused the General Assembly to pass a law requiring that older buses be phased out on an annual schedule. Another investigative project we did revealed that many people who eat fish from our state's rivers have elevated levels of toxic mercury in their bodies due to mercury fallout from coal-fired plants. After that series was published, the U.S. Department of Interior urged the state to stop approval for a new \$1.25 billion power plant until a thorough study is made on the effects of mercury pollution. The interior department also urged the state to drop plans for a coal-fired plant in favor of cleaner technology. And state environmental officials agreed to take a new look at how it measures and regulates mercury releases. It also posted warning signs at all boat landings and public fishing spots.

With the new watchdog site, Hawkins says, we've expanded our

reach on the Web by giving readers a better opportunity to get involved in helping bring about such change. "I am counting on the result to be more quick-hit investigative pieces that supplement our long-range projects," he says. Hawkins clearly expects that we will get more plugged in with the community, "especially as more and more people ... realize that we are interested in their tips and fearless in pursuing them," as he put it. In some ways, we've been doing that already as we've responded to tips we've received in phone calls, letters or walk-ins. Having the Web page simply gives people in our community an easier way to get their ideas to us. Already, tips are pouring in through our watchdog site, and we are now involving our entire newsroom by farming out the good ideas to appropriate beat reporters.

"Hell yeah!" Hawkins says. "Good investigative reporting effects change in a positive way. It makes our community better. It resonates in the community. It makes people look to the newspaper and say, 'they're the ones watching our back.'"

Bottom line: Investigative reporting has a future on the Web. Now, if we can just get the Web to make real money. ■

*Doug Pardue is projects editor for The Post and Courier in Charleston, South Carolina. For his work as a reporter and editor, he has received five National Headliner Awards, including two this year, and a Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Awards Citation. He was part of a Roanoke (Va.) Times team that was a 1990 Pulitzer Prize finalist for coverage of the yearlong Pittston Coal strike.*

<sup>1</sup> [www.charleston.net/news/watchdog/](http://www.charleston.net/news/watchdog/)

<sup>2</sup> The Post and Courier's spot coverage of this fire won the American Society of Newspaper Editors' Jesse Laventhol Prize for Deadline News Reporting by a Team.

## Employing Different Strategies With Two Projects

‘... investigative reporting can be just as effective at revealing why something did happen as it can be in documenting how something could happen.’

BY RON MENCHACA

I sat in the darkened auditorium, my face illuminated by the glow from my laptop screen. It was June 18th, the one-year anniversary of the Sofa Super Store blaze that killed nine Charleston, South Carolina firefighters in 2007. I was blogging for my newspaper, *The Post and Courier*, from a memorial service marking the solemn occasion. As slide-show images of the fallen firefighters flashed on a giant video screen, I reflected on the past year—the tragedy that rocked our city and our newspaper’s efforts to investigate what went wrong.

In the wake of the blaze, we uncovered numerous failings in the Charleston Fire Department that directly contributed to these firefighters’ deaths. Our stories prompted a complete overhaul of the fire department, the abrupt retirement of a beloved fire chief, and pledges from the mayor to rebuild the department into a national model.

But a sense of guilt gnawed at me that day. If we’d been a public watchdog before the fire, perhaps this loss of life might not have happened. Of course, it’s hard to say if we could have pulled off an investigation back then given the revered status of our fire chief and the mayor’s constant refrain about our city having the country’s best fire department, with firefighters known for their daring rescues and selfless heroics. No firefighter had been lost in the line of duty in decades. Why should the local newspaper be questioning the department’s practices and expounding on what might happen?

Yet that’s exactly what we should have done.

Why do I feel so certain about this? Not long before this tragic fire, our newsroom faced a similar question about whether to investigate the dismal



The caskets of the firefighters killed in the Sofa Super Store fire are loaded into hearses on June 22, 2007, after the memorial at the North Charleston Coliseum. *Photo by Alan Hawes/The Post and Courier.*

condition of South Carolina’s 6,000 public school buses. No one had died, nor had anyone been seriously injured on a state-owned school bus. So who were we to question the condition of the aging fleet of buses or the safety of those who ride in them?

But if there were problems—and we had reason to think there were after a series of bus fires around the state the previous year—then the lives of the tens of thousands of children who rode them each day were in danger. So we decided that their safety and the potential for disaster were too great to ignore. In our three-part series published in March 2007, “School Bus Breakdown,” the evidence we’d gathered enabled us to reveal that our public school buses were the oldest, most polluting, and least safe in the nation.

To tell this story, another reporter, Mindy Hagen, and I spent months crisscrossing the state interviewing parents, teachers, bus drivers, bus mechanics, and others to find out whether—and then describe specifically how—the state’s school buses were putting children’s safety in jeopardy. By employing the state’s open records laws, we obtained school bus maintenance and accident records. We compiled the information into a database and used that to document an alarming trend of accidents, including the fact that all too often buses were suddenly catching fire with children onboard.

### Newsroom Demands

Reporting and writing the bus series differed dramatically from how we would end up tackling the investiga-

tion we did after the fire. For starters, on the school bus series, I was teamed with Hagen, a young beat reporter who, while talented and energetic, had never worked an investigation. During our work on that story, she continued to be responsible for covering two large county school districts. (The newsroom—in the midst of belt-tightening and a hiring freeze—could find no other reporter to take over that coverage.) Throughout the assignment, her beat responsibilities often took priority over the school bus project, and I was left nudging it toward the finish line on my own.

As a general assignment reporter at the time, I was also forced to set aside my reporting on this project as harried city desk editors requested my help with the daily paper. I tried not to complain too much because I knew that times were tough on everyone in our newsroom given the financial constraints we now faced. When even one of us was freed up to focus on the school bus project, I felt fortunate that some progress was being made.

But this on-and-off approach sapped our momentum and motivation. The important work of building and exploring a complicated database became next to impossible. Only after we'd wrapped up our reporting and prepared to write the series was Hagen given a block of time to help me craft the three main stories and sidebars.

Once completed, our series revealed how children in public schools were often forced to ride buses with more than 400,000 miles—buses that lacked modern safety features such as antilock brakes and extra emergency exits. Our investigation determined that the state agency in charge of school bus maintenance was undercounting the number of bus fires, and we quoted by name bus experts and school officials who predicted that it was only a matter of time before one of these decades-old



Fire Chief Rusty Thomas directs Charleston firefighters as they battle a fire that destroyed the Sofa Super Store and a warehouse. *Photo by Tyrone Walker/The Post and Courier.*

pleading for more time and balancing project demands with other reporting duties—the investigation of the fire department followed a very different track. Reporting on it was more methodical, with a newsroom strategy of publish-as-you-go being applied to what was found. The fire was simply too big of a story to not throw everything at it. So we worked the story just about full time, almost like a regular beat, for months.

## Investigating a Tragedy

buses claimed the life of a child.

Our series prompted a public outcry. State lawmakers reacted by immediately passing a law requiring the state to retire and replace a portion of school buses every year. In many ways, this series was a classic newspaper investigation—the findings growing slowly over time, then hitting the front page with a big splash.

After completing this series about the buses in the old-fashioned way—

The Post and Courier newsroom did not have a formal investigations team when the fire broke out on the evening of June 18, 2007. It was the country's worst firefighting tragedy since 9/11. A small outdoor trash fire swept into the sprawling furniture store and boiled into a raging inferno, killing nine firefighters when they became disoriented in the coal-black smoke and maze of flammable couches.

The fatal blaze devastated our city



Mechanics rely on parts from old school buses from this bus graveyard in Beaufort, South Carolina, to keep the current fleet rolling. Over time, however, scavenging becomes less viable as buses run out of spare parts. *Photo by Grace Beahm/The Post and Courier.*

not only because of the scope and suddenness of the loss but because of the hype we'd heard for so long from the mayor and fire chief about our fire department. Frequently, they touted the department's top national rating from the insurance industry. But what we soon learned was that this rating had almost nothing to do with the department's actual capabilities and that the "Best in America" motto was a myth.

Once we started our examination of the department it became apparent that the tragedy had been decades in the making. The fire department's tactics, equipment and training were 30 years behind the times, and it was completely unprepared to handle a fire of such magnitude.

From the start, our executive editor, Bill Hawkins, had made it clear that the fire was one of the bigger stories in our city's history. We would not cede any ground in reporting on it. In the first few days after the fire, story assignments were a free-for-all. No idea seemed too far-fetched or unjustified. Any reporter who wanted to pitch in could.

Our early coverage broke news by describing how the city discouraged businesses from installing fire sprinklers by charging exorbitant fees, how lax code enforcement failed to flag illegal building additions at the sofa store, and how the department's practices at the fire conflicted with contemporary firefighting standards and guidelines.

Over time, the number of reporters working the story tapered off. It was then that I found myself paired with veteran police reporter Glenn Smith, with whom I'd been teamed on another investigation about bad cops a couple of years earlier. In working on that story, we'd developed an effective collaboration, and as we started our work on this project we knew that our comprehensive examination of this fire needed to answer the core question:



Firefighters battle the blaze at the Sofa Super Store. Photo by Tyrone Walker/*The Post and Courier*.

How could this happen?

Our projects editor, Doug Pardue, argued that the fire story's significance (by then, it had generated a lot of national interest) and the circumstances unfolding around us meant that a traditional multipart series wasn't the best direction in which to head. [See Pardue's article on page 19.] Firefighters and fire service professionals from around the country were calling and e-mailing us to point out things in photos and video of the fire that looked totally wrong. They were mystified by the sight of firefighters running around the blaze without proper safety equipment. But most were reluctant to go on the record while the fire department and city were still reeling. When the fire chief issued a gag order on his firefighters, our access to the local fire stations evaporated overnight.

As we began our investigation—by assembling and verifying what we'd heard from these fire experts—the number of alleged inconsistencies and mistakes at the fire seemed overwhelming. In part, we felt this way because at that point we lacked understanding about the firefighting profession. So we backed away and spent countless hours educating ourselves. We attended firefighting conferences, read fire journals, and talked with lots of firefighting experts, whether they were in our backyard or thousands of miles away.

We organized the myriad problems we'd been told about into categories

with titles such as safety, incident command and water supply, and began to investigate each one, then publish what we learned. With each successive story, new tips surfaced. What we came to realize is that the accuracy of our reporting on technical subjects gained us credibility within the fire service, and this encouraged reluctant sources to share what they knew with us. Had we waited to publish a lengthy series, at least some of what we were

able to include in our reporting would very likely have been missing.

In the newsroom, there was never much doubt that the investment of time and resources were worthwhile. The death toll was so high—even by firefighting standards—it was evident something had gone terribly wrong. Our editors, from the top down, trusted that we'd eventually piece it together.

## Lessons Learned

Working on these two assignments taught me much about investigative reporting. In neither case did I work on my own. Having a colleague to share the workload is critical, since a collaborative effort offers an intangible that is often overlooked as team members act as a cheerleader for one another and for the project. Another lesson: the need for a dedicated projects editor to orchestrate. Pardue shepherded both projects from day one, keeping us focused and inspired. He even helped report and write a couple of the fire stories.

These projects demonstrated that investigative reporting can be just as effective at revealing why something did happen as it can be in documenting how something could happen. And both of these projects received numerous state and national reporting awards. All of this helped persuade our top editors that even with this work being a resource-heavy load to carry in our slimmed down newsroom,

investigative reporting is worthy of special focus and the reporting time it takes to get it right.

Recently, *The Post and Courier* set up a dedicated investigations desk called Watchdog. As we work to get our new team off the ground, we are trying to keep in mind that not all good investigative stories need to spring out of tragedy. Instead, watchdog journalism can help prevent the tragedy from occurring in the first place. What our fire reporting showed us was echoed in what post-tragedy reporting uncovered

in the Minnesota bridge collapse last year: perilous conditions were there to be discovered before people died. The loss of life in both of these tragedies might have been averted if journalists here and there had devoted more time to questioning policies and practices at governmental agencies responsible for public safety and infrastructure.

It's certainly possible—though not able to be proven—that our investigative reporting has helped head off the deaths or injury of children riding the state's school buses. That we'll never

really know is a credit to investigative journalism. ■

*Ron Menchaca, an investigative reporter at The Post and Courier, was named 2007 Journalist of the Year by the South Carolina Press Association. The probe of the fire received the 2008 National Headliner Award for investigative reporting and a 2007 Sigma Delta Chi Award for nondeadline reporting.*

## Joining Forces to Produce Public Service Journalism

'By using a model like this one, we can more effectively use our staff to do investigative journalism that holds government institutions accountable.'

BY DAVID LEDFORD

**W**hen The Associated Press Managing Editors (APME) seriously began discussing the prospect of its first-ever national reporting project in the summer of 2007, the newspaper industry was struggling, but it didn't feel like it was searching for its soul. Today, it is being dismantled at breathtaking speed. And those of us left must ask: Who are we? What are we attempting to do? Why does it matter?

Through a national investigative reporting project—focused on earmarks loaded into the federal budget and collaboratively undertaken by 75 newspapers—a few answers have begun to emerge. As a consequence of this project, APME leadership decided to forge partnerships with open government foundations as a way to produce high-quality public service journalism in smaller newspaper markets throughout the country.

Our intent with this initial effort

was to tell an important story by helping reporters find the connective threads between earmarked requests, the flow of money, and influence in the legislative process. In fiscal year 2008, earmarks loaded into bills were worth \$18.3 billion, and most were tantamount to no-bid contracts. In explaining how the system works—for recipient and legislator—we provided readers valuable watchdog reporting.

We also created a potential model for investigative journalism, one that weaves together the newsroom needs and skills of smaller market papers to create a story that some news organizations could not do on their own.<sup>1</sup> And what we've learned might be of help to newspapers as they struggle through their darkest financial chapter since the Great Depression.

In this project, newspaper reporters joined forces with our nonprofit partners—Taxpayers for Common

Sense, the Sunlight Foundation and, of course, The Associated Press (AP), which has worked with newspapers since its inception in 1846. Here is a glimpse at the role each of these partners played:

- Taxpayers for Common Sense sifted, sorted and made sense out of a series of very large federal databases. Their efforts helped reporters connect the dots between earmarks and campaign contributions from lobbying firms and businesses to members of Congress.
- The Sunlight Foundation organized and oversaw free six-hour training sessions in 13 cities across the country to show reporters and editors how best to harvest information. It also conducted two lengthy Webinars for those who couldn't get to a classroom. More than 220 reporters and editors from 150 news organizations participated.

<sup>1</sup> In the Spring 2008 issue of *Nieman Reports*, Brazilian journalist Fernando Rodrigues wrote about a similar collaborative model of investigative reporting undertaken on a global scale. Read his article, "Global Efforts at Investigative Reporting," at [www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/08-1NRspring/p71-rodrigues.html](http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/08-1NRspring/p71-rodrigues.html).

- The Associated Press writers and editors played an invaluable role by taking the information that had been gathered by reporters working at local newspapers and then producing analysis pieces imbued with historical perspective. This collaborative effort placed the local investigative reporting into a broader national context.

Each of the partners played an essential role in gathering and analyzing information about Congressional earmarks. Once assembled, this information—tailored to the interests of local readers and written in different styles and with varying emphasis—appeared in newspapers scattered throughout the country on a weekend in early June.<sup>2</sup>

In *The Herald* in Monterey (Calif.) County, staff writer Julia Reynolds began her article, called “Bringing Home the Bacon,” by focusing on the local Congressman.

*Rep. Sam Farr says he doesn't think the public understands pork. At least not the legislative kind.*

*In fact, Farr—a Democrat who has been voted “porker of the month” by a taxpayers’ group and is regularly derided by Republicans for bringing millions in federal funds to the Central Coast—vigorously defends legislators’ use of the earmark system to bring home the bacon.*

*“I’m on the appropriations committee, and I’m there to represent Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito counties,” he said. “I’m glad to argue with anyone about it.”*

In the *Concord* (N.H.) *Monitor*, reporter Daniel Barrick took a different approach in his article, “Are state’s earmarks wasteful? You decide.” [A box from his article is on page 26.]

*Franklin’s sidewalks. Robert Frost’s farmhouse. The Mount Washington Observatory. A Nashua engineering firm. What do they have in common? All benefited from spending requests tucked into the current federal budget.*

*Those weren’t the only beneficiaries of so-called “earmark” spending in New Hampshire. Dozens of companies, nonprofit groups, and communities across the state received millions of dollars in federal cash this year, thanks to requests from the state’s four members of Congress.*

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**In fiscal year 2008, earmarks loaded into bills were worth \$18.3 billion, and most were tantamount to no-bid contracts. In explaining how the system works—for recipient and legislator—we provided readers valuable watchdog reporting.**

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### Lessons Learned, Future Directions

Newspaper editors involved with this project tell me that it helped their reporters produce good work that hit with pinpoint accuracy. What their staffs learned will have long-range impact on these papers’ ability to do sophisticated database journalism. And the interactive links set up on the newspapers’ Web sites give readers the opportunity to experience for themselves how the earmark game is played in Washington, based on searchable databases prepared by Taxpayers for Common Sense. These databases contain information about the 13,000 earmark items in the 2008 fiscal budget. Susan M. Catron, executive editor of the *Savannah* (Ga.) *Morning News*, whose team went to

Atlanta for training, describes this opportunity as “golden.”

APME, AP, and Sunlight are planning to collaborate on another public service project in 2009. APME operates under the same strict ethical guidelines as does AP, and we’re careful about selecting partners. When partnerships are carefully structured with groups such as Taxpayers for Common Sense and the Sunlight Foundation, whose missions revolve around openness in government, I see the combined efforts of foundations such as these

and news organizations being a potential force in producing solid watchdog journalism. As the newspaper industry experiences wave after wave of staff cuts after each disappointing earnings report, we need to become more inventive, and sometimes that entails taking risks.

By using a model like this one, we can more effectively use our staff to do investigative journalism that holds government institutions accountable.

At the same time, editors at the barricades could use some help from the industry’s leaders, who’ve been searching a long time for a business model to sustain what journalists do. With our print, online and niche readership numbers combined, so-called old media now reaches a larger audience share than ever before. Yet a financial solvency isn’t on the horizon.

As newspapers soldier on in search of such a new profitable model, journalism groups like APME will continue to forge partnerships with foundations to enrich the experience for readers. Ryan Alexander, president of Taxpayers for Common Sense, sees promise in what’s been done. “We can put together data sets, but they are so much more amplified when the work is shared with citizens [through projects like investigating earmarks]. There’s

<sup>2</sup> A project overview and links to specific articles that appeared in local papers can be found at [www.apme.com/earmarks/](http://www.apme.com/earmarks/).

a benefit for everyone.” Ellen Miller, executive director and cofounder of the Sunlight Foundation, sees this kind of partnership as being essential to maintaining a healthy democracy—in part because it is apparent that newspapers, traditionally the nation’s most effective watchdog, need help. “Sunlight firmly believes in supporting the future of journalism,” adds Miller.

Kathleen Carroll, executive editor of AP, observed that “The earmarks project is the kind of journalistic

work that helps readers understand how well the officials they elect are serving them. On the right topics, these kinds of reporting partnerships between AP and APME member newspapers deliver critical information to taxpayers—exactly what news organizations should be doing.”

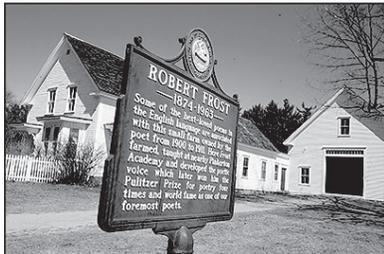
The industry is being forced to reinvent itself. Those left standing need to stop talking about what we used to be and focus on what we can be. We’re no longer fighting to breathe life

into a dying business model of words delivered only on the printed page.

We’re in this fight to preserve journalism—which, as this project reminds us, is a fight to preserve investigative storytelling that strengthens our democracy. ■

*David Ledford is vice president for news and executive editor of The News Journal in Wilmington, Delaware. He also is president of the Associated Press Managing Editors group.*

## Compliments of Congress



The Robert Frost Farm in Derry.  
Photo by Ken Williams/Concord Monitor.



The Daniel Webster Farm in Franklin.  
Photo by Lori Duff/Concord Monitor.



Diverted Suncook River in Epsom.  
Photo by Preston Gannaway/Concord Monitor.

New Hampshire received about \$140 million in earmarks in the current federal budget. Among the projects, organizations, companies and communities receiving some of that money:

**\$8.9 MILLION** for a training facility at Pease Air National Guard Base.

**\$6.2 MILLION** for an administrative site in the White Mountain National Forest.

**\$6.5 MILLION** for UNH’s Cooperative Institute for Coastal and Estuarine Environmental Technology.

**\$1.6 MILLION** to Nanocomp Technologies in Concord, to develop individual body armor protection with “carbon Nanotube yarns and felts.”

**\$3.5 MILLION** for conservation projects in the Great Bay.

**\$1.7 MILLION** for reconstruction of the Little Bay Bridge on the Spaulding Turnpike.

**\$1.6 MILLION** for reconstruction of a portion of Interstate 293 in Manchester.

**\$200,000** for renovation of the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Manchester.

**\$195,000** to fund a civic education program at St. Anselm College.

**\$205,000** for renovation of the

Robert Frost Farm in Derry.

**\$784,000** for revitalization of downtown Franklin, including sidewalks, lighting and fences.

**\$94,000** for the Volunteer Lake Assessment Program.

**\$846,000** for anti-gang programs with the state police.

**\$98,400** to rehabilitate the Daniel Webster farmhouse in Franklin.

**\$150,000** for Pembroke and **\$50,000** for Epsom to help pay for damage from flooding to the Suncook River.

Source: Congressional Budget Office, Citizens Against Government Waste

CHARLOTTE THIBAULT / Monitor staff

# Connecting Congressional Earmarks With Campaign Contributions

An investigative reporter creates a database of earmarks revealing the relationship between wasteful spending and political favors.

BY DAVID HEATH

**A**s an investigative reporter, I'm accustomed to digging up information that's been deliberately buried. But I underestimated the archaeological excavation it would take to unearth details from a public document. Not just a public document, but a law passed by Congress and signed by the President, and one having to do with how the dollars spent on our nation's defense are being allocated during a time when two wars are being waged.

I was looking for earmarks<sup>1</sup>—pet projects lawmakers insert into spending bills, usually as favors for particular constituencies in their district or state. What I wanted to examine was whether the people and companies benefiting from these military-related earmarks had donated to the campaign of the person who had inserted their request in the legislation. In other words, I wanted to investigate whether members of Congress were reaping campaign dollars in return for their generosity in doling out tax dollars.

It's a simple question, and naively I thought getting the answer would be relatively easy. But I'm an outsider to Washington, D.C., and it turned out that my reporting on this story taught me a surprising lesson about Capitol Hill. While Congress might be

a cornerstone of American democracy, it is the most secretive public body I'd ever covered.

The only real public documents on Capitol Hill come in the form of press releases. In recent years, it's become a common practice—among at least half of the lawmakers—to tout how

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**Though lawmakers passed the Freedom of Information Act to deal with such abuses of power in the wake of Watergate, the law covers only the executive branch. Congress made itself exempt.**

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they successfully added earmarks to pieces of legislation and thereby garnered mostly favorable stories from their hometown press. So it was to these press releases I was ultimately forced to turn, given that the actual documents in Congress—the kind I routinely am able to get from local and state governmental bodies—are secret. Though lawmakers passed the Freedom of Information Act to deal with such abuses of power in the wake of Watergate, the law covers only the executive branch. Congress made itself exempt.

## Searching for Earmarks

I tried to plum the few documents that Congress does make public. At first, I felt pretty confident that they'd lead me to some answers. After all, while lawmakers control the purse strings, they do so through a legislative process.

Earmarks have to be put in bills to become law. Surely, Congress can't hide what is actually printed and even embossed in a public law.

As I started to read the 2007 defense appropriations bill, I found a few earmarks. I knew there had to be more. The Congressional Research Service had counted 16,000 earmarks among several appropriations bills in 2005, at a total cost of \$52 billion.

Where were the hundreds of earmarks I'd expected to find in this year's defense department bill?

Fortunately, I stumbled across an article written by former Senate aide Winslow Wheeler. It offered a detailed guide to finding earmarks, and after reading it I gave Wheeler a call at the Center for Defense Information, a think tank where he now works. Earmarks aren't actually in the law, he explained to me. They're buried in the "joint explanatory statement," a report intended to explain how the Senate and House resolved their differences on a

<sup>1</sup> The word "earmark" derives from a mark that farmers made on the ears of livestock for identification. On Capitol Hill, the word refers to any part of a spending bill that allocates money for a very specific purpose. In defense bills, an expense is considered an earmark if Congress adds money beyond the department's request "at a level of specificity below the normal line item level," according to the Congressional Research Service.

particular bill. Wording in legislation tends to be carefully crafted to withstand scrutiny from the courts, but not so with the explanatory statement, an informal document that doesn't carry the same legal burden.

It turns out that lawmakers slipped nearly 2,700 earmarks, costing nearly \$12 billion, into the 382-page report that accompanied the defense appropriations bill. These earmarks were not easy to read, and I mean this literally. Congressional staffers had converted the text of the earmarks to images and shrunk the type down to a tiny 1/20 of an inch, making them illegible to my farsighted eyes and impossible to copy and paste. Even worse, the descriptions were so brief and cryptic as to resemble a secret code. For example, I read that Congress set aside \$2.3 million for the Navy for "LCS ASW mission area commonality" and another \$1.3 million for "Multispectral threat emitter system," yet I still had no idea what any of this meant.

Despite the difficulty in knowing what had been earmarked, at least I was comforted in knowing we'd found them. My next step became figuring out which members of Congress had authored each one. The appropriations committees had such information, but they wouldn't reveal it. I also sent out scores of e-mails and made dozens of phone calls to military officers at bases to find out more about the vendors who'd been granted the earmarks. Most feigned ignorance by saying either the contract hadn't yet been awarded or that they simply didn't know.

In the end, my best sources still turned out to be press releases sent out by lawmakers. As I searched the Web site of each of the 535 lawmakers, I found that about half had boasted about their earmarks.

Doing this often tedious research

took months of work, even with the help of a couple of interns in the newsroom. Over time, we managed to construct a one-of-a-kind database of key information about all of the earmarks—including sponsors, recipients, how much each recipient gave to the campaign of the earmark's sponsor, and how much recipients spent on lobbying. Now I am in the process of rebuilding this database so it is current for 2008. And once



Microvision, Inc. received earmark funds to develop the Nomad, a helmet-mounted computer monitor. It was called "junk" by a soldier who helped evaluate it. *Photo by Ted Baz/Courtesy of Microvision.*

again, the process is time consuming and challenging, yet the work on it continues to receive full support from my editors despite two rounds of job reductions this year that—through shuffling of bodies—cut the size of our investigative team in half. With the extreme budget cuts journalists are enduring industrywide, I fear that readers will see fewer stories that require so much time and effort.

When the data were assembled, we were able to see the disturbing pattern of the close relationship between the inclusion of earmarks and campaign donations. It suggested that lawmakers who granted favors by inserting earmarks to defense companies were rewarded for it with campaign contributions. In all, we identified 500

companies that had received earmarks and, of those, nearly 80 percent had employees or political action committees that gave money to Congressional reelection funds over a period of six years. Their donations totaled more than \$47 million. Additionally, these companies spent more than \$160 million in 2006 alone to lobby for earmarks.

## Stories Behind the Earmarks

Of course, numbers were not about to be able to tell the entire story, since the lawmakers are slipping earmarks into the defense appropriation bill to request that the Pentagon buy things that it hasn't even requested. This practice is Congress's way of ensuring no-bid contracts for favored companies. Once we decided to take a closer look at what actually happened to the items Congress had forced the military to buy, Hal Bernton, who covers the military for the Times, joined the project.

### Helmet-Mounted Computer Monitors:

Our focus was on earmarks targeted at companies in the Pacific Northwest. Microvision Inc., which was developing a computer screen that is put onto soldiers' helmets, had received \$55 million in earmarks in recent years, and its executives were big campaign donors. On May 10, 2004, five Microvision executives each gave \$1,000 to Washington Senator Patty Murray's campaign. A month later, Murray announced that she had gotten a \$5.5 million earmark for the company. Bernton tracked down soldiers in the Army's Stryker Brigade, based out of Fort Lewis, Washington, who served in Iraq. They told us that hundreds of Microvision's helmet-mounted computer monitors—mostly bought with earmarks—had been stored away in unopened boxes.

Soldiers didn't like them and didn't want to test new equipment in battle, especially something that interfered with their vision in situations where their lives were at risk.

In August 2005, Microvision lost a competition set up by the Army to test various helmet-mounted monitors. Yet four months later, apparently acting on an earlier lobbying effort by Microvision, Senator Murray managed to get the company a \$6 million earmark to sell 1,599 of the rejected devices to the Stryker Brigades. The Army gave the use-it-or-lose-it funds to Microvision to do further research.

**Polyester T-Shirt:** Bernton also tracked down the story of a polyester T-shirt earmarked for Marines in Iraq. In late 2005, Congressman David Wu of Oregon got a \$2 million earmark for InSport, a small athletic clothing company. Wu said Marines would be more comfortable in InSport's polyester than in their standard-issue cotton shirts. But polyester melts when exposed to heat and was banned in early 2006 after a Marine, caught in an explosion, suffered burns over 70 percent of his body. His melted polyester shirt had to be cut from his body.

Despite the ban, the Marines went ahead and bought the InSport shirts, saying they could only be used in training. InSport later made a shirt with fire-resistant sleeves, but the Marines wouldn't approve it for use in battle because most of the shirt remained polyester. Still, Congressman Wu got InSport another \$1 million earmark last year to sell the shirts to the Marines.

InSport executives gave Wu's campaign \$6,100 on a single day in the spring of 2006. The day after the

defense bill with the earmark passed in September 2006, one executive gave another \$750 to Wu. Two others followed with identical donations within three weeks.

**Patrol Boat:** I was also curious to learn what had happened to several boats Murray and others had forced the Navy and Coast Guard to buy from a tiny Edmonds, Washington company. The \$4.5 million boat was big and fast,



Neither the Navy nor the Coast Guard could use this patrol boat that they were forced to buy. It was transferred to the University of Washington and later to the National Weather Service. Photo by Thomas James Hurst/*The Seattle Times*.

sort of a cross between a sports car and a recreational vehicle. The Coast Guard didn't want it, so Murray put an earmark into a bill specifying that the Coast Guard had to buy "a currently-developed 85-foot fast patrol craft that is manufactured in the United States." The only company making such a boat was the Edmonds company, Guardian Marine International.

The Coast Guard tested the boat but eventually gave it away to a sheriff's office in California. The Navy didn't want its boats either and, before one of the boats was even built, gave it to the University of Washington. But the university couldn't find a use for

it. So the boat sat idle for years on a university pier near downtown Seattle. Recently, the National Weather Service took it. Guardian Marine and the subcontractor who assembled the boat donated nearly \$150,000 to the campaigns of those who helped with the earmarks.

We've posted our database online; it can be searched for any member of Congress or recipient of earmarks.

Its information will reveal the relationship between this member's legislative action and campaign contributions this member of Congress received from the earmark recipient.<sup>2</sup>

Congress made some modest reforms last year and toyed briefly with a moratorium on earmarks. Each of the presidential contenders supported the moratorium proposal, which leads to speculation that the November election could have a big impact on the future of earmarks. Of course, the greatest impact would come if Congress increased its own accountability by opening its records and its processes to the public.

It's time for us in the news media to demand it. ■

*David Heath, a 2006 Nieman Fellow, is an investigative reporter for The Seattle Times. For their series "The Favor Factory," Heath and his colleague Hal Bernton won the national Clark Mollenhoff Award for Excellence in Investigative Reporting. This story was featured on "Bill Moyers Journal," and the video telling this story can be seen at [www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/02222008/profile.html](http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/02222008/profile.html).*

<sup>2</sup> The database and series can be found at [www.seattletimes.com/favorfactory](http://www.seattletimes.com/favorfactory).

# Investing in Watchdog Reporting

‘... the Journal Sentinel has built a 10-person Watchdog Team with a robust Web presence called Watchdog Online.’

BY MARK KATCHES

Journalists are trained to be skeptics, and investigative reporters ratchet up the skepticism a notch, almost to a point of paranoia. So when Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Editor Martin Kaiser and Managing Editor George Stanley hired me in November 2006 to help build one of the largest investigative teams in the United States, I encountered doubters among my peers.

Could the Journal Sentinel pull this off? The newspaper certainly had a rich tradition of explanatory and investigative reporting. But the paper had gone years without a dedicated project team. So when I started putting feelers out to a couple of people I considered hiring from other newspapers, I was met with long pauses and blank stares. We’ll believe it when we see it, they said. Their reaction was understandable given today’s climate as newsrooms mostly slash and cut.

There’s something awfully rewarding about bucking the trend. During the past 18 months, the Journal Sentinel has built a 10-person Watchdog Team with a robust Web presence called Watchdog Online. Despite rising newsprint costs, shrinking classified sections, and numerous other challenges, we’ve found new—often Web-centric—ways to invest in public service journalism while also managing two staff buyouts and dramatically boosting our online breaking news output.

Our investment in this high-impact journalism has paid dividends. The Journal Sentinel won this year’s Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting for uncovering illegal pension deals that cost Milwaukee County taxpayers \$50 million and a Sigma Delta Chi Award for a two-part series examining the health risks posed to the human

endocrine system by bisphenol A, a hormone-mimicking compound found in numerous household products, including many used by babies and children. In June, American Journalism Review profiled our watchdog team. The next month, Editor and Publisher named the Journal Sentinel as one of “10 That Do It Right.” The Associated Press Managing Editors have also selected us as a finalist for the Innovator of the Year Award for our watchdog work in print and online.

## Diversity Is Critical

In an industry beset by unprecedented challenges, our investment represents a “good news” story that began with courage and commitment from the newspaper’s top editors, Kaiser and Stanley. Next, it required us to take a multidimensional approach. Instead of emphasizing only ambitious projects that can take months, quick-hit investigations, blogs, consumer-focused watchdog stories, and searchable databases are stressed. We have launched a popular Citizen Watchdog site, a one-stop center for Wisconsin residents wanting to do their own poking around. It includes links to campaign contributions, lobbying reports, business records, government meeting agendas, and much more.

Along the way, we manage to mix in some longer-term watchdog projects. Each of our award-winning investigative projects (about pensions and chemicals) took about six months from sign-off to publication and had immediate impact. Dave Umhoefer’s pension story prompted Milwaukee County officials to turn themselves in to the IRS and launched a criminal investigation. Our “Chemical Fallout” series by Susanne Rust, Meg Kissinger,

and Cary Spivak prompted Congress to hold hearings, and their reporting on potentially dangerous chemicals hidden in everyday products continues.

The investigative culture at the Journal Sentinel extends well beyond our Watchdog Team. Daily beat reporters are getting into the act—helping to brand the Journal Sentinel as the go-to Web site for hard-hitting, high-impact investigative reporting in Wisconsin. Since February 2007, we’ve published more than 50 stories under the “Journal Sentinel Watchdog Report” label. Many were produced by daily beat writers working on their own or in tandem with members of the Watchdog Team.

A few months after we launched the Watchdog Team, Kaiser decided he wanted to see more quick-hit, consumer-focused watchdog stories. To get a sense of what might be possible, we looked at other news organizations, including the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, the South Florida Sun-Sentinel, and Florida Today. We then set out to create our model with a distinct look and feel and hired a team of two reporters. Raquel Rutledge moved from a general assignment position, and we hired Ellen Gabler just as she was finishing her master’s degree at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism, where she focused on investigative reporting.

## Public Investigator

With Rutledge and Gabler on board, Stanley came up with the name “Public Investigator” (P.I.) and added a motto that appears with all of our stories: “Taking tips, chasing leads, solving problems.” Rutledge and Gabler mostly write about people getting a raw deal. Inevitably, when they report one story it

generates a flood of tips from a public that is clearly hungry for a place where their experiences merit attention and action. Of course, not every tip we receive turns into a newspaper story. But many of them lead to items on the P.I. Team's blog, which is updated at least once a day.<sup>1</sup> [See next article, by Rutledge and Gabler.]

Our experiences with blogs like this one have helped transform how we handle nuggets of reporting in the Journal Sentinel newsroom. A few years ago, if a reporter learned of a juicy news item that wasn't quite interesting enough to merit a newspaper story, the item would remain in the notebook, either filed away in a cabinet or tossed away. Now blogs offer a perfect outlet for these little gems. This blog is used, too, for a little marketing—teasing stories that are soon to appear on the Web site or in the newspaper. And the success of the P.I. Team's blog inspired the Watchdog Team to launch a second blog called "Dogged."<sup>2</sup>

We've given the P.I. Team lots of

latitude. They have written about shady political dealings and problems in local schools. But their primary mission is being a watchdog for local consumers. Rutledge and Gabler often tell their stories through the experiences of a single individual, but are able to connect their experiences to larger trends and problems occurring in Wisconsin.

The P.I. Team has proven to be innovators, offering readers something we call "extras"—self-contained quick facts. These include everything from product recall announcements to spreading the word about broken streetlights that need attention. They are featured as stand-alone items on our blog and also at the bottom of our stories. One of my favorites is something we call "Tick Tock." The reporters start a stopwatch when they enter places like a post office. They report how long it takes to get served—the type of thing that every reader can relate to. In a small way, this kind of reporting helps hold public institutions accountable.

Is the public noticing the Journal Sentinel's watchdog additions? Thanks to Web tracking tools, we know they are. Our Public Investigator features consistently rank among our most clicked stories on our Web site and are always among our more popular watchdog stories. We've heard lots of anecdotal evidence from appreciative readers to back up what the data tell us and, of course, there is the e-mail box filling up with more story tips. Our other watchdog offerings also drive Web traffic. Searchable databases on our "Data on Demand" page log as many as 800,000 clicks a month, and clicks on our Watchdog Online pages—excluding our searchable databases—have shown double-digit growth nearly every month since November 2007.

The investment is most definitely paying off. ■

*Mark Katches is the assistant managing editor for projects and investigations at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.*

<sup>1</sup> <http://blogs.jsonline.com/piblog/default.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <http://blogs.jsonline.com/dogged/default.aspx>

## Public Investigator: Transforming Tips Into Stories

Two reporters use quick-hit, watchdog journalism to investigate local issues—and blog about what they do.

BY RAQUEL RUTLEDGE AND ELLEN GABLER

Joyce Hill had tried everything she could imagine. She complained to the state consumer protection agency. She hired a private investigator. Nobody could help her. Hill, a longtime factory worker, had been swindled out of \$1,336 she had put down on layaway for a new dining room set. The store, and its owner who had taken her money, had disappeared. Then she spotted a Public Investigator (P.I.) story in the Milwaukee Journal

Sentinel and sent us an e-mail.

Upon first blush, her story might not excite most journalists. It certainly didn't fall on anyone's beat. Using typical standards to judge its newsworthiness it easily could have been overlooked—one consumer, not the masses; dollars lost, 1,336. Not huge. Ho hum, one might think. Yet with a lot of digging and cobbling together of public records databases, the P.I. team turned Hill's tip into a front-

page story exposing an unscrupulous store owner who had a pattern of closing down and reopening under a new name, sometimes down the block from his last location. The story also revealed a splintered oversight system that allowed this situation to continue for years.

Our initial fear was that this consumer watchdog assignment could end up being the proverbial "pot hole" beat, a dumping ground for insignifi-

cant stories about broken street lights and the like. But it's turned out to be just the opposite; since the launch of P.I. in September 2007, 32 of our 53 stories have landed on Page One (as of late August).

Our stories run the gamut. Many times they are about how someone got a raw deal. Often they're about what a government agency or program did or didn't do. Some of our stories turn out to be the ones that create a buzz—the proverbial “water cooler” piece—such as our “Bad Beer in Brew City,” in which we tested beer tap lines in local watering holes and found some caked with bacteria. Turns out that in Wisconsin, unlike other states, there is no law requiring restaurants or bars to clean their keg lines regularly.

Others stories we've done have taken a hard look at situations involving the breakdown of public services and the consequences to those who are dependent on them. In one case, we investigated a problem at the county food stamp office that was causing thousands of people not to receive public assistance within the time period required under federal law. P.I. also spotlighted how many of Wisconsin's neediest children were not being tested for lead poisoning, even though it is mandated by federal Medicaid rules.

Every day, in addition to stories we do for the paper and the Web site, we write on our P.I. blog. It's our way of interacting with readers and keeping the “Public Investigator” name in their minds. We also solicit tips and seek help from people who might be affected by something we're writing about. Recently, we used our blog to find customers who'd been back-billed by the local utility company. We also blog after a story runs to share readers' reactions, sometimes posting their comments after we get their okay that their comments are on the record.

Our blog is also a place where we let people know when our investigations result in changes. After we wrote about a senior home that charged families rent long after their loved ones had died, the practice was stopped—with urging from a United States senator who'd read our story. That story wasn't going to make the paper as a



full-blown story, so our blog was a perfect fit.

We use computer-assisted reporting and laboratory testing as investigative tools for some of our P.I. stories. We also base many of our reports on documents we obtain through open records requests. Using these investigative techniques makes stories harder-hitting and gives them the watchdog edge we want. For three stories, we included searchable databases that have generated tremendous Web traffic.

A major reason for P.I.'s success is the backing we get from our editor, Mark Katches. [See Katches' story on page 30.] He is constantly pushing us to hold people and agencies accountable and to probe until we find the real reason why something went wrong. With his support in the newsroom, we are given ample time to do the necessary digging. We don't have story quotas, but both of us make a concerted effort to keep a steady stream of short- and long-term ideas flowing. This way we keep P.I. in front of the public—whether in print, on the Web site, or on our blog. We write most of our stories individually,

but we toss around ideas, and we keep one another informed about what we're working on.

Neither Katches nor we are afraid to have fun with stories or try new things. With our “Under the Microscope” feature, we've been testing products to find out what's in them. It costs the Journal Sentinel a little money, but it has proven to be an innovative approach for the paper to take and led to some eye-catching stories. Of course, there are times when the testing doesn't result in a story, but it's been worth taking the risk.

Another goal is to try to be very accessible to readers. That's why every P.I. story in the paper and online is accompanied by our looking-glass icon next to the words “Blow the

Whistle. Do you have a tip for the P.I. Team? We're all ears.” Under that we publish our tip line e-mail, our names, phone numbers, and direct e-mail addresses and, finally, offer a link to the P.I. home page.

What's hard about the job is that there aren't more of us doing it. There are times when we feel overwhelmed by the volume of tips and reader response to our work, as well as their requests. After a story runs, other people affected by a similar situation call in, and they want us to do an investigation of their situation or help them with a particular problem.

Since P.I.'s launch a year ago, we've been in touch with many people in the community. We've discovered that there's a huge appetite for local, quick-hit investigations. With the help of readers, our watchdog work seems to be feeding the public's hunger for accountability. ■

*Raquel Rutledge and Ellen Gabler are members of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's Watchdog Team who report for the paper's Public Investigator section.*

# Nurturing Newsroom Talent With Local Investigations

‘For projects, the newspaper now typically links a lead investigative reporter with beat reporters.’

BY MICHAEL SALLAH

**W**hen The Miami Herald published a series exposing corruption in the local housing agency in 2006, hundreds of citizens stormed county meetings and marched in Miami’s poorest neighborhoods. Enraged over the newspaper’s findings, readers contacted the state attorney’s office demanding arrests of developers who pocketed millions but failed to build promised homes.

“The housing agency was supposed to be their lifeline, and it failed to come through,” said reporter Debbie Cenziper, after receiving the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting for the series, “House of Lies.”

That same year, the newspaper published two other major projects, “Predators Among Us,” which revealed breakdowns in Florida’s treatment of sexual offenders, and “Deadly Express,” an exposé of the hidden dangers of air cargo carriers across the United States.

While the stories prompted reforms and, in some cases, arrests, they also presented a new challenge to newsroom leaders: How can a newspaper with a rich tradition of local watchdog reporting continue that work in an era of dwindling staff and diminishing resources? On another level, who is going to do this kind of work in a community where corruption runs so deep?

## Moving to a Different Model

With staff turnover taking away some of our top reporters (a 17 percent staff cut in June) and a hiring squeeze during the past year, The Miami Herald has been determined to continue to launch ambitious projects, even with fewer full-time I-team members. To do so, we have turned to a different



For years, the Miami-Dade Empowerment Trust reported to federal officials that companies such as Overtown Manufacturing Company—where Gerda Billy, pictured above, worked—were not only operating, but also thriving, with dozens of newly created jobs. The reality is that Overtown had been shut down since 2003—with no job gains, as was reported in the Herald’s “Poverty Peddlers” series. *Photo by Danna E. Natale Planas/The Miami Herald.*

model than having a member of the I-team fly solo or with other team members.

For projects, the newspaper now typically links a lead investigative reporter with beat reporters. This enables us to keep several projects on track each year while allowing younger reporters to get the kind of training they may have waited years to acquire. It more fully invests those beat reporters into their turf, giving them time to spend exposing serious issues that normally get shorter shrift in their daily reporting.

In 2007, the Herald launched three projects. Two landed in the newspaper last year, and a third was published this summer—all with remarkable impact. For each assignment, we paired an I-team member with a reporter (or reporters) who knew the beat related to the project’s topic. As work on the story took place so, too, did mentoring in the skills and challenges of this type of long-term reporting.

The first investigation examined the Miami-Dade Empowerment Trust, the area’s largest antipoverty agency, by investigative reporter Jason Grotto



Diddy, hip-hop entrepreneur and MTV host, sits in his Rolls Royce in front of the Hotel MTV (Surfcomber Hotel) on Miami Beach. The Miami Herald uncovered tens of thousands in payments made by the local antipoverty agency to pay for Diddy and other celebrities to fly to the city for the MTV Awards. *Photo by Patrick Farrell/The Miami Herald.*

and metro reporter Rob Barry. While Grotto found the agency failed to vet a troubled biotech park project that cost taxpayers millions, Barry determined that despite millions spent to create jobs, the poverty rate in Miami was actually increasing.

The result of this combined effort—“Poverty Peddlers”—led to the arrest of a prominent developer and the shut-down of the biotech project. For other articles in this series, metro reporter Scott Hiaasen joined with Grotto for a deeper dive into the Empowerment Trust; he set out to examine the agency’s programs since 2000 and probed its job creation program. In doing so, he turned up information demonstrating that the trust fabricated job numbers while continuing to receive federal dollars. The reporters also found a small cadre of developers—insiders with deep ties to the county’s most powerful political figures—were siphoning millions in public dollars from projects without delivering any services. Additionally, they found the antipoverty agency had spent tens of thousands of dollars flying celebrities

to town for the MTV Video Music Awards and funding expensive junkets for agency board members.

In working as partners on this project, each reporter utilized his particular strength. Grotto, who’d been a computer-assisted reporter, worked the numbers while Hiaasen mined familiar ground from his years covering local government. Their effort resulted in a shared byline on four of the “Poverty Peddlers” seven stories—articles that stirred outrage, prompted a second criminal investigation, and the recovery of millions in tax dollars. The county has since overhauled the antipoverty program.

This experience proved invaluable for Hiaasen, who now leads projects while assigned to the paper’s I-team. In the course of his career, he had worked on some serious enterprise stories, but this project truly tested him. “There was so much information to work with,” he said. “It would have been easy to get overwhelmed.” Hiaasen said Grotto was able to teach him how to better organize his information in computer files and, through long

rounds of editing, he gradually picked up on the more declarative style of projects writing.

## Teaming Up to Cover Corruption

The newspaper also teams up veteran editors with metro reporters on short-term investigations. Herald Urban Affairs Editor Ronnie Greene, a former I-team member who reported the “Deadly Express” series, directed coverage of an explosive issue in the city of Miami involving a once-secret memo written by one city commissioner relaying allegations that another commissioner was demanding kickbacks for political allies. The Herald successfully sued to get the memo and, once obtained, broke ground on several major tentacles of what’s now a prosecutor’s corruption probe. Hiaasen and city hall reporter Michael Vasquez joined in an examination of the ties between the commissioner accused in the memo and her most ardent allies, who had been hired as lobbyists by city vendors.

After the city and county approved an unprecedented three billion dollar megaplan that would build everything from a new baseball stadium to a new port tunnel, Greene led beat reporters on a four-part series, breaking apart each piece of the project and serving as a mentor during the reporting. As a former county reporter, Greene was able to keep reporters focused on several key issues, including influence peddling and lobbying. “This is Miami. You follow the money,” he kept on reminding them—and he showed them how to do it.

Overall, every reporter in the Herald’s newsroom is encouraged to carry out watchdog journalism and, from these journalists, the newspaper develops its next generation of I-team members. From the experience working with Cenziper on the housing series, beat reporter Larry Lebowitz is now steeped in his own investigation on the county’s transit authority. Investigative reporter Jack Dolan was teamed with business reporter Matt Haggman and Rob Barry for an investigation

published in July that showed Florida regulators allowed thousands of ex-convicts to peddle mortgages in the state—with many going on to steal millions from borrowers.

Rarely does the newspaper hire a projects writer from the outside; rather, editors develop them from

within the ranks. By teaming our investigative staff with beat reporters, we are, naturally, training the next crop. The strategy will allow us to persevere in our newspaper's core mission—relentless digging on local issues—even as the industry changes around us. ■

*Michael Sallah is investigations editor and reporter at The Miami Herald. He was co-recipient of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting for the Toledo Blade and directed The Miami Herald investigation that won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting.*

## When Fierce Competitors Join the Same Team

North Carolina's leading newspapers now publish each other's investigative work 'as prominently as we would have had we reported them ourselves.'

*Since June 2006, North Carolina's two leading newspapers, The Charlotte Observer and The Raleigh News & Observer, have been owned by The McClatchy Company. Two years later, after a companywide reduction of staff in McClatchy-owned newsrooms, Charlotte Observer Editor Rick Thames and Raleigh News & Observer Executive Editor John Drescher told their staffs that the two papers will have a far closer working relationship. Some departments would merge, they announced, including the papers' capital bureaus and sports staffs. The person selected to head this new sports department is Gary Schwab, who for the past seven years had been The Charlotte Observer's projects editor, where he oversaw that newspaper's investigative reporting. Before assuming his new job, Schwab wrote this article for Nieman Reports about some of what he'd experienced as the two papers, once fierce rivals, had begun to work together to bring local investigative reporting to more readers in North Carolina. His words offer a valuable glimpse into one of the ways—in an era of diminishing resources—the work of investigative reporters at regional newspapers can be brought to ever-expanding audiences.*

BY GARY SCHWAB

It was the most bizarre conversation I've had in 25 years at The Charlotte Observer. Here's the long-term investigation we're working on, I explained two years ago to Steve Riley of The Raleigh News & Observer. And Steve, in turn, shared with me his paper's plans.

For the two of us, each the editor in charge of projects at North Carolina's two largest daily newspapers, telling each other what we're working on was like the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox exchanging strategies for an upcoming three-game series in the midst of a heated pennant race. The two papers serve communities about 170 miles apart and don't generally compete for readers, though we've

competed against each other for decades, battling to be first and best in coverage of politics, ACC basketball, and important news investigations.

Then, in 2006, McClatchy Company bought Knight Ridder, Inc., and our newspapers were now considered to be part of the same team. In a time when newspapers are struggling for revenue and resources, the advantages in working together soon became clear.

"At first, it seemed really odd," says News & Observer Executive Editor John Drescher, who formerly worked in Charlotte. "Faced with the thought of cooperating with The Charlotte Observer, a lot of the staff really recoiled. But I think our folks realized that the Observer isn't the competitor anymore.

Our competitors are everybody else .... We're not going to lose this game to The Charlotte Observer. If we're going to lose, it's to some upstart Web site."

### Reconfiguring Assignments

In 2007, political editors divided coverage of John Edwards on the presidential campaign trail, and sports editors split up ACC basketball assignments. And we began to plan how to get the largest impact out of our best investigative work.

Riley shared with me what it was like for him to break the news to longtime News & Observer investigative reporter Pat Stith, known for his competitive spirit, that he was planning to tell our paper about his latest project.

Stith looked at him and said, "Riley, this has got to be a bunch of crap. We can't tell the Observer."

"Pat," Riley replied, "look at it this way. If we tell them, they can't go to work on it."

Stith stroked his chin, then said, "Then go tell them everything."

Though we're still figuring out all of the logistics, our basic guidelines are these:

1. When one paper hears what the other is working on, it can't go out and do its own two-day version of the story.
2. It's good to do a local sidebar to

make the investigative project even more relevant to your own paper's readers.

3. We'll play the other paper's stories as prominently as we would have had we reported them ourselves.
4. If we both are working on the same project—well, we'll figure that one out if it ever happens.

## Expanding the Reach of Reporting

In February, we delivered a glimpse of the power of the new relationship. A Charlotte six-part series, "The Cruellest Cuts," examined the human cost of bringing poultry to the dinner table and showed how one large North Carolina company masked the extent of workplace injuries behind factory walls. The Observer reported that House of Raeford Farms ignored, intimidated or fired workers who were hurt on the job and also found the company had broken the law by failing to record injuries on government safety logs.

Two weeks later, the state's mental health director resigned days before The Raleigh News & Observer began a five-part series on the state's failure to reform mental health services. The newspaper reported that the state had wasted at least \$400 million in an ill-conceived and poorly executed plan to treat more mentally ill people in their own communities and fewer in the state's four psychiatric hospitals.

The two newspapers have produced powerful work before. But this time, both series received prominent play in both newspapers. Combined, total circulation for the two reaches about 475,000 on Sunday—or more than a million readers. "In moments like these, we truly become a state newspaper," says Charlotte Observer Editor Rick Thames.

Both series had strong online components, expanding the reach even more. Charlotte had 2.4 million unique online visitors in March. Raleigh had 1.7 million the same month.

Even as this happens, we are continuing to work out details of our relationship. We'd each like to get series

packages sooner, since each newspaper works out its own display and production. Raleigh, for example, sometimes runs shorter versions of our stories and vice versa.

Though we share a healthy respect for each other's reporting standards, there is sometimes disagreement. In our poultry series, Raleigh editors decided not to run some information we'd published and attributed to unnamed sources. In a Raleigh series on the Duke lacrosse case, we chose to not include some graphic detail of the rape investigation.

To be sure, there's a valid argument to be made that having reporters from different papers competing as they pursue the same story will benefit readers. And that still happens on some stories. But we've also found the readers benefit when one paper handles an assignment for both; this arrangement frees other reporters' time for other enterprise and watchdog work. Coordinating investigations and planning their rollout gives us even greater impact.

Reaction from legislators was swift when the two newspapers published both of these investigative reports in February. Lawmakers vowed reform in response to both of them, and the U.S. Senate and House committees have held hearings to focus on worker safety in response to our poultry series.

"Suddenly, the best journalism being done in the state has a bigger platform," says Charlotte Managing Editor Cheryl Carpenter. "That's good for readers. That's good for justice." ■



After three years of being a line worker at the House of Raeford chicken processing plant, this 35-year-old woman's hands are gnarled and swollen and always shaking. "My hands were good when I started," she said. "Now I can't do anything." She was fired in February 2007. The reason: three unexcused absences. She disputes this, saying she called the plant several times to say she was seeing a doctor about her hands. "They fired me because they had no use for me," she said. "My hands don't work. I could no longer do the job." March 2007. Photo by John D. Simmons/The Charlotte Observer.



The House of Raeford chicken processing plant in West Columbia, South Carolina, has 150 workers packed into six evisceration lines where they pull skins, remove chicken tenders, and make cuts with razor sharp knives while birds move down the line to the next station for more processing. May 2007. Photo by John D. Simmons/The Charlotte Observer.

*Gary Schwab has been projects editor at The Charlotte Observer since 2001. Previously, he was executive sports editor at the newspaper for 14 years, and this summer was named to oversee the merged sports department of the Observer and The Raleigh News & Observer newspapers.*

# Investigative Talent Departs After Awards Come In

The Blade's commitment to investigative reporting endures despite the loss of key reporters to larger news organizations with better pay.

BY DAVE MURRAY

It was June 2005, and The Blade was in the middle of unraveling Ohio's rare-coin investment scandal—the biggest investigation the Toledo, Ohio newspaper had ever undertaken. Blade reporters uncovered that dozens of rare coins the state had purchased were missing and, as they continued to investigate, they brought to light an extensive pay-to-play system in state government. The Blade's probe prompted the formation of a state and federal law enforcement task force and the eventual acknowledgement that millions of dollars were missing from a state agency's \$50 million rare-coin fund.

Reporters were pulled from the city desk, business desk, regional desk, and statehouse bureau to build a team that would unmask the scandal that would eventually be called "Coingate." Shortly after state officials acknowledged that \$10 to \$12 million was missing from state coin funds, they admitted they'd concealed a separate \$215 million investment loss in an offshore hedge fund.

As the newspaper's special assignments editor, I needed another reporter to cover the development, so I turned to Joshua Boak, who had just been hired. I asked him if he knew anything about hedge funds. He began telling me about risk aversion and hedging against market upturns or downturns. He had never worked for a newspaper before, but I knew he had graduated from Princeton and Columbia. He was smart, and I needed somebody like him to explain hedge funds to our readers. I had no idea what they were; all I knew was that Ohio had just lost almost a quarter billion dol-

lars in one of them.

I had edited and managed several investigative projects at The Blade before but never a story like Coingate.

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**The Coingate investigation led to the criminal convictions of Governor Bob Taft, several former aides, and prominent Republican officeholders for violating state ethics statutes. The Blade's reporting unraveled a web of corruption in Ohio and resulted in the state turning from red to blue in November 2006 ....**

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The team eventually expanded to six reporters, an editorial librarian, a forensic accountant, and a file clerk. After The Blade successfully sued the state for access to coin-fund records, the team was moved to Columbus to report on the 500,000 records that were eventually released by the state.

The Coingate investigation led to the criminal convictions of Governor Bob Taft, several former aides, and prominent Republican officeholders for violating state ethics statutes. The Blade's reporting unraveled a web of corruption in Ohio and resulted in the state turning from red to blue in November 2006, with the Republicans losing all but one statewide executive office to Democrats. The political careers of Taft and his cronies were

over. Boak's career had just taken off, along with the careers of the five other reporters on the Coingate team. The investigation was named a Pulitzer finalist in 2006 for public service and won other national journalism awards.

## Awards, Then Defections

By the end of 2007, Boak and four other team members departed The Blade for newspapers in Chicago, Baltimore, Detroit and Charlotte. The Blade was the victim of its own success, but that was nothing new. The Blade has maintained its commitment to investigative reporting, but during the past 10 years we have had to form four new investigative teams as we've watched some of our better reporters depart for bigger papers after their investigative work was recognized with national awards.

- Sam Roe's groundbreaking Blade investigation into the death and injury caused by the American beryllium industry earned him several national awards as well as being named a Pulitzer finalist in investigative reporting in 2000. He soon left for the Chicago Tribune. In April, he was part of the team at the Tribune that won the Pulitzer for investigative reporting for its product safety series.
- After The Blade won a Pulitzer for investigative reporting in 2004 for its Tiger Force investigation into Vietnam War atrocities, writers Mike Sallah, Mitch Weiss, and Joe Mahr left for jobs at The Miami Herald, The Charlotte Observer, and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

The pattern repeated itself after the success of the Coingate investigation. Each time an award was won, a team was lost. And each time, The Blade began building another team and looking for the next great investigative story. It's a frustrating situation for editors, but one that has worked in Toledo.

## Shrinking Pay, Departing Reporters

While The Blade was racking up awards for its investigative journalism, financial losses were also piling up. In 2006, Blade executives decided they had to stop the losses, so they hired the Nashville law firm of King & Ballow to negotiate with the paper's labor unions. At his first meeting with newsroom editors and managers, Bob Ballow told stories about how he broke into the newspaper business as a boy and his life in the South. He also said unions had been running The Blade for far too long and now it was "our turn."

Here was a well-dressed southern gentleman hired to save The Blade from financial ruin. He handed out Goo Goo Clusters, Nashville's signature chocolate confection, and a completely new contract for The Blade's union workforce that he said he wrote himself. It called for cuts in pay, vacation, sick time, personal days, and for a longer workweek.

Over the next year, labor turmoil roiled The Blade. Ballow locked out five production unions at the paper, with reporters crossing daily picket lines with the permission of their union. Months dragged by, the unions held rallies, called for circulation and advertising boycotts, and Ballow and Blade owners didn't budge. In the end, the unions capitulated, agreeing to wage and benefit cuts and a two-tiered salary structure that drastically lowered pay for new reporters in return for an end to the lockouts.

During this protracted labor dispute, reporters realized they would soon face pay cuts, and many of them left for other jobs, including five of the six Coingate team reporters, fresh from

picking up awards for their investigation. Early on, I had informed Ballow that it had taken years to build a culture of investigative reporting at The Blade, and I feared that would be lost if he was successful. I still remember what he told me after one of our first meetings, "Son, we'll get you a new team when this is all over."

Ballow has returned to Nashville, and The Blade's investigative team has been reduced to one reporter. It is time to rebuild.

## The Value of Support

By nature, an investigative editor wakes up feeling cynical—always looking for what's wrong with government, with business, with the institutions that impact readers' lives. To get through the day, however, requires that the editor also be an optimist. Time and time again, The Blade has watched reporters head to bigger papers, but we've come back stronger. Years ago I learned that successful investigative reporting is a team sport, only possible with smart and hard-working reporters being well supported by top editors. And despite our loss of reporters, we have been able to maintain our editing and newsroom management team.

The Blade's executive editor, Ron Royhab, and managing editor, Kurt Franck, have spent many nights reading copy behind me, asking the hard questions I don't always think to ask and running interference with the bean counters on the business side who always want to cut space and budgets. And any honest editor will admit that the copy desk and design desk catch mistakes and transform what investigative teams produce into pages that look amazingly good.

The top editor at The Blade is John Robinson Block, the newspaper's co-publisher and editor in chief, and the grandson of Paul Block, Sr., who bought the paper in 1926. John Block is a hands-on editor who is a driving force behind his newspaper's investigations. During the Coingate investigation, he called me daily asking for "coin team updates." I considered him the seventh reporter on the team because of his

extensive knowledge of Ohio politics. Many of his ideas and tips turned into Page One stories.

One of the benefits of having the publisher on your I-team is that scarce resources become available. As with most great newspaper investigations, Coingate coverage was not planned or budgeted and happened during a year when The Blade was losing money.

After Blade attorney Fritz Byers, who had won numerous public records lawsuits for the newspaper, sued the state and the Ohio Supreme Court ordered the release of all records documenting its rare-coin investment, the Ohio attorney general began releasing several boxes of records each day to The Blade, the Columbus Dispatch, and the (Cleveland) Plain Dealer. By this point, the other big Ohio papers had assembled teams of their own to cover the expanding state government scandal.

On the third day of the records release, Blade reporters came across a document that would make a great story if we could only remember where we'd put a related document we'd read three days earlier. Our small office was filling up with stacks of paper, and state officials told us there were hundreds of thousands of records yet to be released.

The phone rang, and it was Block asking for his daily update. I was frustrated, and he could sense it. He asked me what was wrong, so I told him what I was facing. I told him the coin team needed a bigger office and a file clerk to create a record system to help reporters stay organized. He told me to rent more space, hire a file clerk, and said he was hiring a forensic accountant to help the team find the fraudulent transactions he was sure were documented in the records.

The Blade continued to cover the unfolding scandal, most days staying ahead of state investigators and our competition. Within months, Republican fundraiser and Bush Pioneer Tom Noe had been charged with fraud, money laundering, and stealing more than \$13 million from the rare-coin funds he founded and managed for the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensa-

tion. Noe now sits in a federal prison in Florida. After serving a 27-month sentence for illegally funneling cash to President Bush's 2004 reelection campaign, he will be transferred to an Ohio prison to serve an 18-year state sentence for his state crimes.

## Starting Over

The only thing I know to do after an investigation ends is to find another one to begin. It's that simple.

Before Coingate was published in *The Blade* in 2005, I fielded a call from a former employee of National Machinery Company in Tiffin, Ohio. The worker explained that he was part of a group of employees who sued the company when the factory they had worked at for years closed without warning. *The Blade* had written a news story about the settlement the employees received, and I recall being struck by a comment in that story by the federal judge who approved the settlement. He said the money the workers were to receive was a "pittance," but it was all they could hope for.

By early last year, as the entire Coingate investigation wound down, two of the remaining reporters on the team—James Drew and Steve Eder—were looking for their next investigation. I asked them to contact the workers to get their side of the story. In July 2007, *The Blade* published "Without Warning," an investigative series that showed how corporations across the country routinely violated the federal Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act, which requires a 60-day notice to workers whose plants are closing. [See Eder's article, below.]

On the second day of the series, Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown introduced legislation in the U.S. Senate to reform and strengthen the WARN Act. By the end of that year, the U.S. House had approved a WARN Reform Act, which remains bottled-up in the Senate. After this investigation, Drew left for *The (Baltimore) Sun*.

*The Blade* is trying a different tactic with our remaining projects reporter, Steve Eder. We are pairing him with other reporters on staff to conduct investigations. This arrange-

ment takes more planning, but so far it's working well. He's been working with our health reporter on a project we recently published as a four-part series, will soon travel overseas—a trip made possible by funding from a nonprofit foundation—and he is already laying the groundwork for an investigation he'll do with one of our sports reporters.

And we've finally begun to hire reporters again. Most have limited experience, but they want to be at *The Blade* in large part because of our tradition of investigative reporting. I've begun working with several of them on Sunday stories, as well as with beat reporters. It is in these moments that my optimism surfaces. Many of them have the potential to join Eder on what could be the resurgence of *The Blade's* I-team.

So it begins anew. ■

*Dave Murray is the special assignments editor for The Blade, where he has been a reporter and editor for 28 years.*

## Changing Circumstances Delay An Investigation—and Lead to a New Approach

With *The Blade's* I-team no longer functioning, the paper's only investigative reporter now partners with beat reporters to do watchdog stories.

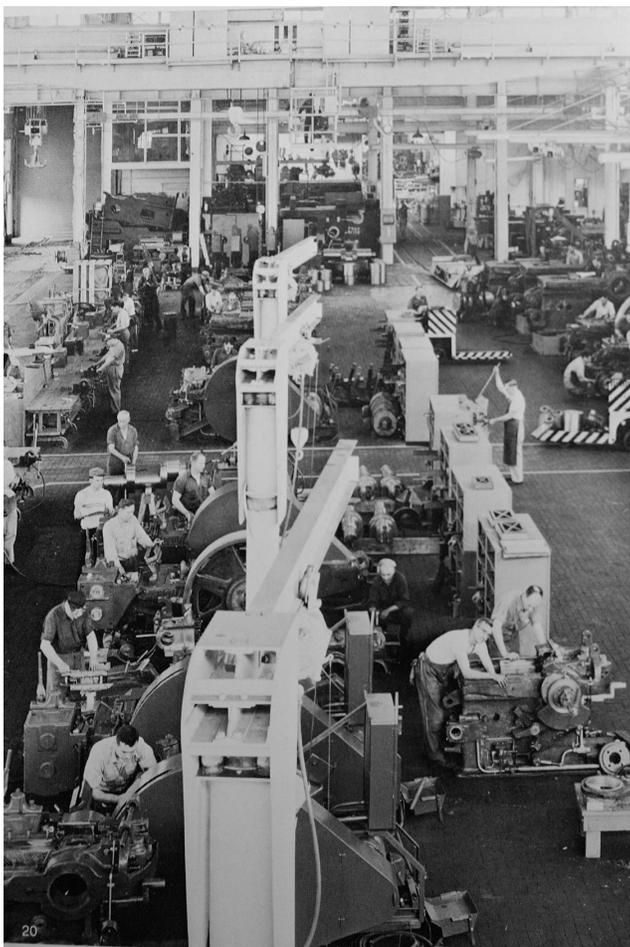
BY STEVE EDER

**F**our days after Christmas in December 2001, National Machinery Company workers read in disbelief the headlines in their local newspaper that their factory, a cornerstone of Tiffin, Ohio, abruptly closed. More than 500 men and women—many who served the company for 25 years or more and some who were second and third generation employees—lost their jobs without any notice. For more than 130

years, the employees there had built the machines that cut nuts and bolts. With its deeply rooted traditions like its summer picnics and its Quarter Century Club for its longest-serving employees, the workers of Tiffin felt honored to serve "The National," as they affectionately called it.

The manner in which they learned of National's shuttering left the workers stunned and feeling betrayed. Look-

ing for answers and a way to channel their furor, some learned that National Machinery might have violated the federal Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act, known as the WARN Act, by failing to notify workers of the impending layoffs. The 20-year-old law requires many employers to give workers 60 days advance notice before plant closings and massive layoffs.



National Machinery workers in 1967. *Courtesy of National Machinery Company. Photo by Jeremy Wadsworth/The Blade.*

Workers later sued, seeking 60 days of back pay, the most they could demand under a WARN Act claim. Three years later and over the objections of former National Machinery employees, U.S. District Court Judge James Carr reluctantly approved a settlement that paid the workers \$375 each, a far cry from what many felt they were owed. The judge labeled the settlement a “pittance” and explained that it was the best they could hope for under the weak WARN Act.

### Needing a Public Watchdog

Spurned once by his longtime employer and again by the government’s failure to protect workers on the verge of losing their jobs, Tom Kummerer, a National employee for nearly 25 years, called *The Blade* in nearby Toledo and spoke with Special Assignments Editor Dave

Murray. He pleaded for the paper to do some digging, and this became my first investigative project with *The Blade*.

In July 2007, nearly three years later, *The Blade* revealed in a four-part series the shortcomings of the WARN Act and its failures to protect not only the men and women who’d worked at National Machinery Company but displaced workers nationwide.

That this series of stories took nearly three years from assignment to publication is testament to the kind of resource-related challenges confronted by newsrooms, even by ones as dedicated as ours to investigative efforts. During those intervening years, labor disputes arose at

*The Blade*, investigative reporting colleagues departed, and a huge watchdog story broke in our backyard stretching our depleted ranks even thinner. Now, my role with *The Blade* is evolving as the paper’s only remaining investigative reporter. These days I am paired with beat reporters on projects of varying length and scope to expose them to investigative reporting as we try to keep alive *The Blade*’s reputation as the public’s watchdog.

To report this story initially, I shuttled between rural Tiffin, Ohio, and Toledo, about a 50-minute drive. In Tiffin, I pieced together the history of National Machinery Company and the lineage of the Frost-Kalnow family, which owned the company for most of the 20th century. I met with groups of National Machinery Company employees so I could chronicle their stories and learn what transpired in

the days after Christmas 2001, and later in 2002, when the company reopened as National Machinery LLC. Former employees told stories of lives changed overnight. For some, it had taken years to find new jobs; others never returned to work. A gripping story began to emerge of what it’s like when hundreds of dedicated workers from a community’s dominant employer suddenly have no jobs and no paychecks.

Next, I needed to figure out how the WARN Act failed these people. So I started to review thousands of pages of legal documents and depositions. As I did it became clear that this law—intended to help such workers—was of little use to them or other workers who were confronting this same circumstance. I had already found dozens of examples of employers nationally skirting their obligations under the WARN Act with little or no repercussions. This prompted the paper to decide to examine more broadly how often workers had been ill served by the WARN Act.

### Expanding the Investigation’s Focus

Early in the spring of 2005, just as the National Machinery investigation was picking up steam, another *Blade* investigation took off. On April 3, 2005, reporters James Drew and Mike Wilkinson wrote the initial stories about Toledo-area rare coin dealer Tom Noe, a political insider who managed a \$50 million rare-coin fund for the Ohio Bureau of Workers’ Compensation. Within two weeks, there was an onslaught of attention on the story—known soon as “Coingate”—and this caused *The Blade* to expand its “coin team” to include Christopher Kirkpatrick and me. [See Dave Murray’s article on page 37 for more about *The Blade*’s Coingate investigation.]

For two nearly two years, and as our team grew to six reporters, we tirelessly investigated Ohio state government, triggering a state and federal probe that led to 19 criminal convictions, including Ohio Governor Bob Taft on ethics charges. In November 2006, a

judge sentenced Noe, a top contributor of the governor and President Bush, to 18 years in prison for stealing millions of dollars from the coin fund. As Coingate ballooned, my National Machinery files sat untouched. It wasn't until early 2007, as Coingate drew to a close, that the files were opened again.

At that point James Drew, who worked with me on The Blade's investigative unit, joined me on this story, and we picked up where I'd left off—starting to examine in-depth national examples of the failures of the WARN Act. Soon we were in Detroit for a week, working out of the nonprofit Maurice and Jane Sugar Law Center that assists workers in WARN Act lawsuits, where we sifted through the center's records and correspondence. This gave us a good sense about the number of people affected by this act's weak provisions.

Combining the center's records with court documents, we built a database of 226 WARN Act cases nationwide. This is what steered our reporting through the final months of the investigation as these records highlighted for us the many ways that businesses exploited the law's loopholes to avoid warning workers facing layoffs. We spotlighted loopholes by pairing the information we'd garnered from documents with stories we were hearing from affected workers across the nation, including coal miners in West Virginia, mortgage company employees in Connecticut, and paper cup manufacturers in Illinois. Their stories—like those we'd heard in Tiffin—illuminated how few protections the WARN Act actually provides, and our reporting about this situation spurred legislative initiatives in the U.S. Congress.<sup>1</sup>

### Trying a Different Approach

Within months of the publication of our WARN Act series, Drew announced his departure, leaving me as the news-



Elmer Hoffman, who worked for New Delphos Manufacturing Company for nearly 47 years until it abruptly shut down in 1990, walks on the empty field the company used to occupy. *Photo by Andy Morrison/The Blade.*

paper's lone investigative reporter. The rapidly changing circumstances of newspapers in this uncertain time of declining ad revenues and digital demands haven't permitted The Blade to hire an investigative reporter to fill Drew's position. Our I-team is no longer a team but a single player. But this has not prevented us from doing watchdog journalism.

In August, The Blade published a four-part series documenting new threats to the doctor-patient relationship, an eight-month investigation that I coauthored with Blade health reporter

Julie M. McKinnon. The series was the first under our newsroom's new strategy of integrating beat reporters into investigative projects. In transforming our approach to investigative reporting, the goal is to train more reporters in our newsroom to perform watchdog



Gene Goshe was abruptly laid off by the National Machinery Company and joined other workers in a lawsuit related to the WARN Act. *Photo by Jeremy Wadsworth/The Blade.*

<sup>1</sup> The House of Representatives passed an overhaul of the WARN Act in 2007, and action in the Senate—where Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama has backed a bill to reform the plant closing notification law—is pending.

journalism so our tradition of investigative reporting holds strong.

Like other newspapers, The Blade is looking for ways to tap alternative sources of financing for costly investigative projects. Earlier this year, I was awarded a World Affairs Journalism Fellowship through the nonprofit Washington-based International Center for Journalists. I will use this fellowship opportunity in the fall to journey halfway around the

globe, and from there I will report an investigative story that will be of significant importance to our local readers. When I return, the plans call for me to resume my role as an investigative partner with beat reporters in the newsroom; this time I will work alongside a sports reporter on what promises to be a long-term project. And like the others I've done, its roots are likely to burrow deep into our local community. ■

*Steve Eder is projects reporter at The Blade. He was a member of the paper's "Coingate" reporting team whose coverage won a National Headliner Award, a Gerald Loeb Award, and an Associated Press Managing Editors' Award. The WARN Act project won first place in investigative reporting from the Inland Press Association.*

## From Idea, to Beat Reporting, to Investigative Project

At the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, the I-team created a new strategy to make certain that watchdog journalism is featured in the newspaper.

BY LOIS NORDER

**A**s a rookie reporter, I wore out my editors asking for the okay to pursue investigative stories. Finally, they told me the paper would be interested in publishing the stories. But they had two caveats. "You can't have any time," they said, noting that there was no one else to cover my beats. "And you cannot," they emphasized, "spend any money."

I took that for a "Yes."

Now, it seems much of the investigative reporting at newspapers is accomplished under the same restrictions—and not just at small dailies, where in-depth work has always been the province of the passionate. Investigative reporting slots are disappearing from midsized dailies and project teams are shrinking at the majors.

Yet as resources dwindle across entire newsrooms and I-teams are asked to show that they can help to carry the load, we can find new approaches that strengthen investigative journalism and overcome the public perception that newspapers have abandoned that core mission. In the process, maybe we can also change the harsh opinions of some beat reporters, whose interest in (and support for) investigative work can be pretty rickety. To them, we're the



The Star-Telegram published investigative stories about public employee pensions in Texas. Firefighter Gene "Shakey" Holder, who worked with the Irving Fire Department for 50 years, remained on the job past his retirement age. Financial incentives offered by the Irving Fireman's Relief and Retirement Fund allowed firefighters to retire as millionaires.

*Photo by Tom Pennington/Star-Telegram.*

gee-whizzes of the newsrooms. Glory hogs. Goldbrickers. Here today, then gone (on to something else) tomorrow.

And leaving them to deal with the follow-ups as we move on to pursue the next big thing.

A strategy we're using at the Fort Worth (Texas) Star-Telegram is to try to devise ways to break up some projects. Rather than producing an enormous package of articles and boxes and graphics after many months of work, we spin out stories in our newspaper and on our Web site as we move along. Doing this, we've found, can tamp down newsroom pressures and keep an important topic in front of the public for an extended time. This strategy became more of an imperative this summer when the Star-Telegram, like other McClatchy newspapers, had a sizable layoff. We lost a member of our investigative team and now scrutinize use of all our resources more carefully. Gone are the days of having four investigative reporters, each assigned to a separate long-term project.

### Devising a New Investigative Strategy

Actually, budget constraints didn't give birth to this strategy. Ambition did. Turns out that at times we were reaching for projects that we lacked the expertise to grasp.

In 2004, reporter Yamil Berard bent my ear time and again about her desire to examine various government pension plans in Texas. I was hesitant. Berard had recently joined our investigative team after years as an education writer. Her only exposure to pension topics came from a handful of stories related to teacher retirement accounts. As the paper's investigative editor, I would find it hard to guide her, because I didn't know much about pensions. I wondered, too, how we would snag readers with our coverage. And I could only imagine what it would be like in the newsroom to pitch a story about actuarial accounting or unfunded liabilities.

On the other hand, state and local pensions are among the huge pools of tax dollars that received little media scrutiny. And as part of Berard's effort to convince me of the story's merits, she put me on the phone with one of her expert sources, who urged us on and shared some tantalizing tidbits.

So I relented, with a caveat of my own. We'd both spend two or three weeks immersing ourselves in the topic. We'd find out what kinds of data and source documents might be available. Then we'd talk scope. Taking that plunge convinced me that the project would pay off—but also persuaded me that it was hopelessly complex. This meant that if I sent Berard out to identify the flaws in the Texas pensions, she'd be on this story exclusively for several months. And I'd be down by one reporter for the entire time it took her to both report the story and then find her story line in the thicket of information she was bound to discover.

Beat reporters wouldn't have this same challenge. With experience on a specific beat, they gain the knowledge and sources to point them to the next story and then the next. And that is why I knew that some of the best project ideas can come from those reporters.

So my solution was to have Berard approach government pensions as a beat, starting with a couple of promising topics we initially identified. We would see where it went from there.

As it turned out, she wrote more than two dozen stories during the next two years, shook up pension funds, and helped prompt changes in state laws and oversight. Her reporting revealed how millions of dollars were being drained from public employee pension funds through high fees; she identified conflicts of interest between pension consultants and money managers, and she showed how boards were failing in their oversight, even as they ventured into riskier investments.

As stories were published, readers weighed in with tips. Sources stepped forward to offer help, and she began to write stories about pension fund policies that allowed retirees to double dip or game the system and about incentives that were allowing firefighters and public works employees to retire as millionaires. Finally, as her understanding deepened, she undertook an analysis of the city of Fort Worth's pension fund, showing how flaws in the fund's oversight could lead to

conflicts of interest, high costs, and squandered opportunities.

### Making 'Beat' Investigations Work

Not every project can or should be carved up in this way. In making decisions about which ones are suitable, consideration might be whether a topic is important enough and compelling enough to justify dedicating an investigative journalist for an extended period of time. As editor, I must consider whether each segment will offer fresh insights. I also need to weigh whether our reporters—and ultimately our readers—will be able to make sense of the parts of the story without understanding the whole.

But our I-team has used the "beat" strategy with subsequent projects on nursing homes, public housing, and emergency medical services, and we adapted it this year for an examination of our public health system. These are the keys we've found to make this work well:

- Identify and prioritize story segments.
- Set aggressive deadlines to complete these segments.
- Modify our story plans as we build on our knowledge.
- Have reporters be expected to "own" the topic and cover related news developments—perhaps in perpetuity.

The approach is particularly well suited to the Web. Readers interested in a topic can click through to find previous stories online, along with source documents. We also have used our Web site to invite readers to suggest stories through comment board or e-mail, and this helps us identify new angles and fresh sources at the grass-roots level.

The payoffs for following this strategy can be numerous. The topics get more durability. Stories are shorter, so they are less of an imposition on readers' time. Yet they can include a richer level of detail, improving credibility. And readers who follow along

can see how we got from point A to point Z.

For reporters, this approach makes framing their stories easier, and they get adrenaline fixes from their more frequent bylines. Newsroom colleagues also remember—and show collegial respect for—those who work on our

project team. And when newspapers no longer define “investigative journalism” as a lengthy package that appears two or three times a year, perhaps the public will appreciate that we’re doing a good job in fulfilling our vital watchdog role. ■

*Lois Norder is the managing editor of news at the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. She won the 2008 Mimi Award, given by the Dart Society, an independent group of journalists dedicated to promoting sensitive coverage of victims of violence.*

## Team Reporting on a Watchdog Project

Tensions surfaced as an investigative team produced a six-part series amid pressures of a downsized newsroom.

BY DARREN BARBEE

In retrospect, I would like to be able to describe the Star-Telegram’s investigative team as a well-oiled engine that relentlessly pushes forward. But our team’s dynamics just didn’t work that way during the four months this year when we joined forces on a project. Stress, the mesh of personalities, and the heat of the moment—with deadline pressures intensified by newsroom cutbacks and our topic’s own timeline—created a different kind of combustion.

There were arguments, days of strained (if any) communication among us, and at least one smartly slammed door. There was also exultation, and a few eureka moments, and the time one of us dubbed “geeky pants day,” to commemorate when something went our way.

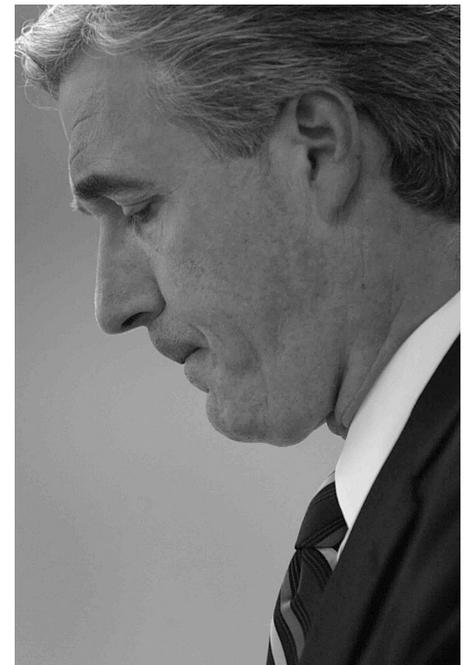
We set out with a simple plan to analyze a complex public hospital system. JPS Health Network operates three dozen clinics and two hospitals in and around Fort Worth, Texas; the network employs 4,000 nurses, doctors, technicians and janitors, and treats 156,000 patients each year. Reporter Anthony Spangler’s job was to dig out how much money the public hospital had in the bank. Yamil Berard was to probe the sources of its wealth. I was to hunt for people denied access to the system.

We expected our plan to change, and we weren’t disappointed. It

twisted and morphed, at times on a daily basis. Remaining flexible—“shift and fire,” they call it in the military—became our strength. In the end, what emerged was a solid six-part newspaper series, and consequences followed for some whose actions and policies we’d investigated along the way. The hospital’s chief executive officer was shown the door. The chief financial officer also resigned. State inspectors and a health care accrediting agency launched surprise inspections, turning up dozens of violations. The cleaning service was fired. The board of directors began studying the impact copayments have on medical care for the poor. Board members left. And angry county commissioners and community groups lashed out.

### Making Plans, Hitting Walls

In our newsroom, there had been talk for years about investigating the “hospital district,” which is the primary provider of health care for the poor. In 2005, the Star-Telegram had uncovered serious problems in jail inmates’ health care provided by JPS. Yet a year later, efforts to launch an investigation of the hospital district had fizzled due to the complexity that the reporting of this story required combined with the lack of newsroom resources. Still, a steady trickle of complaints and tips kept



JPS Health Network CEO David Cecero delivers his farewell speech as he resigned during a board meeting. April 2008. Photo by M.L. Gray/Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

coming our way as the local medical society blasted JPS for failing its mission, and a survey of doctors showed concerns over hygiene and staffing as comments such as “we don’t help the poor” surfaced.

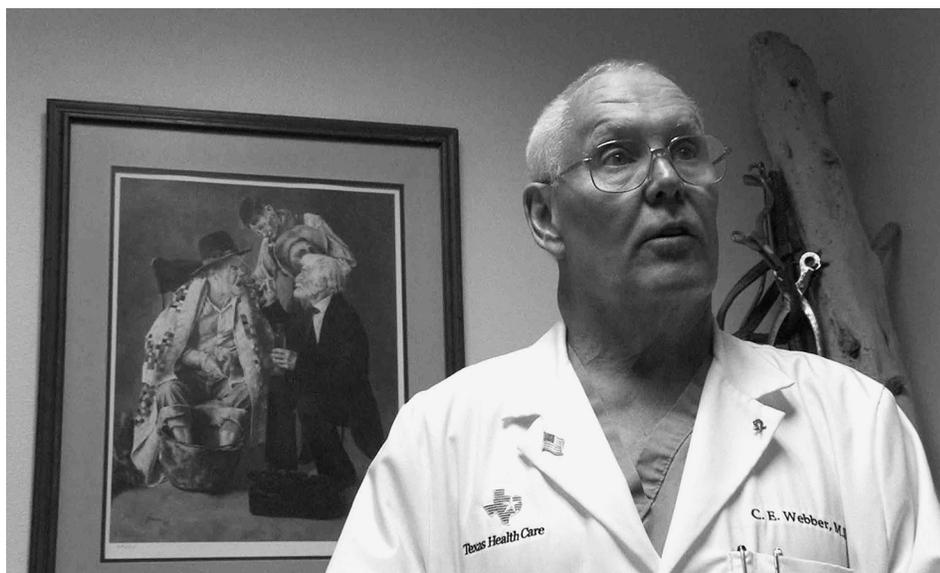
So in late 2007, Lois Norder, who oversaw investigative projects, drafted a team of two investigative reporters—

Berard and myself—along with Spangler, who had covered the district as part of his county government beat. She'd already spent months sending out public information requests to state and federal government to gather financial details, which she'd carefully analyzed and put in spreadsheets. Our first assignment: to enter reading hell as we tackled scholarly articles and journals and slogged through government reports mostly without a working coffeemaker. We sifted through JPS's annual audits cover to cover; most challenging was deciphering the mysteries of hospital finance.

Then, our real frustration began. Despite being a public institution subject to state public records law, the hospital district stonewalled some of our requests, though officials there said they were unaware of others. More than once I sent long e-mails detailing unanswered requests and then days or weeks later district officials would ask me what requests hadn't been fulfilled. When information did reach us, it was sometimes unusable. At times JPS used the nuance in the wording of a request to skew their answers. None of this was surprising. JPS board members and county commissioners had long grumbled that the hospital district administrators were not forthcoming.

For our project, however, such delays were damaging. We could feel time rushing by and yet we were missing crucial chunks of essential financial information. We were told, for example, that the district didn't know how many nurses it employed prior to 2006. We also suspected that enrollment in the hospital's charity care program was flat even though the need for such medical services had increased with the growth in the county's population. But we couldn't get answers even as the statutory deadline to provide us the information passed.

Two months into our investigation, we were staring at a largely financial story, which was not what we'd envisioned, nor a story our readers would want to digest. At the district's clinics, people I interviewed seemed resigned to long waits and were muted in their



JPS trauma surgeon Dr. Chuck Webber spoke on the record with his observations about practices he observed at the hospital. Later he repeated his comments on video for the newspaper's online presentation. *Photo by M.L. Gray/Fort Worth Star-Telegram.*

complaints about their care. For them, this was the only medical option they had. But we also had some success, mostly thanks to Spangler's county sources, in getting a highly respected surgeon to go on the record with his critical observations about practices at the hospital, words he was willing later to repeat on video for our online presentation.

Berard, in the meantime, wrapped up an eye-opening analysis of hospital pricing and then set up a meeting with local religious leaders who had done their own review of the hospital's finances. Though they were largely advocating for allowing illegal immigrants to access the hospital district's health care, they also knew of patients who were angry about their treatment by JPS.

### A Buried Report Is Found

One of my most challenging writing assignments during the project may have been the hour I spent carefully crafting an e-mail suggesting a meeting between the three reporters on the project to "talk about what we've got, what we need, and where we're going with it." In the end, we managed only a two-thirds majority and, as the



June Kelly spoke to the Star-Telegram reporters about the bad treatment she felt she'd had at a JPS Clinic. *Photo by Ron T. Ennis/Fort Worth Star-Telegram.*

project wore on, we began to grow impatient with one another. We were occasionally tripping over one another's sources. Our meetings weren't always going smoothly. But as we began to share potential sources, that helped lead to some breakthroughs. Berard, for instance, sacrificed a couple of her solid patient sources to us. She also initiated contact with another source whose information proved enormously valuable.

Spangler followed up and learned more that led to the discovery that JPS had commissioned a consultant's study but kept its findings under wraps. Asking for the report from the public hospital would likely mean another long, drawn-out fight. The hospital district had contested releasing to us similar information about an American College of Surgeons report. (The college verifies trauma centers.)

Spangler arranged to get the series of consultant's reports from another source. Late on a Thursday, he told us breathlessly about 600 pages depicting a hospital system replete with filth, ineptitude and callousness. That was what he called our "geeky pants day," a phrase he says refers to a time "when one is so enthralled by something of a wonky nature that one begins to dance, metaphorically of course, in one's 'geeky pants.'"

And so we did, in a manner of speaking, as our editor, Tony, and I spent the weekend studying the reports. In them, we discovered information and data that corroborated the almost unbelievable stories that patients and doctors had been telling us, as word spread about our project. Unlike those whom we'd tried to interview at the clinics, these individuals sought us out with information about what they'd experienced and observed. Some told of flies buzzing around beds, bloodstained mattresses, and hostile treatment.

What we now had was an exhaustive inside look at critical areas of the hospital and its clinics. Just as the community groups had suspected and patients had conveyed, serious deficiencies were widespread. Large numbers of medical records were missing. Unnecessary tests were being

performed. Nurses readying operating rooms that they'd thought were clean found blood, bone and fat globules on tables and on the floor.

Given what we'd learned, I went back and interviewed several patients three or four more times. One woman complained she'd been locked in a room at a hospital clinic, separated from her service dog. An asthma patient told me he was left off the food distribution list after being admitted to the hospital. A weeping mother told me how her son had gone to the hospital with chest pains and been sent home. He died hours later at another hospital. One surgeon told us that his patients were turned away because they could not afford the \$20 copay, and he suspected some had died as a result. Another said that money, not quality of care, was driving the district's decisions.

At about this same time, I sent another e-mail to the hospital district spelling out all of the information they'd said they couldn't provide. I copied it to the board chairman. Suddenly about a dozen spreadsheets were sent our way. As we suspected, one showed the district had fewer people enrolled in its charity care program than five years earlier. Despite this, we knew from looking at the financial records that year after year the hospital district had deposited tens of millions of dollars into its bank accounts—money that was supposed to go toward providing medical care for the poor.

With notebooks of three reporters now bulging and spreadsheets proliferating, Norder created order out of our informational chaos. Using huge sticky notes, she broke down by category the hospital district's systemic flaws. Her notes became my cue cards, which as the project's lead writer I used to synthesize the work



Jamara McRae talked with Star-Telegram reporters about the death of her son, Jacob, after his visit to JPS. Photo by M.L. Gray/Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

we'd done as individual reporters and as a team. Discussing this later with Norder, we agreed that completing this project was akin to falling in love. At first, there was the desire to maintain control, even as it seemed everything was spinning out of control. Then came the realization of liking being in this new place, even though getting here required relinquishing control.

With our project available in multimedia on our Web site ([www.star-telegram.com/jps/](http://www.star-telegram.com/jps/)), our investigative reporting on related topics goes on, though in different ways. No longer are the three of us intertwined by one specific project; instead, each of us is building on the expertise gained on this assignment and using it in more frequent enterprise reporting. Stories I've done recently about Texas laws that keep from the public information about the quality of hospital and physician care are a natural outgrowth of this project, as is the ongoing work of the others on this team.

Public reaction was overwhelming to our series, but the comments I heard from the higher-ups at the paper were also gratifying. Coming off a round of layoffs, with morale low, the project served as a reminder in these troubling times of what a newspaper can accomplish for the community it serves. ■

*Darren Barbee is a staff writer at the Fort Worth (Tex.) Star-Telegram.*

## In Zimbabwe, Courage Is the Journalist's Companion

'What Mugabe did not want the press to report was how he was using systematic state torture and violence against blacks opposed to his rule.'

BY ANDREW MELDRUM

Printing presses bombed. Five newspapers banned. Scores of journalists jailed on spurious charges. Editors, reporters, photographers and cameramen beaten, tortured and murdered. Robert Mugabe's regime in Zimbabwe

is one of the most repressive against the press in the world, according to rankings by the Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters Without Borders.

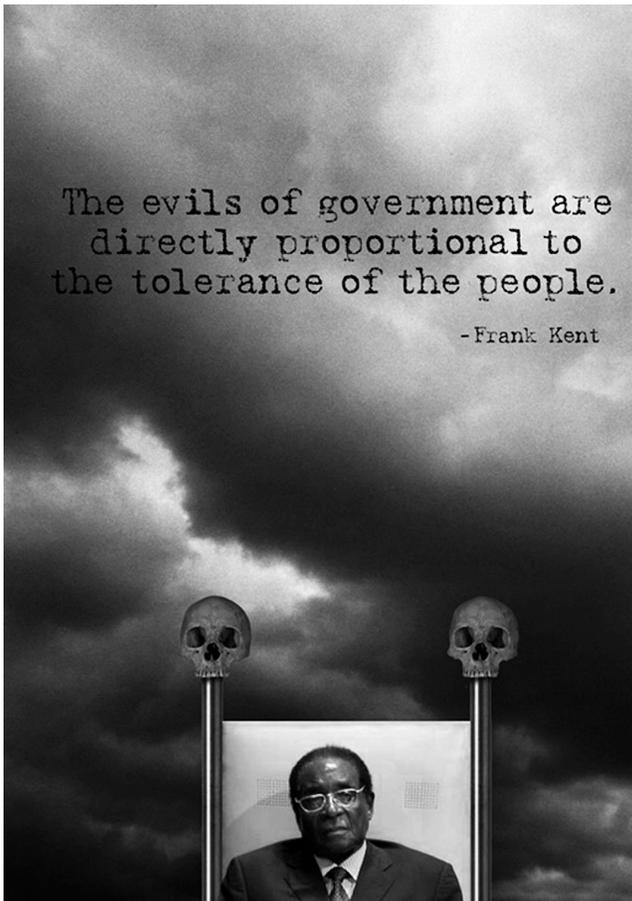
Despite Mugabe's efforts to silence journalists, however, Zimbabwe's ongoing political, economic and humanitarian crisis succeeds in grabbing headlines. In the past year it has been one of the most widely covered African stories in the American and British press. Exposés of state torture and the chaos caused by multimillion percent inflation have been reported thanks to brave Zimbabwean journalists, determined foreign correspondents (and their Zimbabwean on-the-ground co-reporters and sources), and courageous lawyers. The Internet, short-wave radio broadcasts, and plain old newsprint all helped spread the Zimbabwean story around the world and, crucially, back into the country.

I worked in Zimbabwe for 23 years, writing for *The Guardian* and *The Economist*. For most of that time, other journalists and I could report relatively freely about events. But since 2000, when Mugabe's presidency was challenged by a new opposition, he has worked to muzzle the press, though he

did not mind when journalists concentrated on his seizures of white-owned farms. He wanted the world to view him as the radical African leader who rid his country of white farmers, a vestige of colonialism.

What Mugabe did not want the press to report was how he was using systematic state torture and violence against blacks opposed to his rule. When I uncovered human rights abuses against black Zimbabweans, Mugabe and the state media labeled me a "terrorist." I was knocked out by one of Mugabe's so-called "war vets" who hit my head with a rock. In May 2002, I was jailed for two days and charged with publishing a falsehood, a crime that carried a two-year jail sentence.

My lawyer, Beatrice Mtetwa, defended me brilliantly, and I was acquitted. I continued my reporting until May 2003, when I was abducted by state agents and held captive with a hood over my head and forced onto a plane out of the country. At that time, I was the last resident foreign correspondent in Zimbabwe. Since then foreign journalists have had to sneak into the country as tourists and do their reporting undercover. Several have been caught by authorities, includ-



An image created by Zimbabwean graphic artist Chaz Maviyane-Davies. *Courtesy of the artist.*

ing New York Times correspondent Barry Bearak, who spent several days in jail earlier this year. He, too, stood trial and was acquitted thanks, again, to Mtetwa's legal representation.

Beatrice Mtetwa is one of the outstanding heroes of the battle to keep a shred of the free press alive in Zimbabwe. She has defended several journalists, both foreign and Zimbabwean, as well as many more opposition supporters and ordinary Zimbabweans. She has been beaten twice by police, but this has not deterred her from crusading for the rule of law. Mtetwa has also represented the handful of courageous Zimbabwean journalists who continue to write for the international media, including The Associated Press, Reuters, Agence France-Presse, The London Times, and the Telegraph.

Visitors to Zimbabwe are struck by how overwhelming is the pro-Mugabe propaganda spewed forth by state newspapers, television and radio. Many Zimbabweans complain that no matter how hard they try to ignore the constant stream of state diatribes, it still gets to them.

The Mugabe government shut down the country's most widely circulated newspaper, The Daily News, in 2003, and now the country's two daily newspapers are both state-owned government mouthpieces that spout virulent rhetoric that media-monitoring groups and the European Union have blamed for whipping up government supporters to carry out the antiopposition violence witnessed this year.

Two fiercely independent weekly newspapers have managed to keep publishing in Zimbabwe. The Independent and The Standard, both owned by Trevor Ncube, publish on Fridays and Sundays, respectively. They directly contradict government propaganda, report on abuses, and uncover corruption scandals. Their journalists have spent many nights in jail, but they remain determined to continue.

"Each week we are never sure which story or what headline is going to land some of us in jail," said Standard editor Bill Saidi of the constant threat that

looms over the papers.

The state holds a monopoly on all television and radio broadcasts. The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation competes with the state newspapers for the most shrill pro-government coverage.

Radio news is crucial because it reaches Zimbabwe's rural areas, where more than 60 percent of the population lives. Although the state controls all AM and FM broadcasts, enterprising Zimbabwean journalists are managing to pierce Mugabe's "radio curtain." Three shortwave broadcasts are beamed into Zimbabwe featuring special reports critical of the Mugabe regime:

- "Short Wave Radio Africa," created by Zimbabwean journalist Gerry Jackson, is produced in England and broadcast back into Zimbabwe.
- "Studio 7" is produced by the Voice of America in Washington, D.C., with exiled Zimbabwean journalists Ray Choto and Blessing Zulu, and it is relayed back into Zimbabwe.
- The "Voice of the People" is produced in the Netherlands and sent back into Zimbabwe.

The shortwave reception for these shows is often scratchy, but these efforts all have devoted listeners. The Mugabe government has jammed the broadcasts, using equipment purchased from China. The rebel shortwave stations get around the jamming by sending news bulletins via text message to thousands of cell phones in Zimbabwe and by sending their stories on the Internet. Zimbabwe has an estimated 100,000 Internet users of a total population of 13 million, a high ratio for Africa.

Several exiled Zimbabwean journalists take advantage of the new technology with online news services:

- Former Daily News editor Geoff Nyarota fled Zimbabwe in 2003 after he was arrested six times and received two death threats. Now in exile in the United States, he edits an online paper, The Zimbabwe Times, which features reports by journalists in Zimbabwe.

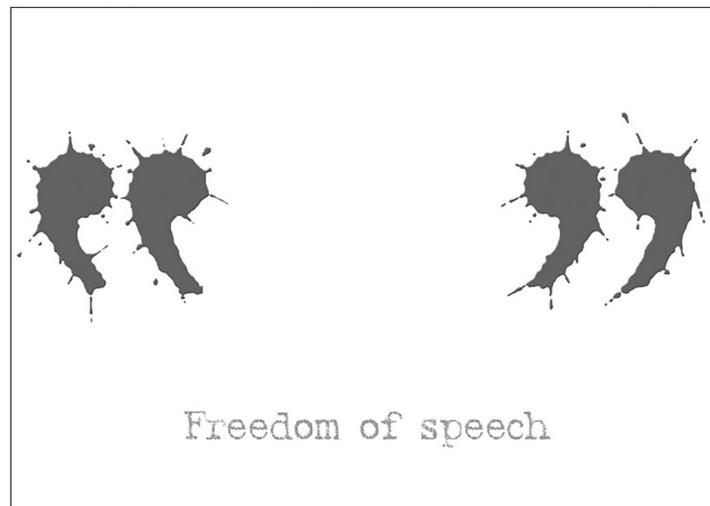
- ZimOnline is produced by Zimbabwean journalists in Johannesburg, South Africa, and highlights breaking stories.
- ZWNNews is a daily digest of stories about Zimbabwe that is compiled from a wide variety of news sites including British, American, South African, and Zimbabwean newspapers.

Many Zimbabweans access these sites from Internet cafés in Harare and other major cities. Zimbabwe's secret police, the Central Intelligence Organization, have caught on to this, and agents now haunt the cafés to hunt for any antigovernment activity.

Exiled journalist Wilf Mbanga spotted a loophole in Mugabe's stringent antipress laws that allow the importation of newspapers printed outside the country. He launched The Zimbabwean, which has achieved wide circulation in the country. [See Mbanga's article on page 51.] In the past few months the government has slapped a hefty import duty on the paper, and its delivery truck was fire-bombed. The Zimbabwean's articles are also available on its Web site [www.thezimbabwean.co.uk].

Foreign correspondents continue to surreptitiously sneak into the country as tourists. Many use local Zimbabwean journalists to provide reporting from townships and rural areas where they are not able to go unnoticed. Although the Mugabe government tries to control the news, determined journalists—Zimbabwean and foreign alike—have battled to keep getting the story out to the international community and the Zimbabwean people. At a time when people in this country are suffering with hyperinflation, a repressive government, violence against those who oppose Mugabe, who has refused to relinquish power, there is great need for this kind of extraordinary effort. ■

*Andrew Meldrum, a 2008 Nieman Fellow, reported from Zimbabwe for The Guardian and The Economist.*



## Graphic Art as Political Commentary

The arresting images (above, on page 47, and on the following page) created by Zimbabwean graphic artist Chaz Maviyane-Davies are editorial comments presented as art.

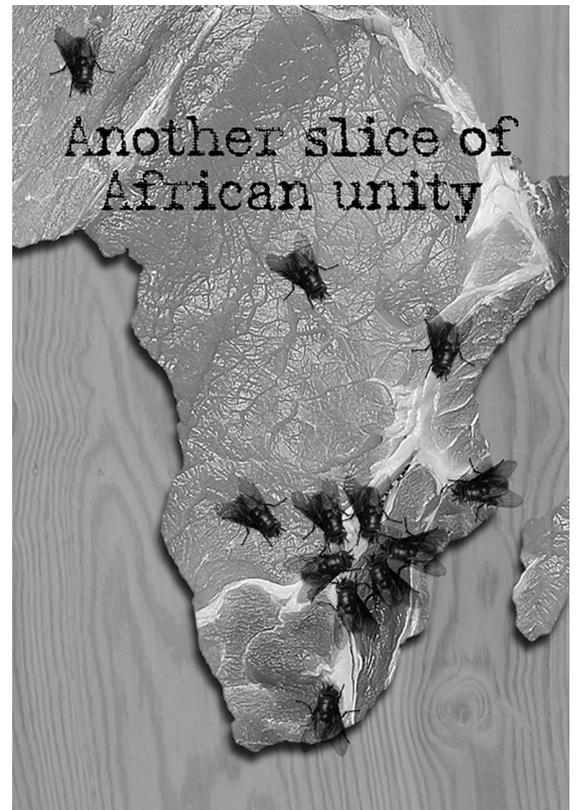
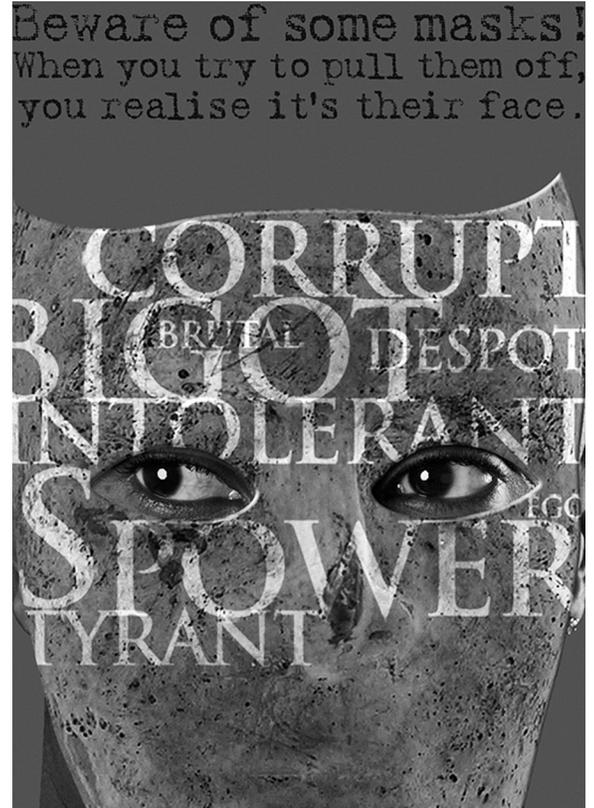
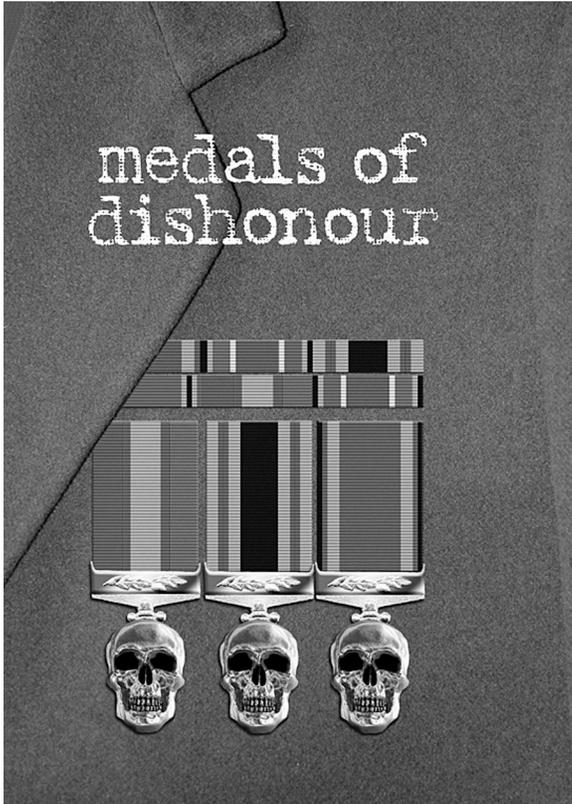
Stifled by racial discrimination in white minority-ruled Rhodesia, Maviyane-Davies went into exile and studied art in Britain. He returned to majority-ruled Zimbabwe in 1982 where he reveled in the liberation of his country and established himself as a sought-after graphic artist, both locally and internationally. He became known for combining his commercial work with messages of African liberation and human rights.

“If design is used to sell perfume and lipstick, why can’t it also be used to promote democracy and the values of human rights? I would not be happy as an artist if I didn’t do that,” said Maviyane-Davies.

When Zimbabwe was wracked by state violence in the run-up to the June 2000 election, Maviyane-Davies launched his own campaign in which he designed a graphic image commenting on the election every day for a month. He created another series of daily graphic commentaries during the presidential election campaign in March 2002. “I was horrified to see my country descending into dictatorship

right before my eyes,” he told me. “I created these images to stay sane.... Design is my weapon. I call my work ‘creative defiance.’”

His stark, sharp designs with pointed antigovernment messages traveled across the Internet and were reproduced throughout Zimbabwe and abroad. Sensing that he and his family were no longer safe, Maviyane-Davies left Zimbabwe. He is now professor of communication design at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, and he continues to create designs that promote democracy and human rights. More of his work can be seen at [www.maviyane.com](http://www.maviyane.com). ■—A.M.



Images courtesy of Chaz Maviyane-Davies.

## Zimbabwe: Telling the Story, Reporting the News

‘The finer points of journalism have, regrettably, had to be compromised in the desperate battle for access to information. This is guerrilla journalism ...’

BY WILF MBANGA

**W**hen Zimbabwe’s President Robert Mugabe and his political party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front, lost the presidential and general elections in March for the first time in their 28-year history since liberating Rhodesia from colonial rule, Mugabe’s chief election officer, Emmerson Mnangagwa, blamed the media.

Mnangagwa singled out *The Zimbabwean*, the country’s mass circulation weekly independent newspaper, and SW Radio Africa, an independent broadcaster, for having adversely influenced the electorate. Within days our truck carrying 60,000 copies of the Africa Day (May 25) edition of *The Zimbabwean* on Sunday from South Africa to Zimbabwe was hijacked and torched by eight plain-clothed gunmen in unmarked vehicles brandishing new AK-47 assault rifles. Speaking at a government media event a few days later, Mugabe’s press secretary, George Charamba, declared that the government would “deal with” *The Zimbabwean*. He moved fast. By the beginning of June, a new “luxury” tariff had been officially announced, which slapped punitive duties on all foreign news publications.

Mugabe’s battle against the independent media hit a new low in 2003 with the passage of the misnamed Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). This draconian legislation made it mandatory for all journalists and media organizations operating inside the country to be registered (and therefore policed) by the Media and Information Commission (MIC). Headed by an unashamed Mugabe apologist, Tafataona Mahoso, the MIC holds the dubious distinction of having closed down five independent newspapers including Zimbabwe’s first



independent daily, *The Daily News*, and its sister *Sunday*, in its first two years of existence. Exploiting a loophole in AIPPA, *The Zimbabwean* is published outside the country and trucked in from South Africa for sale on Thursdays. The entire content of the paper is available on *The Zimbabwean* Web site ([www.thezimbabwean.co.uk](http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk)) each Wednesday at midnight, with updates made several times each day during the rest of the week. A link to it is also sent via e-mail to online subscribers. Since the beginning of June, *The Zimbabwean* has been subjected to exorbitant charges of 40 percent duty, plus 15 percent value-added tax, as well as a surcharge of 15 percent—all payable in foreign currency. Prior to this duty being imposed, the paper was charged in local dollars at the rate of 10 percent. Because of this financial situation, we’ve been forced to suspend publication of the *Sunday* edition and cut severely our print run for the *Thursday* edition—from 200,000 to only 60,000 copies per week. Even at this limited level, we’ve had to pay

At three o’clock one morning, the head of Zimbabwe’s Central Intelligence Organization in the town of Chipinge, accompanied by a gang of men, arrived at the home of Crispin Rambo, a car washer, and broke down his door. They beat him and hit him on the head with a piece of angle iron, then drove him in the official vehicle some 40 kilometers before beating him again and leaving him unconscious. Three hours later, after regaining consciousness, he was rescued by a stranger, who took him to the Movement for Democratic Change offices in Chipinge. He was admitted to S.A.S.U. Hospital in Mutare. *Photo by Lylaani Dixon.*

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more than \$100,000 between early June and July 29 in duty costs to the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority. In addition, the loss of our truck forced us to incur expenses of \$40,000 in transport hire charges to get our newspapers into Zimbabwe.

Frantic project proposals to donors have elicited funding for another truck and 100 tons of newsprint, and checks poured in from well-wishers in response to British newspaper reports about the paper's situation. But the cost is just too astronomical. While we have funds to enable us to keep going for another few weeks—after that, who knows?

### Guerrilla Journalism

The Zimbabwean has grown quietly from 10,000 copies a week when it began in February 2005 to 200,000 copies in the run-up to the March elections—having become the largest newspaper ever to be published in Zimbabwe. It effectively penetrated Mugabe's media blackout and gave accurate information and hope to millions of Zimbabweans suffering at home under Mugabe's rule. Active market penetration into the rural areas provided information, as opposed to crude propaganda, to the people who had hitherto formed Mugabe's main stronghold. At the same time, our Web site grew phenomenally—peaking at 3.8 million hits a week during the election period. The paper edition is also available in 52 countries through newspaperdirect.com.

Because of the AIPPA legislation, it is not possible for our reporters—who are not officially accredited—to operate as journalists within the Zimbabwean system. This means that they cannot attend or cover official events, nor can they seek official comment from police or army spokesmen. Simply by being in

the country—and doing any reporting about what's happening there—means they are constantly at risk of being arrested, beaten or worse.

In the past few years countless



While celebrating the victory of Mathias Mlambo in the Musirizwi area of Chipinge, Daniel Simango, 24, was attacked and beaten by four ZANU-PF youths (members of Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front party), one of whom stabbed him in the eye. He ran into hiding, then came to the Movement for Democratic Change offices in Chipinge, and from there he was brought to the S.A.S.U. Hospital. *Photo by Lylaani Dixon.*

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**Simply by being in the country—and doing any reporting about what's happening there—means [our reporters] are constantly at risk of being arrested, beaten or worse.**

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numbers of journalists have been harassed, arrested, beaten, tortured and locked up. Among them was Gift Phiri, chief reporter for The Zimbabwean, who was tortured and had his finger broken by Mugabe's extra-legal militia forces (dressed in police uni-

forms) last year. Cameraman Edward Chikomba has been killed. In no case of physical torture, harassment or murder of a journalist has there been a conviction.

Under such conditions it is virtually impossible to operate as a professional news organization. We do our best to get the story out and break the silence by exposing the appalling human rights abuses and government corruption. The finer points of journalism have, regrettably, had to be compromised in the desperate battle for access to information. This is guerrilla journalism and, as in guerrilla war, shiny boots and smart parade-ground salutes have to be sacrificed to get the battle won.

### How We Report

We gather our news from a variety of sources. Zimbabweans love to tell stories. There is no shortage of well informed, thinking

people to offer opinion pieces and analysis. We have countless contributors—all unpaid. In addition, through the years there have been numerous "leaks" from disgruntled intelligence and military officers. It might surprise some to learn that many government officials at all levels have been keen to provide us with information. On some occasions, even cabinet ministers are eager to be our Deep Throat.

In such situations, there is only one way we can protect our sources from horrific consequences: We must give them total anonymity. And so we have. The same applies to members of various opposition political parties operating in Zimbabwe, among whom we can always find people with good information to pass along. The challenge for us is that human nature being what it is, the temptation to embellish information is always

present. So we need to corroborate and check what we are told, and so we do this to the best of our ability while protecting the identity of those who gave us the information. There is always the niggling doubt that the information could be planted—and that our newspaper could be used to further someone’s agenda. In fact, there have been a number of instances when we’ve spotted government intelligence attempts to destroy our credibility. This is a constant worry.

If, after publication, somebody approaches us with an alternative viewpoint or new and different information that presents the “other side” to a story we published, we provide them with equal opportunity to make their point.

Modern technology has been a helpful partner in enabling us to publish news about Zimbabwe while being thousands of miles away. (Those of us directing publication of *The Zimbabwean* face the threat of death at the hands of Mugabe’s forces if we return to Zimbabwe.) Digital media allow citizens within Zimbabwe to report news and send the information and photographs to us. The *Zimbabwean* receives more than its fair share of its news in this way; today, reports received from nonjournalists in Zimbabwe is perhaps the main source of the information contained in our columns.

However, communicating with our reporters (and citizen reporters) on the ground inside Zimbabwe is a huge challenge. Apart from the constant electricity blackouts, bandwidth is limited, and e-mails are monitored by government officials. We work on the premise that our e-mails are intercepted and telephone calls bugged. All of this does not make for clear communication. Those who provide information to us also have to avoid

public places and Internet cafés where Central Intelligence Organization operatives and informers always hang around. At great cost, we’ve provided laptop computers and various means



The Meikle farmhouse in Zimbabwe, where 19-month-old Jesse Sazukwa lived, was burned by the farm’s owner and a young man from ZANU-PF, according to a report given by her mother. Because of the fire, Jesse received medical attention, which likely saved her life because her doctors treated her malaria as well. *Photo by Lylaani Dixon.*

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**[Our reporters] are under strict instructions not to meet new sources in isolated spots, not to take information or informants at face value, and to always make sure that someone else knows exactly where they are.**

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of communication to our staff reporters so they don’t need to rely on these public locations.

We are fully aware that those who report for *The Zimbabwean* are constantly at risk. They are under strict instructions not to meet new sources in isolated spots, not to take information or informants at face value, and to always make sure that someone else knows exactly where they are. At the newspaper, we receive lots of threats, and we do not take them lightly. Mugabe’s militia, as well as state security agents, are more than capable and willing to thrash, torture and even to kill journalists. We rely constantly on the guidance and assistance of Lawyers for Human Rights, who are always ready to rush to court on our behalf, as they’ve had to do on several occasions.

In mid-July another “official” death list surfaced and made the rounds of *Zimbabwean* Internet sites. There was a chilling new dimension to this one. After listing pretty much every known living *Zimbabwean* journalist not working for the state-controlled media, the final paragraph says, “The majority of those named on the list, although they are living in the bliss and security of the Diaspora and the anonymity of cyberspace, their family members will not be so lucky.”

Despite the family being sacrosanct in *Zimbabwean* culture for centuries—and never before threatened—Mugabe has taken horror to new heights. This action flies in the face of everything decent, as what was once unthinkable has become reality. My fellow journalists and I have chosen to fight Mugabe to the death. We are prepared to face the repercussions of our actions. Some have already paid the ultimate sacrifice. But can we put our families at risk? That is a tough one. ■

*Wilf Mbanga is the editor of The Zimbabwean.*

# The Emotional Tug of the Zimbabwean Story

‘I’ve fallen hard for the country and for its people and ache to go back. And when I am there, I feel more challenged as a reporter than I’ve felt anywhere else.’

BY TRACY McVEIGH

I still have a postcard my father sent to my elder sister when he was working in Africa. The year was 1968, and it shows a street in Salisbury, the capital of Rhodesia. When he came home, I remember how much I loved hearing his stories, especially the ones about him being charged by a bull elephant. As a child I was fascinated, too, by this picture.

More than three decades later, I stood in the same spot as the photographer did when he took that picture, but now the name of the city and the country were different. In front of me was a view of Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe, and I recognized the spot because it looked so much the same, yet the fortunes of the people who lived there had changed beyond recognition. In 1968, the country—transitioning from one name to another—was proceeding on its journey from colonialism through white minority rule and war, moving toward independence.

When I first went to Zimbabwe two years ago, I arrived as a British journalist working for *The Observer*, a publication effectively banned from the country. Zimbabwe was in a state of long-term and devastating economic crisis—one that showed no promise of being turned around—and I had a hard time persuading my editor there was much new to write about this failing African state.

This year a hotly contested presidential election and a real desire for change among an oppressed people breathed life into the Zimbabwean story. And the wave of murderous violence that followed the March election, won by opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai, has kept the world’s attention on this beleaguered country, even as up to a

third of its population has fled overseas, its economy has deteriorated even more, and its aging president, Robert Mugabe, has transformed himself into the continent’s stereotypical despotic madman.

There has been criticism, expressed certainly by several of *The Observer*’s readers, that the British press gives a level of coverage to the Zimbabwe crisis that it would never dream of giving to other African countries, especially places like Sudan and Congo, where substantial loss of human life is occurring. Conflict in Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea is almost ignored by the Western news media. Undoubtedly the British colonial link and a historical familiarity with Zimbabwe (and Kenya fits the bill here, too) piques the interest of both the British reader and journalist.

There is recognition and ease of communication between cultures when there has been an historic connection. But the downside—as a reporter working for a publication in Great Britain—is the impossibility of reporting the Zimbabwean story in a vacuum. For us, our nationality is the first thing every Zimbabwean with whom we speak wants to know, and once this information is given it taints any interactions we then might have.

There are some big, lingering grudges and, as a British journalist, Zimbabweans expect me to know and understand these festering issues of contention. They stretch back over the decades and involve the duplicity by the British authorities that have enabled the Mugabe regime to be so forthright in its rejection of international criticism. In its dealings since

it first annexed Shona land to create Rhodesia in 1890, Britain has made mistakes of an eye-watering order, and the Blair government’s belief that it could simply put the past behind and get on with a new era in its relations with Mugabe, the hero of independence, was naive in the extreme. There are many Zimbabweans who fervently believe that the British government promised to compensate Zimbabwe over land stolen by white farmers—a pledge that, in all probability raised behind closed doors, was never made anywhere near public enough to be taken as a serious political commitment.

## Working in Zimbabwe

Of course, there are the practical difficulties of working there. To start with, Mugabe and his regime have banned most foreign press from entering or reporting from Zimbabwe; to enter the country, then, is to be an illegal. (I think the prison sentence is six years, but it changes.) It’s not safe to stay in a hotel because police raid them frequently, looking for foreign journalists. Just staying there on your own or having a laptop in the room puts you under suspicion, so someone has to be willing to let you stay in their home. And though an astonishing number of people I have met have been willing to do so, that kind of hospitality puts their safety and security at risk.

Working in Zimbabwe is a risky business, but it is not a war zone, nor is there anything remotely heroic in just keeping your wits about you and maintaining as low a profile as possible. It’s the Zimbabweans who run the real risk—those who house

and feed foreign journalists and talk with them. Several opposition party members I've interviewed have later been subject to beatings, and one man was killed.

The possibility that talking to a white journalist in any way raised their profile among their neighbors and made them more identifiable to their enemies preys on my conscience. It's those kind of issues that are the hardest to deal with. Perhaps this is why I've found it offensive when a minority of British and American TV reporters, notably John Simpson of the BBC, tacitly present their presence in the country as some kind of extraordinary news event in itself. With the suffering going on in Zimbabwe, with people struggling for basic food and medicines, with the dozens daily swimming a crocodile-infested river to swap one kind of destitution for another, those Western journalists who manage to get past the poorly staffed and noncomputerized immigration authorities at Harare airport have a duty to go easy with the self-congratulatory attitude.

I don't dismiss the dangers that exist in Zimbabwe for all journalists. Those dangers are very real. Foreign journalists must take enormous care inside Zimbabwe to avoid arrest and imprisonment, and I know several who have spent a far from pleasant few days in a Harare cell, including one who was lastingly traumatized by the experience. And I've had a few adrenalin-pulsing run-ins with police and an encounter in the bush with a trio of armed war veterans with the hardest eyes I have ever seen. That moment left me with a recurring nightmare and a strong sense that I had a lucky escape.

Zimbabwean reporters and editors who've tried to work in their country as independent journalists have faced much harassment, including arrests and beatings, with police raids and abrupt closures and fire bombings of presses and offices. The threat to their lives—and their families—is very real,

and the struggle to keep independent newsgathering in operation has been a courageous business. The Zimbabwean, the newspaper edited and produced by exiles before it is smuggled each week into the country, is an extraordinary operation of defiance and bravery that has without question held up the spirits and hope of many tens of thousands of people trapped by the grip of Mugabe's oppressive regime. [See the article about The Zimbabwean on page 51.]

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**It's the Zimbabweans who run the real risk—those who house and feed foreign journalists and talk with them. Several opposition party members I've interviewed have later been subject to beatings, and one man was killed.**

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As I look at the risks this story holds for me, I always return to the fact that I choose to go to Zimbabwe. There have been a lot of places I've worked as a journalist and many people I've met with whom my engagement has been fleeting; I've written a story and moved on. But in reporting on the humanitarian and political crisis afflicting Zimbabweans, I've developed a deeply emotional as well as professional interest in the story. I've fallen hard for the country and for its people and ache to go back. And when I am there, I feel more challenged as a reporter than I've felt anywhere else. It's an addictive feeling, and sometimes it is hard to sort out whether my impulse to return is driven by my love of the place or by an adrenaline-related response to the challenges of working there, which makes this feeling akin to the attraction war correspondents develop to working in conflict zones.

Resident foreign journalists also

have faced the constant threat of harassment and harm. A few years ago, The Observer's Andrew Meldrum was beaten by Mugabe's forces, jailed for two days, and put on trial for two months, where he faced a two-year jail sentence if found guilty of "crimes" related to his work as a journalist. He was also abducted, held captive with a hood over his head for 12 hours, then illegally forced onto a plane and taken out of the country. With his departure, Meldrum became the last resident foreign journalist in Zimbabwe.

[See story by Meldrum on page 47.] Then there is the exceptional, dogged determination of my journalistic colleague, The Guardian's Chris McGreal, who spends months at a time illegally inside Zimbabwe. Several times McGreal has been named by Mugabe's mouthpiece newspaper, The Herald, as an "enemy" of Zimbabwe. His calm, informative reporting has earned him the deep animosity of many within Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front, Mugabe's political party, who have the power to do him gross harm.

This kind of unobtrusive, intrepid and honest reporting is an essential force in trying to prevent Mugabe and his forces from hiding from the international community's eyes the desperate plight of ordinary Zimbabweans. In this kind of effort, journalism, too, assists its own reputation at a time when such a lift is so desperately needed. ■

*Tracy McVeigh became foreign editor of The Observer in 2002. This year she became the newspaper's chief reporter and has covered stories throughout the world. Africa, and Zimbabwe, in particular, hold special interest to her. She has also produced short news videos for Guardian Unlimited, The Observer's Web site, including those about Zimbabwe, at [www.guardian.co.uk/world/video/2008/mar/29/zimbabwe](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/video/2008/mar/29/zimbabwe).*

## Reporting on the White House From the Outside In

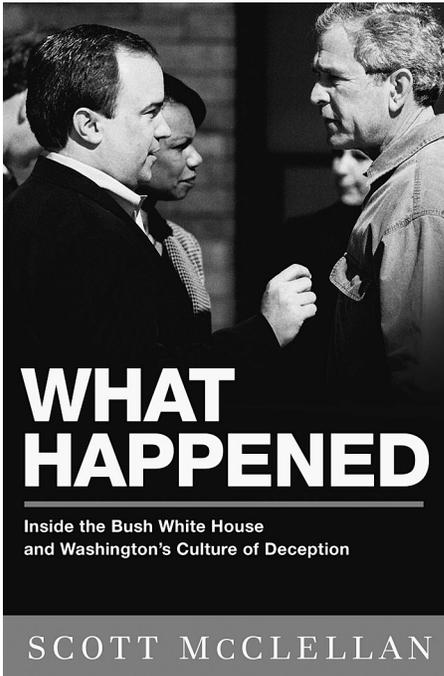
‘If reporters entrusted to cover the White House know we are in the midst of a “truth-deficient” environment, what is the most responsible way to do our work?’

BY AMY GOLDSTEIN

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**What Happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington’s Culture of Deception**  
Scott McClellan  
PublicAffairs. 341 Pages.

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Just after lunch on February 1, 2007, a jury in a federal courthouse a block from the U.S. Capitol sat, utterly rapt, watching a few moments of old videotape. The trial, the first I had covered in more than two decades, was the celebrated case against I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, Vice President Cheney’s former chief of staff. Libby was on trial for lying to investigators about whether he had slipped to reporters the

identity of a covert CIA officer whose husband was an early critic of the Iraq War.

The brief video clips that captivated the jurors showed President Bush’s press secretary in the early fall of 2003, Scott McClellan, at the familiar podium in the White House briefing room. On the tape, McClellan was insisting that Libby and two other senior members of the administration had not leaked information about the officer, Valerie Plame. “I spoke with them, so that I could come back to you and say that they were not involved,” McClellan assured the White House press corps.

Prosecutors had fought hard to play the videotape during the trial, telling the judge that the press secretary’s assurances undercut Libby’s defense that he had been scapegoated by the White House—and heightened Libby’s motive to lie about his role in the leak when he would be interviewed by FBI agents investigating it soon afterwards.

In the end, the jury believed neither McClellan nor Libby, convicting the vice president’s longtime right-hand man of perjury and obstructing justice.

Now, two years after he stepped down from the podium for the final time, it turns out that McClellan is the one who believes he was scapegoated by the White House. “I threw myself in front of the bus,” is the way he describes it. He says he was

“knowingly misled” and ordered to tell an unwitting falsehood in order to protect three of the President’s men.

His complicity in the White House’s deceptions about Libby is a central, gnawing episode in a progressive disillusionment—with Washington and with a President in whom he believed—that McClellan traces in his book, “What Happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington’s Culture of Deception.” McClellan’s main argument is that the Bush White House, like several before it, fell captive to a “permanent campaign” mentality in which political marketing—whether of the Iraq War, Social Security or, in this instance, the reputations of top aides—became paramount, even if it eclipsed the truth.

### A Revisionist Appraisal

It is an unlikely critique, coming from McClellan, who gravitated to Bush as a young politico, followed him from Texas into the White House, and spent a half-dozen years articulating the President’s message. Predictably, when “What Happened” was published in the spring, McClellan’s revisionist appraisal was condemned by several of his former colleagues. But as I pored through the pages over the summer, many of its basic themes rang true, from my experiences with the Bush White House and

with Scott himself.

I covered the White House for three and a half years of George W. Bush's first term until I decamped to Cambridge for a year, in part because I wanted to gain perspective, away for a time from the venomous political climate in Washington that McClellan describes. During those years, my focus was writing about domestic policy issues. Given the way issues were divided among the press office staff, I interacted with Scott, while he was the chief deputy, more frequently than with Ari Fleischer, Bush's first press secretary, or with the office's other deputy.

McClellan, I found, was guarded and faithful to the White House's party line, but usually honest. I know of at least one occasion on which he was a source of information for one of my colleagues, then turned around and berated this reporter, publicly insisting that the story he personally had leaked was untrue. But I do not recall any such episodes firsthand. If McClellan was spinning me, he usually would acknowledge it. If he was not allowed to answer a question, he would tell me that, rather than lie.

Once he took over as press secretary during the summer of 2003—just a few months before he would erroneously vouch for Libby—he sometimes seemed more stilted, awkward. It is hard to know whether this lack of grace at the briefing room podium was because he was, as he now suggests, trying to reconcile his talking points with his conscience. Or perhaps he simply was less agile in that more public spot.

It is hard to know, too, what to make of his revisionism. Is he sincerely remorseful, now that he has reflected on his time in the White House? "... we perpetuated the endless investigations and scandals we'd vowed to move beyond," he writes, "by engaging in spin, stonewalling, hedging, evasion, denial, noncommunication, and deceit by omission." Is he bitter? ("I sacrificed my own credibility," he writes, "for the sake of the administration.") Or is he,

as his critics contend, cashing in or trying to advance his career prospects by distancing himself from a President who has become extraordinarily unpopular?

In a sense, though, McClellan's motivation for what he has written is beside the point. "What Happened" describes a corrosive style of behaving with the press, the public, and the opposing political party that was familiar to me and to any other reporter who has covered the White House during this administration, "... a truth-deficient culture," as McClellan

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**It is hard to know whether this lack of grace at the briefing room podium was because he was, as he now suggests, trying to reconcile his talking points with his conscience.**

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describes Washington in one of his book's more memorable phrases.

He raises the issue, debated widely ever since the Iraq War began, of whether the press was, as he contends, "too deferential." Even this issue, significant as it is, is not the heart of the matter. Reporters' questions, no matter how incisive, cannot compel a White House to provide answers—or honest ones.

### **Journalistic Coping Methods**

For me, the essential thing is this: If reporters entrusted to cover the White House know we are in the midst of a "truth-deficient" environment, what is the most responsible way to do our work? As my editors knew well, it is a question that nagged at me throughout my time covering the Bush White House. It influenced my reporting methods and the stories I chose to write.

Confronted with the "hedging,

evasion, denial, noncommunication" that McClellan has now confessed, I learned to report indirectly, from the outside in. It was a curious aspect of my beat that, although I was assigned to cover the White House, some days I did not speak with anyone there until late afternoon or early evening. It was more productive, I discovered, to spend the day pursuing other sources, often in Congress or among interest groups aligned with or in opposition to the administration—anyone who had a strong self-interest in ferreting out what was going on inside. The insights I gained in this way gave me leverage, once I finally called McClellan or someone else in the White House, to confront them with what I already knew. It was not a perfect reporting strategy. Sometimes, officials yelled at me—or, on occasion, my editor—that we would publish a story at our peril, refusing to confirm what we knew to be true. Yet, it enabled me to break stories before the White House wanted them out—to pierce, in other words, the infamous Bush "message discipline."

In the administration's early weeks, this indirect reporting method enabled me to write that Bush was about to abandon a half-century tradition in which Presidents had relied on the American Bar Association for advice about the qualifications of potential federal judges—a move that foreshadowed years of ideological disputes over the administration's judicial nominations. Later on, I was able to write about disagreements within the White House over how quickly to pursue changes to the Social Security system and about cuts the administration was on the cusp of proposing in nonmilitary parts of the federal budget.

The other habit I adopted was an obsessive resistance to being a passive stenographer. The rhythm of White House reporting can make it difficult at times to write with enough balance and detachment. This is particularly true on the road, when members of the press corps cover a presidential speech, then have perhaps 90 min-

utes to file a story before boarding a charter flight back to Washington. Increasingly, I prepared for such travel days by reporting hard ahead of time, gathering history, context and people with divergent views who agreed in advance to send me their reactions immediately after Bush spoke. In this way, the stories I wrote on those tight deadlines were less dependent on the White House message machine.

If the Bush White House influenced my reporting methods, it also affected the kinds of stories I wrote. Here are a few examples, not about Iraq (which I did not cover) but about Medicare, the vast health insurance program for the elderly that I wrote about often when it became a dominant domestic issue around the same time that the war began.

**Revealing distortions of the truth:** In early 2004, not long after Congress had passed a major law that Bush favored, adding prescription drug benefits to Medicare, a respected, nonpartisan federal employee in charge of analyzing the program's costs told me that administration officials had threatened to fire him if he disclosed that his internal calculations showed that the change would prove more expensive than the White House said. Richard S. Foster, the chief Medicare actuary for nine years, said he nearly resigned in protest after his boss in the Health and Human Services Department had ordered him to "cease responding directly to Congress" about the cost of the legislation. Foster told me he believed his boss was acting under instructions from the White House.

**Writing about negative space:** What the President does not say, I came to believe, can be more telling than what he does by shedding light on his governing style and on evasions of policy questions for political advantage. I was particularly struck by this when I covered a speech that Bush gave the day after his 2003 State of the Union Address. It had become customary for the President to fly somewhere in the country the morning after his annual address to Congress and the nation,

giving him a chance to draw further attention to an important part of his agenda for the year. On this day, the White House had chosen Grand Rapids, Michigan, for a Medicare speech. I remember Bush standing in front of a large backdrop that said, "Strengthening Medicare." Timing his remarks, I noted that he devoted just three minutes of his 42-minute speech

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to the topic. Even more significantly, the President and the aides who accompanied him that day repeatedly dodged the central question looming over their plans: Did the White House want to make prescription drug coverage available to everyone 65 and older who Medicare insures or only people willing to switch to managed care—a matter that carried deceptively large practical and political significance. The story I wrote that day was about what Bush did not say.

**Exploring the anatomy of the administration's efforts to manipulate public opinion:** One of the most colorful of these stories involved a videotape that administration officials sent in early 2004 to television stations across the country. It appeared to feature a reporter describing advantages of the revisions to Medicare; in reality, the woman, who ended the tape by saying, "In Washington, I'm Karen Ryan reporting," had been paid by Health and Human Services to read a script the agency had written. Two months later, when the investigative arm of Congress found that the publicity campaign violated two federal laws, that was a front-page story, too. "The

General Accounting Office concluded that the Department of Health and Human Services illegally spent federal money on what amounted to covert propaganda," I wrote, "by producing videos about the Medicare changes that were made to look like news reports."

Such stories enabled me to feel that I was doing my job with proper independence. But they were coping mechanisms in a bad reporting climate. They were not a substitute for an open rapport with people who run the government, willing to make themselves accessible to the journalists who cover them to explain what they were doing and why.

In the final pages of his book—after he chides Bush's decision to commute Libby's 30-month prison sentence as one more misplaced use of political power—McClellan shifts from recollection to a prescription for the future. His specific recommendation is to create a deputy White House chief of staff for governing. Whether a change in the West Wing's organization chart would help is debatable. But the premise behind McClellan's recommendation strikes me as sound for the White House and the press corps alike: Counterbalance attention to politics with attention to substance.

In January, a new President will move into the White House. It is uncertain whether the dynamic that McClellan says disillusioned him will outlast Bush's tenure. Certainly, intense partisanship in Washington—in McClellan's view, the root cause of the "permanent campaign"—is deeply entrenched. And, having watched how effectively Bush and his aides used presidential "noncommunication" for political purposes, their successors might be tempted to do the same thing. Still, 2009 will offer the next administration—and the journalists who cover it—a fresh chance to tell the public the full truth. ■

*Amy Goldstein, a 2005 Nieman Fellow, is a staff writer at The Washington Post who now writes nationally about social policy.*

## Editorial Cartooning: Tradition, Timidity and Transition

Missing from a lot of cartooning ‘is Mauldin’s sense of righteous indignation.’

BY CHRIS LAMB

### Bill Mauldin: A Life Up Front

Todd DePastino

W.W. Norton & Company. 370 Pages.

During the last weeks of editorial cartoonist Bill Mauldin’s life, he was visited by countless World War II veterans; many came dressed in the same fatigues they had worn more than a half-century earlier. Most of these men, in their late 70’s, 80’s and 90’s, carried medals and tattered photographs and newspaper clippings from a day long ago to share with Mauldin, whose body was in constant agony from a scalding in a bathtub accident and whose mind was ravaged by Alzheimer’s disease.

In his riveting biography, “Bill Mauldin: A Life Up Front,” Todd DePastino tells the story of how old soldiers came to pay their last respects to Army Sergeant, Technician Third Grade Bill Mauldin, who had distinguished himself not on the battlefield but by capturing the verities of the battlefield in his cartoons that appeared in the military publication Stars and Stripes.

Jay Gruenfeld, then 77 years old, was wounded five times while fighting in the Philippines. As Gruenfeld recovered in an army hospital, he received a copy of Mauldin’s book, “Up Front,” which chronicled the life and times of soldiers Willie and Joe with unmistakable irony, humor and poignancy. Gruenfeld never forgot how the book “spoke *for* him, expressing his grief, exhaustion and flickering hope,” as DePastino put it.

Fifty-seven years later, Gruenfeld now found himself at Mauldin’s bed, pinning his own Combat Infantryman Badge on Mauldin’s pajama shirt. When Gruenfeld returned home, he wrote newspapers and veterans organization to remind them what Mauldin had

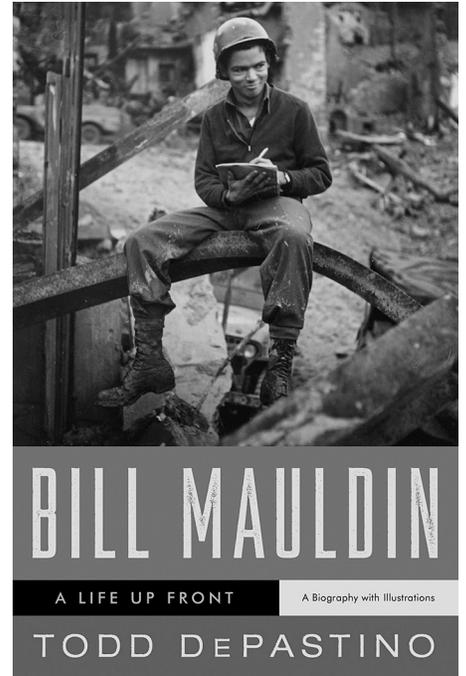
meant to American soldiers. When word spread about Mauldin, veterans came to his bedside. Others sent cards and letters, telling Mauldin that his cartoons in Stars and Stripes “saved my soul” and “kept my humanity alive.”

One veteran said that he remembered being in a foxhole full of water, reading a soggy Stars and Stripes, and then seeing a Mauldin cartoon and laughing. In one of Mauldin’s most famous drawings, Willie and Joe are in a muddy swamp. Willie, his arm around Joe, says, in earnest, “Joe, yestiddy, ya saved my life an’ I swore I’d pay ya back. Here’s my last pair o’ dry socks.”

### Cartoons’ Enduring Power

DePastino’s vignettes of soldiers coming from all over the country to pay homage to Mauldin remind us of the staying power of editorial cartoons. Cartoons are drawn of the moment, but the best ones take hold of us and never let go. They don’t just outlast other cartoons, they outlast written words. Few articles, if any, captured Lyndon Johnson’s failed presidency as well as the David Levine cartoon of Johnson raising his shirt to reveal a gall bladder scar in the shape of Vietnam.

Herblock captured the right-wing hysteria of the 1950’s by showing a man labeled “Hysteria” climbing a ladder to douse the Statue of Liberty’s flame. Thomas Nast’s drawing of the corrupt “Boss” Tweed with a bag of money for a head appeared nearly 150 years ago. The cartoon will remain timely as long as there are corrupt politicians. During World War I, Robert Minor characterized the military’s exploitation of soldiers by drawing a hulking, headless soldier standing next to a medical examiner, who gushes, “At last the perfect soldier.” These drawings are



no less timely today than they were in Minor’s day.

Mauldin responded to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy by drawing a weeping Abraham Lincoln. The grief cartoon has since become a cliché—but, in Mauldin’s hands, it captured the nation’s mourning in a way that was *sui generis*.

Mauldin’s best work was created from his sense of righteous indignation—such as his civil rights era drawing of two rednecks using their clubs on blacks demonstrating for equal rights. “Let that one go,” one redneck says to the other, “he says he don’t wanna be mah equal.” When newspapers insisted that he tone down his cartoons, Mauldin simply refused and left the profession. He would not compromise his integrity.

Mauldin’s death in 2003 came two years after Herblock’s death. Of the five giants of editorial cartooning in the second half of the 20th century, Mauldin and Herblock are dead, Paul

Conrad and Pat Oliphant are in their 70's and 80's, respectively. Only Garry Trudeau continues to produce work comparable to his best work. Editorial cartooning—like any profession or civilization for that matter—needs its heroes. Heroes, as Joseph Campbell said, tell us what we're capable of. Maybe if the profession had more heroes, more cartoonists would aspire to great cartoons and not be satisfied with their first drafts.

This is not to say there aren't a lot of good cartoonists working today. There are. The best cartoonists continue to create work that rises above caricature and simple tomfoolery to the level of satire. They are no different than the best cartoonists of any day. Editorial cartoonists should reveal our leaders as they are and not as their publicists portray them. Satire often tells the truth laughing. But the best satirists use humor as a means to an end and not as an end itself. Too many cartoonists today are simply in it for the laughs. What's missing from a lot of cartooning is Mauldin's sense of righteous indignation.

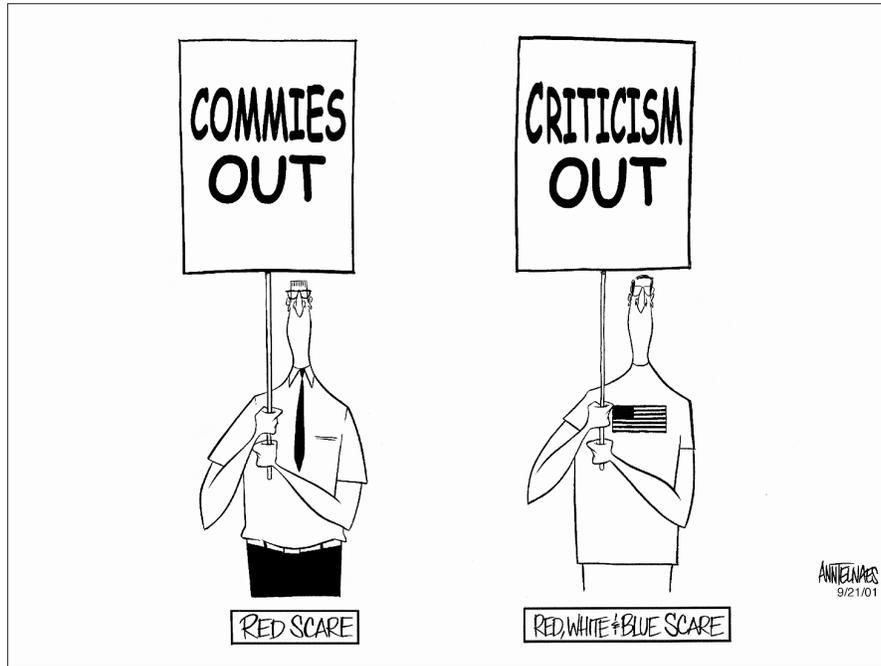
### Cartoonists and the Bush Administration

Editorial cartoonists failed, in particular, in their response to the Bush administration and the war in Iraq. Like much of the news media, too many editorial cartoonists fell in line with the government in the months leading up to the invasion of Iraq. Unlike much of the news media, however, editorial cartoonists should have known better. With notable exceptions such as Trudeau, Oliphant, Conrad, Clay Bennett, Ann Telnaes, Ted Rall,

Joel Pett and others, they acted more as government propagandists than satirists. They defended the Bush administration's claims that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction—contrary to the findings of U.N. weapons inspector Hans Blix and U.S. weapons inspector David Kay. Cartoonists were brutal and unconscionable in their

might it do to its real critics? Then-White House press secretary Ari Fleischer used his bully pulpit to condemn cartoonist Mike Marland, who criticized Bush in a drawing appearing in a few New Hampshire newspapers. If Fleischer had intended to send a message, he succeeded. Marland received death threats and had trouble finding newspapers that would publish his work.

When Washington Post cartoonist Tom Toles criticized then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the Army Joint Chiefs of Staffs, in an unprecedented act, wrote a scathing letter to the newspaper. The cartoon was innocuous enough; the administration simply wanted to punish Toles, a frequent critic. Cartoonist Ted Rall, who also has received death threats because



Cartoon courtesy of Ann Telnaes.

portrayals of Blix and Kay, who turned out to be correct, of course.

Nor have editorial cartoonists been as hard on the Bush administration as the Bush administration has been on cartoonists. Administration officials, for instance, once sent a Secret Service agent to interrogate Los Angeles Times cartoonist Michael Ramirez. Ironically, the administration had missed the point of Ramirez's drawing, which was intended to defend the President. Ramirez, of all people, should have reacted with anger to the administration's policy of intimidating critics—or those the administration even viewed as critics. Instead, Ramirez continued—and continues—to defend the administration.

If the Bush administration would go to such lengths to intimidate Ramirez, a friend of the administration, what

of his criticism of the Bush administration, defended Toles's freedom of expression in an interview with conservative Fox News commentator Sean Hannity. When discussing how Americans would react if we heard generals were trying to intimidate a cartoonist who criticized the government, Rall said, "We'd be up in arms and rightly so."

The Bush administration and its friends on Fox News and talk radio have made it a practice to accuse government critics of being unpatriotic. Yet nothing is more patriotic than free speech; criticism of the government is as American as the First Amendment. No profession takes the role of government critic more seriously than editorial cartoonists.

Fox commentator Bill O'Reilly once accused Garry Trudeau of undermin-

ing the war effort by having one of Doonesbury's long-running characters, B.D., lose his leg in battle while on a tour of duty in Iraq. "A case can be made that Trudeau is attempting to sap the morale of Americans," O'Reilly wrote, calling the strip "irresponsible." While Trudeau's cartoon spoke to the reality of what was happening with soldiers and Marines in Iraq, O'Reilly's condemnation was predictable and misplaced. He, of course, did not mention Trudeau's monetary contributions to or his involvement with the Fisher House Foundation, which supports a home away from home for families of soldiers recovering from wounds. (Trudeau donated all of the proceeds from his book, "The Long Road," which detailed B.D.'s own recovery, to this project.)

A lot of soldiers see Trudeau's comic strip not as undermining the war effort but rather as sensitively addressing the morale of wounded soldiers. "I think it's fantastic what he's doing," said Army Spc. Joe Kashnow, a 4th Infantry Division soldier who lost a leg after being wounded in Iraq in 2003.

Trudeau's treatment of soldiers is the closest any cartoonist has come to Mauldin's Willie and Joe since World War II. His defense of soldiers, however, has come with a price. Van Wilkerson, the president of Continental Features, which provided Sunday color comic packages to newspapers in nine southeastern states, strongly supported the administration. He decided to no longer include "Doonesbury" in the package of comics going to 38 newspapers and replaced it with a strip that did not criticize the administration. The editor of one of those newspapers, H. Brandt Ayers at the Anniston (Ala.) Star, called the decision "an obviously political effort to silence a minority point of view" and continued to publish "Doonesbury" inside its paper in black and white.

### New Demands of Animation

With job opportunities for cartoonists more and more scarce, many of them feel pressure to obey their editors who, in turn, are pressured by readers who



Cartoon courtesy of Joel Pett.

disapprove of their work based on political leanings. When John Sherffius worked for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch he, like Mauldin before him, quit rather than work under the onerous dictates of an editor who insisted that he include criticism of Democrats in cartoons that criticized the Bush administration. The Boulder (Colo.) Daily Camera hired Sherffius, who is currently doing some of the best work in editorial cartooning.

Editorial cartooning, to be sure, has had better days. The fate of editorial cartooning is linked to the fate of the newspaper industry. The industry is in transition. Newspapers, as they have been for centuries, are being replaced by modern technology. Newspaper editors and publishers are holding on with one hand in the past and one in the future. Online newspapers will replace printed newspapers just as talkies replaced the silent movies nearly 80 years ago. The actors who survived were the ones who made the transition.

Likewise, the future of editorial cartooning belongs to those cartoonists who can make the transition from pen or pencil to animation. Thus far, however, something has been lost in the transition. What's missing from animated editorial cartoons is that sense of purpose—that sense of

righteous indignation—that drives great cartooning. Too many editorial cartoonists are concentrating too much on being animators that they've forgotten—temporarily, I think—that they're editorial cartoonists. Too many animated editorial cartoons sing and dance but lack punch. The great Muhammad Ali floated like a butterfly, but he also stung like a bee. Ali's opponents knew when they'd been hit.

Editorial cartoonists may end up producing work better than anything in past generations. This will require that animation become a means to an end and not the end itself. Editorial cartoonists need to remember their own tradition. Editorial cartoons should grab readers by the shirt collar and shake them out of their indifference. Editorial cartoons should say something. They shouldn't defend the high and mighty. They should comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Editorial cartoonists need to remember Bill Mauldin and his approach to editorial cartooning. "If it's big," Mauldin said, "hit it." ■

*Chris Lamb is a professor of communication at the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina. He is the author of "Drawn to Extremes: The Use and Abuse of Editorial Cartoons."*

## Finger-Wagging at Journalists Doesn't Illuminate the Problem

'What we need—and this attempt doesn't satisfy—is insight into how all of this happened.'

BY DOUG STRUCK

### So Wrong for So Long: How the Press, the Pundits—and the President—Failed on Iraq

Greg Mitchell

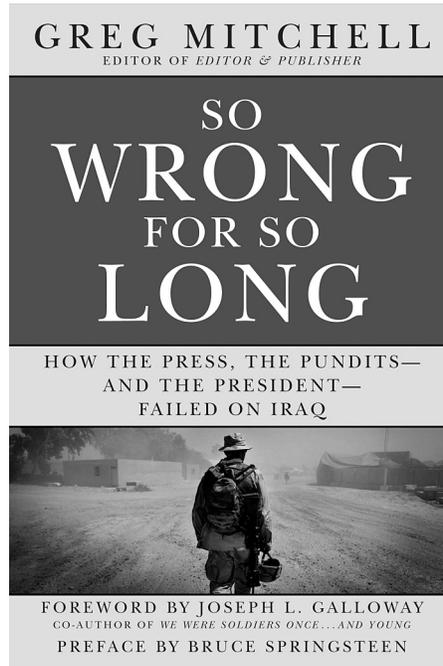
Union Square Press. 298 Pages.

President George H.W. Bush stopped the rush to capture Baghdad February 28, 1991, on a Kuwaiti road that earned the name “highway of death.” It was a shrewd call. The allied coalition that included nine Arab nations was fraying at the spectacle of Pentagon videotapes showing Iraqi troops being gunned down from the air like carnival targets as they tried desperately to retreat from Kuwait into Basra. Even the American public had little stomach to watch this massacre much longer.

On the ground, days later, the highway still was a gruesome tableau to those of us reporting on the war. The convoys had been pinched with textbook strategy: The front and rear vehicles were disabled, trapping the others between for the next strafing runs. Evidence of the terror that ensued was clear. Trucks crashed into jeeps, smashed cars, and overturned, trying to careen out of the killing line. Drivers fled, their doors open, meals left on seats, Kuwaiti loot piled in the rear. The blood on the sand suggested many did not make it.

There was another calculation in Bush's decision to end the war in 1991. If the Baghdad regime were toppled, what would happen then? No one had a plan. Saddam Hussein was vile and ruthless, but anyone with knowledge of the region knew he was a cork stop to even more chaos that would be unleashed by a void in Baghdad.

The first President Bush took harsh criticism for not “getting Saddam” by



those who were ignorant of the consequences of doing so. A decade later, his son took it upon himself to finish the job for his father. Amazingly, he still did not have a plan for what would happen afterwards. Sadly, we would all learn the consequences.

President George W. Bush set about creating support for his Iraq quest with now familiar moves: a cynical Big Lie linking Saddam Hussein with the September 11th attacks, fabricating evidence of weapons of mass destruction, and an Orwellian campaign equating patriotism with support for his war. A book by Greg Mitchell, editor of Editor and Publisher, revisits the success of this strategy with the media through a collection of his columns published from 2003 through 2007. The columns—compiled into a volume entitled, “So Wrong for So Long: How the Press, the Pundits—and the President—Failed on Iraq” rail at a compliant press and a manipulative

administration.

The only thing more annoying than a scold is a scold who was right and keeps telling us he was right. Mitchell undoubtedly was right in much of his parade of criticisms of the performance of the American press leading up to and into the Iraq War. He reminds us often in his columns how prescient he was and, if we miss the point there, he reminds us often again in the introductions he penned for this collection. His book can be fairly summed up by the mantra, “I told you so.”

I was left wondering at the point to this finger-wagging approach. Yes, we in the press should be collectively contrite for our lack of aggressive skepticism. Of course, we should learn from mistakes we made and, yes, the predominant narrative was shanghaied by one or more ambitious reporters and a masterful and unethical public relations campaign from the White House. Some of the shrewder editors in the country got fooled, along with a majority (at times) of the American people and the U.S. Congress.

But we already know all of this. We don't need another recitation of the indictment. What we need—and this attempt doesn't satisfy—is insight into how all of this happened. Reliving this period, and hearing once again about the many failings Mitchell's columns spotlight, raises more fundamentally troubling questions not answered by the stock prescription that journalists should have been more skeptical of the war claims.

Heretical as this may seem, I'm not sure it would have mattered.

Case in point: Recall how many Americans believed Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11th attack. Two years later, in September 2003, nearly 70 percent of

Americans believed this, according to a Washington Post poll. By 2007, the figure had only slipped to 41 percent (Newsweek poll) and to a still astounding 28 percent by March of this year (CBS/New York Times poll). Even back in 2003—and continuing through the years—reporting debunking this as a lie pushed by Dick Cheney (still) has been out there, even if it was offered up too weakly when the lie was first told. Yet for a sizeable portion of the public, none of this matters.

This divergence—between what the press reports and what the public believes—is profoundly discouraging for those of us who think of our jobs as resting on the premise that given the facts, the public will make reasonable decisions. To imply that America would not have gone into this war if only journalists had written the *truth* is to buy into a myth of the power of the press that I think is no longer true.

With the public relations strength and electronic bully pulpit of the presidency—bolstered by the echo chamber of the Web and the punditry of talk radio and cable TV—I'm not sure any amount of journalism critical of the conventional wisdom

of the day could have outweighed a President hell-bent on whipping up war fervor in this country, especially given the fragile national psyche after September 11th.

This raises a second critical issue: the willingness of the nation as a whole—including the press, public and Congress—to be swept by emotion into a drumbeat of nationalism. When I'd return periodically to Iraq to cover the story for *The Washington Post*, I always felt I was entering Alice's Wonderland. The reality I'd find there held little resemblance to the impression of Iraq at home. My newspaper featured its war coverage on Page One day after day. And Western and Iraqi journalists risked their lives to bring factual accounts to those pages. But the view I found at home was framed not by our reports—or other original reporting from Iraq—but by the Bush administration's spin, which characterized this as a simplistic good vs. evil struggle from which no patriotic American should shirk.

My disappointment lies not so much with the journalism, but with the seizure of American minds by a kind of patriotism that demanded support for jingoism, no matter how

wrong or foolhardy. Journalists should not have been infected by this. Nor should members of Congress or families who sent loved ones to war. Yet, too many were.

I saw the grip of this mentality on a personal level. While I made regular reporting trips to Iraq, my brother offered feverish flag-waving support for the war from his home in Pennsylvania. It was the kind of love-America, send-guns-to-Iraq support that Bush and Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld encouraged. My brother never once asked me what it was really like on the ground in Iraq. He did not want to know the truth about what was happening there. In preferring to hide behind blinders, he is all too typical.

In our business, too many of us did fail to dig hard enough. But the failures that let this war happen went beyond those of journalists. ■

*Doug Struck, a 2004 Nieman Fellow, reported from Iraq nearly a dozen times between 1990 and 2006 for The (Baltimore) Sun and The Washington Post. He is a freelance writer in Boston.*

## Connecting the Threads of Democracy and Journalism

'Too often, the decision—based on expedience and expenditure—to publish what is popular or entertaining trumps what is necessary.'

BY GERALD B. JORDAN

### Moyers on Democracy

Bill Moyers  
Doubleday. 416 Pages.

School children don't like history. Why should they? It's a topic that has been so thoroughly and successfully derided from my parents' generation, when it was dismissed as "the study of dead people," to mine as "the study

of dead white people." Now, my students refer to it as "the study of dead white males." So this generations-long resistance toward understanding how our democracy came to be and how it continues to function carries forth into our most fundamental civic role, as voters turn their backs to reason or plunge their heads into the sand.

It is during our election season that any residue of understanding about

the historic roots of how we came to be who we are—and why it matters today—gets quashed further in the babble of AM talk radio and dumbed down by political ads and the rarity of critical assessment of their distortions. With the Internet so pervasive in our communication, we find ourselves in the throes of deciphering damage done by disinformation so effortlessly spread on it.

Certainly, disinformation is nothing new, especially involving political campaigns, but it is nonetheless a great relief to be given a restored sense of hope in the form of “Moyers on Democracy,” a wonderful collection of talks veteran journalist Bill Moyers has given in recent years in which he lays out when, where and how we, as Americans, have gone off track. Not surprisingly, the quality of our democracy and the quality of our journalism are deeply entwined. As Moyers told the National Conference for Media Reform in May 2005, as he addressed the Bush administration’s attempts to curtail PBS (including the pressure to cancel his PBS show), “We’re seeing unfold a contemporary example of the age-old ambition of power and ideology to squelch and punish journalists.”

### Abandoning Responsibility

Wall Street is forcing media companies—especially newspapers—to retrench. In the past three years, 85 percent of large dailies and 52 percent of smaller ones have cut staff size, according to a comprehensive survey of editors done by the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ). Where financial markets see fat to be trimmed, editors see loss of the capacity to pursue complex stories that take days, weeks or months to uncover. Too often, the decision—based on expedience and expenditure—to publish what is popular or entertaining trumps what is necessary.

It is in these many pivotal moments of decision making that power goes unchecked. And as Moyers aptly warns, power unchecked threatens democracy.

“There are fewer pages, shorter stories, and notably fewer editors checking copy for errors. Most topics, not just foreign and national news, are getting less space and resources and are considered less important than three years ago. Stand-alone business sections are

## MOYERS ON DEMOCRACY



## BILL MOYERS

disappearing. And just five percent of editors surveyed say they are very confident in their ability to envision how their newsroom will operate in five years,” according to PEJ’s report, released in mid-July.

This is hardly the first dire reading of the state of newspaper journalism. It surely won’t be the last. In Moyers’ vision, conveyed to those attending the National Conference for Media Reform in January 2007, the press is losing ground to a “thoroughly networked ‘noise machine,’ to use David Brock’s term, creating a public discourse that has changed how American values are perceived.” He went on to observe that the “egalitarian language of our Declaration of Independence is shredded by sloganeers who speak of the ‘death tax,’ the ‘ownership society,’ the ‘culture of life,’ ‘compassionate conservatism,’ ‘weak on terrorism,’ the ‘end of history,’ the ‘clash of civilizations,’ and ‘no child left behind.’”

By now, campaigns by sound bite (and with attendant demagoguery) are accepted as the norm by young voters.

Those old enough to know (and expect) something different have all but retreated to the comfort of misinformation as they’ve become dulled by lack of perspective. A press corps weakened by attrition and under greater pressure to bolster corporate profits than to puncture governmental misdeeds and corporate greed can’t possibly keep stride.

The danger in all of this, Moyers argues, is evidenced in anthropologist Jared Diamond’s book, “Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed.” Moyers contends that “If elites insulate themselves from the consequences of their decisions,” as Diamond’s book shows has happened before, it’s a “blueprint for failure.” If defense spending is crucial—and it is—then why does a wealthy country like ours smile proudly while folks organize bake sales to support U.S. troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan? Or families buy flak jackets to send to loved ones posted in that region?

Where is the public’s outrage when U.S. soldiers are being electrocuted in their barracks showers because of faulty work being done by well-paid private American contractors? Why do so many veterans lack the kind of medical care their wounds—physical and psychological—require to return them to good health and productive lives?

“They’re counting on patriotism to distract you from their plunder,” Moyers said in an October 2001 speech on the impact of money on politics. “They’re counting on you to stand at attention with your hand over your heart, pledging allegiance to the flag, while they pick your pocket!”

On the economic front, Moyers speaks to concentration of wealth—and the gains being made by wealthier people in our nation. Citing Norton Garfinkle, writing in “The American Dream vs. the Gospel of Wealth,” Moyers noted in his 2007 speech to the National Conference for Media Reform that in the past quarter century, the top one percent of households

captured more than 50 percent of all gains in financial wealth. He goes on to cite economist Jeffrey Madrick in reminding us that “equitable access to public resources is the lifeblood of democracy.”

It is true, as Moyers points out, that in politics there are no victimless crimes. “The cost of corruption is passed on to you. When the government of the United States falls under the thumb of the powerful and privileged, regular folks get squashed.” Yet the American press is losing ground in its responsibility to keep its watchful eye focused on the process of democracy. And when some do try to check these distortions, they get bullied into silence by charges that they are unpatriotic and un-American.

The landscape is bleak, Moyers

acknowledges, but not hopeless. “Organized people have always had to take on organized money,” he said in a February 2006 lecture series called “Money and Politics.” “If they had not, blacks would still be slaves, women wouldn’t have the vote, workers couldn’t organize, and children would still be working in mines. Our democracy is more inclusive than in the days of the founders because time and again, the people have organized themselves to insist that America become a ‘more perfect union.’”

His book is a worthy call to take that fight once again to Washington. There, sensational stories still emerge about scandal and corruption, but only a relative few surface anymore about problems that “ooze,” a term favored by former newspaper editor Gene

Roberts, whose investigative reach was legendary. Today, it’s all about “breaking” news, but it’s really all of what oozes undetected that threatens the health of our democracy. It is these stories-in-waiting that seem ever more difficult to report at a time when those who own the news organizations have cut staff and slashed resources.

If the greatest sedition we can commit would be, as Moyers says, to remain silent, then it seems the contemporary economic stranglehold on the press is choking us into that quiet sedition. ■

*Gerald B. Jordan, a 1982 Nieman Fellow, is an associate professor of journalism in the Walter J. Lemke Department of Journalism at the University of Arkansas.*

## The Internet: How It Changes Everything About Journalism

‘What was once an important role—making editorial choices—starts to feel more like a bottleneck in the system.’

BY JOSHUA BENTON

### Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations

Clay Shirky

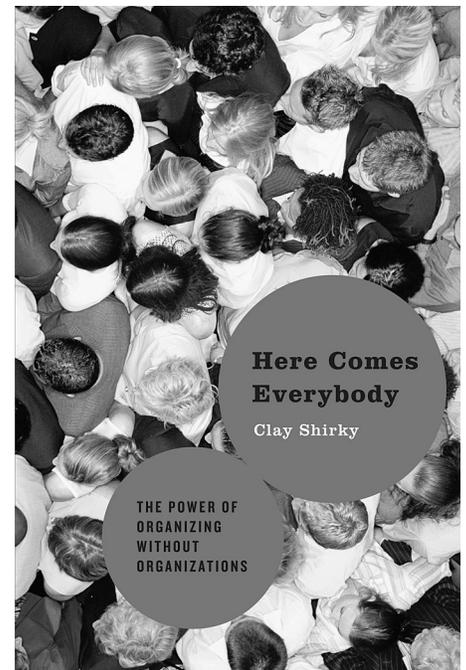
Penguin. 327 Pages.

Clay Shirky’s uncle was a newspaperman in small-town Missouri. When USA Today debuted in 1982, Uncle Howard didn’t like it one bit—he called it “TV on paper” and thought it degraded the business. But the upstart was still words and pictures on paper—just designed and distributed in a new way. It was familiar enough that Howard could quickly size up its potential impact on his business. It was a threat to the status quo, but a recognizable one.

Old newspaper hands had a lot more trouble understanding the Internet as

a competitor in the 1990’s. How could a geeky computer network render obsolete something as fundamental as a newspaper? It must have seemed absurd—as if the world’s demand for socks was suddenly replaced en masse with licorice.

Shirky’s terrific new book, “Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations,” is an excellent primer for those journalists who feel confused by the impact technology is having on their industry—those who, at some fundamental level, feel they don’t *get* the Internet. Only a fraction of the book is directly about the news business; his narrative sweeps from Belarusian political movements to a case of New York cell phone theft. But all of Shirky’s ideas echo against the established paths of human communication. His



book is fundamentally one of theory: How does technology change the ways human beings interact? And what are the implications for those institutions built around the old models?

His central argument is that the Internet makes organizing groups trivially simple. A mass e-mail, a Facebook group, or an online petition can be created in seconds and at essentially no cost. Collaboration on any significant scale used to require the power of institutions and organizations. Now they require only a good idea and the right tools.

Shirky—a professor at New York University and a consultant on Internet issues—asks you to define “group” broadly. It could be something conventional, like a Kiwanis Club or a bowling league. But a group could also be more abstract, like “fans of Thai surf-rock bands from the 1960’s.” Or “people who are interested in the Milwaukee city council.”

Traditional news organizations profited from making the connections that create and connect these groups. Those people interested in the Milwaukee city council needed a way to find the information they wanted, and newspapers made that connection. Department stores wanted to be able to reach people who needed clothes and appliances—and newspapers made that connection, too.

But with the Internet, retailers don’t need newspapers to connect with their customers; they can set up their own Web sites and mailing lists. Milwaukee’s civic-minded can start a blog and post leaked documents to their hearts’ content. It’s the same antimiddleman trend that lets Amazon cut retail stores out of the chain from supplier to buyer.

Another middleman job Shirky identifies: Deciding what combination of news was the most important for the public to know. Traditionally, that’s been a job for newspaper editors, the ones who decide what makes Page One

and what gets cut for space. But space isn’t a limited resource anymore; there’s no shortage of electrons. Instead of trusting the local paper’s brain trust to judge what’s important, any Internet user can get their news through the filter of their choice—a favorite blogger, the machine-generated Google News, or the Most E-Mailed list on some news site. Or they can find news about the near-infinite number

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**Instead of trusting the local paper’s brain trust to judge what’s important, any Internet user can get their news through the filter of their choice—a favorite blogger, the machine-generated Google News, or the Most E-Mailed list on some news site. Or they can find news about the near-infinite number of subjects American newspapers find too uninteresting to cover at all.**

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of subjects American newspapers find too uninteresting to cover at all.

What was once an important role—making editorial choices—starts to feel more like a bottleneck in the system.

Shirky argues these changes are enormously freeing. The news business, like any profession, has evolved its own set of rules about what gets covered and what gets ignored. Those rules get thrown out the window when the flow of information slips out of the control of a few village elders. And that means that a new, smarter grammar of news gets the chance to evolve from scratch.

Even though Shirky is in one sense dancing on the graves of traditional organizations, some of his best material is his analysis of how they operate. He’s

particularly smart on how professions function—on how their members prefer approval from within the profession than from society at large or on their natural reaction against new outside competition for their work.

Shirky isn’t a techno-utopian. He acknowledges that previous technological shifts engendered periods of chaos and unrest before society coalesced around a new set of rules.

But he seems optimistic that the work journalists do will survive and thrive in the new environment. As for journalists themselves—or their hopes for a decent paycheck—well, that’s another matter.

He writes several times of the role of scribes in the 1400’s—the few literate monks who hand-copied books for centuries. They were critical for the preservation of civilization. Then along comes a fellow named Gutenberg. Suddenly, scribes were no longer a necessary link between knowledge and learner. History records the dislocating impact of Gutenberg’s invention—the Protestant Reformation among them. But what happened to the poor scribes?

Shirky quotes an apologia called “In Praise of Scribes,” written by a German abbot in 1492. Instead of citing the benefits scribes brought society, the author cited the benefits all that bookcopying brought the scribes. (“His understanding is enlightened as he writes,” for one.) Before too long, scribes devolved into calligraphers, and a role once critical to human knowledge was reduced to decoration.

“In Praise of Scribes,” Shirky notes dryly, wasn’t produced by the monks it lauded. It was made on a printing press. ■

*Joshua Benton, a 2008 Nieman Fellow, is editor of the Nieman Journalism Lab.*

## Correcting the Errors of Our Ways

‘By ignoring readers’ pleas for accuracy and accountability, journalists are losing the most valuable asset: their credibility.’

BY GREG BROCK

### Regret the Error: How Media Mistakes Pollute the Press and Imperil Free Speech

Craig Silverman

Union Square Press. 366 Pages.

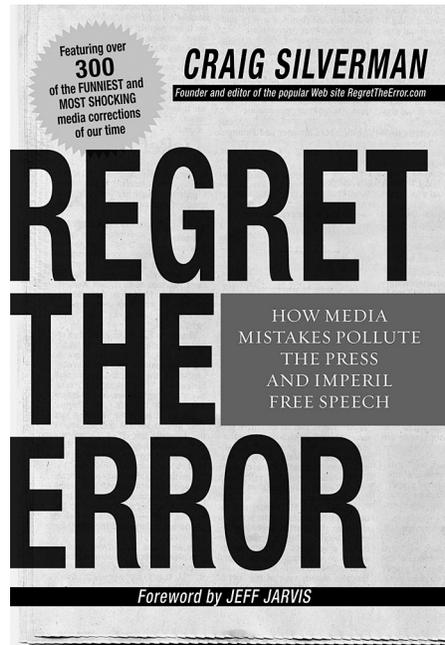
Just after seven on a Sunday morning, a message from a young woman who was to be married within hours landed in the readers’ e-mail box at The New York Times. Subject: You Ruined My Wedding Day!

In its weddings pages that morning, the Times had misspelled the surname of the woman’s husband-to-be. “At least you were consistent,” she wrote. “It was misspelled in the headline and in the announcement.” As I read her note, I kept thinking: *Please* let this be a parody of the parody that “Sex and the City” did of the Times’s wedding announcements—the episode in which Charlotte opens the Sunday paper to find that an ink splotch on her wedding photograph makes it appear that she has a moustache.

But in this case, we had a real-life Charlotte, not a reader playing a prank, as sometimes happens. As the editor who oversees corrections for the Times, I apologized to the young woman and assured her that we would promptly correct the error online and in the print edition the next Sunday.

I knew, of course, that the bride’s message was merely the first of hundreds the Times would receive that day and throughout the week. The messages and telephone calls come fast (and mostly furious):

- How can the best paper in the country keep misspelling the attorney general’s name?
- How could you write such a head-



line? “McCain Claims Victory as Democrats Duel in Iowa and Texas.” Is it proverbial parochialism that prevents you from knowing the difference between Iowa and Ohio?”

- How could someone born in 1915 be 81 years old in 2007? Even my second grader can subtract!

At the Times, we ask tough questions, too: How could such an error happen? How *did* it happen? How do we keep it from happening again? Unfortunately, we must come up with answers while publishing the Times 24/7, but in doing this it’s our good fortune to have Craig Silverman on our side—and watching us 24/7. Silverman is a journalist and founder of RegretTheError.com, a Web site that compiles media errors. And now he is the author of “Regret the Error: How Media Mistakes Pollute the Press and Imperil Free Speech.”

Journalists and news organizations

who continue to brushoff readers’ complaints or issue terse “we stand by our story” statements will no doubt find the subtitle of Silverman’s book a bit overdramatic. That’s unfortunate because the book, which includes more than 300 funny and shocking corrections, is on target with its broader message and could not be more timely.

Newspapers, and other media as well, are losing more than their stock value these days. By ignoring readers’ pleas for accuracy and accountability, journalists are losing the most valuable asset: their credibility. Silverman says it best: “It is accurate news that matters most to society. The desire for factual information is an inseparable component of news and has emerged as the foundation of modern journalism .... Accuracy is at the core of how the media builds trust.”

### Digital Media: Accuracy and Accountability

Silverman observes in his book that The New York Times has led the way for several decades in striving for accuracy and in setting the record straight. He credits a former executive editor of the Times, A.M. Rosenthal, with creating in the 1970’s what many consider the modern newspaper correction—at least in print. There are days we wish we had Rosenthal around so we could say: Here, create a new model for corrections to serve us for another 35 years—this time with the new demands of digital media in mind.

If Rosenthal were around to take up that challenge, he would have plenty of help—from the outside. Each day brings another blogger or another Web site dedicated to correcting the Times’s errors. We welcome these, just as we

ask readers to let us know when they spot an error. And like many readers, some bloggers are thorough in their research. But many post items before they check, only to learn later that they were wrong about the Times making an error. This lack of fact checking extends to Web sites that monitor media errors. Few ask for an explanation or response from us before telling the world that the Times was wrong. Media Matters for America is one that does do its reporting first. This adds to its credibility—and reduces the odds that it will have to acknowledge its own error.

But bloggers overall are increasingly correcting their own errors, as Silverman notes, and they are finding innovative ways to do so. At the Times, we have struggled for more than a year to develop a system for correcting and acknowledging online errors. From a practical standpoint, correcting every error that flashes on our Web site for even five minutes is a logistical nightmare. But Silverman, rightly, cuts the print media and their online sites no slack for using “the lack of resources” as an excuse for not doing what we manage to do each day in print.

Nor does merely correcting what was wrong in a given article appease readers. They want us to acknowledge

that we made the error. The Times does this by adding a note at the bottom of any article that has been corrected, but other readers agree with Silverman that we need a feature on our Web site that lists, in one place, all of the online articles that have been corrected. We’re working on it.

Of course, the Times compounded its online problems when it opened its archives, dating from 1851, to the public. Every day brings several e-mail messages from readers asking for a correction. Some are simple: “I thought I would look through your archives today to see if you ever misspelled Pervez Musharraf. It has been ‘Musharaff’ seven times since 2002. Please correct.” (We invoke our arbitrary statute of limitations on ones like this. No correction.)

Other errors that will live for eternity—thanks to Google—are more serious. “You wrote in 1987 that I was charged with a bank robbery. The charges were dropped. Please correct this. You are ruining my life! I can’t get a job!” (With official documentation, the Times now appends a note to the article if a case we reported involved felony charges that were dropped.) Still other readers trolling the archives want us to correct what might be considered their mistakes: “Please

correct my wedding announcement in 1992. I am no longer married to that sorry excuse for a husband.” (The announcement was accurate at the time, so no correction is warranted.)

Now, every time I receive another request to correct the status of a marriage—there are many—I wonder if I will hear again from the young bride who wrote us that Sunday morning. (Of course, I hope I don’t.) I did hear from her father later that Sunday afternoon. He wrote: “It seems that my daughter was so upset this morning about the misspelling of her fiancé’s name that she did not notice that you referred to me as her ‘late father.’ I just wanted you to know that I am indeed alive and attended the wedding. It was a great day—in spite of the Times.”

We sent the couple a belated wedding gift: corrected page proofs, both full-size ones on newsprint and smaller glossy ones. This gesture cost us almost nothing, but it earned us a great deal of goodwill—and hopefully restored their trust in us. ■

*Greg Brock, a 1994 Nieman Fellow and senior editor at The New York Times, has made his share of errors—including editing mistakes into three corrections. (He ran corrections on all three.)*

## Public Service Pulitzers: How These Stories Were Told

Reporters’ experiences ‘remind journalists why they are in their business and inform the rest of the world how the mission of the press fits into society.’

BY ELIZABETH MEHREN

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### **Pulitzer’s Gold: Behind the Prize for Public-Service Journalism**

Roy J. Harris, Jr.

University of Missouri Press. 488 Pages.

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In the summer of 1966, when he took his first reporting job on the Metro desk at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Roy Harris, Jr. was still a teenager.

The city editor at the time, Selwyn Pepper, was not much older when he worked on a series on voter fraud that won the paper the 1937 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service Journalism. So it seemed fitting early this year that one of the first-off-the-press copies of “Pulitzer’s Gold: Behind the Prize for Public-Service Journalism,” Harris’s exhaustive history of print journal-

ism’s most coveted award—the prize for Public Service Journalism—would go to Pepper on his 93rd birthday in Overland Park, Kansas.

Even on major stories like the discovery of 40,000 “ghost residents” on the St. Louis voter registration rolls, most newspapers in those days did not carry bylines. In a book that is crammed with the kind of details

that are like heroin for hard-core news addicts, Harris mentions this fact almost casually. Stop for a moment and consider the kind of egoless camaraderie that had to have existed among the team of reporters, editors, photographers and the paper's editorial cartoonist that uncovered a scandal that brought down the city's election board. Contrast that collaboration with today's star-studded newsrooms. My, how times have changed.

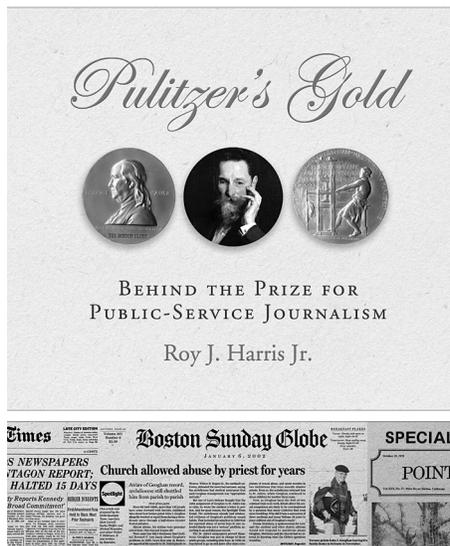
Not incidentally, Harris's father was one of the unnamed reporters who broke the voter fraud story. Roy J. Harris, Sr. also took part in the reporting that brought this Pulitzer to the Post-Dispatch in 1940 for a successful campaign against the industrial smoke that had made St. Louis one of this country's filthiest cities. In 1948, the senior Roy Harris—along, once again, with Selwyn Pepper—helped the Post-Dispatch earn another of these Pulitzers for its coverage of a mine explosion in a remote town in southern Illinois. The eternal journalistic virtue of persistence is what paid off for the Post-Dispatch reporters who stayed around the site of the Centralia coal mine catastrophe after all the other newspapers packed up. By lingering, the St. Louis reporters came across letters the dying miners had left for their loved ones.

*Dear Wife and Sons,*

*Well, hon, it looks like the end. Please tell mom and dad I still love them. Please get the baby baptized and send [the name was withheld] to the Catholic school....*

*Love to all of you.*

In a way, it would not be inaccurate to characterize "Pulitzer's Gold" as a sort of love letter in its own right. The book, reflecting five years of research and writing, evolved from a presentation Harris made for the Post-Dispatch in 2002 on the occasion of what would have been Roy J. Harris, Sr.'s 100th birthday. Roy Harris, Sr. also helped the Post-Dispatch share the Public Service Pulitzer with the Chicago Daily News in 1950, in an exposé of 37 Illinois newsmen who



held "grave train" jobs on the Illinois state payroll.

"It was a tribute to my dad, and to the paper where I got my start, and grew up reading," Harris recalled. "I worked there for five summers. I had my first front-page byline there—all of these things that mean so much to us as journalists."

Harris loved his father, who—in the fashion of a generation that seldom talked about its war experiences, either—did not make a practice of com-

ing home and regaling his family with his latest acts of professional heroism. He respected the senior Harris enough to follow him into the news business. The younger Harris went on to work at the Los Angeles Times, The Wall Street Journal and, most recently, CFO magazine, in Boston. (Selwyn Pepper's daughter Miriam Pepper also became a journalist and is the editorial page editor of The Kansas City Star.)

With a heavy note of nostalgia, Harris adds, "I did love the paper."

## Small, Approachable Stories

In a conversation I had with Harris about his book, he bristled slightly when I said I thought "Pulitzer's Gold" might be described as encyclopedic. [See box for a description of the neighborly connection between Mehren and Harris.] Far from a doorstop, one of those books that people buy—or authors hope they buy—to gather dust and look lofty on a coffee table, Harris prefers to think of his work as a collection of small, approachable stories that remind journalists why they are in their business and inform the rest of the world how the mission of the press fits into society. Really, Harris protested, the text is *only* 488 pages. It's all that tiny-type appendix that makes it feel like a bicep-builder.

In fact there is something to his

## Journalists and Neighbors: Mehren and Harris

Now for a little truth-and-disclosure. Roy Harris is both a friend and a neighbor. He and I met 10 years ago on a fundraising walk for our local wildlife rescue center. He spotted my Los Angeles Times T-shirt, and I saw his hat from the Napa Valley. Good wine and printer's ink: In a small colonial town in coastal Massachusetts, that made us instant comrades.

Throughout the arduous research and reporting process, Roy

occasionally bounced ideas off my husband, Fox Butterfield, and me. We represented two newspapers named Times, and Fox, after all, was part of the investigative team that helped The New York Times win the Pulitzer for Public Service in 1972, for publication of the Pentagon Papers. (Blessedly, the no-byline policy was long since over by then.) Roy rewarded us with kind references in his book. ■—E.M.

remonstrations. “Pulitzer’s Gold” is a newshound’s “story behind the story.” It’s all about the people who made great news and who made the news business great. It is loaded with the Aha! moments that make us, as journalists, glad we passed up the big-bucks MBA track to try to save the world instead.

There is the tale of a then-Philadelphia Inquirer reporter named Gilbert Gaul—cool byline, by the way. Gaul made a habit of donating blood whenever the Red Cross came around. One day, with his arm outstretched and a technician taking his blood, Gaul got to wondering: What happens to all the blood that is donated? Where does it go? Who processes it and how? What kind of dollar value might be placed on all that blood?

Thinking he might have a “fun little business story” on his hands, Gaul

called the head of the local Red Cross. “Why are you asking these questions?” the director snapped. “We don’t have to tell you that.”

Never say “No” to an investigative reporter. That’s all it took for Gaul to start reporting the series that won the Inquirer the public service Pulitzer in 1990 for disclosing how the American blood industry operates with little government regulation or supervision.

With the news industry changing so rapidly, Harris predicts developments in the Pulitzers, too. Before long, he believes that blogs will be included in the public service category, or perhaps as an entry zone of their own.

For unrepentant journalism junkies, “Pulitzer’s Gold” is fun to read, too. It’s history in digestible snippets. Each entry comes with its own headline, proving that Harris just can’t help himself: The man who got

his draft notice while working on the Los Angeles Times metro staff in 1968 has newsprint in his DNA. But one mission of any work of history is to record the past and, sometimes, the passing of great movements and institutions. If all the major newspapers fold up and die, disappearing like the dinosaurs that naysayers already think print journalists have become, this book will remind journalists of purpose-driven professionals whose goal was to right wrongs and, above all, to find and tell the truth.

“I am not sure whether this book is a eulogy or a call for action,” Harris admitted. “But I hope it is the latter.” ■

*Elizabeth Mehren, a professor of journalism at Boston University, was until 2007 a reporter at the Los Angeles Times.*

## The Missourian: A Unique Approach to Teaching Journalism

‘All journalism schools have trouble reconciling vocational goals and academic needs, and the conflict was felt first and most sharply at Missouri.’

BY PHILIP MEYER

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### A Journalism of Humanity: A Candid History of the World’s First Journalism School

Steve Weinberg  
University of Missouri Press.  
314 Pages.

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Steve Weinberg’s excellent chronicle took me back to the summer of 1947 when I was a rising high school senior in Clay Center, Kansas. That’s when I first fell in love with the University of Missouri School of Journalism. It was a long distance, unrequited relationship triggered by a magazine article. In that steamy July, Collier’s published “City Without Secrets,” about

the then-39-year-old newspaper war in Columbia, Missouri, between the journalism school’s *Missourian* and the privately owned *Daily Tribune*.

*You don’t have to be famous to meet the press in Columbia, Missouri. All you have to do is step off a train or bus.*

*“Help you with your bags, sir?” The young man or pretty girl who greets you so helpfully is not a porter, you find, but a reporter from the Columbia Missourian.*

*A loud noise anywhere in town will bring two or three of them on the gallop. On Broadway, driving up to your hotel, your cab locks bumpers with a*

*car backing out of a parking space. Before the dust has settled, two young men have gotten your name, birthplace and business, and you’ve apologized for remaining intact.*

Weinberg doesn’t mention that Collier’s moment of fame in his detailed account of the first 100 years of the Missouri J-School. Perhaps it was a bit exaggerated. But that newspaper war is still going on. And Missouri students still learn journalism by actually doing journalism. The Missouri method remains unique with its newsroom directed by professional editors and staffed by students who do the reporting, design, copyediting,

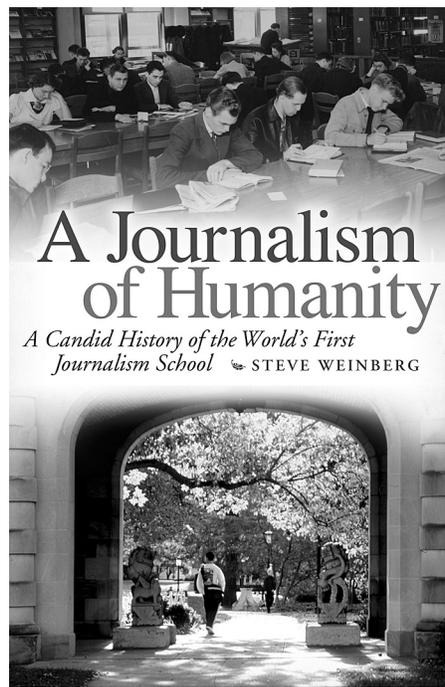
information graphics, photography and multimedia. Now we can see how it happened.

The reason that it has not been widely copied is easy to understand. The journalism deans, from Walter Williams to Dean Mills, must have had the hardest academic job in the world. In addition to the usual need to keep students, faculty, alumni, donors and the university administration happy, the dean must also work to keep an increasingly complex (now multimedia) business operation solvent. And, unlike most CEOs, deans have had to fight political battles against the privately owned competitors who incessantly complain to state lawmakers that the university-owned media are unfair competition.

This problem existed from the first day. Williams, the founding dean, had no models to emulate when he organized the first journalism school, and he faced considerable resistance from skeptical editors and publishers who thought that journalism was a craft that could be learned only on the job. Williams himself lacked a college degree and had learned the news business through a long apprenticeship like everyone else.

But building a working newspaper into the curriculum solved that problem, and the genius of Williams was that he was able to found a new newspaper and a new journalism school simultaneously. The first issue of the paper coincided with the first day of class, September 14, 1908. The university expanded the Missouri method into broadcasting with the creation of a TV station in 1953 and an FM station in 1971. More recently, an online newspaper, MyMissourian.com, featuring citizen-provided content, was added to the package.

All journalism schools have trouble reconciling vocational goals and academic needs, and the conflict was felt first and most sharply at Missouri. The model depended on faculty who had learned on the job, not through study toward advanced degrees. And so the vocational tail kept wagging the academic dog. But to maintain



its standing within the university, the school needed a PhD program and, in 1931, the faculty designed one that demonstrated academic rigor by requiring “evidence of ability to translate French and German on sight.”

The advantage of having curious PhDs and their graduate students under the same administrative roof as a grown-up newspaper could have been seen as an opportunity to use the paper as a weapons lab for discovering applications and effects of new technology as it came along. Weinberg’s account makes it clear that the opportunity was there, because he shows how the paper kept up with the industry with conversions, from letterpress to offset and pagination. But unlike professional schools in other fields, it tended to follow, not lead, the profitable and self-confident industry that it served. There is no indication in Weinberg’s account of much communication between the research faculty and the *Missourian* management about studying the implications and effects of technological change.

That changed in the Mills administration with the creation of the Reynolds Journalism Institute and faculty like Esther Thorson and

Margaret Duffy, who developed links to the newspaper industry as it began to appreciate the need for new knowledge. Thus began, Weinberg reports, “a journey into the mostly unknown reaches of the profession.”

Despite being smitten by the school when I was 16, I never made it to Missouri. Family finances could get me no closer than Kansas State in the next county. But I lucked out. Smart young professors understood what newspapers were for, and they left us free to experiment as we applied our freshly gained knowledge to the college paper.

And I started crossing paths with members of the Missouri Mafia even before I graduated. Newton Townsend, who’d received his bachelor degree from Missouri in 1948 and his masters in journalism a year later, was my city editor during a summer internship at the Topeka Daily Capital in 1951 when I got my first Page One byline. He rates a mention in the book because he returned to Columbia in 1957 to run a training program for foreign journalists. Newt’s brother Robert “Bear” Townsend, also a Missouri graduate, was The Topeka reporter who introduced me to “The Journalist’s Creed,” written by Williams and memorized by students. “I believe,” it says in part, “that suppression of the news for any consideration other than the welfare of society is indefensible.”

Those words and a supportive faculty helped sustain me when I experienced conflict with Kansas State administrators as a student editor in my senior year. I doubt that there are many of us who have not been influenced, in one way or another, by the Missouri method. You didn’t have to be there. ■

*Philip Meyer, a 1967 Nieman Fellow, is professor emeritus in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His “Precision Journalism,” first published in 1973, is in its fourth edition. He is working on a memoir about the evolution of that work.*

## The Life and Times of a Female Foreign Correspondent

A British reporter writes about reporting from war zones and overseas assignments—and adds marriage and motherhood into the mix.

BY MARY JORDAN

### Small Wars Permitting: Dispatches from Foreign Lands

Christina Lamb  
Harper Press. 390 Pages.

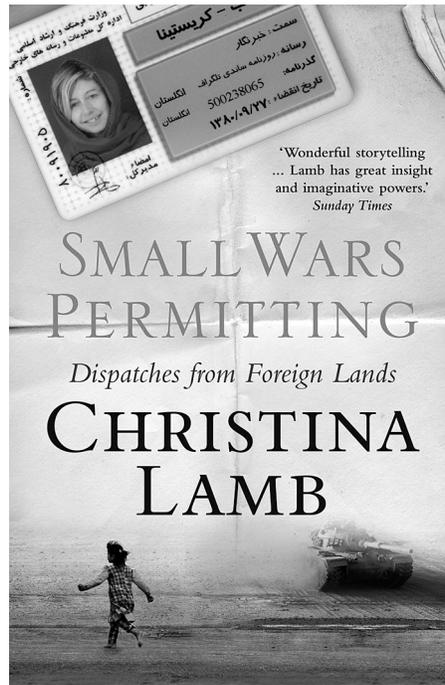
When Christina Lamb, one of England's best known foreign correspondents, started out in 1987, there were few women reporting from abroad. Her book, "Small Wars Permitting: Dispatches from Foreign Lands," which recounts her adventures from Pakistan to Zimbabwe to Iraq, is a reminder of how much that has changed.

After landing a summer intern job at the Financial Times (FT) more than two decades ago, Lamb said she wanted more than anything to be part of the "camel corps," those foreign correspondents who "would waft in with the smell of the desert or tang of the sea, dressed in crumpled linen suits, their tanned faces making the people in the office look washed out and gray. They covered wars, revolutions and insurgencies, and they spoke on the phone in exotic languages.

"They were all men and to me they were all gods."

Her first assignment was in Pakistan writing about the wedding of Benazir Bhutto; many years later she would be on the campaign bus when a bomb exploded killing many bystanders, narrowly missing Bhutto, and splattering blood on Lamb.

Lamb's career path, like so many of us in journalism, wasn't shaped by intense planning. She was an intern in the FT's newsroom when she got invited to a lunch and was seated beside a representative from Bhutto's political party. He told her Bhutto was in London if she wanted to interview her. That interview led to "a large gold-inscribed invitation that



landed on my mat" and that, in turn, prompted the FT to agree to "rent me a Tandy word processor and pay for whatever they published."

Her editors, she said, let her know that they were more interested "in Russian occupied Afghanistan than Pakistan." And, as she headed up to Peshawar near the Afghan border, she said, "my first night there someone tried to sell me a multi-barrel rocket launcher."

Lamb was hooked. She didn't mind the "shiny born cockroaches" in the hotel given the breathtaking "dark serrated ridges of the Khyber Pass."

Being a woman in the field can lead to some odd situations, such as one she recounted, which involved an often-maddening part of the job: applying for a visa. She was in Amman, Jordan in the mid-1990's, desperate to get a visa to Iraq. While waiting in a roomful of journalists, "most of

whom were male," in the Iraqi consulate she was singled out, to the envy of others, to proceed into an inner office. But there a consular official, "far from stamping the precious visa into my passport, proceeded to invite me to dinner."

She accepted. Then the roses arrived at her hotel—along with the note that he wished her to stay in Amman forever. Lamb said she told him that the Sunday Times, the paper she was then working for, would pull her home immediately if she didn't get a visa, but if she did get into Iraq, she could then come back to Amman. A problem nicely finessed.

More and more women are joining Lamb in reporting from war zones and on foreign assignments. Currently 10 of the 24 foreign correspondents at The Washington Post are female. The bigger issue now confronting our editors is how to deal with the challenges that those of us who are married, and especially those with children, face. It seems as though we are always juggling road trips with children's first steps, school concerts, soccer games, and birthdays that somehow seem uncannily to coincide with a news event or must-do assignment. Lamb, who married fellow journalist Paulo Anunciacao from Portugal in 1999 and has a son, continues to go abroad, often for weeks at a time.

Yet despite the cost to her family life, Lamb keeps getting on a plane to head to the next story, and she does her job so well that she keeps winning awards. Only one day after being released from the hospital after giving birth to her son, born 11 weeks premature in an emergency Caesarean, Lamb was still "high on morphine" when she went to interview General Augusto Pinochet. It was 1999, and

Pinochet was living in a luxury estate south of London. Another time, while other families wrapped Christmas presents and attended holiday parties, she was out on a long stint on the road, just making it back to her son and husband on Christmas morning. And, in 2003, after two months in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq, she decided to go with her husband for his 40th birthday to Marrakesh, while her mom stayed with their son. The two flew out Friday. On Saturday morning, a phone call woke her at dawn. There had been a series of al-Qaeda attacks in hotels and clubs in Casablanca, her editor told her, and since she was already there he asked her to go check it out.

“One of the most important qualities for a foreign correspondent is managing to be in the right place at the right time, but now [that] I was a wife and mother I was starting to wish events wouldn’t keep following me around. Fortunately we were staying in a beautiful old riad and Paulo felt he could survive a day alone lounging in the courtyard by the turquoise pool, reading and sipping gin and tonics, while I drove to Casablanca at top speed to wander round shattered nightclubs and hotels and interview bloodied survivors.”

Some will surely read Lamb’s book and second-guess her choices. All working mothers face difficult decisions, but these are amplified for women whose

workplace is a war zone. Whether Lamb has found the right balance in her life is for her—and her family—to judge. For many of us in the field, the bottom line is that Lamb is out there, bringing a woman’s critical eye on world events to a field too long dominated by men. ■

*Mary Jordan, a 1990 Nieman Fellow, is co-bureau chief in London for The Washington Post, a position she shares with her husband, Kevin Sullivan. She and Sullivan have been co-bureau chiefs in Tokyo and Mexico City. They shared the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting for their coverage of the Mexican criminal justice system.*

## TV News: When the Networks Were In Their Prime

During the 1960’s and 1970’s, the CBS Washington bureau—including Roger Mudd, who now writes about it—led the way for broadcast journalism.

BY BILL WHEATLEY

### The Place to Be: Washington, CBS, and the Glory Days of Television News

Roger Mudd  
PublicAffairs. 413 Pages.

If a hall of fame for broadcast journalists existed, Roger Mudd would almost certainly be voted into it on the first ballot. A probing reporter, talented writer, skilled questioner, and authoritative newsreader, Mudd was among the most respected journalists of an era when it was TV network news that brought the visual force of reporting about the civil rights movement, the Cuban missile crisis, the assassination of President Kennedy, the Vietnam War, the moon landing, and Watergate into American households.

And if an award could be given for the best bureau in the history of television news, the powerhouse CBS Washington bureau of the 1960’s and



THE PLACE TO BE

WASHINGTON, CBS, AND THE GLORY DAYS OF TELEVISION NEWS



1970’s would be an odds-on favorite to win it. Serving as home base for Mudd, Dan Rather, Marvin Kalb,

Bob Schieffer, Lesley Stahl, Fred Graham, Eric Sevareid, and a long list of other skilled news practitioners, the bureau distinguished itself year after year in a time when Washington news dominated the network evening newscasts.

In “The Place to Be: Washington, CBS, and the Glory Days of Television News,” Mudd, now 80, has combined his story with the bureau’s to create an informed and candid memoir of CBS Washington during these two decades. It was a time that Mudd calls simply the “Golden Age of Television News.”

Presided over for much of the period by the dour and demanding Bill Small, the CBS bureau was a journalistic juggernaut, as notable for its aggressiveness as it was for its skills. Mudd tells us how, time and again, its hard-charging staff put the network out in front on major stories. Acting on a Saturday morning tip, a

CBS producer runs blocks to the local courthouse and the network breaks the story of the Watergate burglary. When George Wallace is shot, a CBS cameraman captures the incident exclusively, then commandeers a passing truck to get his footage into position for broadcast. Over time, these and other superior efforts paid off: CBS passed the perennial leader, NBC, in the evening news ratings and stayed on top for almost a generation.

By any measure, Mudd, the network's top Congressional and political correspondent, was a big contributor to CBS's success, appearing often on the evening news from Capitol Hill, anchoring special coverage of major events, reporting prime-time documentaries, and filling in regularly for Walter Cronkite at the anchor desk. A perfectionist, he prized preparation and accuracy and had little regard for those who didn't.

Never was Mudd's penchant for excellence more in play than in his marathon coverage of the 67-day Senate filibuster against the 1964 civil rights bill. Filing morning, noon and night for both television and radio, his pointed, sometimes irreverent, reporting won him a national following. (Sensing the moment, CBS took out a full-page ad in *The New York Times* with pictures of Mudd reporting in good weather and bad, accompanied by the postman's motto, "Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night ...".)

Mudd concedes that all the attention swelled his head and that his stubborn insistence on high standards sometimes gave colleagues and superiors "a pain in the neck and elsewhere." He describes himself in his early years at CBS as "prickly, at times sardonic, slightly self-important, unnecessarily unforgiving of others' mistakes, reliable, trustworthy, knowledgeable, and regularly infatuated with the absurdities of the Congress in particular and the government in general." Having worked with Mudd years later, when he came over to NBC, I find it hard to quarrel with his self-description. Fortunately, his shortcomings were more than matched by his strengths.

The CBS News of the '60's and

'70's, Mudd claims, "set a standard for thoroughness, balance, credibility, commitment and journalistic skill that has not been equaled." Integrity, however, seems to have been an occasional problem. Mudd chronicles several examples of serious ethical lapses. In one, after the bureau failed to cover a hearing that turned out to be newsworthy, a CBS reporter convinced an all-too-willing House committee chairman to stage a same-day reenactment of the hearing—Congressmen, witness and all; the television audience apparently was not told that what it was watching was not the real thing. In another, a CBS reporter made repeated, illegal contact with a member of a sitting Watergate federal grand jury; wisely, higher-ups refused to air what he learned. Mudd gives no indication that either reporter was ever punished.

Mudd describes some conduct of his own that raises ethical questions. Seemingly without qualm, he accepted an assignment to report a major documentary on Senator Robert Kennedy as the senator prepared to run for President; this, despite the fact that the Robert Kennedy and Mudd families were close socially. When the documentary aired, the senator and his wife, Ethel, joined the Mudds for a celebratory dinner. Later, Mrs. Kennedy has a falling out with Mudd over his 1979 documentary "Teddy," in which her brother-in-law, Senator Edward Kennedy, stumbled badly when Mudd asked the simple, now famous, question, "Why do you want to be President?" At another point, Mudd eavesdropped repeatedly on closed-door Senate Democratic caucuses with the help of a Republican staffer who provided him with access to a closet separated from the caucus room by a paper-thin wall. If he had any doubts about the propriety of this or of doing the documentary on Robert Kennedy, he doesn't mention them.

As Mudd tells it and his colleagues confirm, the correspondents at the CBS bureau sometimes seemed as competitive with each other as they were with their rivals at other networks. Airtime was oxygen and few

at CBS were reluctant to compete for it. Mudd regards this as a good thing overall, but concedes that, inevitably, it led to tension, even personal animus. He feels that the bureau's pride in its accomplishments was an effective antidote to this, but there must have been more than a few days when CBS Washington wasn't a very happy place to be.

There was no greater competition in the bureau, of course, than the one between Mudd and Dan Rather as the time approached to replace Cronkite. Mudd writes that he was "ambivalent" about getting the post, fearing it would compromise his professional independence and personal privacy. But it's clear that, deep down, he wanted the job badly, believing Rather to be a less worthy heir, a man "calculating and suspicious of mind" and lacking "personal believability." When Rather got the job, Mudd was crushed and cleaned out his desk. Later, he went on to do good work for NBC, the "MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour," and the History Channel, but his professional life would never be quite as fulfilling, it seems, as in "the glory days."

"The Place to Be" is filled with good reporting and compelling stories, but one wishes Mudd, a student of history, had reflected more deeply on how well he and his contemporaries served the nation's needs. Was the huge amount of time devoted to Washington news appropriate? Or did it come at the expense of news about other important matters such as major social trends, medicine and science, and consumerism? By placing so much emphasis on White House coverage, did CBS News and its competitors help to create the Imperial Presidency? Was the television news "star system" of which Mudd was a part a good or bad thing for journalism and, by extension, the country?

Let's hope Mudd turns his attention to such matters in future writings, expanding the contribution he has made in "The Place to Be." ■

*Bill Wheatley, a 1977 Nieman Fellow, is a former executive vice president of NBC News.*

## The Rights and Responsibilities of Journalists

In his new book, Anthony Lewis offers a ‘cogent, yet complete accounting of some of the most searing issues that have faced journalists over the past decade.’

BY JOEL KAPLAN

As the Nieman Foundation approaches its 70th anniversary, it seems a fair question to ask: Who involved in the program has had the most influence transforming the Nieman idea from “a dubious experiment” to the premier fellowship opportunity that has had such an overriding impact on American—and worldwide—journalism?

Certainly some of the wise and avuncular curators—from Louis Lyons to Howard Simons and Bill Kovach—could stake their claim. There have

been dozens of Pulitzer Prize-winning reporters and editors who have gone through the Nieman program. And we shouldn’t forget our overseas colleagues—from South Africa to China to Russia—many of whom have tried to practice our craft in the most repressive and autocratic environments.

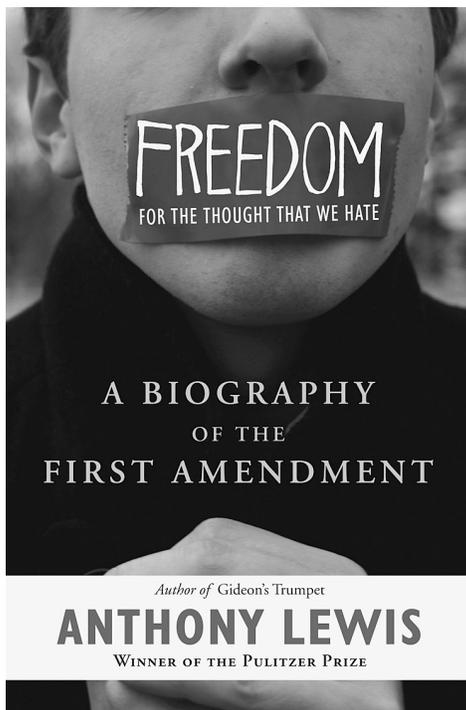
Still, my vote would have to go to Anthony Lewis, the former reporter and columnist of *The New York Times*. Lewis, a member of the Nieman class of 1957, won one Pulitzer Prize before his Nieman year and one after. But his influence on the program stems from his 15 years at Harvard lecturing generations of Nieman Fellows—and Harvard Law School students—on the First Amendment and the role of the press in a democratic society.

Lewis’s understanding of the courts, the legal process, and constitutional law served as a guide not only to those he taught or who read his columns, but journalism students and judges. His book about the watershed First Amendment case of our time, *The New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, “Make No Law: The Sullivan Case and the First Amendment,” is perhaps the most important account of the singular case that has transformed modern American journalism.

Now Lewis, who retired from the *Times* at the end of 2001, has done what many of his generation of journalists are also contemplating—penning a biography. But his is not one of a great political figure or a prominent journalist. Nor is it an autobiography. Instead, Lewis has written what its subtitle calls, “A Biography of the First Amendment.” It is entitled “Freedom for the Thought That We Hate.”

This relatively short First Amendment treatise goes beyond the issue of libel to discuss all of the legal issues facing modern journalists, from invasion of privacy to journalistic privilege, from prior restraints to copyright. It is a cogent, yet complete accounting of some of the most searing issues that have faced journalists over the past decade. Yet to Lewis, unlike *The New York Times* of the Sullivan case or the Pentagon Papers case, contemporary American journalism has come up short.

The beauty of this book resides in the realization that Lewis is neither a First Amendment absolutist nor is he a knee-jerk Pollyannaish defender of the press. In fact, Lewis chooses to level some of his harshest criticism at journalists—several of whom might actually have been Nieman Fellows:



Anthony Lewis is a 1957 Nieman Fellow.

*In the mid-twentieth century, American reporters began drinking white wine. They had college, some even graduate degrees. And their ambitions climbed. They wanted to be in Washington, the center of the world. They wanted to go to dinner parties with the secretary of state. That is a bit of a caricature, but not much. Reporters used to be outsiders, badly paid. Now they, at any rate those in Washington and others among the top in the profession, are part of the establishment, upper-middle class in outlook. They call themselves journalists rather than reporters. There is a danger in all that: the danger of becoming too close to power. It is a palpable danger in Washington. Writing critically about a cabinet member is hard after sitting next to his or her spouse at a dinner table.*

Lewis goes on to excoriate the press for its failures in covering the lead up to the Iraq War:

*Where was the press in that period? The kindest answer would be: out to lunch. When the government seized two American citizens and detained them without trial as “enemy combatants,” there were brief newspaper stories—with no sense of the constitutional stakes.*

According to Lewis, it was only when The New York Times finally published its story disclosing that President Bush had secretly ordered the wiretapping of U.S. citizens’ international phone calls without a warrant that this differential era ended.

## Privilege and Privacy

But while Lewis was willing to laud his former newspaper here, he was also quite willing to criticize it, particularly when the newspaper tried to assert the notion that journalists should have a constitutional privilege not to name their confidential sources. Failing that, most news organizations continue to argue for a federal shield law.

Most journalists are absolutists when it comes to protecting their sources even though nearly 40 years

of legal opinions say such a privilege is not absolute. Lewis shows why such a position is untenable, citing the case of Los Alamos scientist Wen Ho Lee, who was accused of committing treason against the United States. Through leaks from government sources, various press accounts detailed accusations that Lee was a Chinese spy. The only problem was that none of it was true, forcing the federal judge handling the case to apologize to him. Lee decided to sue the government for invading his privacy via the press leaks. He subpoenaed reporters from five news organizations, who refused to testify. The news organizations eventually settled by paying Lee \$750,000. As Lewis writes:

*In settling the case, the news organizations made no apology for their contemptible treatment of Wen Ho Lee. They said they agreed to settle “to protect our journalists from further sanctions” and to protect their ability to obtain information that can come “only from confidential sources.” In other words: We don’t care what we did to Wen Ho Lee; we care only about our needs.*

Lewis goes on to point out how a federal shield law could turn out to be a pyrrhic victory for the press:

*Suppose that a federal shield law had existed when Wen Ho Lee sued to seek some compensation for his nightmare ordeal. The journalists who wrote the damaging stories would have had their subpoenas dismissed, and without the names of the leakers Lee would probably have had to give up his lawsuit. Is that what a decent society should want? Would that have really benefited the press? Or would it have added to the evident public feeling that the press is arrogant, demanding special treatment?*

Lewis’s view of the First Amendment when it comes to journalistic privilege is the same nuanced approach that he takes when it comes to libel. He correctly points out that the Sullivan case “emboldened the press, encouraging

it to challenge official truth instead of acting as a mere stenographer.” But some elements of the press also became reckless with these newfound rights, which he thinks in part is what has led to the vulgarization of the public dialogue. More distressing to Lewis are court decisions that expanded the Sullivan protections from public officials to any news subject designated a public figure. This meant that businessmen and actors suddenly had to meet a much tougher—almost impossible—standard to win a libel action. Lewis writes:

*The press was pleased that more libel plaintiffs had to bear the heavy burden, but I was and remain unpersuaded. If a supermarket tabloid prints a sensational story about a movie actress, why should she have to meet the same test as a politician if she sues for libel? What does she have to do with what the Sullivan decision called “the central meaning of the First Amendment,” the right to criticize government officials?*

Yet, despite his occasional criticism of the modern press, this book is a must-read for all journalists because it clearly and succinctly describes the current state of communications law that affects all of us in this age of the Internet, blogs, online pornography, and routine copyright infringements. As all newsrooms face the current economic uncertainty and the difficulty of covering important stories with fewer resources and fewer journalists, Lewis’s book is an excellent primer on where our rights came from, how they have evolved, and what we must do to keep them. ■

*Joel Kaplan, a 1985 Nieman Fellow, is associate dean for professional graduate studies at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University.*

1968

**Jacob (Jack) Landau** died on August 9th of complications from emphysema in an Arlington, Virginia hospital. He was 74.

Known for his passionate advocacy of legal rights for journalists—and sometimes criticized for his confrontational approach—Landau was an early leader of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press and served as its first executive director for 11 years. Along the way, he created the first free 24/7 hotline for journalists dealing with First Amendment issues, started the Press Censorship Newsletter (now the quarterly magazine, *The News Media & The Law*), and worked with other media groups to petition for state and federal laws protecting journalists. He was inducted into the Freedom of Information Act Hall of Fame in 1996.

The self-proclaimed “First Amendment guerilla” was born in Englewood, New Jersey. He started his journalism career at *The Bergen Evening Record* a year after completing his undergraduate studies and went on to work for *The*

*Associated Press*, *The Washington Post*, and *Newhouse Newspapers*, where he worked as a Supreme Court reporter. In 1969 he briefly left the newspaper industry to serve as press secretary to Attorney General John Mitchell at the start of the administration of President Richard M. Nixon and helped promote legislation that prevented the government from issuing subpoenas too easily to the news media.

A year later, after federal prosecutors ordered *New York Times* reporter Earl Caldwell to hand over notes from interviews with Black Panther members, a group of concerned journalists formed the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. Landau left Mitchell in April 1970 and joined the committee, becoming its first executive director in 1974. Under his leadership, the committee took on numerous pro bono cases, fought subpoenas forcing reporters to testify about confidential sources, and successfully filed suit for access to more than 40 million White House tapes and documents that the Nixon administration had withheld from the public domain. By the time Landau resigned in 1985, he had helped the committee grow from its

part-time, shoestring-budget origins to a full service, nationwide legal defense and advocacy organization for journalists.

“Jack was the right man for that difficult time, with the Nixon Administration pursuing an antipress agenda,” recalled **Floyd McKay**, NF ’68, who wrote a 2004 journalism monograph on the early days of the committee. “Jack’s focused competitiveness and, yes, his prickly personality, supported working reporters during a very difficult time.”

Landau is survived by a daughter, a son, a brother, and his former wife, **Brooksley E. Born**.

1977

**Al Larkin**, who recently retired from *The Boston Globe*, received the Yankee Quill Award this fall for his contributions to the improvement of journalism in the New England region. The judges honored Larkin for his “steadfast support for the people’s right to know and the First Amendment in both the newsroom and the front

*Continued on page 79*

## The Morton Mintz Fund for Comparative Journalism: Established By a Gift to Columbia’s Graduate School Of Journalism

Columbia’s Graduate School of Journalism has established the Morton Mintz Fund for Comparative Journalism. Meredith Berkman, a 1987 graduate of the journalism school, and her husband, Daniel Mintz, established the fund in honor of Daniel’s father, **Morton Mintz**, NF ’64. The endowed fund will enable students, through their masters’ projects, to look outside the United States and report about how other countries might have devised better solutions for the many challenges to good government.

“I hope that this program will encourage students to look everywhere in the world for the best ideas and

practices to address serious societal problems and then bring those ideas to a wider audience in the United States and other countries,” Morton Mintz said. Journalism School faculty members will select Mintz Fund winners each autumn by screening master’s project proposals for the appropriateness of the subject matter.

In 1983 Mintz received the Columbia Journalism Award, the highest award given by the school to an individual for professional achievement. He has been a journalist for more than 60 years, including 30 years at *The Washington Post*. Since leaving the *Post* in 1988, Mintz has continued to work as a

freelance writer and, increasingly, a media critic. He is a senior adviser to the Nieman Foundation’s Watchdog Project and, as a contributor to [niemanwatchdog.org](http://niemanwatchdog.org), he has focused on a wide range of issues that profoundly affect the lives of Americans but that he believes the mainstream press ignore or slight.

In addition to his newspaper reporting, Mintz has written four books, including “*At Any Cost: Corporate Greed, Women, and the Dalkon Shield*,” 1985, and has co-authored five books, including “*America, Inc.: Who Owns and Operates the United States*,” in 1971. ■

## Edwin O. Guthman, 1912-2008: Reporter, Editor and Civic Leader

**Edwin O. Guthman**, NF '51, died at his home in Los Angeles, at the age of 89, from complications of amyloidosis, a rare blood disorder involving the build-up of amyloid proteins in the body's organs.

Guthman won the 1950 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting as a 30-year old reporter at The Seattle Times, served as national editor of the Los Angeles Times from 1965 to 1977, where he led its coverage of the Watergate break-in and political consequences, and directed The Philadelphia Inquirer's editorial pages from 1977 to 1987, developing that newspaper's editorial policy independent of the news operation.

Guthman, who was born in Seattle in 1919, the son of a German grocer and a mother who had been raised in Canada, joined The Seattle Times in 1947 after a brief time working at the Seattle Star. He'd returned to Seattle after serving in the Army during World War II, where he fought in Italy and North Africa and was awarded a Purple Heart and Silver Star. He was interviewed about his wartime experience by former NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw, author of "The Greatest Generation," who wrote of Guthman, "In any accounting of the good guys of American journalism, Ed Guthman is on the front page."

At The Seattle Times, Guthman was assigned to cover Washington State's Committee on Un-American Activities, a local entity formed to identify Communists during the McCarthy era. In this assignment, Guthman reported on the case being made against University of Washington philosophy professor Melvin Rader. According to the charges against him, Rader had attended a Communist training school in New York in 1938, a charge he denied. Guthman's investigative work—including his discovery that

the committee had confiscated hotel registry pages that supported Rader's claim that he was not in New York at the time he was said to be there—resulted in Rader's career being saved, and it earned Guthman the Pulitzer Prize.

During the next decade, Guthman's reporting focused on corruption in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, spotlighting suspicious activities of Seattle's Dave Beck, president of the Teamsters from 1952 to 1957. In 1956, his reporting led him to meet with Robert Kennedy, who was then counsel to the U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations and examining corruption in labor unions. (Beck was sent to prison for misusing union funds.) When Kennedy became U.S. Attorney General in his brother's administration, he hired Guthman as his press secretary at the justice department and worked closely with him during the time of the civil rights movement. "Kennedy admired Ed for his directness," said **John Seigenthaler, Sr.**, NF '59, a journalist who also joined Kennedy's staff. "If you asked Ed a question, you were going to get an honest answer, unvarnished," he said, in Guthman's obituary in The Philadelphia Inquirer. Guthman wrote or edited four books about Kennedy, including a memoir entitled, "We Band of Brothers."

In 1965, Guthman left that position to oversee the Los Angeles Times's national coverage. The reporting he directed on the Watergate scandal brought the paper national attention. The Times' obituary of Guthman quotes David Halberstam, author of "The Powers That Be," as saying of the paper's early groundbreaking reporting that it "brought Watergate right to the heart of the Nixon reelection campaign in a more dramatic way than any other story

so far." By 1973, it was revealed that Guthman's dual roles—with Kennedy and at the Times—had placed him #3 on President Nixon's enemies list.

In 1977, Philadelphia Inquirer editor **Eugene L. Roberts**, NF '62, hired Guthman to direct the newspaper's editorial pages. For a decade he served as that paper's editorial and op-ed editor during the time of the Three Mile Island nuclear power crisis and the city's confrontations with the radical group MOVE. When he retired, Guthman returned to Los Angeles to join the faculty of the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication, where he taught journalism for 20 years. During those years, he also served in several civic roles, including in 1993 being named to an independent panel reviewing the government's role in the deadly raid on the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas and for six years, from 1991 to 1997, serving on Los Angeles's first ethics commission, created to be an independent watchdog agency. There he participated in the drafting of new laws regarding lobbyists and spearheaded investigations of campaign money laundering in local elections.

**Jack Nelson**, NF '62, who worked with Guthman as a reporter on the Watergate break-in story, said of his former editor, "You always knew whatever he told you could be taken to the bank," according to the Inquirer obituary. And **John S. Carroll**, NF '72 and former editor at the Times and the Inquirer, was also quoted in that same obituary as saying, "If I wanted the public to see how a journalist worked, I would want them to see Ed Guthman."

Guthman's wife, **JoAnn**, died in 1990, and he is survived by four children and five grandchildren. ■

office, and exemplary outreach efforts to connect the Globe to the broad and diverse community it serves." Larkin, who started at the Globe in 1972 as a police reporter, was executive vice president at his retirement.

The Yankee Quill Award is presented annually by the Academy of New England Journalists with the support of the New England Society of Newspaper Editors and the New England Society of Newspaper Editors Foundation. Along with Larkin, three other New England journalists were honored.

1982

**Steve Oney's** article, "Casualties of War," will appear in "The Best American Magazine Writing 2008" to be published in November by Columbia University Press. The piece, which

originally appeared in Los Angeles magazine and was a finalist for the 2008 National Magazine Award in profile writing, tells the story of Corporal Christopher Leon, a United States Marine from California killed by sniper fire in Iraq. It examines his reasons for joining the Corps and details the impact of his death on his family, friends and comrades. Oney is a senior writer at Los Angeles magazine.

1985

**Mike Pride** retired as editor of the Concord Monitor in July. He writes, "I had held—and loved—that job for 25 years, after 5½ years as the Monitor's managing editor and eight years at Florida newspapers.

"My last year at the paper was a fairy tale. I was co-chairman of the Pulitzer Prize board and worked as a

reporter and columnist. I wrote extensively about New Hampshire's double-barreled presidential primary, seeing many old friends on the campaign trail. Fresh from a John McCain town meeting, **Ed Chen**, NF '85, and I had enchiladas and cervezas on a snowy Concord night just after Christmas.

"With Meg Heckman, a Monitor reporter, I did an eight-month series of oral histories with veterans and civilians of World War II. I covered town meetings and a high school graduation, interviewed authors, wrote a column on life after 60, and reported a series on a rare 15th-century painted relief rescued from the basement of a Manchester art museum. In short, I had a blast.

"The best came last. This spring, the Monitor won the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography, the first Pulitzer ever won by a New Hampshire paper. And in June, my colleagues at

## First I.F. Stone Medal for Journalistic Independence Awarded to John Walcott for Pre-Iraq War Coverage

John Walcott, Washington bureau chief of the McClatchy Company, is the first recipient of the I.F. Stone Medal for Journalistic Independence. Walcott is being honored for leading his team of reporters—then the Knight Ridder bureau—in their probing, skeptical coverage of events during the run-up to the Iraq War at a time when most U.S. news organizations failed to question the motives and rationale for the invasion of Iraq.

Established earlier this year, the award recognizes journalistic independence and honors the life of Stone, who published I.F. Stone's Weekly from 1953-1971. The award, administered by the Nieman Foundation and the Nieman Watchdog Project, will be presented annually to a journalist whose work captures the spirit of independence, integrity and courage that characterized Stone's publication.

In 2002, Walcott, then Knight Ridder Washington, D.C. bureau chief, and

two of his reporters, Jonathan Landay and Warren Strobel, produced dozens of stories that refuted the George W. Bush administration's claims about the need for war and exposed the serious reservations many intelligence, Foreign Service, and military officers had about the rush to invade Iraq. In 2006 The Knight Ridder chain was sold to the McClatchy Company. Walcott is now McClatchy's Washington bureau chief; Landay and Strobel are senior correspondents in the bureau.

In announcing the award, Nieman Curator **Bob Giles** said, "This is belated recognition of the powerful work done by Walcott in directing his colleagues in developing stories that were unappreciated and almost totally unnoticed at the time. Because so many journalists fell short in their pre-Iraq War coverage, there's a real need to recognize this dogged editor who went about his business in a resolute way to challenge many of the

justifications for the war that proved to be false."

John R. (Rick) MacArthur, chair of the selection committee, said, "In recognizing Walcott, we wanted to honor the spirit of Izzy Stone as much as the reporting done by the Knight Ridder team. And we wanted to emphasize that the spirit of I.F. Stone can still flourish in an institutional setting—that you don't necessarily have to be out there all by yourself to do the right thing."

Along with MacArthur, who is president and publisher of Harper's Magazine, the selection committee included Roger Wilkins and **Patricia O'Brien**, NF '74.

The I.F. Stone Medal will be presented in a ceremony at the Newseum in Washington, D.C., on October 7th. More information about Stone's life and work and the medal created in his honor can be found online at [www.ifstone.org](http://www.ifstone.org). ■

the Monitor and dozens of former staffers from all across the country gathered in Concord for a three-day retirement extravaganza. Among those celebrating were two Nieman Fellows, **Michele McDonald**, NF '88, and **Mark Travis**, NF '03.

“**Monique** also had a moving retirement sendoff in June after nearly 20 years as a teacher of French and other languages and cultures at a local middle school. Now we are settling into a new life together that, for me, includes many elements of my old life. I am writing regularly for the Monitor and other publications, and Meg Heckman and I have turned our wartime oral histories into a book—“We Went to War”—which should be out in October. I am also researching and writing a book about a New Hampshire editor who served as the Lincoln campaign’s secretary in 1860 and have several other projects on the horizon.”

1986

**Geneva Overholser** has been named director of the School of Journalism at the University of Southern California’s (USC) Annenberg School for Communication. She will succeed Michael Parks, the former Los Angeles Times editor who led the school from 2001 to June 2008.

“I am thrilled to join a community that I believe is singularly well-situated to lead at this critically important time,” Overholser said in a USC press release.

Overholser had been the Curtis B. Hurley Chair in Public Affairs Reporting for the Missouri School of Journalism’s bureau in Washington D.C., chairs the board for the Center for Public Integrity, and serves in several other journalism advisory groups.

She has been recognized as “Editor of the Year” by the National Press Foundation and “Best in the Business” by the American Journalism Review for her work as the editor of The Des Moines Register from 1988 to 1995, when she led the Register to a Pulitzer Prize for Public Service in 1991.

## Five Nieman Fellows Receive NABJ Awards

The National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) announced the winners of the 2008 Salute to Excellence National Media Awards in July, and five Nieman Fellows received recognition.

- **Mary C. Curtis**, NF '06, **Tommy Tomlinson**, NF '09, and Eric Frazier, The Charlotte Observer, “50 Years After Integration,” newspapers with over 150,000 circulation.
- **Derrick Z. Jackson**, NF '84, columnist, The Boston Globe, sports, newspapers with over 150,000 circulation.
- **Bryan Monroe**, NF '03, and Ebony staff, Ebony, “TheN-word,” magazine with over 1 million circulation.
- **Ju-Don Roberts**, NF '04, Liz Heron and Nelson Hsu, The Washington Post, “Fixing D.C.’s Schools,” in the new media category.

The awards “recognize exemplary coverage of the African and African-American experience by the nation’s print and electronic media.” NABJ Vice President **Ernie Suggs**, NF '09, said, “As the media landscape moves closer to the Web, journalists are finding extraordinary ways to tell stories of the black experience. My hope for the nation’s newspapers, as layoffs and buyouts become the norm, is that the content of their stories not suffer as a result but continue to show the extraordinary strength of investigative and feature reporting.”

NABJ, established in 1975 in Washington, D.C., is the largest organization of journalists of color in the nation, with more than 4,100 members, and provides educational, career development, and support to black journalists worldwide. ■

1987

**Susan Dentzer** was named editor in chief of Health Affairs, the nation’s leading journal of health policy, effective May 1, 2008. She also continues as an on-air analyst on health issues for the “NewsHour with Jim Lehrer” on PBS, where she has served as health correspondent from 1998 to 2008. Health Affairs, based in Bethesda, Maryland, is published bimonthly in print, and additional papers and articles are published weekly online. Dentzer also was appointed chair of the Global Health Council board of directors. The council is the world’s largest membership organization of groups concerned about global health and, in particular, about improving health in developing countries.

1988

**Juan Manuel Santos**, Minister of Defense for Colombia, announced in

January the rescue of 14 hostages who were being held by FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), a leftist insurgent force. Included in the rescue was Ingrid Betancourt, a former Colombian presidential candidate, who had been held in captivity for six years. In a CNN interview at the time of the release, Santos said that he hoped the rescue would be the first of many, indicating there might be as many as 700 hostages still being held.

**Will Sutton** is director of communications and strategic marketing for Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count. The multiple-year national initiative managed by MDC Inc. of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, is a nonprofit educational coalition focused on strengthening community colleges with a special emphasis on student groups that have traditionally faced significant barriers, especially students of color and low-income students.

For three years, Sutton was a professor at the Scripps Howard School

of Journalism and Communications at Hampton University and director of its Academy of Writing Excellence. Under his tutelage, several Scripps Howard School students earned internships with NBC, KNBC-TV in Los Angeles, The New York Times's Washington Bureau, the Detroit Free Press, The Kansas City Star, WNCN-TV (NBC 17) in Raleigh, The News & Observer in Raleigh, the Tribune Company's Daily Press in Newport News, the News & Record in Greensboro, the Roanoke Times, and other media outlets. In addition, some of his writers have worked for the Triangle United Way in Raleigh, the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), and earned internships and scholarships through the Freedom Forum's Chips Quinn program, the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund's editing and business reporting programs, and other prestigious internship programs.

"Hampton is my alma mater, and I love my school," Sutton told Nieman Reports. "But driving nearly four hours, one way, from my home in North Carolina to Hampton was quite tiring after three years. Though I love working with the students and helping them be successful, I couldn't resist the opportunity to help expand a national initiative like Achieving the Dream while having the chance to be home each night."

Sutton is a former editor and vice president and managing editor of the Post-Tribune in Gary, Indiana, and a former deputy managing editor at The News & Observer in Raleigh, North Carolina. He's a cofounder of UNITY: Journalists of Color and a past NABJ president.

His new e-mail address is [wsutton@mdcinc.org](mailto:wsutton@mdcinc.org). His new telephone number is 919-968-4531.

1990

**Ann Marie Lipinski** resigned as editor and senior vice president of the Chicago Tribune in July. In the Tribune article about her resignation, Lipinski was quoted as saying, "... the decision was difficult and a long time

coming, and it would be inaccurate to attribute it to any one event. I began my editorship seven months before 9/11, and in the seven years since have become accustomed and even comfortable with editing and managing through crisis and change. But professionally, this position is not the fit it once was. Personally, my family and I believe it is time." Lipinski started at the Tribune in 1978 as an intern and became editor in 2001. In 1988 she shared a Pulitzer Prize with two other reporters from the Tribune for "City Council: The Spoils of Power," a series about corruption.

1992

**Marcus Brauchli** became executive editor of The Washington Post,

effective in September. He succeeds Leonard Downie, Jr., who held the position for 17 years. The announcement came fewer than three months after Brauchli resigned as editor of The Wall Street Journal, which is owned by Rupert Murdoch. "It's both a privilege and possibly the most intimidating thing I've ever done to think about coming into an institution with such deep and proud traditions as the Post," Brauchli said in a Post article. He continued, "It's going to be a challenge, obviously, to adjust to a new culture .... I'm anticipating having to go through a steep learning curve at hyper-speed." Brauchli, who is the first executive editor chosen from outside of the Post company, will not only head the newspaper but also will supervise the editors of the Post's separately managed Web site.

## 70th Convocation to Celebrate the Old and New

The Nieman Foundation's 70th Anniversary Convocation will take place in Cambridge November 7-9, offering fellows from all classes an opportunity to reconnect, to examine the dramatic shifts in the way journalism is practiced today, and to learn more about the challenges and opportunities presented by new media. In celebrating 70 years of Nieman Fellowships, the event will look at how, despite the many changes in society and the profession, the midcareer sabbatical has offered fellows an experience that has remained fundamentally unchanged for the past seven decades.

Centering on the theme "True Grit: Advancing Journalism's Covenant in the 21st Century" and coming on the heels of the U.S. presidential election, the weekend will also take a close look at the intersection of press and politics.

Sessions include:

- Preserving Nieman Values Through the Years: A panel discussion moderated by **Bill Kovach**, NF '89,

Nieman curator 1989-2000.

- The Moral and Ethical Obligations of Journalism in a Digital World: A luncheon address by Leonard Downie, Jr., former executive editor, The Washington Post.
- Voices From the New World of Journalism: Panel discussion moderated by **Geneva Overholser**, NF '86, director of the School of Journalism at USC's Annenberg School for Communication.
- The Press and the Presidency: Dinner speech by Ellen Fitzpatrick, American historian/scholar and commentator on PBS's "NewsHour with Jim Lehrer."
- Press and Politics in the New Administration: Panel discussion moderated by **Tom Ashbrook**, NF '96, host of NPR's "On Point."

The cost for the convocation weekend is \$250 per person and includes all meals and events. For more information and to register, visit <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/events/70/>. ■

For much of his career, Brauchli worked at Dow Jones, The Wall Street Journal's parent company, as a foreign correspondent. He has been based in Hong Kong, Stockholm, Tokyo and Shanghai. In 1999 he was named national news editor, in 2003 global news editor, and in 2005 deputy managing editor. He became editor of the Journal in 2007.

**Martin Gehlen**, after many years living and working in Berlin, Germany as a reporter and editor at Der Tagesspiegel, has become the paper's foreign correspondent in Cairo, Egypt, where he expects to be working for the next five years. There he covers the Near and Middle East, including Iran as well as the French influenced Arabic states of the Maghreb region. He is accompanied by his wife, **Katharina Eglau**, a professional photographer, who for many years has specialized in visual coverage of Islamic daily life, culture and religion. Eglau's photographs appeared in the Summer 2007 issue of Nieman Reports, which featured stories about coverage of Islam. Her images can be seen at <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/07-2NRsummer/eglau-slideshow/index.php>.

1994

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**Lorie Conway** traveled to the Masai region of southern Tanzania early this summer to produce a short film about the work of a local health clinic supported by EngenderHealth, a New York-based nonprofit. The clinic focuses its work on issues such as family planning, HIV prevention and treatment, and fistula care. While filming at the clinics, Conway interviewed some parents of the hundreds of children who were being treated, and said, "It quickly became clear that family planning is both wanted and desperately needed in Africa."

Conway is an independent writer and documentary film producer for her company, Boston Film and Video Productions. Her most recent film, "Forgotten Ellis Island," came out in 2007, with a companion book published by

Smithsonian Books. Information about the Ellis Island project can be found at [www.forgottenellisland.com](http://www.forgottenellisland.com).

**Katie King** has moved to London to work with Microsoft's MSN UK portal as creative and development editor. Her role is two-fold. She leads a specially created editorial team who work on ad-funded content solutions. The team is a division of the portal advertising group that helps clients communicate with their customers and stakeholders by using the best of digital publishing tools and editorial practices. She also directs development and training programs for all of MSN UK's editorial teams. She told Nieman Reports that filling this newly created role at MSN UK is challenging and exciting. "The advertising industry is in as much upheaval and change as the journalism industry. Organizations, whether they are corporations, academia or government, are working to find new ways of connecting with their stakeholders who are increasingly Internet—and social media—savvy. We help clients understand how creating great content and robust communities online can do that."

For the past few years King was director of digital strategy for the public relations agency Burson-Marsteller in Washington, D.C. and London. Until 2001 she was senior vice president of general news for Reuters, where she had worked for 15 years.

1995

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**Anne Hull** received the Elijah Parish Lovejoy Award from Colby College in September during the annual Lovejoy Convocation, where she also received an honorary doctoral degree. Hull, a reporter for The Washington Post, won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for Meritorious Public Service for a series about the mistreatment of wounded veterans at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.. She shared the Pulitzer, and other honors that series received, with Post reporter Dana Priest and photographer Michel du Cille. Hull has been a Pulitzer finalist five times.

## A New Fellow Named to Class of 2009

Russian journalist **Fatima Tlisova** has been added to the Nieman Class of 2009. Tlisova, an independent reporter from the North Caucasus, will join the 28 other journalists whose names were announced earlier in the summer. Tlisova has worked for 10 years as a correspondent for a number of independent Russian papers and international media, including The Associated Press, Novaya Gazeta, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and the BBC. She also served as chief of the North Caucasian bureau of the Russian news agency Regnum and makes regular contributions to the Institute for War and Peace Reporting in London and the Jamestown Foundation in Washington, D.C.. More information about the Nieman Class of 2009 is available online at [www.nieman.harvard.edu](http://www.nieman.harvard.edu). ■

**Ann Marie Lipinski**, NF '90, chair of the Lovejoy selection committee, said, "Anne is an extraordinary journalist, one of the finest of her generation. She brings a level of detail and humanity to her stories that make them among the most distinctive being published anywhere. She is also a thoroughly engaging speaker and storyteller. The Lovejoy Committee is honored to bring her to Colby."

1999

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**Yu Sun** writes that she has been working as chief writer of the Chinese magazine Environmental Protection since 2005. She is also a contributor for The Women's International Perspective, a Web site for which she has written on media bias towards the Beijing Olympics, and for OOSKANews, an international publisher of global water industry news. (Yu Sun's article on the Olympics can be found at <http://>

thewip.net/contributors/2008/06/olympic\_spirit\_and\_media\_objec.html.)

Sun previously worked for 12 years as reporter and editor of the Chinese and English editions of China Environment News. Since her Nieman year, she was a 2004 international scholar at the Center for Science and Medical Journalism at Boston University, spoke at the 2005 Global Investigative Journalism Conference, and attended the 2007 U.N. conference on climate change.

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#### 2000

**Carol Eisenberg** is a senior editor at Muckety, an online site founded in 2006 by three journalists, Laurie Bennett, Gary Jacobson, and John Decker. The name “Muckety” comes from the phrase “muckety mucks.” The Web site states: “Some follow the money. We follow the muckety, producing a daily news and information site based on online databases (which we enlarge daily), extensive research, and old-fashioned journalism.” Among other things, Eisenberg analyzed the Chicago networks likely to influence Barack Obama if he is elected president, in “Chicago’s Top 100: From the nation’s heartland to Washington?” (<http://news.muckety.com/2008/05/22/chicagos-top-100-from-the-nations-heartland-to-washington/2902>).

For 30 years Eisenberg was a reporter and editor at Newsday, covering homeland security, religion and health policy, among other beats, and was a part of two Pulitzer Prize-winning teams at the paper.

**Bill Krueger**, who has been The (Raleigh) News & Observer’s government editor, is now heading a new McClatchy capital bureau that will serve both his paper and The Charlotte Observer. The bureau will be based in The News & Observer’s building, but will operate separately from its newsroom. Krueger’s job change occurs as the papers—both owned by McClatchy since June 2006—undertake a merger of four departments at the two North

Carolina newspapers.

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#### 2001

**Linda Robinson’s** book, “Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq,” has been published by PublicAffairs. Robinson is author in residence at the Philip Merrill Center for Strategic Studies at the Johns Hopkins Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. As a senior writer for U.S. News & World Report, she covered national security issues, including wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Latin America. She has also written the book, “Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces,” in which she was on the frontline with the Special Forces soldiers in El Salvador, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq and during Desert Storm. Robinson has received a number of awards, including the Gerald R. Ford Prize for Reporting on National Defense for 2004.

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#### 2002

**Michel Marriott’s** first novel, “The Skull Cage Key,” has been published by Agate Bolden. The book is in the science-fiction genre, set in the year 2042. Marriott teaches journalism at Baruch College, The City University of New York. For 19 years he was a reporter for The New York Times and has also written for The Washington Post and Newsweek. His writing during the past 10 years has focused on digital technologies and “their influence on the quickening evolution of human culture,” according to his book’s publisher.

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#### 2006

**David Heath** received the 2008 Clark Mollenhoff Award for Excellence in Investigative Reporting from the Institute on Political Journalism at its annual awards ceremony, held at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., in July. Heath and fellow reporter

Hal Bernton shared the award for their Seattle Times series “The Favor Factory,” an exposé on congressional graft. The series details how members of congress received heavy campaign contributions in exchange for obtaining funds for companies. (See Heath’s article about his work on this series on page 27.)

The judges called the series “a groundbreaking blend of print and online investigative journalism that also features the first national online searchable database linking Congressional members to defense earmarks, campaign contributions, and company spending on lobbyists.” The \$10,000 award is named after Mollenhoff, the late Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter whose landmark investigations of organized crime in America in The Des Moines Register and Tribune led to successful crackdowns on corrupt unions and racketeering.

Heath, a reporter for The Seattle Times since 1999, has won a number of awards, including Harvard University’s Goldsmith Prize for Investigative Reporting (with Duff Wilson), the George Polk Award for medical reporting, and UCLA’s Gerald Loeb Award for financial and business reporting. He was previously the director of computer-assisted reporting at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

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#### 2007

**Dexter Filkins’** book, “The Forever War,” has been published by Alfred A. Knopf. The book tracks the rise of the Taliban in the 1990’s, the attacks of 9/11, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which Filkins has covered since 2001 as foreign correspondent for The New York Times. Before moving to the Times, Filkins was New Delhi bureau chief for the Los Angeles Times. From 1987–1995 he was a reporter at The Miami Herald. Filkins received a George Polk Award for his coverage of the assault on Falluja in 2004 and two Overseas Press Club awards. He was a 2008 Fellow at the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard University. ■

## End Note

# Georgian Journalists Send Word of Their Fate

‘The situation is insane.... My friends—both journalists—were killed in Ossetia. Just confirmed that..am devastated..’

*Since 2001, Karl Idsvoog, a 1983 Nieman Fellow and professor of journalism at Kent State, has trained student and professional journalists in the Republic of Georgia. He developed the broadcast portion of the masters program at the Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management and returns there often to teach.*

**T**he free press has been taking a real beating in the Republic of Georgia. Last November, amidst political protests, Georgian special forces stormed Imedi Television. One of my former students working there as a videographer came down to greet them with a video camera and quickly found his camera confiscated, and he was ordered at gunpoint to stay on the floor and not move. Television station Rustavi 2 used to be the hard-hitting investigative station. Since the Rose Revolution, it's become the voice of the government; more than one of my students who works or has worked there tells me that stories critical of the government, quite simply, have been off limits.

Bad things happen when journalism fails. In the United States, we saw the high price paid when

journalists failed to aggressively question the administration as it marched to war. In Georgia, a high price is being paid for the government taking steps to all but eliminate the ability of an independent press to function in what was claimed by its leaders to be a democracy. How different might the situation be today if Georgian journalists had been able to do a better job of questioning the Saakashvili government? Government leaders may wage war, but it's the people of the country who must live with its consequences. —Karl Idsvoog

*What follows is e-mail correspondence that Idsvoog has received from former students and friends in Georgia who are journalists as they have covered and observed what has happened to their country, its people, and their own ability to report on these events during this war with Russia. Punctuation and grammar have been left in their original form.*

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**Rusudan Panozishvili**, student, Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management, Tbilisi.

August 10, 12:54 p.m.

Thank you Karl. I am OK. Who knows what will be? I could never imagine I would hear bombing in Tbilisi. And why? Who cares this South Ossetia if everyone would die? We have info. that very many, about 2-3 thousand Georgians are dead. And the hospitals are filled. And the government today announces that there are 92 dead! Everyone is laughing at our people, not only Russia. And here also everyone is disappointed in the only formal dislikes of the international community about Russia's steps. We are alone here and our friends, boys, journalists are dead. As we know Russians are already at Gori, Tskhinvali is lost. It is not the official info., but our boys, relations, who were



A restaurant in Tbilisi, Georgia. Photo by Karl Idsvoog.



Rusudan Panozishvili, left, and Tsira Gvasalia, students at the Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management, Tbilisi.

in Gori say that. As you would know, Russia is also bombing the peaceful towns all over Georgia. I have an impression that US and Europe and people in the world do not have the right information, what's happening here.

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**Kristina Tashkevich**, reporter, Georgian newspaper *The Messenger*, 2002 graduate of the Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management.

August 10, 4:23 p.m.

Hi,

The situation is insane. A territory near the airport was bombed. We don't know what happens tomorrow. Life has just changed into a nightmare. My friends—both journalists—were killed in Ossetia. Just confirmed that.. am devastated..

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**Eka Chitanava**, masters student at the Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management.

August 11, 4:19 a.m.

Hello Karl!

Can u see what is happening? The war is raging in Georgia, Tbilisi also has been bombed last night. Two bombes struck near

my residence, the sound of explosion was so great that windows were rattling at my home. People are in panic, refugees from various cities, and especially from Gori and Tskhinvali, are coming every day and every hour. But you know what is the most horrible, that we're in an information vacuum. Our government until the very nick of time was saying that Georgian troops controlled the territory of Tskhinvali. But it turned out that we lost this region. Gori and Tskhinvali are loaded with corpses of Georgian soldiers. But our media sources are reporting that death toll comprises just up to 100 people. European media sources are reporting about 2000. It's deceit! People are flocking to hospitals and searching for their lost relatives, friends, some of them just disappeared, some of them are dead, and most are seriously injured.

By the way, according to Georgian TV channels foreign journalists and one Georgian journalist are dead. And what is the most concerning, how reacts international community, the U.S., all the time Bush is calling for ceasefire, but there is no end to hostilities.



Kristina Tashkevich, reporter.

*Photos by Karl Idsvoog.*



Eka Chitanava, right, and Temo Bardzimashvili, masters students at the Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management, Tbilisi.

### Eka Chitanava

August 11, 6:02 a.m.

We couldn't enter Gori yesterday. 5 minutes earlier Georgian TV channel Imedi and Canadian journalists were robbed of their cars and equipment. It is very hazardous for women to go there. One woman was crying about her daughter who was raped in front of her by Ossetian and Kazak rebels. Policemen warned me not to go there because of high risk. I was with Danish journalists, helping them with translation.

So it's really difficult for journalists to penetrate across the border. Rebels are looting those people who stay in Gori and spend nights in basements.

I hope when Georgian policemen take control in Gori we will be able to cover the situation there, otherwise it's very dangerous.

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**Valeri Odikadze**, former videographer/producer/editor of Rustavi 2 Television, now journalism trainer, Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management and owner and president, Videoscope, which supplies professional video equipment/systems.

August 14, 3:01 a.m.

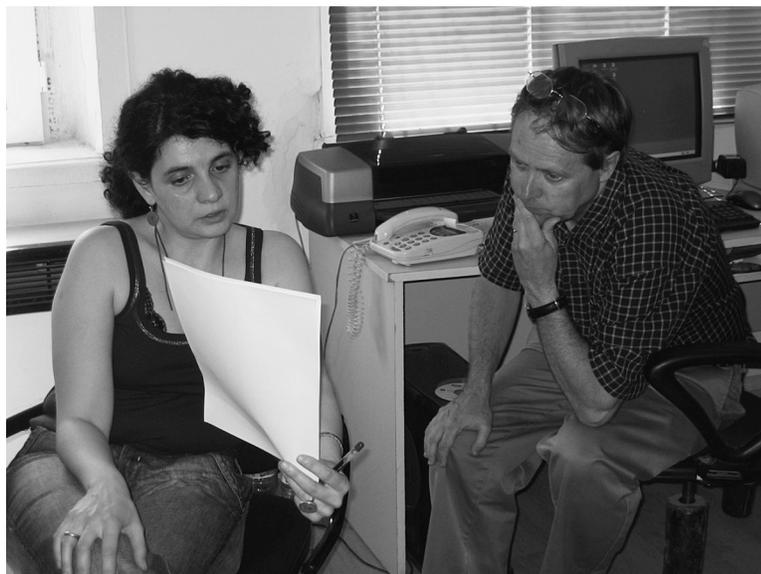
Russians went to a middle Georgia, terrorize resident people. Actually no russian make terror but north caucasus/ossetia/cozacks bandits take things from houses, take young people, young girls.

It is like 16th century.



Valeri Odikadze at a news conference.

*Photos by Karl Idsvoog.*



Tiko Tsomaia, left, an instructor at the Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management, with past academic director David Bloss. Tbilisi.

**Keti Beraia**, reporter, Georgia Public Television, graduate Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management, 2002.  
August 15, 5:36 a.m.

I'm back from Poti. It's truth that our coast-guard boats were blown up. I was covering conflict from the very beginning. I filmed how the Russian troops went to Senaki, to Poti.

We were the only TV company covering Russian troops in western Georgia. Others run away. I filmed what was left after bombing in Senaki. We saw hands, ears and other parts of people after bombing. I saw dead soldiers—that was horrible. But I kept going without panic.



Keti Beraia, reporter.

Yesterday our journalist was injured, while she had a liveshot.

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**Tiko Tsomaia**, Instructor, Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management.  
August 16

Dear Karl,

Thank you, I and my family are safe.

Situation is horrible. It is still tense, but I hope very much for better resolution. I hope for peace.

Right now our forests are on fire and Russians don't allow Georgian and Turkish firefighters to bring a fire under control. You can judge about the rest yourself.

*Photos by Karl Idsvoog.*

**Shorena Shaverdashvili**, manager of a printing company, Tbilisi.  
August 19, 2008

Dear Karl,  
Good to hear from you!

Me and my family are safe and sound. We came back to Tbilisi 2 days ago. There is so much going on that I am having a hard time finding words for what we are going through.

I am hoping this nightmare ends soon, this occupation ends soon, and this crisis does not escalate further, involving American or European military activities here in Georgia. I don't even want to think of what will happen if Georgia becomes the battleground for any kind of international confrontation. This is probably less likely, but it's a consideration.

I do not feel very hopeful, though. I expect that Russia will stay here for a long time to come. They have a lot to gain by their presence here and not much to lose—in spite of the European dependency on Russian energy and despite the international pressure on Russia. They are completely paralyzing the country and the time is on their side.

On the other hand, I cannot imagine my life

here in the presence of the Russian occupation and dominance. If the international community falls short of stopping Russia and forcing them to withdraw their forces, and we don't behave like Chechens, fighting until all our men are dead, then Russians will stay here for good, in which case I, and many other people, don't see our future here.

I wish Russia had shed its imperialistic complexes and grown out of the Cold War era paradigms, and was thinking and acting adequately to the times, or to the goals of any modern nation. I wish we as Georgians had means to stop this war and invasion from happening.

We are also having a hard time maintaining our sanity and figuring out what we can be doing, or should be doing. Functioning on a daily basis is an effort when the country is fully paralyzed, despite our President's hypnotizing and reassuring speeches. Though I realize this is no time to "prosecute" our government—now we just have to help them stop this conflict.

Before this war, we were planning to start a weekly political magazine, with an internet portal. I was in the middle of starting fundraising for it. If this country is to continue its existence, it desperately needs a news source, not propaganda machines in the form of televisions or incompetent daily newspapers with very little influence on the public discourse.

There has been a total information blackout. We receive our information mostly through international media. What we require is the local strong, independent media outlet, a watchdog, which grounds and analyzes news in a nonpartisan way and puts it in a wider perspective, so that we, as a nation, can start thinking critically again, come back to life again, act again, and find our voice again beyond what our government has to say in a constant monologue.

Any ideas on where to look for funding? In case of peace, this will be our N1 priority.

Thank you for your concern, Karl. ■

Shorena



Shorena Shaverdashvili by one of her printing company's Heidelberg presses, Tbilisi, Georgia. *Photo by Karl Idsvog.*

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STAYING LOCAL, DIGGING DEEP

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY