

Nieman Reports

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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LINKS *that* BIND US

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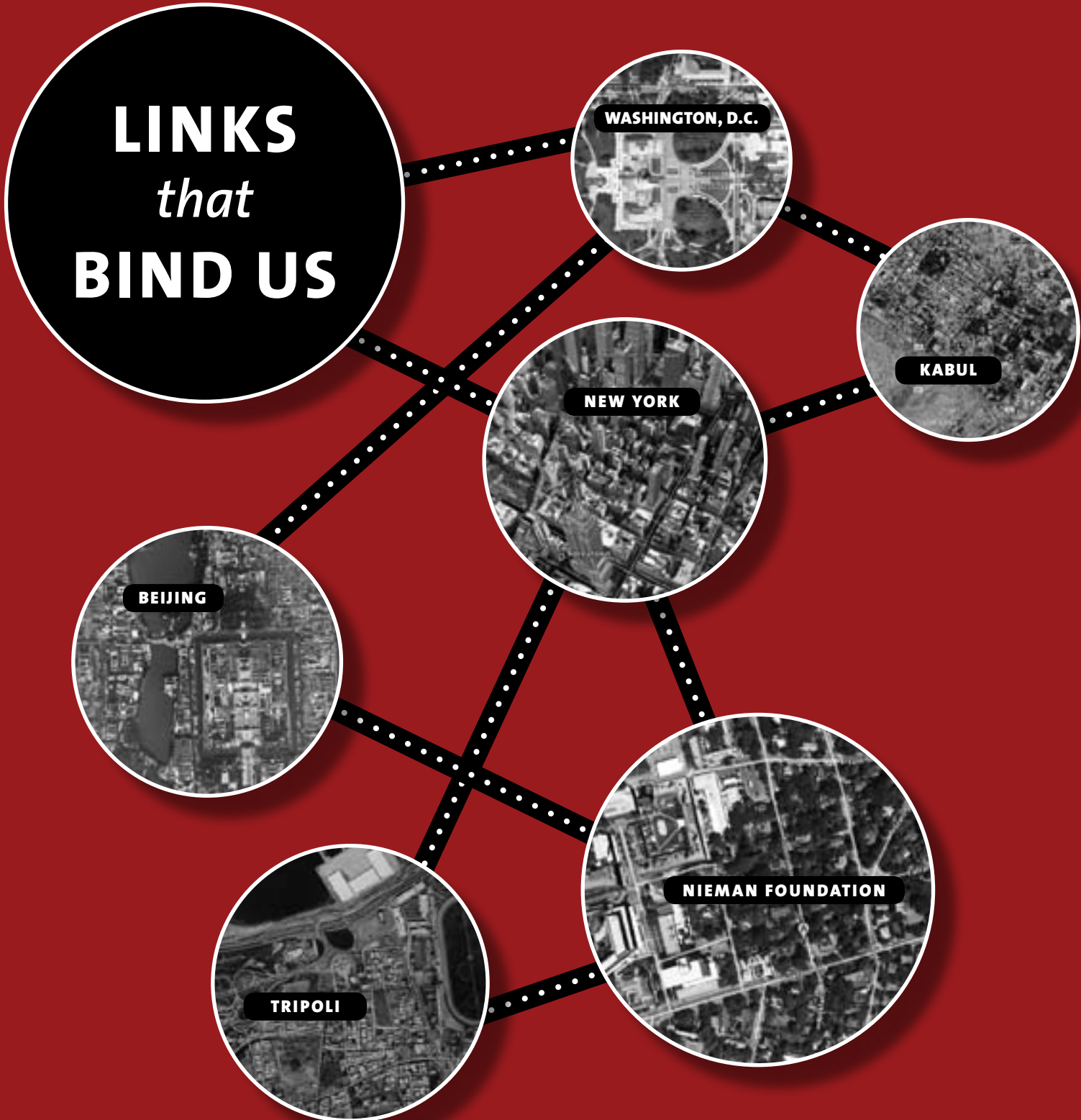
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‘to promote and elevate the standards of journalism’

Agnes Wahl Nieman
the benefactor of the Nieman Foundation

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Nieman Reports
The Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University

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Living the Legacy of the Nieman Foundation

'Helping to free Dorothy [Parvaz] and bring Hollman [Morris] to Harvard demonstrate the effective use of the Nieman bully pulpit.'

BY BOB GILES

News that Al Jazeera reporter Dorothy Parvaz, NF '09, was in custody, first in Syria and then Iran, introduced an unexpected sense of mission into the Nieman family's ritual of springtime goodbyes. Her captivity without contact inspired the Nieman Foundation to find ways to apply pressure for her release. Spearheaded by her family and classmates, the intense effort to bring Dorothy home involved Niemans throughout the world.

Classmate Rosita Boland, a writer with the Irish Times, described the strategy of the Free Dorothy global campaign to the many Niemans who gathered at Lippmann House for my farewell on a weekend in mid-May and appealed for help. Several gave Rosita ideas and contacts and support. Ellen Tuttle, our communications officer, and I had already written to the Syrian and Iranian governments calling for her release. As we did so, we digitally shared those messages with the entire Nieman family, urging them to do whatever they could to keep attention focused on Dorothy's detainment.

During our festive evening at Lippmann House celebrating my 11 years as curator, I paid tribute to Dorothy and echoed Rosita's plea to join the effort to free her. As I spoke, I could see people's eyes tearing as I described how she had put herself in harm's way to try to report on the crackdown in Syria.

A few days later, on May 18, we awoke to learn the Iranians had released Dorothy. She was in the Al Jazeera newsroom preparing a report on her detainment. Later that day, two Al Jazeera editors wrote to thank the foundation for its "help and care." We may never know what compelled the Iranians to send her home, but it seems fair to suggest that by rallying global attention the Nieman Foundation and Harvard helped to create mounting pressure toward persuading the Iranian government to do the right thing.

Last summer the foundation helped to build a similar coalition of individuals and organizations that convinced the U.S. State Department to issue a visa to Hollman Morris, NF '11, an investigative reporter in Colombia. A visa was denied based on the advice of Colombian intelligence officials who, incorrectly, claimed he was too friendly with the left-wing guerrillas. These many voices backing Hollman led to a full review of the evidence by State Department officials who agreed, finally, that a mistake had been made.

Ann Marie Lipinski, who succeeds me as curator this summer, visited with the Nieman staff on the day of Doro-

thy's release. She spoke of using the foundation's power and prestige as a global bully pulpit to advocate journalism's highest values and explore its promising models. Helping to free Dorothy and bring Hollman to Harvard demonstrate the effective use of the Nieman bully pulpit.

We welcome Ann Marie's aspiration to expand our global influence as well as build on initiatives that already bring the foundation's voice into critical conversations about journalism. Through Nieman Reports and our other publications, in conferences and the work the fellows will go on to do, the foundation keeps faith with its founding obligation that elevating the standards of journalism will forever be its unfinished business.

Each Nieman program and publication delivers its perspective and content into the flow of conversation about how to address the challenges confronting journalism today. On the morning we met with Ann Marie, the Nieman Journalism Lab launched Encyclo, an online resource with information about companies and organizations that are shaping journalism's rapid, sometimes tumultuous evolution.

As the end of my work at the Nieman Foundation nears, I find myself reflecting on how the experiences and lessons my classmates and I shared in our year (1965-66) at Harvard have remained a vital part of who I am and what I've done in my newspaper career and as curator. So much about how reporters do their work has changed, but what we learned then shaped and influenced journalism's progress and is at the core of its practice today.

In looking back on the ways the foundation has expanded its global reach and influence during the past decade, my core discovery as a fellow is all the more prescient: education is critical and essential for journalists reporting on an increasingly complex and turbulent world. Add to this the dynamics of change reshaping journalism, and this reinforces the essential role the Nieman Foundation will continue to play by providing a stimulating environment where new generations of journalists will learn. When I hear about or see fellows exercising their responsibilities to set a high standard for other journalists to emulate, it is testament to our program's success.

I am deeply indebted to my colleagues at Lippmann House who worked creatively and effectively with me to hold true to the Nieman legacy, which Ann Marie will now watch over. My heart is full of appreciation for the extraordinary privilege of being curator. ■

Links That Bind Us

With its rhythmic clicks and electronic signal, the telegraph upended the centuries-old practice of people transporting the messages they wanted to send. Now, with a code of dots and dashes, words and ideas spread rapidly to places the sender might never go and to people she'd likely never meet. The code's inventor, Samuel Morse, ruminating on where this mid-19th-century invention might lead, wrote:

... it would not be long ere the whole surface of this country would be channeled for those *nerves* which are to diffuse with the speed of thought, a knowledge of all that is occurring throughout the land, making, in fact, *one neighborhood* of the whole country.

Given the intercontinental connections the telegraph would forge, Morse could well have construed his neighborhood as the world. In time, others would.

Writing 150 years later about what he saw as the profound significance of the telegraph, James W. Carey, journalism professor and communications scholar, argued that it “reworked the nature of

written language and finally the nature of awareness itself.” For decades the telegraph was the go-to electronic carrier of communication until the telephone and radio, television and the computer, then the Internet and mobile devices came along.

As each new technology appeared, what was vertical—top-down, one-way, with the purpose of delivering information—got flattened as peer reached out to peer with an increasing expectation of engagement. Words that traveled through these electronic lines, then wirelessly, grew to feel less like sermons and more like chants.

Even before palm-sized, always-on global communication devices surfaced, Carey had observed in the opening chapter of his 1989 book “Communication as Culture” that the dominant view of 20th-century communication as being about transmission didn't fit so well anymore. In its place,

he envisioned a re-emergence of the “ritual view.” In this view, he wrote, “news is not information but drama. ... It invites our participation on the basis of our assuming, often vicariously, social roles within it.” Into this “ritual” orientation gets bundled, he explained, “terms such as ‘sharing,’ ‘participation,’ ‘association,’ ‘fellowship,’ and ‘the possession of a common faith.’”

Today, #, the Twitter hashtag, forms the cornerstone of a community convened by shared interests and sustained by communal action. Geography no longer defines community, nor is it a constraint on one forming. Word of mouth, as Mark Briggs writes in this issue of Nieman Reports, is being displaced by “word of link.” News and information continue to be transmitted—and this is where reporters step in. As technology encourages this shift toward the ritual, journalists will seek out new roles and purpose in places we call community. ■—Melissa Ludtke



An 1855 map shows plans for telegraph lines connecting the entire world. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Community: A New Business Model for News

‘... the most powerful emerging business driver in the new economy is community.’

BY MICHAEL SKOLER

A few years ago, Public Radio International coaxed its most popular host, Ira Glass of “This American Life,” into digital cinema. Ira had already expanded his famed radio program into a traveling stage show that toured a dozen cities a year. With this new idea he would

perform one show and beam it live to hundreds of movie theaters around the United States at the same time. Efficient, yes, but would it be appealing, Ira wondered.

After all, people came to see *him* and even hoped to meet him. Radio is an intimate medium, and with Ira, so is a live show. What would be appealing about watching him on a screen from thousands of miles away in the company of a hundred strangers? This wasn’t a sporting event—the main draw for digital cinema—it was journalism, storytelling journalism. And people could already watch Ira on DVD.

So would they come and pay \$20 a ticket?

They came in droves. More than 30,000 watched the first digital show at hundreds of theaters across the U.S. and Canada in the spring of 2008. The next year, 47,000 turned out. They came to be with other fans, experiencing something they all loved together. The success wasn’t so much the power of Ira, but the power of his community.

This isn’t a brilliant new insight. We have long known communities are powerful and that local media thrive when they bring together and serve their community. Somehow though when it comes to the challenge of online media, we forget this. We search for new business models that involve paywalls, more video, the iPad, and wealthy donors, while the most powerful emerging business driver in the new economy is community.

Connection as a Strategy

We are social beings. Three-quarters of all American adults belong to voluntary or organized groups, according to “The Social Side of the Internet,” a study published this year by the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project. In fact, today’s social media culture may be reversing the decline in social behavior that Robert D. Putnam documented in his book “Bowling Alone.” While 56 percent of non-Internet users belong to a group, 80 percent of Internet users participate in groups, according to the study.

Clay Shirky, a professor at New York Univer-



Scenes from “This American Life” in digital cinema promotions.

sity who studies the effects of the Internet on society, writes eloquently of how technology is unleashing the greatest wave of social communication and collaboration in our history. The companies flourishing in today's digital, social culture provide more than valued content to people. They deliver valued connections. And they turn this community, the content it creates, and the trust it engenders into money.

Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are the icons of the social economy. Even Google, the organizer of digital information as opposed to people, upended the search business with its algorithms that tracked connections—the links people share with others. There are hundreds and thousands of lesser known, quickly rising businesses that are, at their core, built on community even when it isn't obvious. Here are just a few examples:

Angie's List has more than 1.5 million members in over 150 cities who pay about \$10 to \$60 a year to be part of a community in which members rate and review service providers (plumbers, doctors, etc.) to help each other. In the face of free alternatives, Angie's List has turned its community into annual membership fees in the \$50 million range and an even larger income stream by allowing companies that are highly rated by members to pay Angie's List for the privilege of offering discounts to its members.

PatientsLikeMe, a seven-year-old company, helps 100,000 patients find others with the same illness to share experiences, treatments, successes and setbacks. In today's culture of baring and sharing all, many people still treat medical information as highly private. At PatientsLikeMe, members are told that the company makes money by aggregating the shared patient experiences, removing identifying information, and selling the data to medical and pharmaceutical companies that want insight into patient experiences.

Red Hat has built a billion-dollar business on the Linux open-source

operating system. Linux is free, created and constantly updated by a huge community of volunteer software developers. Red Hat sells support services to companies that run their systems on Linux. By serving as the corporate help desk for Linux, Red Hat has made it possible for Linux to spread into the corporate world, which makes the skills of the volunteer Linux software developers more valuable. Red Hat uses some of its profits and staff to mentor and contribute to the community, advance open-source code, and organize community events.

Groupon has become a collective buying powerhouse with more than 50 million registered users by offering people a deal a day from a local business. This model has spurred many copycats. To ensure that the novelty doesn't wear off, Groupon is now working to turn its users, whose only tie is a desire to find deals, into a community. It is introducing G-Team campaigns, which range from spurring flash mobs to fostering local collective charitable action. "Every G-Team campaign connects you with enough people to achieve something awesome that you couldn't have done alone," the Groupon website explains.

The new business model for news and journalism is beckoning from every site that seeks first and foremost to build a community. Games like Farmville and virtual worlds like World of Warcraft and Second Life are no fun on their own. Their value comes from their communities. Their rapid growth results from network effects, where each new user/member/player makes the service more valuable for everyone else.

Second Life becomes more interesting as more people build virtual homes and businesses. Angie's List becomes more useful to members as the number of reviewers goes up. As membership increases, it also becomes a more important resource for businesses so they are more willing to pay to advertise and offer discounts to members. That attracts more members and fuels a virtuous circle—the hallmark of creating network effects.

Community, Not Audience

To harness this model, news organizations need to think of themselves first as gathering, supporting and empowering people to be active in a community with shared values, and not primarily as creators of news that people will consume. Public radio has created a huge virtual community of people who feel they have shared interests and values, evidenced by the millions of dollars donated during painfully long pledge drives. Still, public radio has hardly tapped the revenue potential of its audience, for it has yet to engage them as a community and let that community organize itself and find novel ways to create value for the group.

NewWest.net, TED and BlogHer run lucrative conferences and events where members and fans meet, learn and plan collaborations. LinkedIn offers paid services that make it easier for users to connect, share advice, hire and be hired. Zynga's game players pay real money for supplies that give them higher status within a community such as Farmville. On Facebook and other social spaces, people pay to send digital tokens of affection or admiration, which only mean something within the community. The annual U.S. market in these virtual goods is estimated by Inside Virtual Goods to be \$2 billion and growing.

Sites with active communities also succeed better in media's traditional revenue hunting ground. They often get higher advertising rates because members are more likely to click or buy from advertisers when they feel invested in the site. Smart advertisers also have the opportunity to study, understand and cater to the community.

If media organizations are going to tap the new community business model, they will need to avoid mistaking their audience for a community. Fans become a community when they have the freedom to explore their interests and connections and organize themselves. That freedom is why Facebook has more than 500 million members.

The digital screenings in 2008 and 2009 tapped a desire by Ira's fans to be part of a community. Yet fans are really only a potential community. Media organizations need to create the tools and foster the mindset to understand, activate and serve their communities, without trying to control them. People relate best to other people, not institutions.

Some news organizations are pursuing the community-building model, such as the Lawrence Journal-World,

which created WellCommons as a health community and just launched a community site around sustainability. [See Jane Stevens's article about WellCommons on page 40.] Without a doubt, some won't get it right or, like the Washington, D.C. website TBD.com, will fail to find sustained management support to put community at the heart of their strategy.

But if there is a common thread that weaves through Foursquare, Facebook, Zynga, Twitter, BlogHer and many

other pioneers in the social economy, it is this: Creating community engenders value for people. And providing value is the heart of any successful business model. ■

Michael Skoler, a 1993 Nieman Fellow, is vice president of interactive for Public Radio International. He researched new business models as a 2009-10 Reynolds Fellow at the Missouri School of Journalism.

Start Spreading the News

'Word of link's power is like nothing we've experienced before. It's about how we pass along information, share ideas, and expand business in our digital times.'

BY MARK BRIGGS

Information, news, recommendations and yes, gossip, have always been spread by word of mouth. In the digital age when people share such things, the result is more immediate, expansive and powerful—and how it happens depends a lot less on conversation and more on the links we send. On Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn, the reigning method is “word of link,” and this strategy also thrives in e-mails and on blogs and websites devoted to publishing news and journalism.

Those “share” buttons on stories and blog posts do get clicked.

Distribution—passing along what's of interest through personal networks—is only the beginning of our community-building impulse. Collaborative journalism happens with a click as readers, listeners and viewers enlist themselves to be ambassadors for those who report, write and produce the news.

How we function in digital communities isn't just changing journalism's

ecosystem; it is having a profound effect on how business works—and this includes journalists.

“At its core, social media requires that business leaders start thinking like small-town shop owners,” Gary Vaynerchuk writes in his new book, “The Thank You Economy.” “They're going to have to take the long view and

stop using short-term benchmarks to gauge their progress. They're going to have to allow the personality, heart, and soul of the people who run all levels of the business to show.”

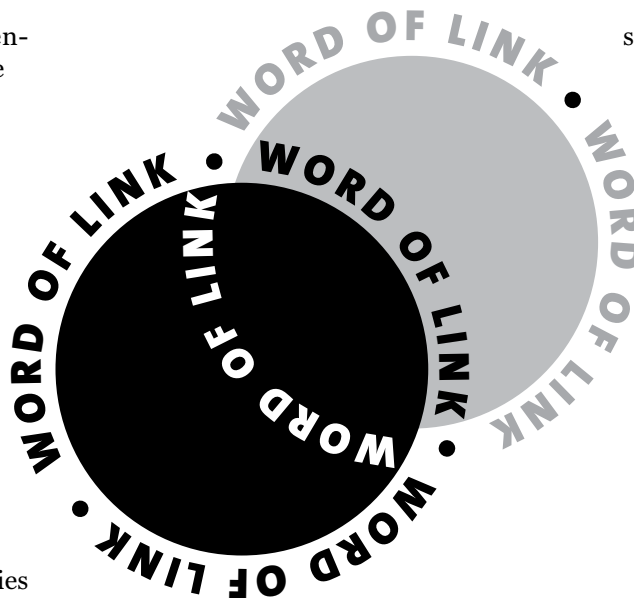
If he's right—and I believe he is—radical transparency (yes, more radical than what's already happened) lies ahead for news companies and journalists. It will involve people covering real news that will be absorbed and shared by people with others they interact with in their various digital communities.

No more being disconnected—of “us” standing apart from “them.”

Like Nothing Before

Word of link's power is like nothing we've experienced before. It's about how we pass along information, share ideas, and expand business in our digital times.

Consider Groupon, one of the fastest growing companies in the history of the Web. Absorb the fact that Groupon—



the community gathering let's-make-a-deal approach to digital commerce—is on pace to pull in \$1 billion in sales in record time. This company didn't start advertising outside of search engines until it had millions of users and had launched in dozens of cities. (Judging by the negative reaction to its Super Bowl ad this year that was probably a good idea.) Instead, Groupon grew from an e-mail listserv in Chicago to launches in Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C. largely through word of link. Motivated to share the daily deal with friends, the customer base grew exponentially. Groupon estimates that more than half of its Web visitors come because of referrals from friends.

In the news business, few would have believed that a start-up would surpass The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post in unique Web users in less than five years. Yet that's what The Huffington Post did. With 17 million monthly unique visitors in March, this celebrity driven website had more traffic than the Journal and Post combined and at a price of \$315 million it became the property of AOL earlier this year.

Absent word of link, it's unlikely that Groupon or The Huffington Post—or Zappos or Pandora or many other digital start-ups—would have found such success so quickly.

The Referral Economy

City University of New York journalism professor Jeff Jarvis talks and writes about the “link economy,” describing it as “the new currency of media.” He refers to it as a “gift economy” in which “links are presents that can be given or earned but not bought.”

Word of link is similar to this link economy, but it is grounded in social conventions that predate the Internet and the digital device known as links. While the link economy speaks more to the power of search algorithms and Google ads, word of link is more about

the power of who is sharing the link and that person's relationship to the person or company behind the link. It's much like the product endorsement that comes from a trusted friend compared to one from a celebrity spokesperson on TV.

Research highlights a pattern that at first glance seems counterintuitive. Those who arrive at a news website because of a link posted on Facebook or Twitter are likely to stay longer and return more often than visitors who get sent there from a link found through a search engine. What is surprising about this finding is that readers who click on links from search engines are actively pursuing information, while those who get there via a social

What sets word of link apart is its accelerated speed, broader range, and potential for stronger influence.



network are passive news consumers who are suddenly transformed into active ones.

The Q. and A. website Quora has been around since 2009. But last year, on the day after Christmas, the influential tech personality Robert Scoble wrote a post entitled, “Is Quora the biggest blogging innovation in 10 years?” During the preceding 10 months, Quora.com averaged 113,000 unique users per month, according to Compete. In the two months after Scoble's widely distributed post, which raced around the Web on Twitter, Facebook and blogs, Quora.com averaged 313,479 unique users.

Who shared a link makes the difference. Powerful referrals come with greater ease and frequency for news companies and journalists who have

personal relationships with those whom New York University (NYU) journalism professor Jay Rosen calls “the people formerly known as the audience.” And Scoble is one of the most well-connected and transparent reporters and bloggers of our time.

The average Facebook user has 130 friends and the average Twitter account has 300 followers. According to Vaynerchuk's math, that means one average user with accounts on both platforms has the potential to reach 7,740 people with a single message. That message could be a thumbs-up, one-word comment, like “interesting,” and the link then piggybacks on that. Or the message could be critical or snarky, questioning the value or approach on coverage.

Authentic, personal interactions with journalists and news organizations transform passive members of an audience into active endorsers and distributors—even partners. NYU professor Clay Shirky talks about three elements that make social media powerful: the promise, the tools, and the bargain. Almost universally, news companies have made the promise of interactivity via social media by launching Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. Now the follow-through must be their use of these tools to stay true to the bargain—of maintaining genuine communication and connection.

They talk to you through their storytelling; the expectation is that you will talk back to them. And just as word of mouth worked better when deeper connections existed between those giving and receiving information, the same dynamic applies to word of link. What sets word of link apart is its accelerated speed, broader range, and potential for stronger influence.

The News Finds Me

When I'm visiting college students, I always ask where they get their news.

Most shrug. I might as well have asked them where they get their food. “Everywhere,” most respond. Another answer I get frequently—and it’s worth remembering—is the notion that “if the news is important enough, it will find me.”

Translated—if my friends think I should know, they’ll tell me.

According to Facebook, the average user creates 90 pieces of content each month on the site. More than 30 billion pieces of content are shared each month, and much of that is what we call journalism. Certainly reporters want their work shared, but if they focus too much on what moves the quickest on social networks this could lead to a form of “link-bait” journalism. The audience is too smart for that; or, let’s

say many of us hope they are and will see through attempts to pander with sensational angles. Occasionally, of course, pandering will work, but over the long haul taking this route will damage the credibility of journalists and news organizations.

Weaving a community together is more than amassing huge numbers of Facebook fans and Twitter followers. It’s a challenge of quality, not quantity. I’ll take 100 people who feel they are partners rather than 1,000 followers who consider us a glorified headline service. We’ll get better news tips, better feedback, and more evangelism from those 100 people—plus all those in their respective networks.

Small-town business owners rely heavily on word of mouth for market-

ing. By embracing this approach but with a new twist, those who gather and disseminate news will leverage word of link in ways that will expand their audience, improve their journalism, and grow their business. ■

Mark Briggs is author of “Journalism Next: A Practical Guide to Digital Reporting and Publishing” and “Entrepreneurial Journalism: How to Build What’s Next for News,” to be published by CQ Press in October. He is also the director of digital media for KING-TV in Seattle, Washington and a Ford Fellow in Entrepreneurial Journalism at The Poynter Institute. He blogs at www.journalism20.com.

When Community and Journalism Converge

‘... I am bypassing the predictable, often sensational headlines to explore the profound ways that digital storytelling can be a force for political mediation.’

BY KATERINA CIZEK

I encountered journalism on the day I came to understand the word “community.”

It was my first assignment as a student photojournalist and I was behind the barricades in Quebec at what became known as the Oka Crisis. It was the summer of 1990, and the news media were watching the military showdown between the Canadian armed forces and a Mohawk community.

The confrontation involved plans to expand a municipal golf course onto an ancient Mohawk burial ground. This standoff, which some consider Canada’s Wounded Knee, lasted two and a half months. When it was over, so much had changed, including the political balance between First Nations and the federal government.

As the day turned to dusk, it was

clear that I would remain at the standoff through the night. A few members of the Mohawk Warrior Society had pulled up plastic lawn chairs around a rabbit-eared television directly behind the barricade of overturned police vehicles and large branches. They were watching the evening news. They invited me to join them, and when I did I saw that Alanis Obomsawin, a First Nations Abenaki documentary filmmaker, was there to document this crisis through her own eyes for the National Film Board of Canada.

One hundred meters down the road and behind the barricades, military guns were aimed in the community’s direction and ready to be fired. Army helicopters buzzed above. Like the military, the Warriors had weapons. But there were unarmed women and children present as well.

As I watched TV with the Warriors, I came to realize how divergent the mainstream representation of this armed conflict was from what I was witnessing. That evening I heard about unresolved land claims and the abuse of power through the centuries as non-Natives encroached on First Nations lands. There were among the mainstream media some well-established members who expressed views about this mistreatment—a view I shared. Later, they were accused of Stockholm syndrome.

That evening I became committed to and certain of the value of the independent and community-centered making of media. During the intervening decades a tsunami of this kind of storytelling became central to the digital democratization of media. But for me that night crystallized the



As filmmaker in residence at an inner-city hospital, Katerina Cizek worked as a storytelling partner with health workers and patients.

connections among media making and democracy, journalism and documentary, citizenship and community.

Digital Media and Community

Taking place, as my epiphany did, at the dawn of digital media, I became aware early on of its revolutionary potential.

A few months later, in March 1991, TV viewers in Los Angeles had witnessed one of the first modern acts of citizen journalism. When George Holliday heard police sirens and a commotion outside his bedroom window, he went to the balcony of his high-rise building with his new hand-held video camera and filmed the confrontation going on 90 feet below. He recorded for almost eight minutes as four white Los Angeles police officers brutally beat Rodney King, a black man.

The one minute of Holliday's footage broadcast on local TV and then on news shows throughout the world sparked a "handicam revolution." More than a decade later, a documentary that I co-directed with Peter Wintonick featured the use of that footage, its impact and legacy, and the political impetus to use digital video to document human rights abuses. Called "Seeing is Believ-

ing: Handicams, Human Rights and the News," it challenged the authorial voice of mainstream media in the face of rising community-based media and the digital revolution. The film was broadcast throughout the world and is used today in classrooms and human rights advocacy training.

Fast-forward to now, and I am at the National Film Board (NFB) of Canada. (Obomsawin, still making films and approaching 80, is my colleague.) I am working to refine and redefine the documentary filmmaking process and think about notions of representation and emerging technology—all with community and the potential of digital citizenship uppermost in mind. What I do happens at the confluence of these issues; my goal is not only to document what I find, but also to locate our place as documentarians in all of this, a subject that has preoccupied me for 20 years.

Storytelling—Inside Out

At the NFB, I've been as likely to be found in the hallways of an inner-city hospital as in an elevator at a residential high-rise building—places, if I'm honest, I would rather not be. But these are the physical spaces where I have had to be to connect communities of people who are rarely heard

from or seen with our unlikely forms of storytelling and media making. It is in these new forms of storytelling that I believe we are creating frames for engaging with some of the most important topics of the 21st century.

For my first four years at the NFB, as I worked with veteran producer Gerry Flahive, I was a filmmaker in residence at an inner-city hospital. Like my approach to covering the Oka Crisis, the perspective I took with this project was unconventional. I examined, in part, how the media and members of the medical community might work together to create new forms of intervention. Could telling a story improve someone's health?

I worked in partnership with health workers, patients and researchers; the key ingredient was respect for our editorial independence and differing expertise. Usually, a film made inside a hospital would be about what happens to workers and patients. I approached making films with them, not about them, with the goal of effecting tangible change in the social and political realms. The seven projects we did there, including "NFB: Filmmaker in Residence," an interactive documentary that won a Webby, dealt with the transformative potential that exists at the intersection of digital media, health care, and community.

Now I'm in another kind of building in the second year of Highrise, another NFB media project. Our notions of what I call "interventionist media" are now transposed from a hospital into a different community ecosystem—the high-rise, which is the most commonly built form during the last century. Such buildings and their inhabitants, especially residential ones, have been, at best, ignored, and, at worst, vilified as being the cause of civil unrest that is often characterized as racial or ethnic.

As I did at the Oka barricade and in the hospital, I am bypassing the predictable, often sensational headlines to explore the profound ways that digital storytelling can be a force for political mediation. For me as a film-

maker, the high-rise building becomes a metaphor for density, and it offers a frame through which to think about sweeping issues of migration and globalization, urbanity and community.

In this century, more than any other, to be human is to be urban. Yet politicians, journalists and academics have only a meager understanding of what people's lives are like in such places. News can't simply be about what happens in the financial district of a city's downtown core when some of the most significant stories are unfolding in our urban peripheries. There, the neglected and pressing needs of vulnerable communities are found along with stark evidence of economic injustice. Amid the concrete, I find inspiration for change.

'Out My Window'

I constructed my first global interactive online Highrise documentary, "Out My Window," as a virtual high-rise. Each apartment window in the building is a digital portal to a different city. Once

inside, the user enters the life of a high-rise resident through first-person storytelling and thousands of images.

Using Skype, e-mail and Facebook, I got in touch with photographers, activists and journalists in mid-sized cities—such as Prague, Beirut and Toronto—which are representative of the places where most urban dwellers live. From 13 cities and in 13 languages, 100 contributors shared more than 90 minutes of stories about living in these urban environments.

"Out My Window" is about high-rise residents harnessing the power of community, music and art in their search for meaning in the space they inhabit, prefabricated as it might be. People renew what was old and crumbling as they repurpose waste into things useful and even beautiful. They create—and recreate—community in spite of the built forms surrounding them.

This Web documentary has garnered global attention, including a 2011 digital Emmy in the nonfiction category. It is spawning conversations on blogs and on Twitter. In short, "Out

My Window" gave the Highrise project the initial push we wanted with its ability to engage in dialogue people who are too often separated into silos of interest, whether in architecture or city planning, journalism or human rights, education or housing activism. And it has spurred conversation among the residents themselves.

Questions We Ask

What lies ahead—at both a global and local level—is the desire to push the boundaries of what's possible at the places where community and documentary intersect. In another iteration of the Highrise project, we've been working for quite some time with residents of a high-rise building to arrive at a sense of the values shared among those who live in the isolating spaces of a tall residential building. Here are a few questions animating our efforts:

- What aspects of these people's lives would conventional journalism and



The online documentary "Out My Window" is a virtual high-rise, with each window on the screen leading into a story about the life of a resident in a different city.

documentary filmmaking usually miss?

- What more can we learn by collaborating with members of the community as they help us, as media makers, get closer to what's happening?
- What about the stories and images that residents create themselves?
- How can we support the self-representation of those who live in the high-rise as we want to hear from people in their voices and see them through their images?
- How can the act of media making support community building?

One overarching question involves

trying to learn more about how notions of community take on wholly new meanings in digital space. As this happens, what is the role of the journalist as documentarian? A key ingredient is what happens with technology—with what it enables all of us, as makers of media, to do. Then there is also the evolving idea of “digital citizenship.” This addresses our level of access to technology and our ability to use and harness the power of technology to engage and transform the world we live in.

What is undeniable is the tightening relationship between communications technologies and political activism. Exploding with the Rodney King video,

this political linkage is seen now in the role social media are playing in the uprisings across the Arab world. From the quieter gestures of photo-bloggers in a meeting room behind the elevator in a suburban Toronto high-rise, digital citizenship is continuing to shape the ways in which community and journalism come together to tell important stories of our time. ■

Katerina Cizek is a documentary director with the National Film Board of Canada. Her recent project “Highrise: Out My Window” won a 2011 digital Emmy.

Engaging Communities: Content and Conversation

‘Editors ought to require that story pitches and budget lines include an engagement component, reflecting community conversation, collaboration and outreach.’

BY JOY MAYER

Of the many challenges news organizations confront, there is one that inspires my research, informs my teaching, and ignites my imagination. It involves the disintegrating connection between journalists and their audiences—the separation of journalists from their communities that has taken place through the years. With the notion of objectivity having become such a dominant strategy, sometimes this distancing has been intentional.

The motivating idea behind the disconnection was simple: To enhance their ability to fairly report the news, journalists needed to stand apart from their community rather than be participants. Other factors, such as journalists’ transient lives as they moved from place to place for career challenges and advancement, added to the disconnection. The result is that journalists often ended up without

any roots, history or context in the communities they covered.

Journalists still foster and celebrate otherness more than they do connection. Ever mindful of conflicts of interest—actual or perceived—they hold themselves apart from influence and are wary of being swayed by sources or vocal readers.

The public journalism movement that emerged in the 1990’s was in part about using news organizations as vehicles for finding solutions for community issues and problems. It was criticized for encouraging journalists to partner and align themselves with sources and for a perception of pandering to audience whims. Critics also threw around a word that makes journalists uncomfortable—advocacy.

Yet if we explore this idea now, helping to find solutions seems an accepted part of the job. I’ve asked a lot of journalists this year if they feel

that they’re working on behalf of their communities. To a person, they say “yes.” (The opening line of the Chicago Tribune’s editorial vision is “We stand up for the community.”)

In general, I’ve found that most journalists would agree with these notions:

- They are using information to improve their communities.
- They want community members to feel invested in and connected to the news product.
- They want as much information as they can get about what their readers want and need to know.

What Engagement Means

As I’ve spent several months talking with journalists about what community engagement means to them, I’ve asked them: Why do they think

it's important? How are they seeking to achieve it?

Some described what it's like to be in conversation with people in their communities and how they use social media to be in the mix of what people are talking about. Others work to pursue collaborative relationships; people help them locate sources and shape stories and, in doing so, become involved in setting the news agenda. Sometimes they then help gather and share information. Still other journalists talk about community engagement mostly as outreach as they look for partners, build bridges, and identify and meet informational needs.

The book “The Elements of Journalism” does a great job laying out the obligations journalists have to their audiences, including principles such as an obligation to the truth, loyalty to citizens, monitoring people in power, and serving as a forum for public discussion. I would argue that today's media landscape now requires an additional element—a new principle to keep us in tune with our digital times: Journalists have an obligation to identify and attempt to connect with the people who most want and need their content.

In some cases, this obligation might apply to an entire publication, but in most cases this reaching out will happen in more granular ways—by the beat, the topic, the project, and maybe even the story. If journalists believe what they are doing is trying to improve their communities by providing information, isn't it true that the information needs to reach the right people to be utilized most effectively? If a journalism tree falls in a forest and no one hears it, does it do any good?

Adhering to this obligation is good for journalism's challenging bottom line. It mimics marketing, in

a way—find the customer, meet the need, bring eyeballs to the product, and build brand loyalty. It's customer service, too—anticipating needs, inviting feedback, being responsive to



California Watch's coloring book on earthquake preparedness.

input, and acting like a human being. It is also the right thing to do for our communities. Identify an informational need; make sure we fill it in a way readers can find and use.

Engagement: A Spectrum of Ideas

Some of the more interesting experiments I've found this year come from start-up news organizations, not legacy media. I like to call them “scrappy media,” mission driven and goal oriented. They know their audience just as they understand the need their product is filling for them. Oakland Local and The Texas Tribune provide examples of mission statements that pair providing information with service to community. California Watch is not shy about its emphasis on “solution-oriented reporting intended to have

an impact on the quality of life” of its online community. Ashley Alvarado, its public engagement manager, considers it part of her job to make sure the website's stories are easily understandable, get translated into all appropriate languages, and are easy to act on. In one riveting example, she and her colleagues at California Watch held free lead screenings as part of a project on unsafe lead levels in jewelry; they spent their time and money to make it easy for people to see if their jewelry was safe—and they viewed this as a natural and needed extension of their journalism.

This spring after California Watch investigated the seismic safety of public schools and found reason for concern, it went one step further and published an educational coloring book about earthquake preparedness. Visuals paired with words that kids can understand explain complex issues and provide information they'd need in an emergency; the books were translated into Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese. The staff had a particular readership in mind—in this case, children—and it went to extreme measures to get important information to the right people.

Another California-based engagement editor, Grant Barrett of Voice of San Diego (VOSD), considers it his job to aggressively seek and connect with niche audiences, especially for important stories. A fantastic example is a six-month project on the life of a refugee who was deaf and unable to speak. To make sure that people who would be most interested and affected found the piece, VOSD reached out to refugee and refugee rights groups, the deaf community, and the public services community. Barrett describes his job as figuring out how to get stories into communities that want and need them. He's careful to say that he doesn't

take this approach for every story; the strategy seems to fit best with projects that are especially significant or that provide much-wanted attention. “We are carefully finding individuals and groups who, if they did not hear about these stories, would be worse off for it,” Barrett wrote in an e-mail to me. “We are hunting for change toward goodness, quality and enlightenment.”

My conversations with Alvarado, Barrett and others have led me to embrace a “take the party to the people” philosophy. Journalists want what they do to reach those who want it. But most are accustomed to putting stories online and then hoping people find them. With so much content out there, hoping isn’t a sound strategy—it’s an excuse. Journalists need to become social by sparking conversation with people whose hobbies, work, ideas or

interests make them natural audiences, and then find ways for their stories to enrich the conversation.

This does mean that sometimes the traffic and conversations happen elsewhere than on their website. This won’t improve their own metrics; eyeballs on another site don’t yet count for much. But what defines success in digital space will need to evolve over time to include conversations that happen on Facebook, mentions in online communities, and pingbacks from other sites.

Let’s also not ignore the value that still comes from those person-to-person interactions that inform coverage, encourage content sharing, and foster brand loyalty.

Editors ought to require that story pitches and budget lines include an engagement component, reflecting

community conversation, collaboration and outreach. In many cases, conversations about stories need to include these questions: Who is going to benefit most from this information? And how will reporters, editors and producers be sure those people find it?

After all, this is our obligation. ■

Joy Mayer was a 2010-2011 Reynolds Fellow at the Missouri School of Journalism where she studied community engagement in journalism in a project she called “Ditch the Lecture. Join the Conversation: Reconceiving the role of journalists in a participatory culture.” She is an associate professor at the Missouri School of Journalism and an editor at the Columbia Missourian, where she and her students are launching a new community outreach team.

Curation, Community and the Future of News

‘People are clearly overwhelmed by the growing volume and weight of digital content and messaging that they feel compelled to process.’

BY STEVEN ROSENBAUM

Thinking back, I’ve always considered news as a dialogue rather than a monologue. I’ve preferred conversations to speeches. That said, I don’t often hang out on street corners or in neighborhood bars partaking in random conversations about the weather or the Mets. I like my conversations curated.

While it’s easy—and tempting—to think of what’s happening to news as the result of technology, my earliest memories of what we now think of as interactive news and social media reside in a single phone line and a RadioShack answering machine.

This memorable moment took place in 1992 when I was the executive producer of a newsmagazine called “Broadcast: New York,” a weekly

half-hour solidly reported news show that was syndicated across New York State. Most of the networks were experiencing an explosion of their own newsmagazine shows. One day as we were trying to come up with original stories and new topics, I exploded in frustration in front of my producers: “We’re doing the same damn stories as everyone else. We’re out of original ideas.”

Viewers News

That was the day that we purchased what was then a pricey 800 number and went on the air with a new segment. We asked the audience to call in and suggest stories that needed to be covered. If the idea turned out to

be good and the lead was solid, we assigned a producer to do the story. Then we used the person’s voice from the call to introduce the segment on air.

It was an immediate hit—so popular that callers often found a busy signal. But they dialed again and again until they got through and could leave their story idea on our cassette recorder. Often, after that week’s program had aired, I would sit alone in the office and listen to the phone machine beep as the callers pitched their ideas. Back in those early days, the sound was mesmerizing.

After this segment had been on the air for a few months, an Associated Press (AP) reporter called to do a story about our new “technology.” I was happy to be quoted by the AP,

but I told this reporter that our technology was no different from any other station in New York or anywhere in the United States for that matter. All of us had phones; it's just that we were choosing to answer them when viewers called.

Six months later, technology caught up with us when Sharp Electronics released a camcorder that made it easy for amateurs to record themselves. Sharp loaned us five of them, and we went on the air the next week offering viewers the opportunity to pitch a story, and if selected, we would FedEx them a camcorder for their use.

"Viewers News"—with cameras shipped to viewers—was an overnight sensation. A few months later a producer summoned me to an edit room. We'd been pitched a story from a woman in Syracuse, New York who had silicone breast implants that had ruptured. She'd had blood poisoning and was now deeply debilitated. The producer was screening her raw tape—a tour of her home, a trip to the supermarket, an awkward interview with her husband, and then, the moment I'll never forget. The last day she had the camera, she woke up and took the camera with her into the bathroom. She set it on the sink, pressed "record," and then unbuttoned her dressing gown.

As we watched, the room fell silent. She had two terrible scars. There was nothing at all sexual about what we were watching. Just terrible scars.

In that instant I knew our world—and our place in it as journalists—would never be the same. With her camera, she had taken us to a place where no journalist was allowed to go. A place so private and personal that if any TV crew had shot those images they would have been guilty of invading



her privacy. But she had taken us there. She had opened the door and invited us in to see what had happened to her.

After some discussion with her and our stations, we broadcast her video that Saturday night at 6:30 on NBC stations.

Journalist Turned Curator

No longer was I a journalist in the old sense of the word.

I'd become a curator—a filter—helping the audience share stories. My role was to decide which stories to put on the air and figure out how to contextualize them. "Viewers News" led to another program that was known as "MTV Unfiltered."

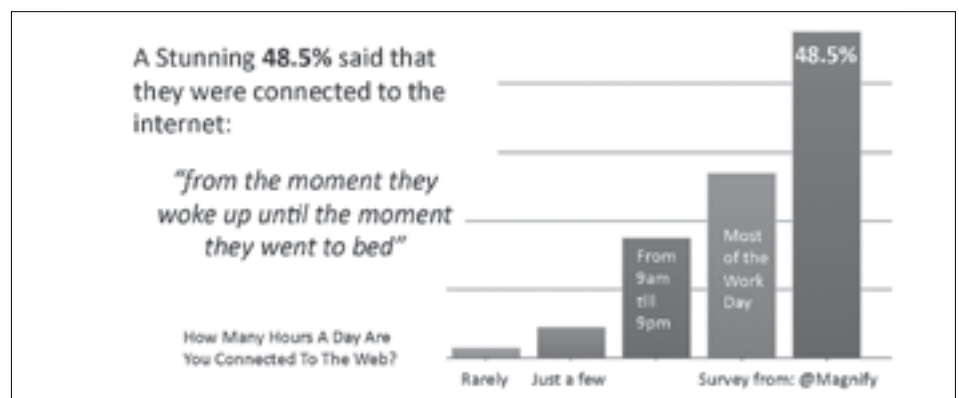
It felt good to play a role in helping viewers emerge from their passive role as TV couch potatoes into an active role as vibrant and prolific creators of content. And today the idea of journalist as curator is front and center, as the tools to make and tell stories are now in the hands of anyone with a cell phone, laptop or desktop computer. The old barriers to entry—the cost of a printing press or a broadcast tower—have evaporated.

Of course, this change doesn't come without a price. Results of the

first annual Digital Lifestyle Survey that we conducted at Magnify.net illuminate the overwhelming amount of data—photographs, texts, messages, chats, videos—that come at consumers. To do the survey, we sent out a Web-based mailing to 10,000 partners, customers and friends in our company database and received 200 responses, mostly from technologists, journalists, entrepreneurs, executives, and professionals.

I found the results stunning. In just 12 months, 65 percent of the respondents said that the data stream coming at them had increased by at least 50 percent. When asked to categorize that data, a majority (72.7 percent) described their data stream as either a "roaring river," a "flood," or a "massive tidal wave."

As they take in this surge in information, nearly half (48.5 percent) of the respondents said that they are connected to the Internet "from the moment I wake up until the moment I go to bed." During their waking hours, they struggle under this load of unfiltered input as increasing bandwidth and data abundance has average consumers unable to keep their head above water. More than half (50.3 percent) of those surveyed admitted that "when I'm offline, I am anxious that I've missed something." To address their anxiety, 79.5 percent check e-mail all the time, 57.4 percent never turn off their phone, and what I found most disturbing was the revelation that one



Almost half of the respondents to Magnify.net's Digital Lifestyle Survey reported being connected to the Internet from the time they wake up until they go to bed.

third of them said that they check e-mail in the middle of the night.

Despite devoting this kind of time and energy to trying to keep up with the data flow, close to half (46.9 percent) agreed with the statement “I am unable to answer all my e-mail,” and 62.5 percent agreed with the sentiment “I wish I could filter out the flood of data.”

These results paint a stark picture of where we are and where we’re headed. People are clearly overwhelmed by the growing volume and weight of digital content and messaging that they feel compelled to process. As more digital devices and software services proliferate, the amount of data and the speed at which it comes at us will grow exponentially.

Human Curated Web

Soon this flood will be like an avalanche, burying us if we don’t outrun it. Google’s Eric Schmidt has said that the entire world is creating five exabytes (or five billion gigabytes) of data every two days. That’s equal to all of the information created from the beginning of civilization through 2003.

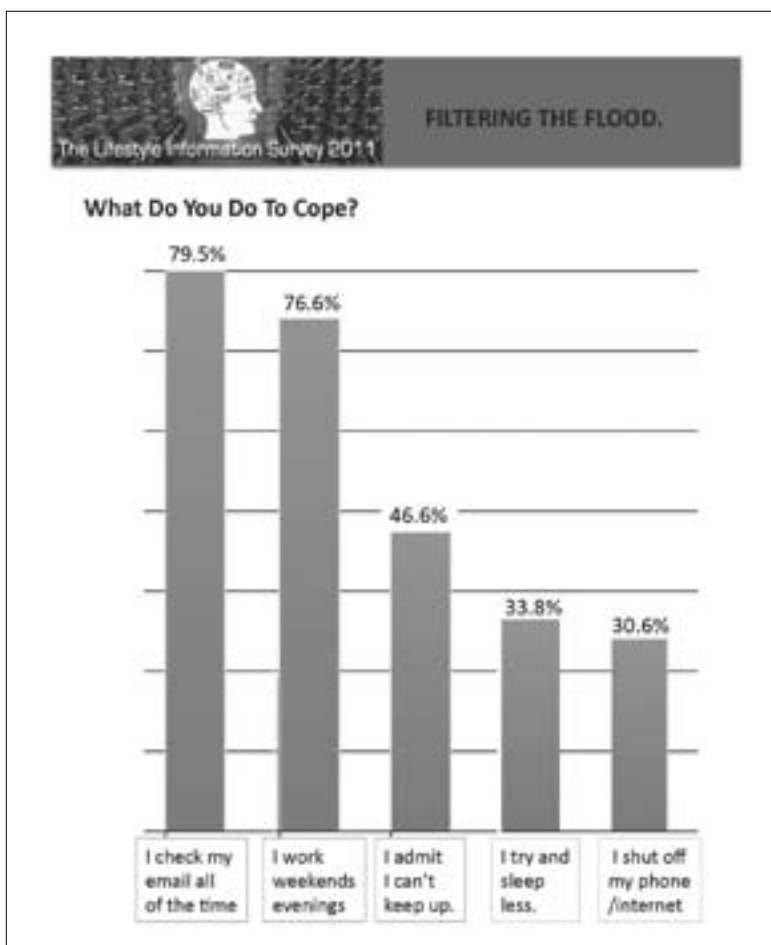
This simply isn’t sustainable. Try as people might, multitasking or going without sleep is a recipe for disaster. People have reached—and many have surpassed—the limits of their ability to manage data, and this sense of inescapable overload is having an impact on how they relate to family and friends and on their productivity and even their sleep.

Algorithmic solutions like better spam filters, smarter search, and social tools that surface the likes and dislikes

of friends will certainly improve things. But the number of connected devices and new social software offerings will create undifferentiated data faster than computers alone can manage.

The solution is not to be found in faster computers or smarter algorithms. The best place to look for a remedy is in the power of the human mind and tapping its capacity to find, sort and contextualize information and ideas. As this happens (and it already is starting) we will think of this time as being the dawn of the human filtered Web—the curated Web.

As a clue to why I am convinced this approach will accelerate as a Web practice, I turn again to the Digital Lifestyle Survey in which a healthy majority (61.3 percent) of the respondents agreed with this concept: “I consider the content I share part of who



In the Digital Lifestyle Survey conducted by Magnify.net, almost 80 percent of respondents said they check e-mail “all of the time” to cope with the overload of information.

I am.” Skillful sharing of information through channels of community filtering and personal recommendations will fulfill people’s sense of digital identity as content curators. And this leads to a different kind of content consumer, one who will do less surfing of the Web and instead turn to curated content delivered by trusted sources.

Journalism isn’t going to be any less important. In fact, as information gets messier and noisier, those who possess the skills to recognize important stories, find themes, provide context, and explain the significance of pieces of information will be critically important. Instead of reminiscing about the good old days—as we long for the relative quiet and lack of disruption we had then—let’s take what we know how to do as journalists and

find the best way to use these skills to tell stories and provide essential information.

There are communities—geographic and otherwise—that are filled with people eager for somebody to play this much-needed role. With curation as the new journalism, it’s time for us to act. ■

Steven Rosenbaum is an entrepreneur, filmmaker and author of “Curation Nation: How to Win in a World Where Consumers are Creators,” published by McGraw-Hill in 2011. He is the CEO of Magnify.net, a real-time video curation engine for publishers, brands and websites.

A Community Watches a Story Unfold

‘It was risky to reveal parts of the story as it unfolded because in 30 years in this business I have seen projects hit dead ends.’

BY RON SYLVESTER

Two days after my story detailing the selling of teenage girls for sex in our city was published in *The Wichita (Kansas) Eagle*, this tweet arrived:

@JenWPortraits: Finally read @rsylvester’s child traffic [sic] story. Sickening. Heartbreaking. How do we fix this?

Jennifer White, a suburban mom and photographer, sent it and in doing so kicked off a community project that raised truckloads of food and clothing and dozens of new volunteers to aid vulnerable teens living on our streets. At each donation drive or volunteer meeting, someone mentioned being moved to act by White’s public sharing of her reaction to my story. Weeks after subscribers had recycled the newspaper, White was still crediting this story as an inspiration.

When I started using Twitter to cover trials three years ago, I had no idea of the power that social networking would have on my reporting.

“I just want to see how this works,” I told Judge Ben Burgess, who gave me permission to tweet from his courtroom. My live trial coverage began, one 140-character message at a time, with the case of Ted Burnett in the murder-for-hire of Chelsea Brooks, a pregnant 14-year-old. Her 19-year-old boyfriend, Elgin Ray Robinson, Jr., apparently thought giving Burnett money and drugs to strangle Brooks would prevent her parents from pursuing a case of statutory rape. Instead, both men are serving sentences of life imprisonment without parole.

My tweets from the courtroom included more detail and dimensions of coverage—a sort of running color commentary from the trial—than a



daily newspaper account ever could:

@rsylvester: One juror forgot to turn off his cell phone. Ring tone: “Carry on My Wayward Son,” by Kansas (1976).

At the end of the first day, I began receiving e-mails and tweets from people who liked being able to follow the trial and a story that had horrified our city. They learned how detectives unraveled the crime while I discovered the power and connectedness of instant feedback. Often I refer to Twitter and Facebook as the digital public square or the community water cooler—the place where people gather to discuss the latest news and gossip. These social media tools have also become the circulation department of the modern newsroom.

U.S. District Court Judge J. Thomas Marten got it. The following spring the tech-savvy jurist allowed me to tweet a trial about Wichita street gang activity from a courthouse that had previously forbidden reporters to carry cell phones or computers. Followers stayed with me for six weeks, tweeting questions and comments. One of their favorites: an annual gang barbecue, held by the Crips and referenced by its nickname from the witness stand. “Cripnic! OMG Cripnic!” came one response.

Those who follow my tweets and

Facebook postings appreciate having a virtual seat at the courthouse and insights about the inner workings of the justice system. A follower said she learned “it’s not like ‘CSI.’”

Risks and Rewards

This year I’m engaging with social media as I work on larger investigative projects. Trials have their own narrative, conducive to strings of tweets. Investigative stories unfold over time with gigabytes of information that may not have context for weeks or months.

A recent story I did followed Ronnie Rhodes, who had spent 30 years in prison after being convicted of murder. But a class of students at Washburn University’s School of Law in Topeka, Kansas suspected he was innocent. As reporting about his case got under way, we decided to use my blog, “What the Judge Ate for Breakfast.” It was risky to reveal parts of the story as it unfolded because in 30 years in this business I have seen projects hit dead ends. To publish incrementally might mean that the story would fizzle in public. Knowing this added tension for me, even if those in the social media community might not have appreciated this aspect of reporting the story in this way.

It was a colleague who convinced me that the reporting process would turn out to be as interesting as the underlying story. “There’s a reason Superman was a newspaper reporter. Because it’s a cool job, and people are interested, even if you’re not Superman,” said Katie Lohrenz, *The Wichita Eagle*’s newsroom programmer and my 27-year-old online journalism mentor. At a time when many news organizations jealously guard their information, online editors John Boogert and Tom



Ron Sylvester blogged about a law class project.

Shine realized that could change. Blogging this story meant we owned it.

The law class at Washburn first discovered problems with Rhodes's 1981 murder conviction after analyzing court transcripts, legal arguments, and evidence in the case. I wrote about Rhodes as I blogged about reporting. I filed short posts about my struggles to access records and find missing evidence.

My main rule: I wouldn't blog anything unless I could give it context. Sometimes I'd receive a piece of information that I wouldn't blog about for months because I didn't know what it would mean to the final story. Along the way, we posted rough cuts of videos and later we polished these for a multimedia presentation. We used comments on the blog to drive some of our reporting.

In the middle of all that, I met Rob Curley, head of online for the Las Vegas Sun, and a fellow Kansan. He told me how the Sun designed projects for online before giving them to print. We'd never done that, but now seemed a good time to try. So I began working with Eba Hamid, our Web producer, three months before we had set a print publication date for the Rhodes story. I deluged her with digital documents, videos and links and we finished our outline for our online presentation before the print side even saw the story budgets.

As the press ran, we stayed up half the night, adding the final touches, including links to outside resources. A priority was setting up multiple ways for community members to interact—with us and with each other. We assigned a Twitter hashtag, linked via Facebook, and set up a live chat with Rebecca Woodman, the law professor whose students launched the project.

This expanded and improved the level of comments we usually see on a story; we received thoughtful responses and questions from those forums that led to follow-up stories. Links to our story traveled through networks of innocence projects around the country.

Social media forces me to stay involved in my community. Rather than simply dropping my stories off at the copy desk, I respond to reader comments and curate feeds from Facebook and Twitter. The story stays alive for days, or, as with the Rhodes and child trafficking stories, weeks and months after the initial run.

When Jennifer White expressed outrage about child trafficking, she sent me a DM (a direct, personal message) asking what she could do. I referred her to the Wichita Children's Home's Street Outreach program, which works to prevent sex trafficking of runaways. As White got involved, she chronicled her efforts on Twitter. I collected her tweets into a blog post. Our online content editor linked to it off our homepage. Within a day, White found her inbox stuffed with offers of help. Her efforts caught the attention of our CBS affiliate. Lori Buselt, our interactive content editor, linked to the TV story about White. In an online community, there is no competition.

During my career, I've seen important stories die within the 24-hour news cycle. But the online community,

expanded by each individual's sharing within his or her social network, is giving my stories extended lives. Rhodes wrote that he's received support from prison staff members who have followed his story.

Social networking changes the relationship between reporters and their community. People stop being thought of as readers, viewers or an audience. They are friends. They follow you. They "like" you. I've found comments on Twitter and Facebook to be the most civil and insightful. On our website, people may comment anonymously. Sometimes, those can be hateful or inaccurate. I try to answer questions and politely correct inaccuracies. I've found that for those leaving comments, just knowing I'm paying attention can raise the level of conversation. Or, as White did, people become participants. Community members who once reacted to the stories we did now drive how we pursue the news.

A follow-up to the child sex trafficking story covered White's donation drive that produced the truckloads of items and \$2,300 in cash for the Street Outreach program. But I didn't just write stories. I also retweeted posts by White and others in the community, linked to their blogs, and put updates on Facebook.

These tools have become as valuable for my reporting as my notebook. They lead sources to me, like the e-mail I received that raised a question so obvious I wondered why I hadn't thought of it myself: Why does the city of Wichita license escort services that seem to be involved in child trafficking?

The next day I sent a request for records to the city department responsible for issuing such licenses. That I didn't come up with this angle turns out not to matter. Let's just put it this way—a friend passed along this information in our new town square. ■

Ron Sylvester has covered courts for The Wichita Eagle and Kansas.com for the past 11 years. Learn more about him at <http://rsylvester.com>.

Finding Information Pathways to Community Inclusion

‘I yearned for grassroots assessments of every community’s information ecology and widespread advocacy for stronger, more democratic media.’

BY PETER M. SHANE

If reporters and editors are looking for a word to identify what Americans need journalism to accomplish in the service of both community and democracy, that word is “inclusion.”

I figured this out during the two years I served as executive director of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy. And the role I’ve played in producing a follow-up project, *Information Stories*, deeply reinforced this lesson. Launched in March, this multimedia project features personal stories that illuminate what’s at stake when the flow of local news and information fails to serve well all the members of a community.

It was at the January 2008 initial planning meeting to set up the commission that Alberto Ibargüen, president of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, first described our task. He did this by setting forth what he called three straightforward questions:

- What are the information needs of local communities in our 21st-century American democracy?
- Are they being met?
- If not, what should we do about it?

Of course no question could be less straightforward or more profound than the first. The meaning of each of its three key elements—information, community and democracy—is not only ambiguous, but also hotly contested. Adding “journalism” to the mix hardly simplifies matters. Yet bringing these ideas within a single frame was itself a conceptual breakthrough.

The challenge the commission took on was to give expression to their relationship and to convey its importance

in concrete language—using as few four-syllable words as possible.

Democracy and Information

Meeting that challenge meant placing the emphasis on democracy. Focusing on democracy has two immediate, critical implications. First is the importance of linking information needs to geographically defined jurisdictions, not just those informal human networks of shared interest or mutual support that might or might not correspond to physical space. This is because of the way democracy is organized by geography.

While I may self-identify with loosely knit communities of law professors, dog owners, or movie lovers, it is as a resident of the city of Columbus, located in Franklin County, Ohio that I am empowered to exercise a democratic civic role. My fellow residents and I have the power and the authority to make choices regarding our school districts, city, county, state and nation. Without information to attend wisely to those choices, democracy withers.

The second implication is that democracy has to be defined. Too often people understand democracy in only a thin procedural sense. Political systems are sometimes called democratic for the sole reason that the government holds regularly scheduled elections. However, democracy represents more than elections, and the Knight commission embraced without hesitation the conclusion that “at a minimum, democracy means self-governance in a political system protective of liberty and equality.”

This was no trivial consensus to reach, especially given the diversity

and independent-mindedness of the members of this commission. What their final report calls “a political system protective of ... equality” must be, by definition, a system in which the needs of everyone are recognized and, at least, taken seriously. Achieving this, the commission stated, requires a healthy community information system to “reflect the interests, perspectives and narratives of the entire community.”

Journalism is central to this process of democratic inclusion. It is what draws us, as citizens, out of our private corners and into a shared conversation by helping members of a community solve problems, coordinate activities, achieve public accountability, and generate a sense of connectedness. Performing these functions in a democratic fashion requires those who provide information to draw the attention of an entire community to the interests and perspectives of every part of itself. Recognizing—and fairly evaluating—everyone’s interests and needs won’t happen unless those who are telling the community’s stories are determined to provide the public with relevant, meaningful news and information that is both credible and comprehensive.

Information Stories

After living with these issues for two years and helping to produce the commission’s report, my hope was that activists throughout the country would grab hold of the Knight commission’s ideas. I yearned for grassroots assessments of every community’s information ecology and widespread advocacy for stronger, more democratic media.

When Machines Decide What We ‘Think’

By Jan Gardner

The Internet helps like-minded citizens find each other, but does it foster democracy? A while back Eli Pariser, board president and former executive director of the liberal advocacy group MoveOn.org, felt optimistic about its potential for doing this. “For a time, it seemed that the Internet was going to entirely redemocratize society,” he writes in his new book, “The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding From You.” Now, Pariser has growing concerns about the answer to that question.

In the days following September 11, 2001, Pariser, then a recent college graduate, launched an online petition calling for a restrained and multilateral response to the attacks. More than half a million people quickly signed the petition, and Pariser joined MoveOn, a liberal online advocacy organization, shortly afterward.

Since then he’s watched the Internet evolve in ways that alarm him. “Democracy requires citizens to see things from one another’s point of view, but instead we’re more and more enclosed in our own bubbles,” he writes. “Democracy requires a reliance on shared facts; instead we’re being offered parallel but separate universes.”

Pariser’s concerns are based in part on his own experience with Facebook. Most of his friends lean



to the left, as he does, but Pariser is interested in what conservatives are thinking so he befriended some. Yet what they wrote stopped being displayed in his Facebook newsfeed because “Facebook was apparently doing the math,” he notes, and discovered that he clicked on links from his progressive friends more frequently than those from his conservative friends. Even if he wants to follow their thinking, algorithmic decisions prevent him from doing so.

Facebook isn’t the only online business that “thinks” it knows what

people want and acts accordingly. Pariser tells of an experiment in which he had two well-educated, politically progressive friends who live in the Northeast do a Google search for “BP” after last year’s Gulf of Mexico oil spill. Each got a different result—one received investment information about BP while the other saw news about the oil spill. It turns out that Google monitors 57 signals about a Web user’s profile and online behavior to personalize search results for each user.

Pariser expresses concern about the personalization of the Internet that creates this troubling filter bubble. Trapped within it, users are exposed to less that surprises them while being fed a steady diet of information that confirms their beliefs.

“Ultimately, democracy works only if we citizens are capable of thinking beyond our narrow self-interest. But to do so, we need a shared view of the world we cohabit. We need to come into contact with other peoples’ lives and needs and desires,” he writes. “The filter bubble pushes us in the opposite direction—it creates the impression that our narrow self-interest is all that exists. And while this is great for getting people to shop online, it’s not great for getting people to make better decisions together.” ■

But any report—no matter how well founded or well written—tends to be a weak mobilizing tool.

Information Stories became for me a digital vehicle to make these ideas vibrant and visible, concrete and accessible. This project was produced in collaboration with Liv Gjestvang, a

filmmaker based in Columbus and the coordinator of Ohio State University’s Digital Union, and helped by a small Knight grant. We recruited people who could describe what it means to suffer the consequences of a broken information flow—and then seek ways to remedy the silence. They scripted

and helped to produce three- to five-minute videos about their personal and community experiences. On our website, each story can be watched on its own, but we also produced a DVD that integrates all of them—along with an introduction and conclusion I created—into a documentary.

These seven women and five men storytellers form a mini-tapestry of America—teenager to senior citizen, white, black, Latino, Asian, Native American, rural, urban, straight, gay, native-born, immigrant, with and without recognized disabilities, living variously in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, Far West, Southwest and California. (Hoped-for recruits from the Deep South fell through.) Each responded in a different way to the inadequacy of the community's information flow. Some turned to newspapers, both print and online; for others, radio, TV and broadband access became their vehicles. Still others used e-mail lists, public art, face-to-face structured community conversation, or direct engagement in community organizing.

Some of their stories are explicitly about journalism:

- A labor union secretary and mother of five narrates the struggle she went through to get media coverage for health and safety issues related to local mining in Libby, Montana.
- A New Hampshire state legislator explains her role in creating an online newspaper, *The Forum*, in an area of her state that she refers to as a “black hole of news coverage.”

Some are stories about activism:

- The executive director of Native Public Media describes the drive to bring broadband to Indian Country.
- A high school student relates why she thought it important to make transgender people a more visible presence at San Francisco Pride.
- The director of a faith-based community organizing project explains how he helps people overcome the powerlessness they feel when they live “in an information vacuum” generated by people and institutions that benefit from the public's “lack of understanding.”

All are stories about the need for inclusion and the dangers of exclusion. In “Why I Mind,” Brenda Jo Brueggeman, a hard-of-hearing English pro-



Snapshots from Information Stories.

fessor, explains her determination to bring the voices and concerns of deaf students into the flow of information in her community. She tells the story of Carl Dupree, a student at Gallaudet University whose repeated failures to pass a required remedial English exam led to an angry confrontation in the English department office. With the arrival of campus security, Dupree became so agitated at being handcuffed—an action that caused him

to lose his one mode of communication—that the police forcefully subdued him. When they inadvertently placed too much pressure on his neck, he died.

It is hard to imagine a more graphic image of the life and death stakes for individuals when they are silenced, misunderstood or ignored in the flow of information.

I recently spoke about the Information Stories project to Fiona Morgan, a graduate student at Duke University and a former reporter who coordinated another follow-up initiative to the Knight commission, the New America Foundation's study of the media ecology of the Research Triangle in North Carolina. When I asked her what she learned from her own project identifying gaps in information flow in North Carolina, she expressed a conclusion identical to my own: “Being left out of the conversation is such a toxic experience for people that it threatens a community's ability to make public decisions and resolve conflict.”

Living amid a digital overload of information at a time when people often limit their attention to stories and commentary confirming the beliefs they already hold, the need to expand awareness of “the other” within our communities has never been greater. Many neighborhoods, towns and villages get virtually no journalistic attention although digital media makes such attention more possible. The key questions remain of who will tell these stories and about whom and for whom they will be told. The stakes for democracy are serious, and they reside in how these questions are answered. Journalists have an important role to play—and the 12 narrators of Information Stories offer instructive paths to follow. ■

Peter M. Shane served as executive director of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy. He is the Jacob E. Davis and Jacob E. Davis II Chair in Law at the Moritz College of Law at Ohio State University. During 2011-12, he will be a visiting professor of law at Harvard Law School.

Journalism of Value = Context for Communities

The approach the Chicago News Cooperative is ‘trying to use journalism to create communities organized around an interest in the news.’

BY JAMES O’SHEA



The Chicago News Cooperative serves readers with in-depth coverage of city issues that promotes civic engagement.

When I was a young reporter for The Des Moines Register, an editor sent me to Fort Dodge, Iowa to follow up on a tip about a cover-up of a local police scandal. The Fort Dodge police, of course, didn’t want a Register reporter snooping around trying to unearth details about trouble in the ranks. In fact, the police had done a good job keeping the scandal under wraps, confining it to rumors swapped over late afternoon long necks at the local saloon.

When hours of attempts to pry loose some details failed, I retreated to a coffee shop to grab a late lunch and considered calling the state desk to report that I would need another day. Then the community spoke to me. “Did you hear about the police scandal?” one man at the lunch counter said to another. His friend replied: “I didn’t see anything in The [Fort Dodge] Messenger this morning. I’ll look at the Register tomorrow. They’ll have it.”

I can still hear the confidence in the man’s voice about the newspaper where I first worked as a daily journalist, and I can still feel my guilt at even thinking about giving up on a story that my readers clearly wanted. The Register called itself “The Newspaper Iowa Depends Upon,” and generations of journalists had delivered on that pledge.

I soon hit the streets of Fort Dodge determined to live up to my newspaper’s heritage, and when the next morning’s Register landed on doorsteps in Fort Dodge and elsewhere throughout Iowa, the front page had a story with my byline. It was about the Fort Dodge police scandal.

Serving a Different Community

Although most of my colleagues and I didn’t know it at the time, Des Moines Register reporters of the 1970’s had it easy compared to their contemporaries at places like the Chicago News Cooperative (CNC), where I’m now editor. The man at the lunch counter in Fort Dodge was an integral part of a much larger and easily identifiable community that the newspaper served with good, solid, professionally edited journalism. Reporters wrote for the community, and the community of readers responded by continuing to

pay for a remarkably concise account of the day's events delivered to their doorstep every morning for less than the price of a cup of coffee.

Almost every little town in Iowa had a town square but The Des Moines Register served as the community's mega town square. Today, of course, all that's changed. Reporters at newspapers, magazines, websites and on airwaves face a far more daunting challenge: The community they exist to serve is more elusive, diverse, fractured and, it seems, reluctant to pay even a small price for the news and information that journalists deliver to their laptops or mobile phones.

There are many reasons for the breakdown of the community once at the fingertips of Register reporters, and the causes of the rupture extend beyond journalism. The suburbanization that converted much of America into soulless communities lacking a center of gravity no doubt played a role. Cable television also fractured the community by dramatically expanding the range of broadcasting choices available to working men and women who once watched the same evening newscasts or read the news in their local newspapers. Fragmentation only increased with the dawn of the Internet when people could sit in front of a computer and create communities organized around narrow—and sometimes—parochial interests. Then there are our industry's self-imposed wounds, including a tendency to edit for advertisers, instead of readers and viewers.

Regardless of the cause of the problems eroding the media, though, the time has come for journalists to use their skills to help re-create community. Embracing such a strategy could be the craft's salvation.

Here at the CNC, which got off the ground in October 2009 with some grants and contributions, we are trying to use journalism to create communities organized around an interest in the news. If, for example, someone in Chicago is interested in education, we intend to provide in-depth information about the city's schools that readers and citizens can't get anywhere else.

I'm not talking merely about better coverage of the local school board meeting or slapping an interview with the head of the teachers union online. That's giving the community "information" which is often free—and should be—since it is usually cheap to create and can be found on the school board's or teachers union's website.

By contrast, journalism isn't cheap, and it's not free. What journalists do is report on that information, expose contradictions, apply a skeptical eye to underlying assumptions, and bring to the community information that's not on anybody's website. In other words, they add value to what might already be known by some and give it meaning within the context of the community's priorities and the day's events.

At the same time, the members of this community are doing exactly what they should do: Demanding value if they are going to pay for something.

Creating Value

We wrestle with this situation every day at the CNC as we do this work at a time when the traditional business model for journalism is under attack as never before. For decades we've relied almost exclusively on advertising revenue to subsidize the cost of news coverage. But I doubt that advertising will remain a reliable partner or source of revenue to provide the kind of resources needed to cover the news anymore. It might remain a part of the picture, but I'm sure it will be a much smaller part.

That means journalists will have to hit the streets and create something that people in the community will actually pay for because it gives them something of value. So we should quit trying to fool everyone with vacuous, cheap content designed to justify ad stacks and start reporting, which is the backbone of journalism.

In one CNC project now under way, we are creating detailed, reported school profiles. Reporters go into schools and question principals, teachers, students and parents. We are even exploring the use of some yardsticks by which the community can judge

the quality of the education that the schools provide. Our goal is to create journalism that will inject enough value into the information to entice readers to join our digital community and get access to our reporting for a nominal membership fee.

By creating numerous communities of interest organized around subjects such as politics, health, technology, science and other areas, our goal is to build a broader community and create a diverse stream of revenue from membership fees, ads and sponsorship that will finance our reporting.

This is not journalism only for those who can afford it. In one pilot project involving local political coverage, we used the membership fees from "Early and Often," the name of our paid site, to support the "Palm Card," a free public interest political news bulletin for those who couldn't—or wouldn't—pay for the exclusive detailed reporting we delivered behind a paywall. Readers of the "Palm Card" didn't get the rich detail offered in "Early and Often," but they got some news. CNC will also provide free memberships to all public libraries and will encourage those with means to sponsor memberships for those in the community who can't afford our fee of about \$100 a year.

The idea animating our effort is to create the kind of civic engagement that enhances the community and serves the public interest.

Will this work? It's too soon to say. But we would rather be out there trying to figure out how we can finance quality journalism than waiting for doomsday to arrive, which is what is going to happen if we all follow the present course. All we risk is failure, a small price to pay for our ambitions.

At CNC, we believe journalism means as much to the community as the community means to journalism. The Internet has made it far easier to spread rumors, lies and propaganda disguised as news at a time when traditional news organizations are cutting back on reporting as they fight for their lives. In some cases, journalistic organizations merely pick up the official line of the company and institutions they cover and report it as news.

As a correspondent, I traveled the world and often saw communities without decent journalism. It is not a pretty picture.

If we don't figure out how to finance public service journalism, I fear the consequences. It is not as if the world of tomorrow will be one without news. We will have quality coverage, perhaps better than ever. But quality news will be for the wealthy—those who can afford to pay \$2 a day or about \$6 on Sunday for The New York Times or thousands of dollars a year for a subscription to one of Bloomberg's targeted services. For those of lesser

means, the news could become the raw, underreported and unanalyzed information they will get from the rapidly growing "news" organizations being set up by the public relations departments at places like city hall.

To serve the community, journalists must provide deeper and better journalism, the kind that creates civic engagement and value. We must also educate the community, not only about the reporting we can deliver but also about the tangible and intangible value of quality public service journalism that holds those who serve the community accountable for their views and actions.

The community needs great journalism more than ever. As journalists, we must rise to the challenge. We have an opportunity to improve our craft. We can—and should—do better. ■

James O'Shea is cofounder and editor of the Chicago News Cooperative, former managing editor of the Chicago Tribune, and past editor in chief of the Los Angeles Times. His book, "The Deal From Hell: How Moguls and Wall Street Plundered Great American Newspapers," will be published by PublicAffairs in June.

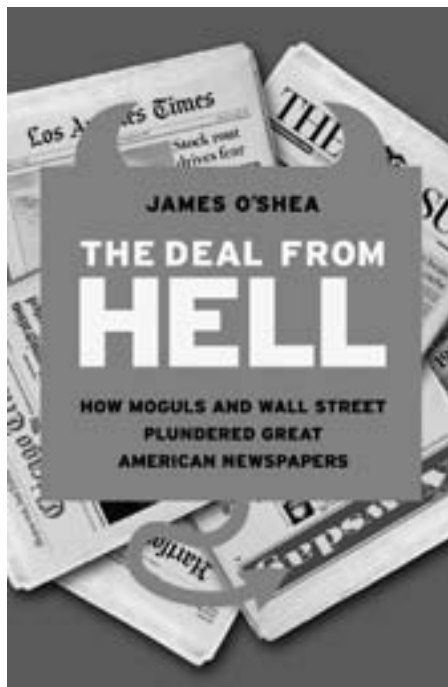
Revealing the Underbelly of Turbulent Times

By Jan Gardner

The plot of James O'Shea's book reads like a fast-paced novel: greedy owners, corporate intrigue, a boorish manager, and a staff revolt. Yet it's a true story.

In "The Deal From Hell: How Moguls and Wall Street Plundered Great American Newspapers," published in June by PublicAffairs, O'Shea, a former top editor at the Chicago Tribune and the Los Angeles Times, chronicles the business deals and internal warfare that threatened the two papers where he spent most of his career. He worked at the Chicago Tribune for 27 years, including five as managing editor; in Los Angeles, his job as the paper's editor was short-lived during turbulent times.

The troubles started when the Chicago Tribune's owner, the Tribune Company, bought the Times Mirror Company, owner of the Los Angeles Times. It was the biggest merger in the history of American journalism, one that went terribly wrong and got worse several years later when real estate billionaire Samuel Zell acquired the Tribune



Company in what he came to call a "deal from hell."

That was bad enough but there was more bad news. As O'Shea points out, even before the ascendancy of the Internet, the media landscape was undergoing seismic

shifts. Newspapers missed, ignored or underestimated the rise of cable television, which coincided with the beginning of a big-time decline in their circulation. "It's hard to believe," he writes, "that these momentous changes failed to generate panic in newspaper publishing circles."

In 2006, as Times staff members revolted against the newsroom directives coming out of the corporate headquarters in Chicago, O'Shea was assigned to take over the editorship of the Times and quell the dissent. The next year O'Shea left the paper rather than make more staff cuts.

Harvard's Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy offered him a fellowship, giving him time, he hoped, to think about the future of newspapers. Back in Chicago before heading to Cambridge, his old paper landed on the doorstep, promoting a search for the city's best cheeseburger. He was certain that this was the right time to cancel his subscription and move on. ■

Reporting Pushes Past Language and Ethnic Divides

‘... Alhambra Source has revealed significant lessons about the power of journalism to build community in diverse and underserved areas.’

BY DANIELA GERSON

Municipal elections were canceled last fall in Alhambra, California, a predominantly Asian and Latino city located about eight miles east of downtown Los Angeles. This is the first time that people there can remember this happening. City officials say this means that residents are satisfied; why else would no one have challenged any of the five incumbents on the city council and school board who were up for re-election? But many residents—the majority of whom are foreign born—are unaware of the city’s governing processes.

Nor do they feel a strong sense of belonging to this place. One reason they might feel this way is the long-time absence of a single news source available to all of Alhambra’s residents. On most days the closest any reporter comes to city hall is in the form of a life-sized bronze statue of the long-gone Alhambra Post-Advocate’s editor. Linguistic barriers also limit the exposure of the reporting that does exist in English, Chinese or Spanish.

What’s happening in Alhambra relates to the intersection of how information flows within a community and how people are engaged in civic-minded activities. For more than a decade this has been a core topic of research for Sandra Ball-Rokeach, a professor of communication at the University of Southern California’s (USC) Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, and her Metamorphosis team. [See box on page 26]. In 2008 she teamed up with Michael Parks, former director of the school’s journalism program and former editor of the Los Angeles Times, to look at how local news coverage could enhance civic engagement in Alhambra.



Present and past: Alhambra Source editor Daniela Gerson is a community journalist as was the late Warner Jenkins, editor of the now-defunct Alhambra Post-Advocate, whom the city honored with a statue. *Photo by Tom Shea.*

This academic project has since morphed into an experimental hyperlocal site called the Alhambra Source. The research afforded by the university and the expertise of Metamorphosis has been fundamental to the Source’s early signs of success. With this research-based input, we grounded the website in the issues residents view as important.

Knitting Communities Together

With a background in immigration reporting—and with a smattering of community organizing skills including managing a Brooklyn farmers’ market and running a small nonprofit magazine—I was hired nearly two years ago to take what the research was telling us and translate it into an online news source for the residents of Alhambra. The site would be, by

necessity, multilingual, with stories focused on building community and overcoming ethnic barriers. Rather than rely on beats in the traditional sense, it would cultivate “communities of shared interest” that cut across ethnicity with topics such as food, schools and transit.

This is not a simple task. While hyperlocal news sites are common today, most serve relatively affluent, homogeneous communities. Alhambra is largely a lower middle-class suburban city of about 85,000 that has undergone tremendous demographic changes during the past 20 years. Residents—about 50 percent of whom are Asian, one third Latino, and 10 percent white—tend to self-segregate along ethnic lines.

Despite these challenges, in less than a year the Alhambra Source has revealed significant lessons about the power of journalism to build com-

What We Learn Informs What We Do

By Nancy Chen

The Alhambra Source was born out of an interest in the dynamic relationships among new technologies, everyday communication practices, and civic engagement in cities with diverse populations. It was inspired by the findings of *Metamorphosis*, a project that studies how globalization, new technologies, and diversity are transforming urban communities in the Los Angeles area. The aim of the project is to improve community life.

During the past decade, the *Metamorphosis* research team at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism has collected data in seven Los Angeles County communities, including Alhambra.

What they have learned led to a communication infrastructure theory, which goes like this: The exchange of neighborhood stories between residents, local media, and community organizations plays a crucial role in promoting neighborhood belonging, collective efficacy, and civic participation. When taken together, these three indicators provide a way to assess a neighborhood's level of civic engagement.

Last year the team turned its attention to exploring the potential of the Internet in facilitating local storytelling and promoting civic engagement. This led to a partnership with the journalism school in developing Alhambra Source—and transformed theory into practice in this ethnically diverse city.

The three key indicators in the theory have particular meaning:

- Neighborhood belonging is about how residents in an area feel about

their neighbors and interact with them.

- Collective efficacy measures how confident residents feel about relying on their neighbors in working together to solve community problems.
- Civic participation is a measure of how much residents participate in civic activities, such as voting in local elections and volunteering at the local library.



A bilingual sign in a local farmers' market.
Photo by Daniela Gerson.

In a study that *Metamorphosis* did a decade ago, the researchers discovered that Chinese residents in the Alhambra area had the lowest level of neighborhood belonging when compared with those in six other residential areas in Los Angeles County. They weren't surprised since many of Alhambra's residents were recent immigrants from Asia who were adjusting to their adopted country. In 2009, focus groups involving Alhambra residents confirmed that many had low levels of neighborhood belonging, collective efficacy, and civic participation. There was also little interaction among the three main ethnic groups in the neighborhood—Asians, Latinos and Caucasians.

This research team next looked at Alhambra-related stories in the news media. They found scant coverage of Alhambra in the mainstream and regional media; the only news outlet that solely focused on covering the city was a monthly Chamber of Commerce publication. It was this combination of almost no local storytelling and low levels of civic engagement that motivated the creation of Alhambra Source—an online storytelling platform that encourages residents and community organizations to produce, disseminate and discuss stories of importance to them.

Design of the website and decisions about key content also emerged out of focus group discussions with residents and in interviews with community organizations and local businesses. This process added voices to the results from a 2010 survey that collected data on residents' practices for accessing local news and involvement with community organizations. Also measured then were levels of civic engagement and patterns of interaction among ethnic groups. These baseline data will be used in two years to measure the impact of Alhambra Source. ■

Nancy Chen is a researcher with Metamorphosis involved with investigating challenges to and opportunities for promoting civic engagement through local journalism in Alhambra, an ethnically diverse community in Los Angeles County. More information about Metamorphosis's research and theory can be found at www.metamorph.org.

munity in diverse and underserved areas. These relate to journalistic work we are doing that other communities could adapt. Two lessons, in particular, stand out:

- Even without full translation, there are important ways that news can have an impact that transcends language barriers.
- A volunteer team of community members, working with an experienced reporter, can influence what happens in a local community beyond what journalists on their own can accomplish.

We began with the goal of overcoming linguistic barriers. This meant the site needed to provide news in the three predominant languages spoken in the city: English, Chinese and Spanish. Realizing this goal presented serious challenges. We did not want to create three parallel sites on which individuals would read—and comment—in their respective languages and not interact. Moreover, while we had on our team Chinese and Spanish speakers as translators, keeping up with the demand for daily content was too much for our quite limited paid staff (me).

We are now in a beta stage for the multilingual site with static pages in three languages. USC students and volunteers provide translation into English of select Chinese and Spanish stories submitted by those in the community. These stories are then published in three languages in a single post. The entire site is also available with a rough translation via Google. With a local twist on an approach that New America Media, a collaboration of ethnic news organizations in the United States, has taken on a national level, we provide full summaries of

all Alhambra coverage in addition to full translation of some Chinese- and Spanish-language reporting.

Before we launched, city administrators, police, teachers and education policymakers told us they could not read the Chinese press. This is a serious problem in a city with three active Chinese-language newspapers providing the bulk of local coverage—and I think it's fair to assume that Alhambra is not unique in this challenge. Despite the Source's limited format, the response to having stories available in three languages has been impressive, and it has created a bridge between what was thought of as "ethnic media" and local decision-makers.



Cecilia Garcia, one of Alhambra Source's community contributors, joins others at the publication's monthly pot-luck dinner meeting.

Photo by Javier Cabral.

In thinking about recruiting community contributors, we relied on the experiences of websites such as the Chi-Town Daily News, Oakland Local, and Sacramento Press. Like us, each of these news sites unites the community expertise of volunteers with the skills of a journalist. Having in-house knowledge about journalism turns out to be crucial in the production process. But equally critical are the in-person meetings and the organizing efforts that go into making the citizen part of this partnership work. I went out

to speak with students at high schools and people in libraries, and I contacted active online users and people involved in nonprofit organizations. After my initial outreach, people started to come to us on their own—from all walks of life. Now more than 30 community contributors and youth reporters, who speak a total of eight languages, are actively involved; they range from engineers and stay-at-home moms to mechanics and students, and they range in age from teenagers to retirees.

Our monthly meetings—part pot-luck dinner, part journalism training, and part editorial meeting—rival in the richness of story ideas any newsroom meeting I've attended. We are able

to offer nothing or very limited payment, but what we can provide is a platform and the opportunity to hone a contributor's voice and argument. And it's a rare opportunity for residents of varied backgrounds to get to know one another. After the first holiday dinner, I did not want to keep asking the volunteer contributors to bring dishes, which have ranged from Taiwanese stew to pad Thai to arroz con leche. But they voted for it, and I've found that sharing food at our meetings nurtures collaboration.

Stories They Tell

The stories that community contributors have excelled at telling come from a personal perspective but also involve some reporting. Some of the more popular pieces have also shed light on the perceptions of and interactions between groups in Alhambra. Anthony Perez asked why at a high school that is largely Asian and Latino he was the only Hispanic in the school's student government out of 52 elected members. Nasrin Aboulhosn shared what it was like to grow up Lebanese in a community that is almost all Asian

and Hispanic. Joe Soong produced a satirical piece about why Chinese residents might not put much faith in the traditional restaurant rating system. Inthava Bounpraseuth wrote about why as a young gay Asian man he chose to live in the relatively conservative city.

Zaiming Hu was the first writer to contact the Source about contributing in Chinese. She came to a contributor meeting and suggested a critique of a new public park with a giant arch, modeled on the Arc de Triomphe, in the middle of it. A few days later Hu, who runs a small Internet business, was out on the streets gathering opinions from other residents. The article she wrote—in Chinese and translated into English—was one of the most commented on stories last year. At another meeting, when a community

contributor, who was a member of the predominantly white preservation group, wanted to write about the phenomenon of mini-mansions replacing historic homes, Hu provided another view. She could not understand why anyone would prefer an old house over a big, beautiful new one.

The contributors' varied voices and backgrounds enable the Alhambra Source to represent this diverse and dynamic city in a way that no traditional newsroom (or reporter) possibly could. What they are sharing is strengthening bridges of understanding and connection. What started as an effort that city officials sometimes referred to as angry bloggers who are not "real journalists" is taken increasingly seriously. When the next election occurs, as long as the Alhambra Source is still around, our online forum will

be a place for community members to discuss and debate the issues. I have a strong feeling no incumbent will go unchallenged. ■

Daniela Gerson is the editor of the Alhambra Source. She has reported on immigration for newspapers and public radio, including the Financial Times Magazine, The New York Sun, and WNYC. She has received fellowships from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the Institute for Justice and Journalism and was an Arthur F. Burns Fellow. She is a graduate of the inaugural class of the Specialized Journalism program at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism.

Focusing a New Kind of Journalism on a City's Needs

'... residents need to have journalism delivered as they want to consume it and in ways that will encourage them to move beyond absorbing news to acting on it.'

BY BILL MITCHELL

Check in with journalists who have spent part of their careers in Detroit—there are a lot of us—and you'll often hear the phrase, "Hell of a news town!" Indeed, the Motor City is packed with the edge and drama that drives compelling accounts of politics, race, crime, corruption, sports and the highs and lows of one of the nation's most important and storied industries.

It's been 35 years, but I've never forgotten the thrill of jumping on the Woodward bus and spotting people reading my story in that morning's Free Press. In my heart, I just knew they were exclaiming to themselves, "Holy Cow!" or words to that effect.

There's still plenty of hell-raising journalism in Detroit, but as good as it is, it's not enough. These days, Detroit—as a city, as a community—is wrestling with a challenge that requires a new kind of storytelling for a new sort of news town. The U.S. Census figures released earlier this year quantify a



"Taking Charge of Our Story," a public forum organized by New Detroit, inspired the idea behind Detroit143. Photo of The Supremes courtesy of The Detroit News. Poster design by Story Worldwide.

decline—under way for decades—that is now reaching a crisis point. The Detroit envisioned a century ago for a population of two million is home to just over 700,000 people today. It's a decline that, combined with recent economic trends, has rendered Detroit unsustainable as a city with its current distribution of neighborhoods, city services, and schools.

Its mayor—former Detroit Pistons star Dave Bing—has highlighted the reshaping of the city as the most important task facing his administration and has launched the Detroit Works Project to address it. His staff has conducted a series of public meetings as part of a civic engagement effort designed to ensure that whatever plan is adopted reflects public opinion. The city has provided few details of what's under consideration, but what appears likely is a version of urban triage, aimed at stabilizing some parts of the city as others are converted from neighborhoods to urban farms or who knows what else.

The city's print, electronic and online media have produced some solid reporting on these issues and public discussions. Detroit is also home to several examples of recent media innovation, including a yearlong project by Time magazine, which bought a house where reporters in its reopened bureau lived; WXYZ-TV's creation of a Detroit2020 website focused on the city's future; and various initiatives such as Data Driven Detroit and Model D that examine the city from enterprising new angles.

Despite cutbacks, the Free Press and The Detroit News maintain the biggest newsrooms in town and lead the way in local accountability journalism. Two years ago the Free Press won a Pulitzer Prize for its game-changing coverage that culminated in Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick resigning and going to jail.

But it's not enough. The uncertain future of Detroit's 143 square miles of land and water—and of the various communities of people who live there—demand a level of focused and interactive coverage that has not yet been attempted in this city. At The Poynter Institute, where I teach

entrepreneurial journalism, we urge a ruthless focus on audience needs as the sine qua non of any new venture. In Detroit, the people most affected by the city's reshaping require a steady stream of hard facts and clear analysis as they decide their future. But just as importantly, residents need to have journalism delivered as they want to consume it and in ways that will encourage them to move beyond absorbing news to acting on it.

We won't know what the audience really needs until we get on the ground and find out, but here is some of what journalism for and about this community might look like:

- Mobile apps with built-in opportunities to mobilize around key issues.
- An online game inviting players to design Detroit's future, Sim City-style.
- Lots of meetings and follow-ups at whatever public library branches remain open.

Journalism and Civic Engagement

During the past 18 months, four of us have assembled the outline for a news venture—we named it Detroit143—aimed at addressing those needs. We discovered after the fact that the numbers 143 signal “I Love You” in texting code. It's a double entendre that might seem inappropriate for a traditionally detached news organization but fits our venture just fine.

The initiative's prime mover is Kirk Cheyfitz. He and I covered the city's first black mayor, Coleman Young, in the 1970's before heading off in different directions. It was Cheyfitz's outraged reaction to a Time magazine cover story pinning much of the blame for Detroit's woes on Young that prompted him to track me down in the fall of 2009. He found me in Cambridge, where I was a fellow at Harvard's Joan Shorenstein Center for the Press, Politics and Public Policy and using my time to explore new ways to sustain local news. Just a few doors down the hall from me sat Daniel Okrent, the author of the Time story that had upset him. [See

box by Cheyfitz on page 32.]

I didn't share Cheyfitz's feelings about that story, but he did convince me that somebody—maybe us—should dig deeper into how Detroit ended up in such a mess and what role journalism might play in its turnaround. It was then that this effort was launched with the goal of creating new connections between what journalists can do and what people in Detroit need to push their city ahead.

Shirley Stancato, president and CEO of New Detroit, the city's leading civic coalition, joined forces with us shortly thereafter to organize a daylong conference to explore the roots of the city's problems and the sort of journalism required for its years ahead. [See box by Stancato on page 31.] And last summer, former New York Times correspondent Lynette Clemetson joined the team after completing a Knight-Wallace Fellowship focused on news innovation. [See box by Clemetson on page 30.]

Together, we've been envisioning ways of linking journalism and civic engagement in ways not tried before.

Just as Cheyfitz took inspiration from Time magazine to get us started, we intend to build on the sort of innovation demonstrated by such city-focused journalism initiatives as EveryBlock, SeeClickFix and Localocracy. But technology isn't going to get the job done without the intervention and interaction of dedicated journalists and engaged audiences. So we intend to focus all three—the people, the journalism, and the technology—in undertaking the most important story in town. Doing this will cost money, which we have not yet raised. But we believe there's no better place than Detroit—and no better story than its reimagination—to get to work building a new kind of news town. ■

Bill Mitchell is the leader of entrepreneurial and international programs at The Poynter Institute. He worked as a journalist in Detroit for 15 years, including stints as a reporter and editor at the Detroit Free Press and a bureau chief for Time magazine.

A Promising Collaboration of Place, Time and Niche

By Lynette Clemetson

I am a believer in niche publishing and its power to create communities and inspire change. Niche communities built around ideology, ethnicity and gender can feed polarization, but they also command the capacity to empower. In 2008 when I helped start *TheRoot.com*—targeting a news-savvy African-American community—niche was central to our mission. Within our demographic target was also a subject niche—one then tightly tied to politics—that gave the site edge, identity and a unique utility.

It was a gift of timing that *Detroit143* reached out to me just as I had concluded a year studying start-ups as a Knight-Wallace Fellow at the University of Michigan. I had become intrigued with how niche news sites built around subject matter had invigorated

they have partnered. Commercial juggernauts like *Politico* and *The Huffington Post* have enlivened a crowded field of traditional competitors. Conversely, some websites, such as *TBD.com*, that have tried to take on too much, too fast, have faltered.

As niche start-ups go, *Detroit143*—with its laserlike focus on covering the resizing and reimagining of the Motor City—is rich with journalistic and social potential. This community-based story is a journalist's dream, as the tinderbox of issues that undergird Detroit's history—race, class, social engineering, and industrial aspiration—are interwoven in the political effort to redefine its boundaries. The urban planning effort cannot be covered without diving into those issues.

Local newspapers, radio and television have done quality reporting on the city's political issues. But they do not have the resources or mandate to cover all aspects of this story with intensity. The editorial mission of *Detroit143* is both broad and well-defined. Do we cover street violence, domestic disturbances, and general police beat stories? No. Do we cover Mayor Dave Bing's program of incentives to entice police officers to move from the suburbs into city neighborhoods targeted for saving? Absolutely.

Plenty of room to roam, not enough to get lost. And *Detroit143*'s mission of enhancing its journalism with tools that encourage and

enable community response to our stories—not merely with comments, but with organized, purposeful civic participation—takes the editorial mandate the final mile into a mission devoted to action-oriented democracy.

So much that is applauded in Web-based journalism these days is about technical innovation—cool tools that allow users to sort and visualize complex data and zippy programs and apps that allow instant information and social validation. *Detroit143* will employ the best of those tools, but its real innovation is the intentional pairing of journalism and community action.

The challenge of defining the lines between journalism and action and figuring out when and when not to cross them is a bold editorial experiment worth undertaking. And the unanswered question of whether Detroit can transform itself into a livable, sustainable city is the story most in need of being told. It is arguably one of the most critical stories for the entire region since what happens in Detroit will affect the road ahead for other struggling cities. Decisions made in the next few years will play out for at least the next quarter century.

The rethinking of Detroit's 143 square miles is a remarkable story. It is a serious journalistic endeavor and as such creates the perfect niche where journalism and community can mingle. What journalist wouldn't want in? ■

*Lynette Clemetson is a former New York Times correspondent who has been helping to shape the vision for *Detroit143* since completing a Knight-Wallace Fellowship at the University of Michigan last year.*



Community members come together to examine Detroit's financial challenges. *Photo by Ellen Jacob.*

journalism. Nonprofit ventures like *ProPublica*—focused on investigative journalism—and *The Texas Tribune*—devoted to reporting on that state's government—have elevated the craft and bolstered the coverage of established media with which

A New Partnership to Build a Common Understanding

By Shirley Stancato

Why is New Detroit, an urban leadership coalition, teaming up with Detroit143? My Detroit143 partners are journalists. I'm a former banker, and New Detroit is a coalition of leaders from business, labor, government and religious and community organizations. New Detroit got started in the summer of 1967 after the violence that erupted in our city exposed deep racial barriers that persist today. So why are we—disparate entities, each with a seemingly different mission—banding together to create a different sort of news venture?

I admit that I had some misgivings about teaming up with journalists in this Detroit143 collaboration. The work New Detroit does in winding our way through differences and forming a consensus on sensitive, sometimes painful issues is usually best done away from the spotlight. The focus of journalists is on uncovering information and laying it out and letting facts fall where they may. So I was concerned that getting involved in a journalistic endeavor could jeopardize what we do.

On the other hand, the reason New Detroit was created more than four decades ago is the very reason why it is important for the Detroit143 collaborative to be created. From day one we have tried to come up with strategies that address this country's most intractable problem: race relations. That remains a monumental task. We continually confront versions of Detroit's history based on myths and



Detroit's challenges hold the attention of those who reside in its 143 square miles. *Photo by Ellen Jacob.*

legends that have too often and too widely become accepted as fact. Yet a highly inaccurate history impedes efforts to turn the city and region around because misinformation or a lack of information cannot be the basis for effective community action.

New Detroit ultimately is about bringing diverse parts of the community together to take action in our common interest. This difficult mission requires, as a first condition, a common understanding of the problems to be overcome. This means that New Detroit is vitally interested in providing people with the kind of common understanding and shared knowledge that empowers a community to take concerted, democratic action.

Through the years we have created a number of programs to develop a more fundamental understanding of "The Origins of the Urban Crisis," to borrow the title of a groundbreaking look at Detroit's history by historian Thomas J. Sugrue. But those programs have never achieved the wide audience that I believe can be reached through journalistic endeavors.

Detroit143 grew out of a daylong symposium, "Taking Charge of Our Story," that New Detroit cosponsored in early 2010 and was devoted to building understanding of the core factors of Detroit's current dilemma. That experience became the seed for Detroit143, whose goal is to create an economically viable, professionally rigorous journalistic model that will tell multidimensional contemporary

stories of a city now in the process of reinventing itself for the 21st century. As that process unfolds, an informed public must feel fully engaged—with voices heard, views respected—in discussions and decisions that determine what happens next.

Detroit143 is grounded in the belief that journalism can be a part of the solution. Its founders believe that by fully covering the issues involved with resizing and reshaping the city and assuring that all people are heard and informed, we will enable residents to constructively engage in the rebuilding process.

So why are we collaborating with Detroit143? Because we believe this journalistic initiative is critical to charting our city's future. Because I trust that this venture—directed by veteran journalists with a proven track record of in-depth coverage of complex issues involving race and urban affairs—can help to build new levels of understanding in this city and region. ■

Shirley Stancato is president and CEO of New Detroit.

Advertising as Storytelling—So News Stories Can Be Told

By Kirk Cheyfitz

While much attention is focused on how to “fix” journalism, the bigger problem is fixing advertising to pay for the news. For me, Detroit143 is, in part, about reinventing what advertising is and how it is sold so it can again pay for journalism. In Detroit143, we want to demonstrate how a serious news organization can be a business success. In doing this, we will also be providing Detroit businesses with tools to drive their financial success, thus helping support Detroit’s economic survival.

My journey to this viewpoint began when I was a reporter in the 1970’s for the Detroit Free Press. During the next two decades I started a magazine in Detroit and, backed by a rich Minnesotan, built a newspaper, magazine and media group with some 1,200 employees. In the process, I learned about the economics of the news business. Then the Web arrived with a clear message—it was going to alter the equations that had made print publishing a dependable money machine.

The Web made traditional advertising progressively less effective. Ads had relied on publishers’ ability to attract audiences with valuable, relevant content (i.e., the news) and then interrupt it with commercial messages (i.e., ads) that often were an irrelevant nuisance. The Web disrupted things by making it extremely easy for audiences to consume



content while blocking, avoiding, evading and ignoring ads. By 2010, total annual print and online ad revenue for U.S. newspapers had fallen to \$25.8 billion, down \$23.6 billion or 48 percent from the peak year of 2005.

Audience control over content means advertising now has to be just as valuable, engaging and sought-after as news and entertainment. To garner attention, it has to be worthwhile and useful—valuable and original stories, usable tools and apps, engaging games, and more. In founding and running an independent digital agency, Story Worldwide, that creates such content to promote brands and publishes it across media, I’ve been able to demonstrate that all this content-marketing stuff really works.

Detroit143 will abandon traditional ad sales and instead build a content-focused agency. Instead of only selling space on the site, Detroit143 Agency will sell advertising services. Much of what the

agency will create may not even appear on Detroit143, but it will produce revenue for the site. The Detroit143 Agency will work with advertisers to find the best stories of their brands and tell them across media platforms—digital, social, print. Revenue will come mostly from selling services: planning content strategies, creating stories, and distributing advertisers’ original content to attract the largest possible audience for their brands.

Making this advertising strategy work depends on us using the same management skills, storytelling talent, and social media smarts demanded by our core business—journalism. Using these efficient, low-cost social marketing skills will be advantageous for Detroit’s business community.

Some journalists might conclude that this is about little more than creating phony news stories for advertisers. Not true. Doing that would prove to be unprofitable, self-defeating and wrong. Detroit143 intends to leverage what we know how to do to sustain what we want to do. ■

Making this advertising strategy work depends on us using the same management skills, storytelling talent, and social media smarts demanded by our core business—journalism.

Kirk Cheyfitz is the CEO and chief editorial officer of Story Worldwide and a former city-county bureau chief of the Detroit Free Press.



Local Reporting Builds a Community's 'Social Capital'

'Community journalism assumes its value in finding ways to connect people—by identifying passions and concerns they share, linking neighbor to neighbor, and motivating people to act.'

BY DAVID JOYNER



The Greasy Pole contest is a signature event of the yearly St. Peter's Fiesta that draws together the community of Gloucester, Massachusetts. *Photo by Kristen Olson/Gloucester Daily Times.*

As this century got under way, Robert D. Putnam's book "Bowling Alone" spoke to the retreat of Americans from organizations and associations that were the bedrock of communities. Club membership was down; fewer people were members of groups or participated in community activities. Putnam described the decline of person-to-person association and activity in terms of communities losing "social capital."

At that time I was a reporter at the Gloucester (Mass.) Daily Times, a community newspaper. I found out about "Bowling Alone" when my editor wrote about Putnam's ideas in newspaper editorials. Putnam's research did not focus on newspaper readers per se, but he did illuminate a few important things to know about their habits and lifestyles. To start with, newspaper readers were 10 to 20 percent more inclined to participate in their communities. Putnam described them as people who "belong to more organizations, participate more actively in clubs and civic associations, attend local meetings more frequently, vote more regularly, volunteer and work on community projects more often, and even visit with friends more frequently and trust their neighbors more."

Even so, Putnam did not frame reading a newspaper as a building block in a community's social capital. Perhaps this is because, like voting, reading is a solitary act and does not forge a direct personal connection. Putnam expressed uncertainty about whether reading a newspaper was a trait shared by those engaged in civic life or if reading the paper somehow prompted people to participate.

In some ways, it doesn't matter. Newspaper readers are a life force in producing a healthy, more vital community. And maybe it's hubris from my time working on various community newspapers, but I think of a newspaper as an important force in creating social capital. It is

the community's common denominator, and as such it makes connections among people whether it wades into a controversy or reflects a shared tradition. At the Gloucester Daily Times, I am convinced our stories prompted people to gather at local meetings, to reach out to neighbors in trouble, and to more deeply appreciate their heritage.

Covering Tradition

In Gloucester, no community tradition is as rich in history and symbolism as St. Peter's Fiesta. Every June, the country's oldest seaport, founded in 1623, celebrates its fishing fleet and the patron saint of fishermen. This tradition dates to 1927, after Captain Salvatore Favazza commissioned a statue of St. Peter for the immigrant community.

Long ago this Italian community branched out beyond the Fort neighborhood of triple-deckers bounded by Gloucester Harbor and fish plants, but every year the fiesta returns to its streets. Timed to the Catholic feast of St. Peter, the fiesta features reunions, open houses, and revelry that continue

late into the night, with a predictable itinerary of athletic events borrowed from old world villages. It's the Greasy Pole contest that gives this event its iconic image as groups of rowdy men assemble on a platform in Gloucester Harbor, each walking a slicked wooden spar jutting over the water. The goal is to stay upright long enough to grab a flag staked to the pole's end. Spills onto the pole and into the harbor below can be brutal.

The fiesta has endured even as the city of about 30,000 people has changed. Still isolated and fiercely independent, Gloucester has evolved into a blend of a working-class port with professionals, artists and tourists. This summer festival has spread beyond an immigrant community to leave its mark on everyone in the city.

Ever since I began as a reporter at the Gloucester Daily Times in the late 1990's, coverage of this event was planned well ahead of time. The playbook is as worn as the one used for local elections. I took turns writing about boat races and the Sunday procession that winds through downtown following a Mass and the Blessing of the Fleet, usually celebrated by the

Catholic archbishop of Boston.

This assignment—more reactive than proactive—was a summer ritual, a long and tiring weekend of work that ended when revelers gathered at midnight Sunday to hoist the 600-pound statue of St. Peter for one last trip through the Fort neighborhood, where I happened to live.

With its coverage, the Daily Times was not so much building or leading the community as it was reflecting through names and faces the memories of past generations and stories of the present. All enriched the community's experience.

Community Connections

My notions of what it means to do community journalism were shaped, in part, by the role I played in telling fiesta stories and knowing how much they meant to those who inhabited this place. Ingrained in me from this experience is the sense that a successful community newspaper—or local blog, website, Twitter feed, or any other communication tool—is much more than a vehicle that conveys information.

To publish a calendar of events or a police log is simple. Community journalism assumes its value in finding ways to connect people—by identifying passions and concerns they share, linking neighbor to neighbor, and motivating people to act. It also serves a vital purpose when it takes on tough, controversial issues and tells stories that lead to the discovery of fault lines within a community.

During my career at the Gloucester Daily Times—five years as a reporter and two as its editor—my focus often was on stories about development or the fishing fleet's perpetual struggle against tightening government policy. Both story lines involved the environment and conservation groups and both frequently incited controversy among neighborhood groups, activists or fishermen.

Experiencing such reac-



With wall-to-wall coverage, the Daily Times pays tribute to the importance of St. Peter's Fiesta in the lives of Gloucester's residents. *Photo by Mary Muckenhoupt/Gloucester Daily Times.*

tion is gratifying, and I fear it is diminishing. Knowing the difficulties many of these local papers face, I worry that as newspaper readership declines and newsroom staffs shrink, communities will be left uncovered, at least by journalists whose job it is to know what keeps the heart of the community pounding. In some instances, hyperlocal websites or blogs are emerging, and some will serve this function, in part if not in whole. But the trend in these digital shops—as in legacy newsrooms—is to devote fewer resources to newsgathering, not more.

That is a stark contrast to the pages of the Gloucester Daily Times every June, when the newspaper serves the community in its comprehensive coverage of St. Peter's Fiesta. Year after year stories, images and personal anecdotes engaged the community, in print and now online, and the newspaper benefited, as well.

In the fall of 2003 I returned to the Daily Times as editor of the paper

after I spent a year at a sister paper. By the next summer the fiesta held heightened significance as we felt our newspaper's connection to the community slipping. The paper had a history of deep readership penetration in Gloucester and the surrounding towns, but we'd ruffled readers with a redesign. A change in press deadlines was forcing us to report news on a different cycle. People in the community were generally suspicious of our new owners. Circulation was bleeding like air seeping from a tire.

Our Monday-after-fiesta edition was always packed with coverage of the Greasy Pole, Blessing of the Fleet, and religious procession. (The Daily Times publishes Monday through Saturday so the bulk of weekend happenings are reported on Monday.) That year we felt a special need to deepen our fiesta coverage so we decided to ignore all other news on June 28, 2004, giving Page One and two other section fronts to the fiesta. It turns out

that we published only three stories unrelated to the fiesta, not counting a package of sports briefs and a Little League roundup.

Such wall-to-wall coverage might have been excessive. That day's newspaper sold well, as I recall, as did most post-fiesta editions. But this wasn't so much a sales ploy as it was a symbolic statement: Just as St. Peter's Fiesta and Gloucester are inextricably linked, so are the fiesta, the city, and its local newspaper. ■

David Joyner was a reporter and editor at the Gloucester Daily Times, then managing editor at The Salem News and The Eagle-Tribune in North Andover. He is now vice president of content for Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc., which owns all three Massachusetts newspapers. In the fall, he joins the Nieman Class of 2012.

Writing About People You Know

'In community journalism, there is no place to hide, and if you want to hide, then you have no business in this business anyway.'

BY AL CROSS

Lyndon Johnson once observed that "the country weekly acts as a form of social cement in holding the community together." But this son of rural Texas, who rose to be president of the United States, also declared, "The fact that a man is a newspaper reporter is evidence of some flaw of character."

Johnson was a man of some contradiction. These two views, each perhaps held with equal fervor, reflect the constant conundrum that good community journalists confront between responsibilities as a professional and the need to have friends and friendly acquaintances, as part of a community.

Holding local leaders and institutions accountable while playing an engaged civic role of building and strengthening the community inevitably leads to conflict.

It's been said that the best thing about community journalism is that you get to write about people you know—and that the worst thing about it is that you get to write about people you know. And even if you don't actually know a person named in an unfavorable story, you had better be ready to defend your work when that person meets you on the street or in the store or shows up at your desk. In community journalism, there is

no place to hide, and if you want to hide, then you have no business in this business anyway.

That is why it is more difficult to be a good journalist in a small market than in a large one. Not only must you manage the inherent conflicts almost every day, you must be prepared to defend journalism as an institution—one that needs to act without fear or favor, taking stands on community issues while also providing a fair forum for all points of view. This is best accomplished with a good dose of humility, and not by casually tossing out phrases like "the people's right to know," then pulling up the

drawbridge, and retreating into the fortress of an office.

Relationship Journalism

The job of building and maintaining personal relationships is essential to success. Chris Waddle, former editor of *The Anniston (Ala.) Star* and now teaching at Jacksonville State University in Alabama, is fond of saying that community journalism is “relationship journalism.” That means community journalists necessarily have closer and more continuing relationships with subjects and sources, and with readers, listeners or viewers than in a metropolitan area like Louisville, Kentucky, where Chris and I worked.

Does that mean community journalists will pull punches or find ways to rationalize that discretion is the better part of valor? Sure. But over the long haul, even the best community journalists will be guided by both principle and political sense—which comes from an understanding of and a respect for the community.

Here’s a good example: Tom and Pat Gish of *The Mountain Eagle* in Whitesburg, Kentucky crusaded against the abuses of coal companies and feckless or corrupt officials, and befriended visiting journalists—including photographers whose pictures often reflected poorly on the Appalachian community. But the Gishes didn’t publish such pictures in the *Eagle* because maintaining the mutual respect they had with their readers was a key to the couple’s ability to keep going for more than 50 years in the face of economic boycotts, personal shunning, and even a firebombing by a local policeman. Today their son Ben edits the paper with the same sensibilities.

Digital Demands

With digital media, community journalism has new challenges, some so fundamental that they are altering the meaning of the word “community.” So far, in the one-two punch of digital media and the recession, community newspapers have generally done better than metro and national newspapers.



Chris Evans, editor and publisher of *The Crittenden Press* in rural Kentucky, explains his mission: “We are here to serve the people.” *Photo by Allison Mick-Evans.*

Here are some reasons:

- They have a local news franchise that few competitors have invaded.
- They do not rely as heavily on the classified advertising that Craigslist and other free services chased from metro papers.
- More of them are independently owned, making them less subject to the demands of creditors and Wall Street.

However, digital media are compelling competition and they spawn competing communities—communities of interest, not location. On Facebook and other social media sites, people interact with little or no regard to physical geography, perhaps eroding connections within the local community.

One virtue of Facebook—at least for the purpose of this discussion—is its insistence against anonymity. The ability to remain anonymous appears to encourage contemptuous, antisocial and unethical behavior. Websites such as Topix, which create anonymous, geographic-oriented discussions both

reveal and create problems for small towns. Posts on that site about a young woman’s personal behavior were blamed for a multiple murder-suicide that wiped out a family in southern Indiana.

Topix CEO Chris Tolles told *The Courier-Journal* in nearby Louisville, Kentucky: “We are the WikiLeaks for small-town America in a lot of cases,” referring to the fact that anonymous posts can serve a role in holding public officials and institutions accountable—especially in places where the news media lack the resources or gumption to do that job. However, that virtue can be quickly subsumed by the accusatory rants, gossip, libel, falsehoods and cyberbullying seen on Topix and similar sites. A social media expert told *Courier-Journal* reporter Grace Schneider that Topix can be particularly troublesome in small communities where it’s easier to pierce the poster’s anonymity.

Social media are not intrinsically erosive. Good community journalists—like their peers working in larger regions—use social media to maintain and improve contact with community

members and weekly newspapers use Facebook to keep readers up to date on breaking news, sports scores, and other topics of daily community interest.

However, the community bonds in many rural areas are being weakened by the disappearance of jobs, forcing residents into long commutes. Last year at the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues we did a survey with Dr. Elizabeth Hansen of Eastern Kentucky University in Kentucky's Estill and Lee counties. There the average commuting time is 35 minutes, which is 10 minutes more than the national average; our survey found that residents who work outside the county are less likely to read one of the local weekly newspapers.

Many rural weeklies have no website or they have one with little or no news content, for fear of cannibalizing their print circulation that is key to advertising dollars. Some weeklies that once put most of their news online for free

now give nonsubscribers just one or two paragraphs of a news story online in the hope that they will buy the print edition or an online subscription.

One of those weeklies is The Crittenden Press, edited and published by Chris Evans, in a county off the beaten path in Western Kentucky. The two-edged digital sword became especially clear to him after a recent drug bust in his community, which prompted false, online rumors of shootings and murder. He countered them with online postings that carried credibility because they were not anonymous, and because people respect him and his newspaper.

"Our task is to be in a position to provide credible information in whatever form people want it in," Evans told me. "You've got to embrace technology, understand where your audience is at, and get there—and the credibility you have will draw people back to you."

Evans got his start at the Post-

Intelligencer, a small daily in Paris, Tennessee, about 90 miles south of where he is today. He clearly has the skills for metro journalism, but he wanted to be his own boss in the model of the Williams family that has run the Paris paper for three generations. "We are here to serve people," Evans said, then quoted Bryant Williams, the family patriarch until his death in 2009: "The only higher calling is the ministry." ■

Al Cross is director of the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues and an associate professor in the School of Journalism and Telecommunications at the University of Kentucky. He was a weekly newspaper editor and manager before he spent 26 years at The (Louisville, Ky.) Courier-Journal, which included a year as president of the Society of Professional Journalists.

Everyone's Welcome at the Newsroom Cafe

'We've torn down the dividing wall and now we can listen closely to the voices once behind it. That's what our changes are about.'

BY EMILY M. OLSON

The digital newsroom conjures up images of eyes locked on computer screens, barely a voice heard, messages tweeted and stories filed with a click, chats going on via Skype and CoveritLive as fingertips tap. Reporters pick up news of the day from sources spread far and wide in cyberspace. No need for face-to-face contact now that cyberconnections are made so effortlessly.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Before I describe how my day goes in our digital newsroom—the one I manage at The Register Citizen in Torrington, Connecticut—let me applaud the gift of expanded outreach that

these digital tools offer. Rest assured we use them to whatever advantage we can to grow our community beyond what we've built with our newspaper.

I've worked at this paper for just over two years, previously as a copy editor and page designer and now as the managing editor with a staff of about 15. Just as editors did a century ago, I sit at my desk first thing each morning and respond to what I find waiting. In my case, this means voice mails to listen to and answer and e-mail to check. These tasks never end—e-mail, it seems, is here to stay, at least for now. I check e-mail from home, but I arrive to find a mountain of messages in the two accounts for

which I'm responsible.

Multitasking commences as I log on to TweetDeck and into our content management system and open the newspaper's website, which is a living, breathing organism, with constantly changing content. In our newsroom at least five people are responsible for making changes on our site at any given time. As soon as I can, I join them—scanning the Web and checking The Associated Press's wire and website for national news. On the local front it's about what meetings are going on and what the police might be finding or looking for. This is what the reporters, lead editor, and my publisher tell me. As the day progresses,

I develop a mental image of what tomorrow's newspaper will look like as we try to blend an understanding of what's happening in our community and beyond.

Our Newsroom Cafe

Perhaps the most significant informers I have are people who aren't a part of our newsroom but visit our offices and inhabit our digital space. These voices belong to members of the public. In the past, our readers, like all readers, must have felt as if a wall existed between them and us. We've torn down the dividing wall and now we can listen closely to the voices once behind it. That's what our changes are about.

Our news company no longer only publishes a daily along with some weekly papers in the Farmington Valley, towns that surround our capital of Hartford. In our new office space, we've created the Register Citizen Newsroom Cafe, open six days a week to bloggers, students and senior citizens as well as public and elected officials. Ordinary citizens stop by our offices nearly every day and share their news with us, sometimes over a cup of coffee in the cafe.

When the staff of The Register Citizen moved out of its 105-year-old home on Water Street late last year, it was a strange feeling to know that we would be part of a public space where anyone, and I mean anyone, could just walk in the door from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and talk to us. Anybody can literally walk up to us at our desks and ask a question. Partitions around our desks are low so we're visible to everyone who walks in the door. No hiding. No turning away from any man, woman or teenager who walks in.

We need to be ready. And we are.

I remember the day when a man walked in with a folder under his arm. His young son was with him and after looking around he asked to speak to a



Bridging the divide between newspapers and the communities they cover is a priority for John Paton, CEO of the Journal Register Company which owns The Register Citizen in Torrington, Connecticut. He met with staff members and local residents during a visit to the paper. *Photo courtesy of The Register Citizen.*

reporter. I could see one of our writers, Mike Agogliati, at his desk, so I sent them his way. Within moments, they were deep in conversation in our newsroom cafe.

The man opened his folder and soon the three of them were looking at documents, letters and other pieces of information. It turned out that he owned a farmstand where he sold fruits and vegetables during the summer and fall. It was in a nearby community directly across the street from the town hall, and a zoning officer had found it to be a "junk yard." This became a legal battle, and he was sued. He was heading to court the next day; he wanted us to know about his case—and he came with a story to tell.

As he and Mike talked, it became apparent that this was about more than what happened to this man's farmstand. What made the story so compelling for us was connecting this legal action with earlier stories about the zoning officer, who had been fired, arrested and fined for embezzlement

for falsely reporting his hours. When Mike and the man finished talking, Mike had a story to track down and confirm. By day's end, a story about the zoning officer and the farmstand was on our website and ready for our print edition.

Something similar surely would have happened in our old newsroom but our open doors, wide spaces for people to walk through, and the availability of a reporter gave this man the confidence he needed to stop by and ask us to talk with him. In our old building, we were in a wing away from the public's view; the only time we saw people other than each other was when we invited them in. Most of the time we went out to see them. The shabby newsroom with its high partitions and sequestered workspaces was not conducive to this kind of open atmosphere.

Here we have a gallery, a cafe with coffee, and places to sit and talk. There's a microfilm machine available so people can look through our archives back to the early 1900's. Or they can

sit quietly and read the paper or work on their laptops in peace.

We also hold open newsroom meetings at 4 each weekday afternoon and stream them live on our website as reporters share their stories. Then we offer a live chat to viewers who always ask questions and give us information. That would never have happened in our old newsroom.

Since we moved into this space where factories once operated, such moments happen a lot more frequently. This is not to say that people line up at the door demanding to talk to a reporter. But knowing we're there and that the doors are open has made a tremendous difference—for them and for us. How to quantify the change—or even to describe it—is not always easy so when someone asks what's different, I say, "Everything."

There are many who believe newspapers are on their way out—about to join the woolly mammoth as an extinct creature, exhibited in museums alongside typewriters. By 2025, maybe sooner, we won't have any need for them. I hope that's not true, but I do know that our newspaper company was in financial trouble two years ago, and we turned our foundering vessel in bankruptcy into something viable that readers can depend on.

Thousands of visitors come to our website each month. We have a vibrant, albeit snarky and cranky, online community that debates everything from the cost of health care to the new fire truck to the color of the flowers planted in the city park.

Online Community Building

Community commentary rarely lacks passion—and we are part of it. If not for the Web and Twitter and Facebook and all those wonderful tools that are available to journalists today, we would be woefully unaware of what our readers genuinely want to know. We do our best to give it to them, in print and online.

How do we do it? We ask them questions and most of the time they respond. For instance, our daily poll

has questions about politics, schools, budgets and the weather, spanning a range of topics. Some gain momentum and we take those further, asking for more input. During a huge blizzard in January, we asked our readers to post photos on Twitter and Facebook. The response was phenomenal. We featured the best ones and posted comments from our readers, which, in turn, led to more comments and memories. Then we asked people to send us photos from other snowstorms and received an avalanche of memories about the Blizzard of '78, which shut down Connecticut.

When the mayor of our city does something people don't like, they tell us on our website. We still get letters to the editor, but a higher percentage of our content and information comes from the Internet or from people who walk in to tell us how they feel. In this city, there's a strong feeling of community ownership for The Register Citizen. Opening the Newsroom Cafe was really about extending that sense of ownership and making it real for more people.

After moving to 59 Field Street, a New York Times reporter asked me what I'd do if a resident sat down at my desk and started telling me how to write my story. "Wouldn't that be hard?" he asked. His expression showed concern.

His question caused me to pause and think for a while about how I would feel. Finally I told him that I didn't know what I would do, but I would figure it out. That hasn't happened, but if someone does come in and wants to talk about a story I am working on, I trust that I would be more than willing to hear what she had to say. If her ideas can improve the story, I see no harm in taking time to listen or even in telling her the direction in which the story seems headed. But the idea of someone standing over my shoulder; that's not easy to imagine. So far, the Times reporter's concern hasn't been realized.

Our digital newsroom is opening up our sense of what community even means. As journalists, we are now

more a part of the community that we report about. Those who live in the community and those who inhabit our digital community—and there is some overlap—feel more a part of our news operation and us. Everything we do goes online first and our print edition provides words and images to those who prefer to hold news in their hands.

Like everyone inside the newsroom, I tweet updates, link to stories on Facebook, and post stories to our website, adding photos and text that appeals to our readers. As managing editor, I also work with staff reporters, fielding story ideas, editing copy, and processing their work for print and the Web.

In March, John Paton, CEO of the Journal Register Company, which owns The Register Citizen, hosted an advisory board meeting with digital media experts such as "What Would Google Do?" author Jeff Jarvis and New York University professor Jay Rosen addressing our staff. In all, there were about 50 guests watching this live broadcast to all the newspapers around the company. This gave all of us a glimpse at what's ahead and served as a good example of the digital newsroom at work.

Our digital newsroom is not an extension of what it takes to run a newspaper; it is the primary element. Advertising still needs to be sold to pay our bills, but at the same time something about how we do our jobs changes all the time. I have been involved with community journalism for more than 12 years. From when I started to now the difference in what the pairing of the two words "community" and "journalism" even means has been profound. It's amazing to be riding on the edge of change, and it's great to have folks from our community riding with us. ■

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Health Draws a Community Together Online

‘A new mindset emerged as the site’s gates swung open to community involvement. Now, community members are part of what we do every step along the way—and we are progressing together.’

BY JANE STEVENS



The newsroom of the community health website WellCommons.com is located in The World Company’s offices in Lawrence, Kansas. *Photo by Jane Stevens.*

In April 2010, The World Company, a family-owned news organization in Lawrence, Kansas (population 88,000), launched WellCommons, created to be the community’s health site. While it’s difficult to determine the “first” in anything digital, WellCommons is certainly among the pioneers in marrying journalism and social media—and making it work for reporters and citizens alike.

Here are a few of its elements heading us in this direction:

Community Engagement: WellCommons provides a look at what journalism can be when integrated with social media. Using a content management system (CMS) that we developed, our site eliminates the barriers that have separated journalists from community members. At the same time, we preserve the goal of being a trusted source of information and news within the community and a safe place for people to share what they know and think.

Niche Journalism: In addition to its main site for the Lawrence Journal-World, LJWorld.com, The World Company already has two niche websites—KUSports.com and lawrence.com, an entertainment site—developed in the late 1990’s and mid-2000’s, respectively. WellCommons is the first in the company’s planned series of social journalism niche sites that it hopes will comprise a Northeast Kansas news network.

New Advertising Model: WellCommons relies on display ads and sponsorship for its revenue. It also gives local businesses that provide health products and services access to the same content-generating and community-building tools as anyone else—and this gives them direct access to and conversations with community members. But businesses—unlike residents and community service organizations—must pay to participate. We are also working on melding social media and display ads; right now, ads are still displayed in the we-talk-you-listen mode. At this point, there's no visual difference between the group pages for businesses and those belonging to nonprofits. We did this for two reasons: The community is small enough that people know which organization is a nonprofit and which is a business, and each group page provides a description of the organization's activities. With the group structure, we recognize that every organization has a vested interest in the information it is providing, whether it is a business or a nonprofit.

Our Beginnings

The roots of WellCommons extend to when I was a Reynolds Fellow at the University of Missouri School of Journalism in 2008-09 and I created HealthCommons. That spring a group of students and I developed a prototype. Here are some of the things we set out to do:

- Map the community to identify major players that influence change by promoting or stopping it.
- Use community data to identify major issues that a typical newsroom reported on once or twice and then didn't revisit for months or years.
- Report on those underreported topics.
- Provide context and continuity for our stories by posting information about our reporting on them.

- Let the community know how these stories affected what happened after publication.

Most of all, we wanted to weave content from the local health community into the site's news stream. However, the Ellington CMS that The World Company developed in 2004 and graciously gave us to use was very helpful in developing a conceptual product, but it didn't have all the tools we needed to actually marry social media and journalism.

So when we covered young women's health, we tried to set up a Facebook page, but back then Facebook couldn't do what we had in mind either. Since then Facebook has made significant progress in this direction but it still isn't totally there. Yet I am confident that Facebook, WordPress or Google will soon master this approach. An encouraging sign is that earlier this year Paul Adams, who did a presentation he calls "The Real Life Social Network" and is writing a book about social circles, left Google to go to work for Facebook.

By that semester's end, HealthCommons had withstood its test as a concept. What it needed was a booster—with funding—to transform it into something real. The World Company surfaced as its champion. In June 2009 the company hired me as its director of media strategies. This meant that I'd supervise its websites while leading the development of a local health site integrating community and journalism.

Working with a crackerjack development team and turning concept into reality is relatively easy. Needed are time and focus. Our team got to work in December 2009 and three months later we launched a private beta version of our CMS system; our public beta went live in April 2010.¹ "We weren't really inventing anything new," says our team manager, Christian Metts. "We were just catching up with the

rest of the Internet."

Maybe so, but when it comes to the journalism, this was something new. We were inventing a digital town square, and moving beyond citizen journalism, content farming, and crowdsourcing. A new mindset emerged as the site's gates swung open to community involvement. Now, community members are part of what we do every step along the way—and we are progressing together.

Getting Started

Six months before we launched WellCommons, about 30 community members—some of whom are doctors, others health advocates, some people with no health insurance, others who are locavores—began meeting regularly with our development team to talk about the website. Part trust building, part content harvesting, our community gatherings still take place every few months.

Some of those who use the site refer to WellCommons as "Facebook for the local health community." Text and video, photographs and graphics are posted directly to the site—by anyone, in much the same way people share things of interest with their friends on Facebook. Community posts are integrated with what the site's journalists produce. On the site, participants can follow and message each other and repost items; it's easy to send posts to Facebook and Twitter.

Similar to how Facebook works, individuals and organizations start groups. Our site's action tends to bubble up from these group pages since content put there automatically aggregates on the WellCommons home page. More than 100 groups are at various stages of development; we work with them to set goals and help them grow their communities and achieve their goals. Among their goals are enlisting more local restaurants to put local foods on their menus, reducing domestic

¹ Members of our development team included Christian Metts, Ben Turner, Ben Spaulding, Eric Holscher, and Charlie Leifer as well as Jonathan Kealing, assistant director of media strategies.

violence, developing school gardens, engaging more people in exercise events, and building more bike trails.

Working in this way requires time and commitment that journalists normally don't devote to such tasks. But doing this pays off for WellCommons as community members repay us in what they contribute to the site. From the start, our goal was to have about 10 new posts a day, with half coming from the community. Right now we hit that number—or exceed it—two days a week.

Building Trust

The site's information architecture helps people to assess the reliability of information. Real names are associated with all of the posts to the site. (A person can contribute three comments before a real name is required.) All of the site's groups, whether launched by a reporter, an individual, a business, a nonprofit, or an institution, function with this same rule—real names go along with informational postings, stories and comments. This means that information is judged on the basis of the person who posted it and the

group from which it comes.

We have a staff reporter who monitors the site full time; if that reporter can't be doing this for some reason, another staff member will. This reporter also answers questions from community members and responds to their posts and comments. Abusive comments are deleted. When community members want us to look into an issue, we will.

Slow News—Aimed at Solutions

We take a community-based, solution-oriented approach to our health reporting. Most national health sites, such as WebMD, focus on personal health and provide information about what individuals can do to improve their own or their families' health. But at the local level, health becomes a community issue.

Medical advice tells us to get an annual checkup. Yet when people who are part of a community don't have health insurance, it's likely they won't act on that advice. Our children should be eating healthy food, but if school lunch programs serve macaroni

and cheese and French fries and only a few overcooked vegetables, then improving nutrition for them becomes a community issue. Exercise is essential for good health, but when a community doesn't have enough safe places to walk, jog, bike and play outdoors, then creating such spaces becomes the responsibility of the community.

Addressing such issues—and others like them—requires community engagement that will stretch over time. Although WellCommons covers breaking news about significant issues, it also provides the community with the tools for slow-news reporting.

What does this mean? The content that community members bring to WellCommons is what provides much of the context and continuity of ongoing issues that are on people's minds and are being discussed and debated in the community. The stories our reporters do are ones that community members generally don't, and they focus on turning points in a debate or an emerging controversy such as a new Medicare rule that is likely to limit patients' access to home health services.

With this approach, WellCommons is changing the community's conversation about health. And the site's information stream reflects this shift with as much content focused on solutions as it has about the problems. This is a significant journalistic shift.

Nurturing Growth

We launched WellCommons in beta—unfinished, knowing we'd be upgrading it within a year. Understanding its usefulness would only come to us through watching closely as the community used the site. Listening to their requests was crucial.

In March, we launched WellCommons 2.0—with enhanced social journalism. With its cleaner, more visual look, the site's usefulness has improved because resources



Last summer about 1,000 people joined what organizers billed as the “World's Largest Community Workout” in Lawrence, Kansas—with WellCommons as a booster. *Photo by Kevin Anderson.*

are easier to find. It also does a better job of integrating data from our Marketplace site, which pulls in lists of businesses that provide health products and services that are rated by members of the community. We can now post more videos and photos on each page.

What else would we like to have on WellCommons? Here are a few items on our wish list: context and topic pages with timelines, a data section, a goals app, and an upgraded events function so people can follow each other's calendars. We also could use another reporter who could help us do more investigative work. With such improvements, my hunch is that we could at least double and perhaps triple the traffic from the 110,000 page views we get each month; we

are aiming for about 250,000.

While WellCommons stands as a separate website, its content funnels into LJWorld.com, which also aggregates content from the company's other niche sites. In April, our second social journalism site, SunflowerHorizons.com, was launched and this one focuses on sustainability. By year's end we hope to launch WellCommons 3.0.

Believing as we do in the promise of this approach, Mediaphormedia, the commercial software arm of The World Company, plans to make the user-generated, community-building Ellington CMS available to other media organizations, as well as nonprofits and community-based groups.

More than the monthly numbers, however, is WellCommons's proven ability to target and attract a good mix

of people. Local health care providers now come together with people in the broader community who are interested in health in this digital town common. Some of them talk about it as "my health site." And that phrase epitomizes its goal. As this site becomes the go-to place for people in this community when they want to find out about health and health care—whether it's to learn how the federal health care bill will affect them in Kansas or to figure out where to get flu shots—then what I imagined in doing my Reynolds project will have become a reality. ■

Jane Stevens is director of media strategies at The World Company, where she has launched two social journalism websites, WellCommons and SunflowerHorizons.

What Football Pep Talks Taught Hyperlocal Reporters

'Inestimable value comes out of making a human connection visible through something as ordinary as a half-time pep talk by a coach to his players.'

BY BOB CALO

We are experiencing a sea change in how students at the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley learn about reporting. Three years ago we tossed out the first-semester intensive reporting requirement and replaced it with the work that goes into producing three hyperlocal websites. Funded in part by a Ford Foundation grant to report on underserved communities near our campus, these websites—covering San Francisco's Mission District, North Oakland, and Richmond—synthesize writing and reporting with cross-platform media production and community service.

These students also learn quickly what journalism partnerships mean and how they work. Not only does their reporting appear on one of

these three hyperlocal sites, but it sometimes finds its way onto SFGate, the San Francisco Chronicle's online vehicle; the nonprofit Bay Citizen, an independent news site about civic and community issues in the Bay Area; and the regional edition of The New York Times. This experience is proving to be a valuable entry point for figuring out what connects people to journalism and journalism to people.

Richmond—Forgotten No Longer

Just over 100,000 people live in Richmond, a city about five miles north of Berkeley. Quite often it's a place people pass on their commute to wealthier communities along the stretch of I-80 heading toward Sacramento, the state capital. With chronic

underemployment and a reputation for crime, it is among the poorer cities in the Bay Area; a few years ago, hearing "Richmond" sparked thoughts of a runaway homicide rate.

With the exception of a gentrified area called Point Richmond, the city is a diverse, hardscrabble place comprised primarily of working class whites, African Americans, and Latinos. One third of the people who live there are foreign born. It was a boomtown in the 1940's, a time that historians refer to as the "Second Gold Rush." Except for Chevron's large refinery, the manufacturing base has withered in Richmond, as it has in so many American industrial cities.

The Contra Costa Times reports on the city, but most of that newspaper's editorial output aims east toward the wealthier suburbs. The San Francisco



Richmond Confidential's multimedia coverage of high school football—in-depth and personal—engaged the city's residents. *Photo by Tyler Orsburn.*

Chronicle does an occasional story about Richmond, but for the most part news coverage is scarce and predictably negative. Essentially, our hyperlocal site, Richmond Confidential, has little journalistic competition. Last fall 16 graduate students were its full-time reporters. Yet convincing residents to sample our stories put us in a different competition—for their time and attention.

Being a part of this teaching effort was wholly new for me. Generally I teach video storytelling, reporting and production in the two-year program at Berkeley. But as we, like most journalism schools, collapse our teaching silos, adding a video instructor into the hyperlocal mix made a lot of sense, given the vital requirement of presenting a visual experience.

At its heart, Richmond Confidential is about making community connections, whether this means reporters connecting with sources or residents connecting with us. One way we measured community engagement was through the number of comments we received; another was by Facebook “likes.” It turned out that most of the traffic to our site arrives via Facebook.

Comments and “likes” are good indicators, but the true test of whether a story mattered to our target audience—residents of Richmond—was if they started talking to each other on the site. Talking to us was fine—and we encouraged it, but when conversation started among them we knew what we set out to do was working.

This didn't happen overnight. They had grown accustomed to reading and hearing a consistent narrative about their city: it's dangerous; no one would want to live there; it's an ugly, post-industrial wasteland. Our job became hunting for community stories that posited a different yet equally genuine narrative. By doing this, we would earn their trust.

The messages our stories convey are these: This is your town; it has a history; here is some useful, true information about it. And here is your voice reflected in our reporting. Our stories are ones in which respect is evident for the struggle that families go through each day to get by. While Richmond boasts a long history of bare-knuckle politics and vibrant local players, such battles are still being played out today—and we covered

them. Some recent ones have revolved around jobs and development, including a proposed casino on Native American land, and there are always stories to be done about crime, health care, and immigration.

This past fall our student reporters never lacked for material with which to build strong and relevant stories. A November election for mayor and political posturing for control of the city council became the focus of much of our reporting. When the local fire and police unions used political action committee money to hire a private investigator to expose what they said was the sitting mayor's lack of mental competency for the job, our story started a conversation in Richmond that percolated throughout the election season. Reporter David Ferry followed up with a series of investigative

stories, tracing the large amounts of campaign money flowing through this poor city. We collaborated with information scientists at Berkeley to build an interactive campaign finance tracker.

The intensity of community reporting can transform it into an emotional experience, sometimes painfully so. In a February 8 feature story that Robert Rogers wrote about a community garden, he included an upbeat interview with Ervin Coley III, a young man employed by a local environmental jobs project. On March 31, Rogers wrote the story about Coley's murder, which turned out to be part of a series of gang-related shootings. Earlier in the fall we had produced detailed daily coverage of a preliminary hearing involving a gang rape that had staggered the city a year before.

Football—A Community Window

One of the most unexpected highlights of our engagement with the community came about because of our coverage of high school football. Our reporters knew little about sports and weren't

drawn to covering it. Their early stories contained embarrassing errors; even though they were raised in this country, few of these graduate students actually knew how football is played. Learning the rules was step one.

As errors diminished, game coverage improved. But other things about our coverage were happening, too, and we were taking notice. In Richmond, being publicly acknowledged is a rare thing. So our stories about the two local high school teams turned out to be about much more than football—they were about the place of these kids in their community. We covered every game; no one else did. We supplemented our written stories with audio slideshow features showing what happens in the locker room when the coaches talked with players. We took and posted on our site hundreds of photos of players, cheerleaders and fans.

The year before our coverage began, John F. Kennedy High School did not finish the season because their players had academic problems and Richmond displayed a general lack of interest. This past season was different. Here's a letter we received that helps explain why:

I just wanted to drop you all a note to say thank you to everyone at Richmond Confidential who covered Kennedy High School's football team this year (and last year too). It really meant a lot to the kids to get some attention and some positive news coverage.

What you may not know is that these kids were called losers, thugs and criminals and were told they wouldn't have the grades to play, etc. and that even if they did, they wouldn't be any good long before the first game was played.

Overcoming a culture of losing and underachieving is difficult, and it is far from over. We have a lot of work still ahead of us in the classroom and on the field but the coverage you provided gave these kids some immediate feedback and gratification, especially the coverage for the

JV team. That is something that, as far as I know, has never been done before and was a great surprise to the kids at both JFK and at Richmond also.

This is a measure of community engagement that can't be underestimated. And it stems, in large part, from the vernacular nature of our coverage. In reporting on these games the students learned a valuable lesson: Inestimable value comes out of making a human connection visible through something as ordinary as a half-time pep talk by a coach to his players. Encapsulated in these moments is a world of meaning that stretches deep into the daily challenges of parenting, poverty and family that are so much a part of the lives of the people in Richmond.

I am under no illusion about the sustainability of these three hyperlocal websites. The program is halfway through a second Ford Foundation grant, and future support is uncertain. But because this approach is now how we teach effective cross-platform reporting, graduate students at Berkeley's j-school will continue to be a part

of these communities as hyperlocal reporters. It will now depend on tuition and the school's operating budget to finance what happens on all three of our sites. Our fundraising continues.

Teaching reporting by committing students to a community is, for me, a highly effective and rewarding idea. To engage the people of Richmond, we have to be innovative and creative, useful for, and respectful of our readers. We have to be open to new story forms that work. We have to bring the traditional values of investigative and civic reporting to a community ignored by the mainstream press. We also have to be transparent, with an ear to the ground and highly responsive to the place and the people within it. ■

Bob Calo is a senior lecturer at the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley, where he codirects the video storytelling and reporting program and is executive editor of Richmond Confidential. During a fellowship at Harvard's Joan Shorenstein Center for the Press, Politics and Public Policy this past semester, he wrote a paper about audience disengagement.



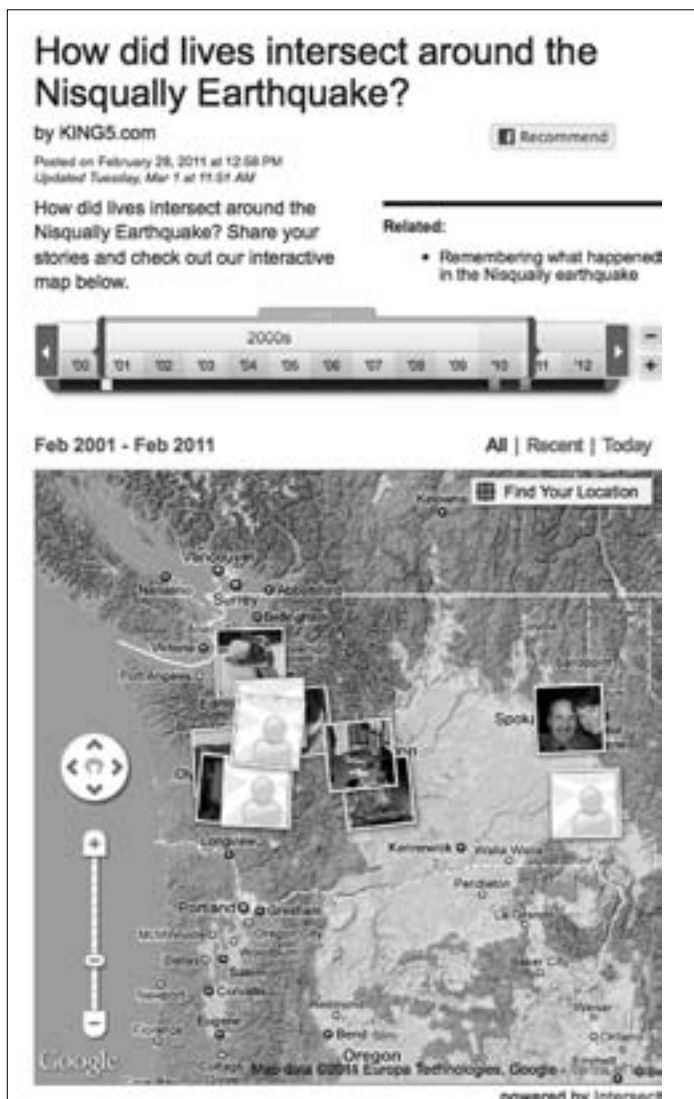
Community reporting was an emotional experience for Robert Rogers of Richmond Confidential. One month after he interviewed Ervin Coley III, above, about his job as a community gardener, the young man was slain and Rogers wrote the story about his murder. *Photo by Robert Rogers.*

Words and Visuals Intersect to Create Community

Interactive sites like Intersect ‘trace the contours of a story’s growth through the flow of time and place and offer viewers the chance to embed their stories into those being told by other members of this community.’

BY PETER RINEARSON

When floodwaters rose in the Ozarks on April 25, the Springfield News-Leader in southwest Missouri tweeted: “Our photographers are running all over the area right now. Here are some of the pictures they’ve sent in.”



Seattle NBC affiliate KING-TV (www.king5.com) invited people to share their earthquake stories on Intersect.com.

When the recipients of this tweet clicked the link, they went to an interactive map on news-leader.com. Once there, they found thumbnails of flood photos tagged with places and times. Clicking a thumbnail revealed a panel with information about what other stories connect to this same time and place. These images—offered in this broader context—told a valuable story and they did so more powerfully than if each had been seen disconnected from the others. Glancing through the photos, readers could quickly learn whether any pictures were of their neighborhood or taken in a place where friends or loved ones lived.

They could watch the story as it was being told and in the ways they wanted to see it; the map gave them the ability to go to places of their choosing and be there in the time they wanted to be.

Stories put into context are more meaningful and are therefore more likely to be compelling. Context frames a story and imbues it with meaning. Amid a torrent of social media and with location-aware cameras, opportunities abound to be inventive in how context is conveyed and communities are formed. Interactive sites like one that I founded, Intersect.com, trace the contours of a story’s growth through the flow of time and place and offer viewers the chance to embed their stories into those being told by other members of this community.

I got the idea for Intersect while watching my daughter play lacrosse. It struck me that the best photos of her game might be taken by parents from the other team, none of whom I knew. I could try to exchange e-mail addresses, but that would be a burden to everybody—and it would do nothing for the parents who didn’t make it to the game but might enjoy seeing photos of it taken by strangers. It made me wonder if we could use the Internet as a place to share our photos and the stories behind them—and in doing so, create a sense of our shared place and time.

Intersect as Social Media

Tantalizing hints alert us to the great potential that digital media hold for journalists—and for journalism—in forming a wide variety of online communities. At The Washington Post, Michael Williamson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer, shows the effects of this country’s listless economy through illuminating photographs and accompanying short

narratives. He took photos as part of his “Recession Road” project; the rest of the pictures are contributed by people who are participating in this online pictorial storytelling. People can view what Williamson describes as a “photocasting” journey across the United States as a website or as an interactive map.

These two interactive maps—Williamson’s “Recession Road” and the News-Leader’s Ozarks flood—were generated by Intersect, a digital storytelling platform my company created that enables people to form online communities based on experiences they’ve shared directly or indirectly. It does this by giving news organizations and others the tools to put stories into the context of place and time and develop chronological storylines.

It’s a form of social media, yet when content is placed on Intersect it sticks around. What a person contributes doesn’t vanish—stories from the past are brought back to life by anyone who wants to move through space and time to rediscover them. When I was in Philadelphia in mid-April I posted a story to Intersect about visiting the Liberty Bell as a tourist. When I clicked to see if any stories intersected with mine, I found out that Williamson had recently posted his own photographs from just across the Delaware River in Camden, New Jersey.

When someone comes to Intersect and wants to see stories done in April or stories from the Philadelphia area (or both), my Liberty Bell story will be there, as will my personal “storyline,” which is a chronology of all the “public” stories I’ve published on Intersect. (If you are an Intersect member and I know you, then certain stories I’ve marked as private are yours to view.) Williamson’s story and storyline are there, too, with our coincidental overlap of time and place linking us at this intersection near the Delaware River. Even though we’ve never met, we can learn about each other by seeing our stories grow over time.

Having the ability to see this growth should be as important online as it is in our daily lives. In interactions we

have with people and institutions, we form our judgments about them as we come to know and understand their stories over time, learning what they’ve done, where they have been, and with whom they interact. Intersect attempts to bring this dynamic to the Web.

The Washington Post uses Intersect as part of its social media engagement effort. Community members are invited to submit their own “Recession Road” stories and photos. The first time the newspaper extended such an invitation was during the Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert rallies on the National Mall in October 2010. That day, more than 100 people, including several Post reporters outfitted with the Intersect iPhone app, sent their photographs and stories to the Post site.

These days Williamson uses an iPhone to take pictures, with the option of immediately uploading them via this app, or he can use his laptop and connect to Intersect.com. An Intersect map can be embedded on a news site, similar to YouTube videos. This is the route taken by news-leader.com, along with King5.com, the website of Seattle’s NBC affiliate. For two mapping efforts, the King 5 newsroom invited sports fans to share stories around an NFL playoff game and then encouraged people to send in their experiences with earthquakes.

Digital media excel at mapping stories and at having people be able to locate themselves in them. News organizations employ them as visual ways to tell stories about events. The Associated Press put together a map and photo galleries about the end of April tornadoes that demolished parts of the South, while The New York Times mapped the path that the tornadoes took that week.

Intersect differs from these news organizations’ approaches since stories on any topic are created on it and they can be put there by anybody. (All of this happens without any cost to the producer.) Unlike custom maps, handtailored by a news organization for stories it covers, those generated by Intersect in response to photos and other stories are self-service.

People are free to create a storyline on Intersect, invite people to share their photos and stories, and embed a map of the resulting collaborative storytelling experience on a website. These photos and stories can be tagged with the name of the publication, topic or a company name. Speaking of companies, when editors at the Springfield News-Leader decided to use Intersect, they just went ahead and embedded the Intersect code on their website. Only after they were up and running did we find out.

Intersect has been in development by a team of 10 for more than three years; it has been open for anyone to use since December. How it evolves will depend, to some extent, on the ways that journalists and others interested in creating communities use Intersect to further this purpose. As its developers, we imagine Intersect being a site where people move through time and places when they are drawn to a particular topic or story around which community has formed. It can also be a way for publishers—commercial and individuals—to get word out about their visual content by sharing with the community links to stories on their websites.

Yes, we imagine being surprised, too. With a place like Intersect, there will likely be ways we can’t think of now that people will find to cross paths with people they don’t yet know but with whom an experience creates a bond. Much is as unclear as it is exciting. Context matters, we know. Beyond this certainty, we are eager to discover how people will form communities around the core of what journalists do—tell stories. ■

Peter Rinearson, founder of Intersect, won a Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing for stories he wrote while on staff at The Seattle Times. He is a former Microsoft vice president who co-authored “The Road Ahead” with Bill Gates.

Connecting Kids With News in Their Community

Youngsters made video games, and educators found that ‘hands-on activity helped kids to process news reporting. It also gave them ways to tell this story by integrating their perspectives as they aimed it at fresh audiences.’

BY RENEE HOBBS

“Flash Mob on South Street.”

These words greeted residents of Philadelphia in the spring of 2010 when raucous, spontaneous and, at times, aggressive gatherings of hundreds of teenagers took place downtown, causing consternation among business and community leaders as well as ordinary citizens. Months later, in a classroom at the Russell Byers Charter School, students ranging in age from 9 to 11 years old spent time learning more about these flash mobs, and with the help of their teacher, John Landis, they created video games to tell this story in a way and through a medium that kids can relate to.

These students are much younger than those who had been involved in the disturbances. But this was a topic they well understood as they, too, are growing up in an urban environment and already are confronting pressure from their peers. As the class began, what they knew about this news story had likely come from what family members who saw stories on TV or read the city’s newspapers had told them.

Not unlike kids in past generations, children today tend to learn news of their neighborhood, the nation, and the world by absorbing information from parents and other family members. Few of them pick up a daily newspaper or weekly newsmagazine. Some will hear snippets of radio news in between songs. Some might even see local or national news while flipping through the channels. A more likely source for teenagers is when friends post links on Facebook; some might click on a story or a video of a news story.

Otherwise, their engagement with news tends to be rare and fleeting.

Yet as children and young people get ready to assume their roles as citizens prepared to fully participate in a democracy, they need to know about what’s happening in their communities, in the wider world, and with their government. They also need to acquire the skills of self-expression and gain experience as members of groups or networks engaged in the process of taking action on a public matter.

This is why digital literacy (the understanding of and capacity to use new information technologies) and media literacy (the capacity to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages in a variety of media) are essential competencies today.

“Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age,” a report by the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, acknowledged this reality, finding that people who don’t acquire these skills bear “a significant risk of being relegated to second-class citizenship.”

Now some journalists and educators are responding to this warning by developing news literacy initiatives to address this situation. One such effort took place in Philadelphia as a teacher explored local news with a class of African-American students at the Russell Byers Charter School. It was through Powerful Voices for



Tyler Jones was among the students who created video games to tell stories of flash mobs. *Photo by Renee Hobbs.*

Kids, a university-school partnership that enrolled 85 children ages 5 to 14 during the summer of 2010, thanks to grants from the Wyncote Foundation and the Byerschool Foundation.

Developing Powerful Voices

In Powerful Voices for Kids, undergraduate and graduate students from Temple University work with classroom teachers during the school year to integrate digital and media literacy into the elementary school curriculum. In the summer, children participate in a play and learning program to more fully explore digital and media literacy activities. [See box on page 51, “Media Literacy: Learning Principles.”]

In Landis’s classroom, 9- to 11-year-old students set out to understand how news is told by exploring local coverage of the flash mobs. After finding out about what the reporters said happened, the students were taught how to use Scratch, a simple programming tool, to make interactive media about this news event. The video games the kids created were designed

to stimulate conversation about how news is constructed and why news is so important in society.

Landis believes computer programming—especially when used to create video games—can be a terrific tool for teaching digital and media literacy. His reasoning goes like this: Video games work when they highlight choices, and this crucial, noteworthy component of video games places the creator and player in someone else’s shoes. For children and young people, this is important, he explained: “You’re not only making choices, but also dealing with the consequences. Creators have the potential to highlight the ethical aspects of a situation but not make it into heavy-handed moralizing.”

Before creating simple video games, the students in the Powerful Voices for Kids acquainted themselves with the news as it was reported in the newspaper and on local TV. With guidance from Landis, they considered the varying points of view of perpetrators, local business leaders, bystanders and police.

A breakthrough moment occurred when Ahmir, one of the students, recognized that one of the most important parts of designing the game was figuring out how to make the player empathize with teenagers who were deciding whether to participate in flash mobs.

“Creating the game had a lot to do with what I and what the class thought about flash mobs,” Ahmir observed. “I think they’re dangerous and bad and that people shouldn’t go to them at all. In my game [the main character’s] friends pressure him to go to the flash mob and he says he doesn’t want people to make fun of him for not going.”

In planning their projects, students found themselves in deep discussions about choices and consequences, about risk-taking and danger. They talked about stereotypes associated with being an African-American teenager as well as the stereotypes people have about how police behave and react. And what they talked about informed the elements that they built into their video games.

Media Lessons Continue

After they made the games, Landis wrote a press release about their work. The children were thrilled when a local TV news team showed an interest in the story. A reporter came to the school, interviewed the teacher and students, and took pictures of children talking and planning and creating their projects. But when a 25-second story ran on a local Philadelphia news channel, the students suddenly had a lot more questions.

Among their questions were: Why hadn’t the reporter used their faces or voices in the news story? Why was the teacher’s point of view omitted?

One student counted how many times the phrase “flash mob” was used in the story. (The answer was too many—and sometimes, it seemed, only for effect.) Another wondered whether their classroom experience was just another excuse for the local station to recycle bad news. Why weren’t any of their video games shown as part of the story? One student found an error in the broadcast story: The reporter had said that the class was held “at” Temple University, but it was actually held at the children’s own elementary school “with” Temple University as a sponsoring partner.

The reporter’s choice of a preposition had led to an inaccuracy. Landis seized on this as a teachable moment. People who report the news sometimes make mistakes, he told his students. He used the incorrect preposition as a way to remind them that every word is important, and each one makes a difference in how a news story is shaped.

What Did Children Learn?

In assessing the learning outcomes from this classroom experience, it became clear to us that hands-on activity helped kids process news reporting. It also gave them ways to tell this story by integrating their perspectives as they aimed it at fresh audiences. Other observations made by researchers from Temple University included:

- Decisions a journalist makes can shape our opinions and feelings about people and places we don’t experience directly, reinforcing or challenging stereotypes.
- Even a small word choice can make a news story inaccurate.
- A lot of information is left out of a news report.
- A journalist makes these choices because there is a lot of news and not much time and journalists must balance what people need to know with what people want to know.



In a video game created by Amhir and Marquise in the Powerful Voices for Kids program, players have the choice of going to the flash mob and finding trouble or not going and facing taunts from their peers.

- Anyone can create a media message about news and current events that reflects his or her experiences.
- Words, images and interactivity can be put to work in investigating, telling and commenting on what's happening in a community.
- Sharing news with family and friends can spark conversation about problems, and this can help people learn about and take action to solve them.

How are these concepts best learned? Students most readily absorb these ideas when educators, well trained in such teaching, combine their lessons with hands-on projects,

according to David Cooper Moore, program director for Powerful Voices for Kids. What doesn't work well is when media professionals lecture about what they do in newsgathering and think that students will automatically appreciate the values of good journalism. [See box, below, "News Literacy: What Not to Do."]

Children are growing up at a time when a Google search might result in access to high-quality information or a slickly designed effort that is little more than a public relations handout. During the process of growing up, they will likely encounter ideas from Holocaust deniers, pornographers, racists and a slew of other miscreants trying to

manipulate or deceive, and they will also come across information posing as news that is more believable but nonetheless false. This is why digital and media literacy skills are so essential; they enable us to make effective choices as responsible consumers and engaged citizens. ■

Renee Hobbs is a professor at Temple University's School of Communications and Theater, where she founded the Media Education Lab. She is the author of "Digital and Media Literacy: Connecting Culture and Classroom," to be published in August by Corwin/Sage. She can be reached at renee.hobbs@temple.edu.

News Literacy: What Not to Do

Three instructional practices that are emerging in news literacy deserve closer scrutiny:

Dumbing It Down: Some educators and news practitioners think of teaching news literacy as a journalism class for non-journalists. Essentially, they dump the content of an introductory course in journalism—topics like the reporting process, relationships between reporters and sources, the First Amendment, press law, and ethics—on students for whom these topics hold little intrinsic interest. For most of the students, this class becomes little more than meaningless facts to recall and spit back on an exam. It's unlikely to support the development of essential skills to carry with them. News literacy needs to be thought about as teaching a different set of skills—more focused on those who consume news and not those who produce it, though they are interconnected in many ways.

Telling War Stories: Teaching news literacy only from a journalist's point

of view—recounting war stories from the good old days—doesn't work when the real job at hand is to help students develop critical thinking and communication skills. As John McManus wrote in "Detecting Bull," journalists have blind spots when it comes to being aware of how commercial bias affects the ways in which stories get told. Students can be inspired when journalists share their experiences about their work. That's important, but it's not enough.

Romanticizing Journalism: Some news literacy initiatives place a significant emphasis on teaching about the ideals of American journalism. While these are important to talk about, journalism needs to be presented in realistic ways that make sense to students. The public should be able to place their trust in the "news neighborhood," as Howard Schneider, founder of the news literacy program at Stony Brook University, calls it. Journalists should be accurate and fair in their reporting. News should contribute to people's ability to participate

as citizens in a democracy. But if the focus is only on the ideals of journalism, then it will be mere propaganda because of its blindness to the reality of today's media maelstrom in which smear fests build audiences and news aggregation services spread misinformation blindingly fast, sometimes leaving truth in the dust.

The bottom line is if a news literacy course leaves students feeling frustrated that American journalistic practices do not meet the idealistic vision we have for journalism as a watchdog on power and a catalyst to democracy, that's OK. As "Mediactive" author Dan Gillmor notes, skepticism is a highly rational approach for news consumers today.

News literacy programs must focus on building learners' critical thinking and creative communication skills. When this happens, news consumers will be better able to understand, appreciate and critique the news while using the tools they've been given to evaluate its fairness, transparency and accuracy. ■—R.H.

Media Literacy: Learning Principles

Educators are discovering what works best to build critical thinking and communication skills when it comes to exploring news and information. These learning principles hold their own no matter what the level of education is and are an integral part of Powerful Voices for Kids, a Philadelphia-based program of digital and media literacy education for grade school students.

Start from the learner's interests. A news event as a teaching tool must be timely, local and relevant. Learners, not the teacher, select the topic to examine, exploring issues that are personally meaningful and relevant.

Connect comprehension and analysis. Learners build reading comprehension and analysis skills through close reading as a way of both understanding what the news is about along with appreciating its form and structure.

Ask critical questions and listen well. Practice asking questions, which is more important than having answers. Respect and value multiple perspectives that arise in the responses. Learners, not just the teacher, ask questions, and as students offer answers, they demonstrate reasoning and present evidence to support their ideas. The teacher is not the exclusive font of knowledge. The teacher listens carefully and helps to create a foundation of knowledge through questioning, searching for new information, developing ideas, and listening with openness, curiosity and respect.

Focus on putting news stories together. Pay careful attention to how news stories are constructed to understand the process and examine how creative and strategic choices of words, images, sounds and graphic design end up shaping a reader's perception of reality. Appreciate

the complex relationship between representation and reality.

Link critical analysis and media composition. Present ideas and information in ways that connect deeply to the task at hand; show by example that there are not any unnecessary, out-of-context, and easily forgettable facts about things that should be known.

Use collaborative multimedia to enable authentic communication. Learners will find ways to share ideas with audiences by using media genres and forms that are appropriately challenging and meaningful.

Engage the class in the community. There is a benefit when classroom activities intersect with the messiness found outside classroom walls. Being in this reality makes learners consider the tensions and contradictions between the ideal and real, between theory and practice.



Teachers in the Powerful Voices for Kids program helped students evaluate and create messages in a variety of media. *Photo by Renee Hobbs.*

Instruction in media literacy can create a learning environment in which students can build knowledge about community events relevant to their lives and engage in critical thinking and communication skills in ways that bolster their ability to become active citizens. ■—R.H.

Online Comments: Dialogue or Diatribe?

Among the minority who dominate the online conversation is ‘the digital equivalent of the loudest drunk in the bar.’

BY ALICIA C. SHEPARD

It might be hard to believe, but one reason NPR was inspired to build its social media community is what it found in personal ads like this one—“Female golfer, loves NPR, travel and skydiving, is looking for like-minded man.” With NPR squeezed into the middle of self-portraits, the network figured that if it created a digital public square, people would want to congregate there.

So three years ago NPR invited its

The goal is dialogue, but it’s pretty clear that the debate between dialogue and diatribe is still being waged. From the view I’ve had for the last three years as NPR’s ombudsman I’d say diatribe is winning—hands down.¹ My perspective is shaped by the reality that my role—taking positions on controversial issues that arise at NPR—puts me in the position of receiving many more negative comments than the NPR community as a whole.

“The discussions on NPR.org are for the most part thoughtful and lively,” said Mark Stencel, NPR managing editor for digital. “And we know we can count on our audi-

ence for strong opinions. We’re used to that. Our rules are hardly onerous—be polite, don’t use obscenities. ... If anything, as a public media organization we are inclined to be more open than what some other national news organizations might be comfortable allowing—and that is still the case.”

When people wrote me messages that were thoughtful, engaging or provocative in a constructive way, I eagerly absorbed what they had to say. Yet the comments I received on the NPR Ombudsman blog usually weren’t any of those things. Most people logged in to share with me—and the rest of the community—what a dimwit I am, that NPR should fire me, that my latest column is laughable, or that I am a first-class shill for NPR.

Here is what “Will Null (Will999999)” wrote in March, a few days after my column appeared

about NPR tightening its rules about commenting on stories:

Did I mention that you are a total jerk to state that! You took the Kings Copper, and now are going about kicking the body! Why am i not surprised by your unprofessional conduct.

I am starting a Lottery for Shepards Firing. I will start with Fire Date of March 15th. Others, please feel free to Post Shepards Firing Date. I will give \$100 to the Winners Favorite Charity.

Want to see more? Click on comments on www.npr.org/ombudsman.

If people were talking with me on the phone or in person or they’d written me a letter, our communication might have been more productive. Instead, with only a click needed to transform writer into sender, dozens of messages arrived in my digital mailbox each day. During especially challenging times, the number has reached into the thousands.

The 90-9-1 principle convinced me that many, not all, comment sections are an exercise in faux democracy. This theory goes that 90 percent of us will read something online and move on. Nine percent—I’m in this group—occasionally take time to comment. That leaves roughly 1 percent who dominate the online conversation, and among this smaller number is found the digital equivalent of the loudest drunk in the bar. Their messages are often rude and accusatory; they indicate little interest in joining a conversation, yet they succeed in scaring off those who might want to



27 million listeners to gather at this virtual water cooler to share ideas, suggest stories, offer comments and criticisms, and participate in civil dialogue. Joining NPR’s digital community requires creating an account. Individuals need to log in each time they comment on a story, though using real names is not required. So far 500,000 people have signed up as members of the NPR.org community.

Since the launch in 2008, those tasked with oversight of this digital community’s dynamics at times have felt as though they are riding a bucking bronco in the rodeo ring. Those feelings hit hardest when contentious issues surface, and it can be challenging to maintain civil dialogue as conversations devolve into downright meanness.

So the hunt is continually on for workable—and affordable—solutions.

¹ Shepard’s term as ombudsman ended on May 31.

truly engage.

This has occasionally pushed away a news source. Once the family of a high-performing high school student who was in the country illegally wanted to stop cooperating on a story for “All Things Considered” because listeners responded so harshly on the story’s online version. The producers ultimately convinced the family to stick with what was going to be an ongoing story, “Undocumented Teen’s School, Work Options Limited.”

“It was by no means easy though, and this experience ultimately had a real chilling effect on our ability to continue with them in the longer term,” said freelance producer Elizabeth Meister. “I feel fairly confident that this incident ultimately led them to believe that sharing their experience was dangerous, and as a result it looks like we are having to abandon work on any follow-ups.”

That was in December 2009, and since then NPR has stepped up its oversight. Today, for the most part, the stream of comments has become more civil and engaging.

Monitoring Comments

Prescreening comments works, but it is expensive, and not all vicious comments will always be taken down. So nearly three years after NPR started allowing commenting on stories, the network (like all news outlets) is still figuring out how best to handle abusive and disruptive commentary. Initially, NPR relied on a “Report Abuse” button—if it were clicked three times, then that comment was investigated.

With NPR getting about 3,000 comments a day, such investigations became unfeasible for staff to manage. Last October NPR hired a Canada-based company, ICUC Moderation Services, to handle the abuse queue for NPR.org comments. But even this is not total premoderation. ICUC moderates comments by new users and

those who have repeatedly broken the guidelines.

It’s a tough job. Moderating comments is more art than science since there are a lot of gray area judgment calls within NPR’s guidelines. Crossing those borderlines can lead to expulsion from the community. “Our goal is to encourage civil and engaging conversations,” said Kate Myers, who oversees NPR’s online community. “It only takes a few people for a discussion to turn bad. In my experience, people

... ninety percent of us will read something online and move on. Nine percent—I’m in this group—occasionally take time to comment. That leaves roughly 1 percent who create and dominate the online conversation...



don’t like to contribute to a site where the comments devolve into ugliness.”

In March, NPR went a step further to refine the system. Now new members and repeat offenders are premoderated—a kind of guilty until proven innocent approach for those new to the site. It’s an attempt to control the digital “trolls,” yet they seem to be too clever by half. Take Boulder Dude, a longtime nemesis, who lets me know in frequent comments that he finds little redeeming about my columns or NPR in general. When NPR monitors banned him, he set up a new account, first as Boulder Dude1, then Boulder Dude2, and so on. But under the new system, he can’t be so crafty.

“And every time he creates a new account, he gets premoderated,” noted

Andy Carvin, NPR’s social media guru. “It’s a losing battle for him except if he behaves. Our system works because he doesn’t have a free bully pulpit for him to use. Our community members get to talk in peace because of the new system.”

Other debates revolve around the anonymity afforded those who comment. Would Boulder Dude be so cutting, ugly or mean-spirited if he had to use his real name? (I know it’s a he; I’ve talked with him.) Andrew Alexander, the former ombudsman at The Washington Post, argued in favor of anonymity, even though the Post, like all news organizations, confronts these same kinds of messages that can border on hate speech. He believes anonymity encourages people to participate and share things online that they might be afraid to post if their real name was used.

I disagree.

We would have more honest, kinder, civil exchanges if people used their real names. One way to do this is to log in using Facebook, a place where nearly everyone wants to be known and where the ethos is that people are known as who they are in real life. Of course, this isn’t always true. There are avatars on Facebook as well, and signing in on Facebook doesn’t guarantee civility. Look at The Washington Post. But it’s a start.

Encouraging a civil dialogue makes sense, so if I could, I’d get rid of anonymity when it comes to participating in the digital town common. I think people behave more civilly toward one another when their true identity is known. ■

Alicia C. Shepard just ended her three-year term as NPR ombudsman. She welcomes suggestions of workable solutions for commenting. Share them with her at lshepard27@comcast.net.

The Inner Fire of Muckraking Journalists

‘... without the time-honored, shoe-leather investigative work and skillful interviewing, passion and outrage amount to little in the journalism realm.’

BY STEVE WEINBERG

Poisoning the Press: Richard Nixon, Jack Anderson, and the Rise of Washington’s Scandal Culture

Mark Feldstein
Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
480 Pages.

Every writer who cares about language usage knows that the word “unique” means one of a kind. There are no degrees of uniqueness so caring writers cringe when reading, for example, that an investigative journalist is the “most unique” ever practic-

ing the craft. But if I were to misuse the word, I would do so on behalf of Jack Anderson, an astoundingly unique investigative journalist who died in 2005 at the age of 83. Or should I say “muckraker”? Or is there another descriptive word not yet coined?

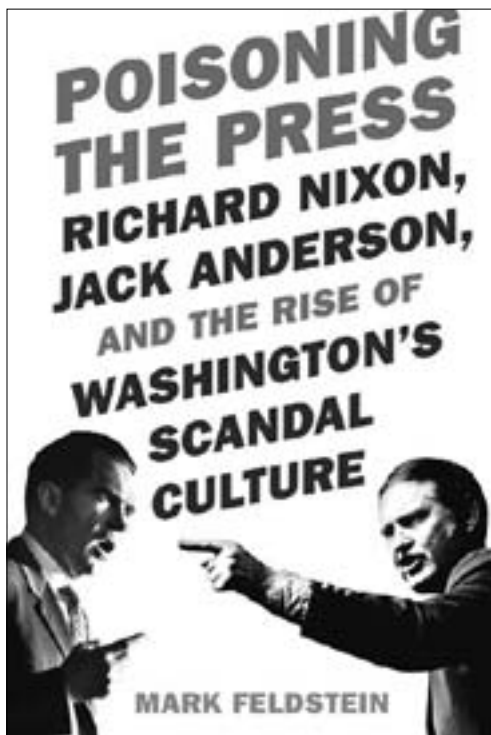
These ruminations are occasioned by the publication of “Poisoning the Press: Richard Nixon, Jack Anderson, and the Rise of Washington’s Scandal Culture,” written by Mark Feldstein. Interesting, informative and important—an all-too-rare combination—Feldstein has written a book that speaks to journalism’s past and its present. It is not a full-scale Anderson biography, nor one of Nixon. Instead, as Feldstein explains, it “is an account of the interaction between these two men that illustrates larger issues about government and the media—and the rise of investigative scandal coverage—during their time.”

Now a journalism professor at the University of Maryland, Feldstein reported for ABC News and CNN, and before doing that he served as Anderson’s intern during the summers of 1973 and 1976. While in that Washington, D.C. office, Feldstein recalls in his book that he “absorbed the spirit of joyful muckraking that permeated” the enterprise. Ever the journalist in his approach to the telling of this intriguing story, Feldstein acknowledges his hope that “this familiarity has

not compromised my fairness, but that ultimately will be up to the reader to decide.”

Feldstein’s research is deep and broad, leading to an excellent book about the numerous and challenging intersections of politics and the press, especially as they exist—and are played out—in Washington. Much of the insight is revealed from what Anderson left behind: more than 10,000 syndicated columns, many of them based on persistent, some might say, compulsive reporting; thousands more magazine and newspaper articles and radio broadcasts; 20 books; speeches; interviews; internal memos mixed in with personal and professional correspondence. What he didn’t glean from documents, Feldstein unearthed in the course of his roughly 200 interviews.

For readers too young or otherwise too removed from the decades-long, poisoned relationship of Anderson, the syndicated columnist, and Nixon, the politician and President, I offer a few of its building blocks: Anderson learned some of his trade from mentor Drew Pearson, also a widely published muckraker based in Washington. Pearson and later Anderson went after anybody in authority who offended their personal and political morality, and Nixon showed up frequently—as a Communist-baiting congressman from California, as an ethically



challenged vice president under Dwight D. Eisenhower, as a failed White House candidate, and later as a twice-elected President. Nixon tended to despise journalists and exhibit paranoia, with Anderson a regular target of his invective; Anderson was a well-recognized enemy of Nixon's long before his administration's top 20 "enemies list" surfaced in 1973—and Anderson's name wasn't on it.

Nixon liked to reside in the international realm and certainly deserves credit for establishing U.S. government relations with China. Though never a foreign correspondent, Anderson relished international scoops, and he is probably best recalled today for exposing Nixon administration lies about who was doing what to whom during warfare between India and Pakistan. Nor did the Vietnam War escape Anderson's relentless effort to bring to public attention the reality of the military campaign as set against the ways in which Nixon (and others in his administration) portrayed its policy.

Journalist's Inner Fire

What became clear in my own research about Anderson—and is conveyed well by Feldstein—is the vital nature of a journalist's inner fire. [See box on page 56.] Some of the more talented journalists in terms of documents research, interviewing techniques, and writing skills make little impact because they lack the inner fire of Anderson. To those who ask me about investigative reporting—and who are eager to discover why one reporter succeeds at it while another fails—I often use such phrases as "sustained controlled outrage" and "relentless curiosity" to describe this inner fire. Yet words fall short as they fail to capture the alchemy that integrates necessary temperamental qualities into the steady grind of a reporting life.

Among those journalists whose blend of temperament, timing and tenaciousness has propelled them into the ranks of successful muckrakers, besides Anderson, I'd put Ida Tarbell, Seymour Hersh, Jessica Mitford, Ida



Jack Anderson holds documents, which he says describe White House strategy sessions on the India-Pakistan war, on his television show in 1972. Photo by *The Associated Press*.

Wells-Barnett, and the team of Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele, among others. On a local level, with fame more circumscribed, I'd include Mike McGraw, Pam Zekman, Bill Marimow, Bob Greene, Jeff Leen, and at least several dozen others.

The inner fire might be partly genetic—that's hard to know for sure—and deeply environmental. Anderson's environment was connected to his lifelong piety to the Mormon faith. As Feldstein mentions, Anderson "sincerely believed that his muckraking furthered the Lord's work." Not so incidentally, the Mormons believe that God inspired the U.S. Constitution, a document Anderson cited often.

Although I would never compare myself favorably with Anderson, my inner fire springs neither from organized religion (I call myself an evangelical agnostic) nor my parents, in any way I can discern. So where does it come from? After 42 years of investigative reporting, I can't say; I only know it exists and probably will

until I die.

Anderson inspired me and many other journalists with his dedicated pursuit of information. He would not tolerate secrecy in government or corporate suites if he had a sense that the citizenry was being screwed. As Feldstein illustrates, if Anderson could not obtain information through standard means, he and his cadre of associates would acquire desired details "by eavesdropping, rifling through garbage, and swiping classified documents." In the tactics these two men used in their back-and-forth attacks on each other—as Feldstein shows Nixon retaliating with wiretaps, smears and even a plot to kill Anderson—they found some discomforting common ground.

Our contemporary culture of extreme government and corporate secrecy would not have altered Anderson's tactics or, I surmise, likely doused his inner fire.

Despite some questionable professional conduct, Anderson remained

an evidence-based crusader against corruption until he died. Pause for a moment to take in those words—evidence based. Some of today’s digital journalists—here I’m talking about bloggers and their techno cousins—exhibit plenty of passion and an abundance of outrage. A few do use the expansiveness of the Web to its best advantage by connecting readers to an open vault of documents presenting a

treasure-trove of supporting details. But without the time-honored, shoe-leather investigative work and skillful interviewing, passion and outrage amount to little in the journalism realm. The great lesson of Feldstein’s book, even if considered only in the Anderson-Nixon context, is the vital nature and immense value of thorough watchdog reporting.

Accept no substitute. ■

Steve Weinberg is the author of seven nonfiction books. His most recent, “Taking on the Trust: The Epic Battle of Ida Tarbell and John D. Rockefeller,” was published by W.W. Norton in 2008. He is professor emeritus at the Missouri School of Journalism and a former executive director of Investigative Reporters and Editors.

Steve Weinberg: Connections and Disclosures

In 1989, Little, Brown and Company published my biography of industrialist Armand Hammer, and then Hammer sued me for defamation, as we knew he would, given his opposition to the truth of his career being exposed.

As preparation for the libel trial moved ahead, I wanted to begin a new biography of another legendary character: Jack Anderson. I researched and wrote a book proposal, obtained a contract, and moved forward. But then a change

at the top of the publishing house occurred, which would have led to cancellation of the libel insurance we had agreed upon. I abandoned the book after failing to find a satisfactory publisher. Instead, I wrote several magazine features about Anderson—two of which are mentioned in Mark Feldstein’s bibliography.

Eventually I heard that Mark would be writing about Anderson at book length so I contacted him and offered whatever research materi-

als I still possessed. He accepted the offer.

I’ve known Mark through our mutual affiliation with Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE). In 1976, when I was a Des Moines Register reporter, I was involved with IRE in its infancy, and seven years later, I moved to Columbia, Missouri to become its executive director, a position I held for seven years. I stayed on part time as editor of its magazine until a few years ago. I also knew Anderson. ■—S.W.

Deciphering the Life of a Complicated Thinker

A novelist turned biographer places ‘[Marshall] McLuhan’s maddeningly difficult ideas in a recognizably human context.’

BY DAN KENNEDY

Marshall McLuhan: You Know Nothing of My Work!

Douglas Coupland
Atlas & Co. 216 Pages.

The great risk in reading Marshall McLuhan literally is that you don’t know how seriously even he took his ideas. “I don’t pretend to understand

it,” he once said of his work. “After all, my stuff is very difficult.”

Yet if there was an overriding theme to which he returned again and again, it was that television—low-resolution moving pictures in a tiny box—was the ultimate “cool” medium, more tactile than visual, demanding that the audience participate because so much information was left out. Unlike “hot,” one-way media such as newspapers,

radio and movies, McLuhan argued, the interactive nature of television could not accommodate controversy and overbearing personalities. Hitler, boffo on radio, never would have made it on TV.

So here’s what I would have liked the novelist Douglas Coupland to tell us in his slim, quirky, highly entertaining biography of McLuhan: Did advances in technology change

television from a cool medium to a hot one? McLuhan himself, in his best-known book, “Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man” (1964), wrote that “improved’ TV” would no more be television than cartoons would still be cartoons if they were transformed into fine art. Could Bill O’Reilly, Glenn Beck, and Keith Olbermann have succeeded back when viewers had to infer what people looked like from fuzzy, black and white horizontal lines? Do cable pundits thrive today because we live in a politically divisive age? Or are they merely the inevitable consequence of HDTV?

Alas, Coupland’s mission in “Marshall McLuhan: You Know Nothing of My Work!”—his title is a play on McLuhan’s memorable cameo in Woody Allen’s 1977 film “Annie Hall”—is not so much to explain McLuhan’s ideas as it is to introduce us to the man himself. We learn that McLuhan may have been mildly autistic; that he had two arteries at the base of his skull, like a cat, which may have nourished his insights by providing his brain with more blood than is normal, but which contributed to the strokes that debilitated and eventually killed him; and that he had an overbearing mother and a wimp of a father. (Coupland believes the cartoon characters Dagwood and Blondie, who pop up repeatedly in McLuhan’s writings, are stand-ins for Herbert and Elsie McLuhan.) The genius of McLuhan’s ideas Coupland takes for granted, even as he chuckles at “Marshall’s tendency in later life to speak first and find the footnotes later.” Indeed, “Understanding Media” rambles on for 359 pages with scarcely any footnotes at all.

Yet Coupland offers sympathetic insight into McLuhan and his influences—no small thing, given McLuhan’s status today as a cultural icon, well known for little more than being well known and for writing “The medium is the message.” And possibly for popularizing the phrase “the global village.”

McLuhan, we learn, preferred talking in front of an audience to writing alone in a room. So it’s not surprising that McLuhan expressed his ideas



Media commentator Marshall McLuhan reads as he reclines in his study, 1968. Photo by *The Associated Press*.

more coherently in a 1969 interview with *Playboy* (back when some folks actually did get the magazine for its articles) than in his own turgid, convoluted prose.

A bit more than midway through the book, Coupland takes McLuhan’s grand idea and boils it down to five short, lucid paragraphs. Let me go one better and see what I can do in five sentences.

- Preliterate, tribal societies lived in an environment in which sound was the dominant sense, which in turn helped foster a communal, emotionally driven form of living.
- The rise of the phonetic alphabet shifted that dominance to the visual, which gave rise to individualism and a linear, rational mode of thinking.
- The printing press accelerated and amplified that process, leading to nationalism, industrialization and Western cultural hegemony.
- The electronic media, and especially television, de-emphasize the visual—remember he believed TV was primarily a tactile experience—

and hark back to earlier modes of interpreting our surroundings.

- The consequence will be the retribalization of humanity, only this time on a global scale—hence “the global village.”

Often McLuhan was accused of being an enthusiast for these changes. Coupland refutes this charge by explaining that McLuhan hated the modern world but was compelled to describe it for our betterment. Yet in his conversation with *Playboy*, McLuhan sounds like he’d spent the previous week rolling in the mud at Woodstock, saying, “Literate man is alienated, impoverished man; retribalized man can lead a far richer and more fulfilling life—not the life of a mindless drone but of the participant in a seamless web of interdependence and harmony.”

From what he regards as McLuhan’s best book, 1962’s “The Gutenberg Galaxy,” Coupland also cites a passage to make the case that McLuhan anticipated the Internet “four decades in advance.” Indeed, there is something

prescient in McLuhan's words as quoted by Coupland:

Instead of tending towards a vast Alexandrian library the world has become a computer, an electronic brain, exactly as an infantile piece of science fiction. And as our senses have gone outside us, Big Brother goes inside. So, unless aware of this dynamic, we shall at once move into a phase of panic terrors, exactly befitting a small world of tribal drums, total interdependence, and superimposed co-existence.

To underscore the theme of McLuhan as Internet seer, Coupland adds some touches to make readers feel as though they are randomly surfing the Web: MapQuest directions to various McLuhan landmarks, catalog entries for McLuhan's books, lists of various kinds, even a test to measure the extent of traits associated with autism. McLuhan may be ultimately unknowable, but such ephemera bring us closer to him.

In a 1965 profile of McLuhan, Tom Wolfe described McLuhan as a geeky professor with a clip-on tie,



otherworldly and clueless about the fame-and-celebrity-driven world into which he had suddenly been thrust. His story ends with McLuhan in a topless restaurant in San Francisco, lecturing the legendary columnist Herb Caen on the deeper meaning of the breasts that were swaying around them. Caen had referred to a woman

as “good-looking”—both an error and a teachable moment, in McLuhan's view.

“Do you know what you said? Good-looking. That's a visual orientation. You're separating yourself from the girls,” McLuhan advised Caen. “You are sitting back and *looking*. Actually, the light is dim in here. This is meant as a *tactile* experience, but visual man doesn't react that way.”

Such a person may seem an unlikely subject for an extended love letter, but that is precisely what this book is. Coupland is an engaging guide to McLuhan's life and family, his academic influences and his religious sensibilities. By placing McLuhan's maddeningly difficult ideas in a recognizably human context, Coupland helps us understand how they arose and why we're still talking about them a half-century later.

If only he could have explained Glenn Beck. ■

Dan Kennedy is an assistant professor of journalism at Northeastern University. He is a panelist on “Beat the Press” on WGBH-TV in Boston and a contributing writer for The Guardian. His blog Media Nation is at www.dankennedy.net.

A Failing Newsroom—Described With a Novelist's Touch

Tom Rachman 'is telling this story at a perfect time as newspapers shed staff and costs and, in some cases, shut down their presses altogether.'

BY CHRISTINA KIM

The Imperfectionists: A Novel

Tom Rachman

The Dial Press. 288 Pages.

By the end of Tom Rachman's novel about the rise and fall of an English-language newspaper in Rome, Italy, I'm left with a dead dog, a lot of

unemployed people, and the sinking feeling that, with journalism, I have chosen the wrong career path. Then I realize that I can always write a novel, though perhaps not so well as Rachman.

While “The Imperfectionists” is about a newspaper, its cast of characters, so flawed and foible-full are what offer an inviting glimpse into the gritty

grime of a daily's newsroom. With the narrative freedom that writing fiction offers, Rachman entices readers who normally might not want to enter the microcosm of the newsroom; once readers are there, he employs skillful storytelling to remind them of all that is lost when a daily paper no longer exists. That he does this so well testifies to the literary transformation he's

made since he worked as a foreign correspondent for The Associated Press (AP) and an editor at the International Herald Tribune.

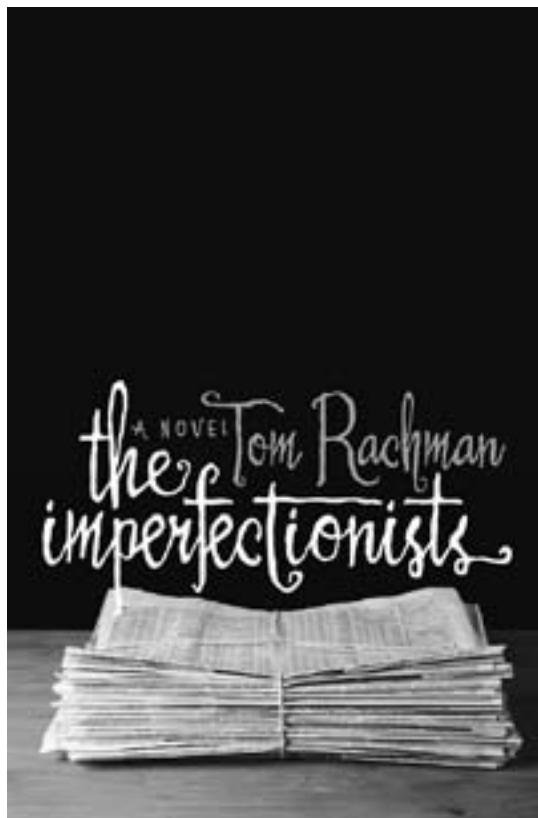
In each chapter he explores the life of one person who works for the soon-to-be-doomed paper along with a chapter about the life of one quirky reader. These are brief, sometimes funny, sometimes tragic glimpses into the hearts of individual characters—delicious little morsels that soon melt away to be replaced by the next short narrative. Throughout, Rachman explores the history of the paper and ultimately the story of its failure, something all too prevalent today.

This newspaper in Rome becomes the thread that Rachman uses to connect these memorable characters to one another—and them to larger themes. With his fluid narrative he weaves the reader through the paper's evolution and its changes in leadership, its advances in technology, and the changes in the world outside the newsroom. He is telling this story at a perfect time as newspapers shed staff and costs and, in some cases, shut down their presses altogether. Yet Rachman isn't nostalgic about newspapering; in fact, many of his characters are so irreparably flawed that they are people we wouldn't likely befriend. Or if they don't start out that way, they get there through Rachman's masterful exposition. But if you don't like them, they at least evoke some measure of sympathy.

Then there is the newsroom, a place he shows in all its muck and garbage, hardly in its glory. No Woodwards or Bernsteins sweep through the scenes taking place there. Rachman dives into the reality of the newsroom as a place where when someone steals your chair, the one wonderfully molded to your rear end, this act—rather than some scoop about a gang of terrorists—becomes the main event of the day. His inspiration is clear when one reads what Rachman once said to writer Malcolm Gladwell about working in

the AP's newsroom: "And although we were immersed in cataclysmic subjects, one's day was more likely dominated by the mood of the person seated at the next desk."

Rachman deftly takes journalists off a pedestal—a place from which most people already have removed them. Yet he magnificently manages to give us reasons to relate to these journalists, not as flawed reporters and editors



but as ordinary people. And through a remarkable feat of writing, he compels us to think of the newspaper in its purest and most valuable form as a composite organism that these flawed individuals create.

The well-known betrayers of journalism's code of behavior—Jayson Blair, Stephen Glass, and Janet Cooke, among others—have had a profound effect on how people think about the news media. Yet every person has flaws; many characters in this novel are inept at life and driven only to be a little less so in a newsroom for

what perhaps are less than noble reasons. Rachman explained in the same Gladwell interview that these reasons included "an urgent need for copy and quotes, the terror of enraging one's irritable bosses, the desire for advancement or for prestigious postings." Flawed, and perhaps ignoble as individual journalists may be, there is still great value in what we do, as Rachman deftly illustrates.

Through Rachman's storytelling a valuable record of the human species is produced in clips of daily life and loss. The accumulated weight of these characters' stories—told in brief, direct sentences—encompasses the broad outline of human existence. After being tugged in by the telling of these stories over a morning coffee or on a commute—much like what happens when reading a newspaper—the moment we set the book down our self-absorption with concerns about our own daily dilemmas resumes.

Rachman's characters appear briefly, crossing, overlapping and twisting together with the newspaper at their core. As distinct portrayals, each is poignant, funny, ironic, but when woven into the novel as a whole, the effect is grand and haunting. Maybe this is his message; news—in this case, the act of gathering and distributing it—is what connects us. It pulls us out of our individual shells and forces us to face the world in all of its messiness.

"The Imperfectionists" might be Rachman's way of letting us know that we are losing those connections on a scale and at a rate that ought to concern us. While we are inside of his novel, this is certainly something we understand. ■

Christina Kim left the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan and now studies journalism at Emerson College in Boston.

Landing in Al Jazeera's Vibrant Newsroom

'... people show up on days off, come in early and leave late often without being asked, because not being in the newsroom when major stories break seems inconceivable.'

BY D. PARVAZ

Al Jazeera is the fomentor of revolutions or, as United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently put it, "really effective ... because it's real news"?

Given that I'm getting close to rounding off my first year at Al Jazeera, I can attest that Clinton's (almost) grudging praise/observation is on the mark. Not that anyone at the Al Jazeera headquarters here in Doha, Qatar was holding her breath waiting

for a U.S. government official to give us the nod of approval.

Please. We're journalists.

But Clinton was right. Nestled in the dusty capital of a dusty country with a name most Americans can't pronounce, Al Jazeera is a news organization and a damned exciting one at that. Even if I was in a coma I'd find my gig here interesting. How could I not? A good chunk of the region seems to be in the throes of some sort of uprising, with my colleagues and me having a front seat to it all.

Shortly after I arrived last August, Al Jazeera released its WikiLeaks projects and content. We were one of the news organizations this whistle-blowing group chose to report on the Iraq War files—and the response was huge. This was also the first time WikiLeaks had leaked information to a Middle Eastern news outlet. Turns out that an audience member had suggested doing so to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange when he spoke at the Frontline Club in London a few months earlier. Seems he took the advice to heart.

Then came the cholera outbreak in Haiti and the Palestine Papers, in which we exposed the extent to which the Palestinian Authority was willing to trade land rights with the Israelis, followed in rapid succession by uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Yemen, Syria and ... We were miles ahead of other news outlets on Tunisia, and this set the tone for our coverage of subsequent uprisings. And we don't just cover the Middle East and the Muslim world; our reporters are in Mexico to cover the drug wars and in Antarctica to do stories about global warming. In March I was sent to Japan to report on the fallout from the devastating earthquake and tsunami.

Simply curating all of the content headed for the website can be a staggering task; reporters in the field file blog posts, tweet and send video, including exclusive interviews, for us to share online.

Since these revolutions broke out in Arab nations, our Web traffic has multiplied—by 1,000 percent—as people throughout the world have come to the website for stories and video clips. But they are also heading there to watch our live stream of Al Jazeera TV. Hey, it will have to do until people in the United States can get Al Jazeera English included in their cable and satellite provider



D. Parvaz roots for Iran, where she was born, during its victorious soccer match against Iraq in Doha, Qatar. *Photo by Ben Piven.*

Feeling the Embrace of Her Nieman Family

D. Parvaz, freed in May after 19 days of captivity in Syria and then Iran, wrote a postscript to the accompanying essay, which she had written before her detention.

Imagine having a story you can't wait to write, not because it's a thing of beauty or joy, but because of a sense of horror and immediacy. It's how I felt with a story I was dying to tell while being held for three days in a Syrian detention center and hearing young men being tortured and beaten around the clock.

But then, the Syrians deported me to Iran, where for more than two weeks I lived in solitary confinement, incommunicado, while the Iranian government investigated me on spying charges. No pen. No keyboard. No phone. Still, I kept inside my head that story and the cries I heard in the night, as I held imaginary conversations with the two young women with whom I'd shared cells in Syria, "Patience, sisters. I'll tell your stories. Patience."

For two weeks I gnawed away at myself for missing a deadline only I knew about, hoping that with each minute, I was getting closer to being released so I could describe what I saw in Syria.

The Iranians, who treated me quite well, were baffled by my

anxious state. They couldn't understand its source, nor could I explain everything to them. So I put it down to worrying about my family, which, make no mistake, was the truth. I worried all the time about them. I knew my freedom would comfort my family, but the Syrians being held in that bizarre, secret detention center would likely still be there. All I could do was to tell about their suffering that I'd witnessed.

Within 18 hours of being released, I called my family, filed a piece, did three interviews, cut the huge cake magically procured by Al Jazeera and happily stared at the faces of my colleagues, all of whom had been working tirelessly to help secure my release. Then I had a few minutes to try to catch up on all the e-mails I'd received for the 19 days that I was missing/detained in Syria and Iran.

I was—and remain—floored by what I found. Of course, I knew that my family and Al Jazeera had been strategizing around the clock to find me and bring me back home. What I wasn't prepared for was the support that seemed to spring up from all corners of the world, with my fellow Niemans leading the charge.

When you fall down a rabbit hole, as I did, what you mostly feel

is alone. You know people might notice that you're gone, but you have no idea that people are writing stories about you, from Cleveland to Dublin, alerting the world to your plight in the Swedish press and on NPR, and coordinating letter-writing campaigns and e-mails to diplomats and members of Congress.

So when you do find out, you are rendered speechless. I was. All I felt was a severe sense of gratitude that manifested itself as a massive lump in my throat until words were ready to come out, and here they are:

For all that my fellow Niemans and the Nieman Foundation—especially friend and curator Bob Giles—did to help free me, to keep my name out there and to let the Iranian government know that I am no spy, I say "thank you." Thank you for the countless tweets, letters, Facebook posts, articles and more. Thank you for helping your fellow fellow out of one heck of a jam. And thank you for helping free me so that I could finally share what is happening to those still held in Syria.

Thank you. ■—D.P.

packages.¹ Since February Al Jazeera has invited visitors to its website to join their Demand Al Jazeera campaign.

If all of this seems a bit rah-rah, forgive me. I guess the honeymoon is still on. This doesn't mean that there aren't moments of utter frustration with how things work here. But on most days I remember that I'm part of

a newsroom that's still young and still growing, which means that it and those who run it aren't quite as entrenched in certain practices as management in an older news organization might be. People here are more open to pitches that come out of left field—they're hungry for ideas and experiments in coverage while still adhering to best

practices.

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't surprised by this—I expected a slightly more conservative approach to things, and while there are some differences between the Al Jazeera newsroom and pretty much any other I've worked in, the basics are the same. This newsroom is a living organism, filled with hard-

¹ Full access to Al Jazeera English via cable TV exists in only a handful of cities, including Washington, D.C.; Burlington, Vermont; and Toledo, Ohio.

working, obsessive, competitive and at times, insufferable (hey, we know these things about ourselves, right?) journalists who sweat and breathe news and content. There is still that vital tug of war between reporters and editors that results in great content.

Despite the demanding shift structure required to feed a 24-hour news cycle, people show up on days off, come in early and leave late often without being asked, because not being in the newsroom when major stories break seems inconceivable. Just as in any other newsroom, each of us pitches and jockeys to get deployed to cover

the story.

This is pretty heady stuff from the perspective of someone who has been observing the decline of Western media. Most U.S. news organizations have been downsizing and cutting back for years, and while there are signs that some are beginning to re-staff, it's doubtful that they'll invest in foreign bureaus and investigative journalism as they did in the past. It's heartbreaking to watch communities and beats go uncovered in hopes that the slack will be picked up—and done well—in blogs.

Having worked at the Hearst Corporation's Seattle Post-Intelligencer,

which was shut down after 146 years of publishing, it's revitalizing to be in such a dynamic atmosphere at a crucial point in history. I can't imagine watching, say, Egypt, a country with centuries of history, taking its first halting steps as a democracy from any other vantage point. ■

D. Parvaz, a 2009 Nieman Fellow, is an online journalist for Al Jazeera English. She worked for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, which shut down its print operations during her Nieman year.

1964

James H. McCartney, a longtime Washington correspondent and columnist who specialized in foreign affairs and defense policy, died at his home in Florida on May 6th from cancer. He was 85.

During 33 years as a Washington journalist, he had datelines from more than 30 countries and covered every President from Dwight D. Eisenhower to Bill Clinton. He wrote about national security, national politics, and presidential campaigns. His coverage was published in 31 Knight Ridder newspapers, including The Philadelphia Inquirer, The Miami Herald, and the Detroit Free Press.

A native of St. Paul, Minnesota, McCartney was drafted into the U.S. Army while still in his teens. He was honorably discharged, with the rank of corporal, after being wounded shortly before World War II ended.

His wife, **Molly Sinclair McCartney**, NF '78, said that the six months he spent on the frontlines were "just a miserable experience ... It wasn't just the physical conditions that were awful, but it was the incompetence of the people running the operation."

After graduating from Michigan State University, where he was editor of the college newspaper, McCartney

took a position at the South Bend (Ind.) Tribune. He later earned a master's degree at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. He was hired by the Chicago Daily News and in 1959 became a Washington correspondent for the paper.

Inspired in part, his family says, by his experiences during the war, he developed an interest in the Pentagon and State Department. He was one of the first reporters to focus on the rise of the military-industrial complex, a trend that Eisenhower warned about in his farewell address.

After three years in Chicago as city editor of the Daily News, McCartney returned to Washington in 1968 as a member of the Knight Ridder bureau. He remained in the city for the rest of his career and developed a reputation for relentlessly questioning officials at White House, State Department, and Pentagon press conferences.

"You knew, if you were a government spokesman, that you'd better have it straight and you'd better have the facts, because he'd keep coming at you," said former State Department spokesman **Hodding Carter III**, NF '66. "He could be the belligerent antagonist when he knew he was being lied to. ... I didn't know anyone I respected more than Jim."

He received the 1989 Edward Weintal Prize for Diplomatic Report-

ing from Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service. He was an adjunct professor at Georgetown for 13 years, teaching courses about the media, foreign policy, and politics.

Although he retired as a reporter in 1990, he continued to write a column for Knight Ridder until 1995. Subsequently, he wrote a monthly column for the Bradenton (Fla.) Herald, with the final one appearing March 27.

His marriage to **Jule Graham McCartney** ended in divorce. In addition to his wife, **Molly**, he is survived by a son, daughter, stepdaughter and four grandchildren.

1968

Jerome Aumente led a series of economic reporting workshops for journalists in Bucharest and three other cities in Romania as part of a U.S. State Department program.

He also conducted discussions with the staffs of Ziarul Financiar, a major financial daily, and "The Money Channel."

"Romania has joined the European Union and is struggling with the global economic crisis, the fragile beginnings of a stock market and the need for its news media to conduct tough enterprise and investigative report-

1973

ing as the economy moves toward a more transparent and open market,” Aumente wrote in an e-mail. “So there was plenty to talk about, including the major changes in the news media landscape as we all transition to a challenging digital and Internet environment for news and information.”

Aumente is distinguished professor emeritus and special counselor to the dean of the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers University.

In May the Livingston College alumni association honored him with a Legacy Award for his work in establishing the journalism department and the Journalism Resources Institute at Rutgers.

He also participated in the “Journalism in Eastern Europe: Who Controls the Media?” conference at the Nieman Foundation on a panel examining what kind of media assistance is most effective. [See box below.]

Wayne Greenhaw, who wrote 22 books, many of them about his home state of Alabama and the civil rights movement in the South, died on May 31st due to complications from heart surgery. He was 71.

His latest book, “Fighting the Devil in Dixie: How Civil Rights Activists Took on the Ku Klux Klan in Ala-



Nieman Conference Examines Media Freedom in Eastern Europe

“One couldn’t be there without recognizing that most of the citizens you met were tethered to their nation, like pigeons tethered to a string. ... State-controlled television, radio and newspapers were delivering this steady stream of propaganda, hearsay and innuendo.”

That’s how **Gwen Thompkins**, NF ’11, summed up her experiences with Eastern Europe and its media when she lived in the former Yugoslavia from 1988 to 1990. And although she was speaking about Eastern Europe as it was before the fall of communism, not all of the region’s new private media owners have given up on the old state model for news.

To continue the conversation started in the Spring 2011 issue of Nieman Reports, “Shattering Barriers to Reveal Corruption,” the Nieman Foundation held a conference—“Journalism in Eastern Europe: Who Controls the

Media?”—on May 6. Academics, journalists and media experts shared what they and their colleagues in the region go through to report—or train others to report—the news in Eastern Europe.

“It’s very rare that you have all these people in the same room together—working journalists and academics,” said Romanian journalist **Stefan Candea**, NF ’11, after the conference. “Journalists can learn new things from scholars, and the scholars can learn a lot from hearing about the reality on the ground, not just from statistics.”

Since the Soviet Union collapsed, millions of dollars have been poured into media training and assistance in the region, with little to show for it. Improving the quality of journalism was a main discussion thread at the conference, but speakers noted that media owners themselves present a major barrier because some care more about furthering their busi-

ness interests than promoting good journalism.

Among the speakers were 2011 Nieman Fellows—**Candea**, co-founder of the Romanian Center for Investigative Journalism; **Thompkins**, former East Africa correspondent for NPR; and **Maxim Trudolyubov**, the editorial page editor of Russia’s *Vedomosti* newspaper—along with **Jerome Aumente**, NF ’68, a media trainer and professor emeritus at Rutgers University.

Other presenters included Harvard government professors **Grzegorz Ekiert** and **Timothy J. Colton**, who also teaches Russian studies; **Maria Sadovskaya**, a Belarusian journalist; and **Peter Gross**, director of the School of Journalism and Electronic Media at the University of Tennessee.

Videos from the conference are online at www.nieman.harvard.edu/eastern-europe/. ■—Jonathan Seitz

A New Curator for the Nieman Foundation

Ann Marie Lipinski, NF '90, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and former editor and senior vice president of the Chicago Tribune, has been named curator of the Nieman Foundation, effective July 1.

Lipinski succeeds **Bob Giles**, NF '66, who retired after 11 years in the post. She is the first woman to head the Nieman Foundation since it was founded in 1938.

"Harvard and the Nieman Foundation have an extraordinary record of promoting and elevating the standards of journalism, and there is more to be done," she said, in a statement at the time her appointment was announced. "I look forward to working with colleagues at universities and news organizations globally in addressing the challenges and promise of journalism. Harvard's deep commitment to this work and to excellence makes this an extraordinary time to be at Nieman."

Lipinski brings three decades of journalism experience to her new post. Prior to joining the University of Chicago in 2008 as vice president of civic engage-

ment and a senior lecturer, she served as editor of the Chicago Tribune for more than seven years. Under her leadership, the Tribune won Pulitzers for international, explanatory, investigative, feature, and editorial writing.

She joined the Tribune in 1978 as an editorial intern. In 1988 she was one of three Tribune reporters awarded a Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting on corruption and conflicts of interest in the Chicago City Council.

After her Nieman year, she returned to the Tribune to lead the paper's investigative team. "I have no doubt of the singular role that experience played in preparing me for leadership in my newsroom and my profession," she said. "I'm indebted to Harvard and to Nieman for what was a transformative year, and I am excited to have the chance to support others in their work here."

Lipinski, a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board since 2003 and a juror for two years before joining the board, in May was elected to serve as one of three co-chairs. ■

bama" was published in January. In an article in the Winter 2010 issue of Nieman Reports, Greenhaw reminisced about his reporting career as well as the political leaders and memorable citizens he encountered over the years.

He started to cover the civil rights movement in 1965 after **Ray Jenkins**, NF '65, managing editor of the Alabama Journal in Montgomery, hired him as a reporter. Greenhaw also reported on the movement as a stringer for The New York Times and Time magazine.

Rick Bragg, NF '93, a friend of Greenhaw's who teaches at the University of Alabama, told The Associated Press, "Wayne is just a part of the

history here and has been a storyteller for so long that I can't imagine things without him."

From 1984 to 1988, Greenhaw was editor and publisher of Alabama magazine, and he was a columnist for the Alabama Journal and the Montgomery Advertiser in the early 1990's.

Among the honors he received was the 2006 Harper Lee Award for a Distinguished Alabama Writer.

A resident of Montgomery, Greenhaw had a varied career and published in a number of genres. He wrote novels, plays, short stories, and poems. He was Jimmy Carter's press secretary in Alabama during the 1976 presidential

campaign, and was director of the state tourism bureau from 1993 to 1994.

He is survived by his wife, **Sally**.

Ed Williams was inducted into the North Carolina Journalism Hall of Fame at a dinner at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in April. He was introduced by **Hodding Carter III**, NF '66, who hired him in 1967 as a reporter for the Carter family's Delta Democrat-Times in Greenville, Mississippi. Williams, a former editor of the University of Mississippi student daily, had just completed two years in the Army.

Williams retired in 2008 after 35 years at The Charlotte Observer, including 25 as editor of the editorial pages. His columns and editorials were part of Observer projects that won the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service in 1981 and 1988. In 2003 he received the annual Liberty Bell Award from the county bar association for his "willingness to take tough stands on tough issues." After his retirement, Governor Mike Easley conferred upon him the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, the state's highest award for service to North Carolina.

In addition to his newspaper work, Williams was a frequent lecturer on innovation and ethics at the American Press Institute.

1976

Jim Rubin is the new secretary/treasurer of the executive committee of the steering committee of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press (RCFP).

Founded in 1970, the RCFP provides free legal assistance to defend the First Amendment rights of journalists. It has been involved in most of the significant press freedom cases to come before the U.S. Supreme Court over the past four decades.

Rubin is the legal affairs editor for Bloomberg News in Washington, overseeing coverage of the Supreme Court and Justice Department as well as related matters in Congress.

1982

Alex Jones received the 2011 DeWitt Carter Reddick Award from The University of Texas at Austin College of Communication in April. Named for the college's first dean, the award honors achievement in the field of communications.

At the ceremony in Austin, Jones, director of Harvard's Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, delivered a keynote speech entitled "WikiLeaks, Facebook and Us: Why Professional Journalism Still Matters." In an e-mail to Nieman Reports, Jones wrote that he was honored by the recognition, adding: "This is an award that the University of Texas College of Communication takes very seriously. Walter Cronkite and Nick Lemann among others have been former winners, and it comes from one of the premier schools of communication in the nation. Plus, at the end of the ceremony, we all stood and sang 'The Eyes of Texas Are Upon You' and gave the hook'em horns salute. Nothing like it."

Also in April, Jones was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a 230-year-old policy research center.

Jones previously was the host of NPR's "On the Media." A former media reporter at The New York Times, he won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the demise of the Bingham family's newspaper empire. He is the author of three books, the most recent of which, "Losing the News: The Future of the News That Feeds Democracy," was released in paperback in December.

1986

Geneva Overholser, director of the University of Southern California's Annenberg School of Journalism, joined the newly formed editorial advisory board of Examiner.com in April. The board will meet quarterly to advise the site on editorial policy and training for its contributors as well as on the best uses of technol-

Saying Farewell to Bob Giles



Scores of Nieman Fellows celebrated the 11-year tenure of Bob Giles, NF '66, curator of the Nieman Foundation, at a party in May. Journalists from throughout the world gathered at Lippmann House to toast Giles, who is retiring on June 30. Fellows from the class of 2010 included, from left, Alejandra Matus, Boris Muñoz, Lisa Mullins, Jeff Howe, and Maria Balinska, wearing glasses at far right. Facing Bob is June Carolyn Erlick, editor of Harvard's Latin American journal *ReVista*. For a video and more photos, visit www.nieman.harvard.edu. *Photo by Lisa Abitbol.*

ogy to serve its audience, according to a press release. The online news network, founded in 2008, publishes 3,000 articles a day by more than 70,000 contributors in nearly 250 markets in the U.S.

1989

Joseph Thloloe received an honorary doctorate from Rhodes University in South Africa in April. A committee that included faculty and student representatives selected him for the honor based on his significant contributions.

Thloloe, who has been a figure in South African journalism for more than 50 years, is the country's press ombudsman. In the past, he was chairman of the South African National Editors' Forum and president of the Union of Black Journalists and the Media Workers Association of South Africa.

In the 1970's, he was imprisoned twice for a total of 28 months. No reason was given in either case. In 1981, the apartheid government banned Thloloe from working as a journalist. In response, the Nieman Class of 1982 selected Thloloe for the Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism.

1991

Tim Giago, a founder of three Indian newspapers and the first president of the Native American Journalists Association, has retired as editor and publisher of the *Native Sun News*, the paper he founded in 2008.

He plans to finish a memoir he has been writing about the evolution of the Indian press over his three decades at the forefront.

Early in his career, Giago grew

Headliner Awards for Print and Broadcast

Two Nieman Fellows received top honors in the 2011 National Headliner Awards, one of the country's oldest annual contests recognizing excellence in print, broadcast and online media. The Press Club of Atlantic City presents the awards.

Boston Globe city and region columnist **Kevin Cullen**, NF '03, received a first-place award in the local interest category for columns on a variety of subjects. Among the columns were one about Phoebe Prince, a high school girl in South Hadley, Massachusetts who committed suicide after being bullied, and another about Lieutenant Scott Milley, an Army Ranger who was killed in Afghanistan.

The investigative team at WCNC-TV in Charlotte, North Carolina, led by **Stuart Watson**,

NF '08, was given a first-place award for investigative reporting. In "Bamboozled: A Story of Liquor and Money," Watson's team uncovered waste and corruption in the Mecklenburg County Alcoholic Beverage Control Board. After the report aired, new statewide rules for alcoholic beverage control boards were approved.

Also recognized were **James E. Causey**, NF '08, who received a third-place award for his editorial writing at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, and **John Harwood**, NF '90, who was part of a CNBC team that received second-place honors in the category of broadcast business and consumer reporting for "Investing in America: A CNBC Town Hall Event With President Obama." ■

frustrated because his white editors at the Rapid City Journal in South Dakota would not allow him to cover the nearby Pine Ridge Indian Reservation where he was raised. They expressed concern that his reporting would not be objective.

In 1981 Giago struck out on his own and founded The Lakota Times, which became the first successful Indian-owned weekly newspaper in the country. Giago did not shy away from criticizing tribal leaders or taking on difficult subjects, and the paper—or rather its building—sometimes paid the price. "After I wrote a strong editorial [against violence perpetrated by the American Indian Movement] in the fall of 1981, the windows of our newspaper office were blasted out with gunfire. We came right back with another editorial challenging the 'cowards who strike in the middle of the night,'" Giago wrote in the Fall 2005 issue of Nieman Reports.

The paper, renamed Indian Country

Today, was sold in 1998. In 2000 Giago founded the Lakota Journal; he sold it a few years later. Reflecting on his career, he said that he regretted selling the first two newspapers he founded to tribes because "freedom of the press is a foreign concept to Indian tribes."

In 1990, the state of South Dakota eliminated Columbus Day and created Native American Day after Giago advocated for the change in numerous editorials in The Lakota Times. That year was also named the "Year of Reconciliation" after a similar lobbying effort.

Giago has been inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame and was the first Native American honoree of the South Dakota Newspaper Hall of Fame.

He told Nieman Reports that his proudest accomplishment was bringing more Native Americans into journalism: "My lasting legacy would be the dozens of young Indian journalists I sent out into the mainstream media

in both newspapers and radio." A founder and the first president of the Native American Journalists Association, Giago said he is pleased that "27 years later, it is still a viable advocacy group for Native media."

Kevin Noblet was promoted to managing editor of wealth management coverage for Dow Jones Newswires in March after serving as deputy managing editor since 2009. Noblet assumed the presidency of the Society of American Business Editors and Writers at the organization's annual conference in April. He has been a member of its board for three years.

He spent nearly 30 years at The Associated Press, including as business editor and deputy international editor.

1993

Rick Bragg was part of a team that received the 2011 James Beard Foundation Journalism Award in the Food, Culture and Travel writing category for "The Southerner's Guide to Oysters," published in the February/March 2010 issue of Garden & Gun magazine.

Bragg, who teaches journalism at the University of Alabama, contributed the lead essay, "Your First Oyster," about his many experiences with bivalves, from his first—"It tasted like wet dirt, only slicker, fishier, like what a tadpole would taste like if you sucked it right out of the ditch, or a wet hoofprint"—to the "magic" experience he had in New Orleans that made him a convert.

Within the confines of his own experience, Bragg also places oysters into context as one of those things "that male writers, of a certain ilk, feel they have to do."

1994

Melanie Sill left her position as editor and senior vice president of The Sacramento Bee for a six-month appointment as executive in residence at the University of Southern California's (USC) Annenberg School of

A Teacher's Legacy of Writing Craft and Community

For 19 years, noted author Rose Moss taught creative writing classes at the Nieman Foundation, gently showing fellows and affiliates how



to relish the art and craft of penning a good story. She retired this past spring after a particularly brutal Cambridge winter left her yearning

for sunnier climes and more time to write.

Moss was born in Johannesburg, South Africa and moved to the United States in 1964. She has called South Africa “the soil of my imagination,” and many of the characters in her fiction and nonfiction wrestled with the effects of exile and reconciliation.

She has written more than 40 short stories and two novels, including “The Family Reunion,” which was short-listed for a National Book Award.

Her teaching method was deceptively simple. Each semester she asked students to produce three “substantial” pieces of writing. In class, students identified what



Students of Rose Moss, longtime writing instructor at the Nieman Foundation, came together on the occasion of her retirement. *Photo by Melissa Ludtke.*

worked in their colleagues' stories and what didn't. The authors, meanwhile, had to stay mum no matter what was said.

Moss typically had her class over for dinner and wine, evenings that fostered the sense of community that has long defined the Nieman experience. Many fellows and affiliates became dear friends; some wrote books that grew from class assignments. “The bond between

Rose and her students is a joy to observe,” said Nieman Curator **Bob Giles**, NF '66, who also is retiring this summer.

Moss once told *The Boston Globe*, “When I'm gardening, my space reduces to what I can see, the plants nearby, the insects. It is totally engrossing.” She had the same focus on her students, and like her garden, they flourished because of her care. ■—Tony Bartelme, NF '11

Journalism.

After three decades working for the McClatchy Company, owner of the Bee, Sill wrote in her farewell column that her work at USC “offers me a rare chance to step back from the fray and focus on broader questions.”

At USC, she wrote, she will “do reporting, research, writing and work with students and faculty on questions that have motivated me as an editor: What can journalists and journalism do most effectively to serve the public

interest in an age of media fragmentation? How can we report news, tell stories and convey information in ways that connect with more people?”

Sill has been the newspaper's editor since 2007, when she left the same position at *The (Raleigh, N.C.) News & Observer*, another McClatchy newspaper. There, she was part of a team that won the 1996 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for an investigation into the environmental and health risks related to North Carolina's pig

industry.

According to a press release from USC, the findings of Sill's research at the school will be released online and through public presentations. “I couldn't be more delighted at the prospect of having Melanie join us,” said **Geneva Overholser**, NF '86, director of the Annenberg School of Journalism. “The opportunity for our students to work with one of America's most respected and future-oriented editors, the chance to bring the fruits

Two Fellows Honored for Magazine Articles

Michael Fitzgerald, NF '11, and **Beatriz Terrazas**, NF '99, won first-place awards in the annual writing contest sponsored by the American Society of Journalists and Authors (ASJA).

Terrazas won in the first-person category for a story she wrote about the role reversal she experienced after her mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. The personal essay was published in *D Magazine*, based in Dallas, Texas. She wrote, "I've wept in the privacy of my shower, raged in the cool

silence of my closet—lamented that Alzheimer's is stealing my mother from me."

Fitzgerald won in the business/technology category for a story published in *Fast Company* about what Warner Music Group and its musicians are doing to combat declining album sales. He examined the company's efforts to develop more sources of revenue as it redefines itself for the digital age.

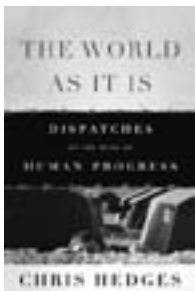
The ASJA awards for 60 years have honored outstanding work produced on a freelance basis. ■

spent 18 years at the Los Angeles Times, covering health and the environment.

Stephen Smith, a health reporter for *The Boston Globe*, was promoted in the spring to city editor. In making the announcement, Jennifer Peter, metro editor, called Smith "a superb journalist and even finer human being." She continued, "He brings to this role more than 30 years in the business (he began delivering a suburban paper near his hometown of Louisville at age 11), an exemplary reputation as a health reporter at the *Globe* and *The Miami Herald*, an insatiable drive to tell important human stories, a stickler's attention to fairness and accuracy, the most expansive vocabulary in the room, and a cooperative spirit that will serve his editing and reporting colleagues well."

of Melanie's research to life in our own news outlets and the prospect of sharing the results with all who care about information in the public interest—all of this excites me tremendously."

1999



Chris Hedges has put together a new collection of essays that were first published on Truthdig, the news website where he is a columnist. "The World As It Is: Dispatches on the Myth of Human

Progress" was published by Nation Books in April. Hedges is a former foreign correspondent for *The New York Times* who has reported from conflict zones in the Middle East, Central America, Africa and the Balkans. The essays are grouped under four headings: "Politics," "Israel and Palestine," "The Middle East," and "The Decay of Empire." Topics include the failure of American liberalism, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the decay of the American empire.

2000

Deborah Schoch was one of the winners of an Award for Excellence in Health Care Journalism from the Association of Health Care Journalists.

Schoch was the lead writer for "A Burning Issue," which won first place in the Community Newspapers category. The series, a partnership between the California HealthCare Foundation Center for Health Reporting, where Schoch is a senior writer, and the *Chico Enterprise-Record*, examined the effects of wood-burning stoves and fireplaces on the air in Butte County, California. The area frequently sees its air quality dip below safe levels during winter months, leading to numerous health problems for residents.

"We're proud of the work that Deborah and editor Richard Kipling did on this project," said David Westphal, the Center for Health Reporting's editor in chief. "But we're just as proud of the terrific journalism produced by the intrepid journalists at *Chico*. They served their readers very, very well."

Before joining the center, which is based at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, Schoch

2001

Andrew Sussman, who has been with PRI's "The World" since the show's inception in 1995, is its new executive producer. In announcing the promotion in April, Melinda Ward, PRI's senior vice president of content, said Sussman's "finely honed global sensibility, developed by over two decades in international news, combined with his energy, wit and creativity, makes him the perfect person to lead 'The World' in its next phase to expand its reach nationally and internationally, on air and online." Three hundred stations nationwide carry the one-hour weekday radio news magazine show.

Sussman previously worked at newspapers in Russia and at Radio France in Paris.

2005

Amy Goldstein is among 51 men and women selected from 800 applicants to be a 2011-12 fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University.

Her project is called "Slipping Downhill: How Changes in the U.S. Economy Are Transforming Lives and

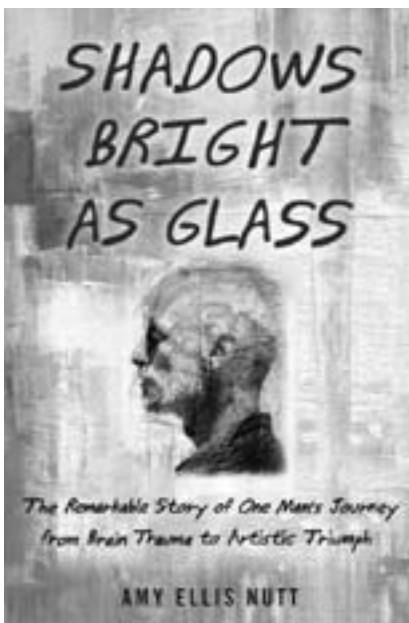
Amy Ellis Nutt Awarded 2011 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing

On the day that the Pulitzers were announced in April, **Amy Ellis Nutt**, NF '05, already had reason to celebrate. Her first book, "Shadows Bright as Glass: The Remarkable Story of One Man's Journey From Brain Trauma to Artistic Triumph," had just been published and Terry Gross's interview with her on "Fresh Air" was being broadcast that afternoon.

Having worked the previous weekend, Nutt had the day off from her reporting job at The Star-Ledger in Newark, New Jersey, and she planned to listen to the NPR show with her parents.

So Nutt was a bit peeved when her editor called and said all staff members were being called to the newsroom for a meeting with the publisher. She changed her plans and was in the newsroom for the announcement that she had won the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing. The jurors had selected her "deeply probing story" into the sinking of a commercial fishing boat. The news was "surprising, overwhelming and deeply gratifying, especially for the newspaper, which has suffered through some hard times lately," Nutt wrote in an e-mail to Nieman Reports.

She had spent many months researching the sinking in March 2009 of the Lady Mary. Six of the



seven crewmen died. Her five-part series, "The Wreck of the Lady Mary," appeared this past November in The Star-Ledger and on its website, where it featured photographs and video by her colleague Andre Malok. She is now talking to her agent about turning that series into a book.

"Shadows Bright as Glass" grew out of a story for which she was a 2009 Pulitzer finalist in the feature writing category. Nutt recounted how she came to meet Jon Sarkin, a quiet, sensible chiropractor living in Gloucester, Massachusetts who,

after suffering a major stroke, underwent a radical change in personality and now has a compulsion to create art.

She wrote, "I first learned about Jon when interviewing a neurologist Todd Feinberg in NYC for a story I was writing about the search for the source of consciousness. He'd just written a book about it called 'Altered Egos,' which was really about his stroke patients who suffered identity disorders." Nutt was struck by a piece of art on Feinberg's office wall and asked him about the work, which was a colorful series of 1950's Cadillac fins created by Sarkin, who had contacted Feinberg after hearing him interviewed on "Fresh Air."

Tony Bartelme, NF '11, projects reporter with The Post and Courier in Charleston, South Carolina, was a Pulitzer finalist in the feature writing category for his "engaging account of a South Carolina neurosurgeon's quest to teach brain surgery in Tanzania, possibly providing a new model for health care in developing countries."

The Chicago Tribune's **Mary Schmich**, NF '96, was a finalist in the commentary category for "her versatile columns exploring life and the concerns of a metropolis with whimsy and poignancy." ■—Jan Gardner

Reshaping Our National Identity." Goldstein is a Pulitzer Prize-winning staff writer at The Washington Post who covers social policy issues on a national level.

She will explore the ways that high levels of unemployment and underemployment "are transforming the private sphere of Americans' lives and the broader public sphere," she wrote in a summary of her plan for

the yearlong fellowship. "My project will provide a ground-level view of potent ripple effects, on domains from mental health to job retraining to politics, as women and men all along the socioeconomic ladder have been torn from their financial moorings. I will gather and, with research partners, generate data to document the changes. The findings can then lead to people and places that illustrate, powerfully

and intimately, the most intriguing patterns." Her aim is to translate what she learns into "prose that can help policymakers and lay readers grasp what the economic crisis has been doing to their neighbors—and possibly to themselves."

Alma Guillermoprieto was named a winner by the Overseas Press Club of America of its 2010 Ed Cunningham

First Amendment Honors for Two Niemans

Two Nieman Fellows have been recognized for work that educates citizens about important issues facing the nation and fulfills the promise of the First Amendment.

Documentary filmmaker **Michael Kirk**, NF '80, is this year's recipient of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication's First Amendment Award, which will be presented at the association's annual meeting in August. Kirk has produced nearly 60 films for "Frontline," including the Peabody Award winners "Waco—The Inside Story" and "Cheney's Law." During the past decade he has focused on the aftermath of the September

11 attacks on the World Trade Center, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He collaborated with Washington Post reporter Dana Priest on the "Top Secret America" series that examined the growth of intelligence services in the United States.

Former New York Times columnist and two-time Pulitzer winner **Anthony Lewis**, NF '57, was honored in April at the Ford Hall Forum at Suffolk University in Boston with the 31st annual Louis P. and Evelyn Smith First Amendment Award. Lewis has written about the First Amendment and civil liberties during more than half a century as a journalist. ■

Award for best magazine reporting from abroad. She and photographer Shaul Schwarz shared the honor for "Troubled Spirits" in National Geographic.

The article adds new dimensions to the coverage of the drug-related violence in Mexico by looking at the emergence of cults surrounding three figures: St. Jude, patron saint of desperate causes; Jesús Malverde, the original narco-saint revered by drug traffickers; and La Santa Muerte ("Holy Death"), who guards the worst of sinners.

"The reporting from within Mexico's prisons and shrines is outstanding, the topic fresh and vital," read the award announcement. "The judges found the care and intelligence of her work a thrill to read."

Guillermoprieto has covered Latin America extensively, writing for The Guardian, The Washington Post, Newsweek and The New Yorker during a decades-long career that was recently honored with the International Women's Media Foundation's Lifetime Achievement Award. She is the author

of four books, the most recent of which was "Dancing with Cuba: A Memoir of Revolution," published by Pantheon in 2004.

Maggie Mulvihill was elected in May to the steering committee of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press (RCFP).

Founded in 1970, the RCFP provides free legal assistance to defend the First Amendment rights of journalists. It is a national and international resource on free speech issues and has been involved in most of the significant press freedom cases to come before the U.S. Supreme Court over the past four decades.

Mulvihill, a former media lawyer and investigative reporter with the Boston Herald, is the codirector and cofounder of the New England Center for Investigative Reporting, based at Boston University. She also is a member of the board of directors of the New England First Amendment Coalition and was a legal intern with the RCFP while she attended Vermont Law School.

Chris Cobler and his staff at the Victoria (Tex.) Advocate received a first-place award from the Inland Press Association for creative use of multimedia storytelling. The association's fourth annual Digital Journalism Awards competition was open to websites run by U.S. newspapers and online-only sites that produce original community news content.

Cobler is editor of the Advocate, which produced "A Father's Strength" about a family's battle with Lou Gehrig's disease. The judges commented, "The carefully reported six-part series and documentary could each stand easily on its own, and yet the ambitious online package lends informative context to the central story and provides its audience with many different entry points into the material. The Advocate's use of free online tools to build and host portions of its content increases the visibility of the story in the community, as well as promotes the easy sharing of its content."

Mary C. Curtis was one of 24 journalists selected from nearly 600 who applied to participate in a social media fellowship launched by the Kiplinger Program in Public Affairs Journalism. The three-month fellowship began this past spring with a week of training at Ohio State University in new media tools and strategies.

Curtis has been a print journalist for most of her career. That changed when she left the Charlotte (N.C.) Observer in 2008. Now she is a weekly commentator on "Fox News Rising" in Charlotte and contributes to NPR, Creative Loafing Charlotte, and the Nieman Watchdog.

She wrote in an e-mail to Nieman Reports, "But although I've become a multimedia journalist, sharing most of my work online, on television and radio and—occasionally—print, with a presence on Facebook and Twitter, I have still been cautious about taking new steps.

"The Kiplinger fellowship was encouragement to stay on that path.

The Argus Leader Wins Taylor Family Award for Fairness

When a team of journalists at the Argus Leader in Sioux Falls, South Dakota started reporting a series about the challenges and benefits of growing up in an Indian reservation, they had a wealth of experience to draw on.

Steve Young, the lead reporter on the series, is a 30-year veteran of the paper who had developed many sources within the community. As an Indian himself, Devin Wagner, a photographer and multimedia producer, was intimately familiar with mores on the reservation.

“Growing Up Indian,” the paper’s eight-part series, is the winner of the 2010 Taylor Family Award for Fairness in Newspapers. In making their selections, the judges identified stories that they believe meet the highest standards of fairness in all aspects of the journalistic process: reporting, writing, editing, headlines, photographs, illustrations and presentation. The series incorporated first-person essays and videos produced by teens on the reservation.

One of the judges, **Annmarie Timmins**, NF ’11, said, “The paper gave voice to an underserved population in a most fair way. A lesser reporting effort might have blamed government policies or the Indian lifestyle for the problems of infant mortality and high school dropout rates. This series didn’t shy from either argument but chose instead to highlight the problems in human ways and begin a discussion of what might be done to remedy them. A newspaper doesn’t have a more important job.”



Bob Giles, NF ’66, Nieman Foundation curator, presents the Taylor Family Award to Argus Leader journalists **Steve Young**, center, and **Devin Wagner**. *Photo by Lisa Abitbol.*

Another judge, **Tony Bartelme**, NF ’11, called the series “a truly ambitious eight-day series that brilliantly captures the challenges and hopes of Native Americans on a reservation in South Dakota.”

Alcoholism, suicide and poverty are endemic in the Indian population but there is much more going on than social ills—and the paper wanted to acknowledge the advantages of Indian children who grow up in a tight-knit community with a rich heritage.

In remarks delivered during the awards ceremony at the Nieman Foundation in March, Young said it is as important to tell success stories as it is to chronicle problems. He mentioned a girl he interviewed who for the first 15 years of her life had no place to sleep except on the couch in her family’s living room. She is now an outstanding student at Dartmouth College.

In addition to Young and Wagner,

“Growing Up Indian” was produced by managing editor Patrick Lalley, metro editor and project designer Jim Helland, and multimedia manager Jim Cheesman. The award carries a \$10,000 prize.

The finalists were The Washington Post’s “Paths to Jihad,” a series that examined the choices of five young Muslims around the world, and The Sacramento Bee’s “Who Killed Amariana?,” an investigation into the death of a foster child.

Members of the Taylor family, who published The Boston Globe from 1872 to 1999, established the award program to encourage fairness in news coverage by America’s daily newspapers. Among them was William Taylor II, who died this past May at his home in Boston at the age of 78. Taylor, following in the footsteps of his father, grandfather and great-grandfather, was publisher of the Globe for 19 years. ■—Jan Gardner

Seattle Times Honored With Bingham Investigative Reporting Prize

While scanning the disciplinary records of state agencies for items of interest, Michael J. Berens of The Seattle Times stumbled upon the idea for what became “Seniors for Sale,” a multimedia series that outraged readers and led to legislative reforms in Washington State.

At the time, Berens was not familiar with the term “adult family home” and he did not know that there was a move afoot to care for the elderly in residential homes.

What Berens found as he investigated home care providers was shocking: Elderly residents were tied to their beds at night, strapped to chairs during the day, and left without proper medical treatment. He uncovered at least 236 unreported deaths that indicated neglect or abuse in these homes.

Berens is winner of the 2010 Worth Bingham Prize for Investigative Journalism, which honors stories of national significance where the public interest is ill-served. The six-part “Seniors for Sale” was selected from among 103 entries for the \$20,000 prize.

One of the factors used to judge the submissions is the obstacles that have to be overcome in reporting the story. Berens filed almost 50 public records requests, collected



Reporter Michael J. Berens investigated the home care industry for his Seattle Times prize-winning series “Seniors for Sale.” *Photo by Lisa Abitbol.*

information that the state was unable or unwilling to provide, and built databases to analyze information from numerous state agencies.

While the state viewed the homes as a way to reduce spending on caring for the elderly, some providers saw the homes as a way to make easy money. Real estate ads sometimes

listed elderly residents as part of the deal, Berens said.

In the first three days after the series was published, The Seattle Times received 1,000 e-mails and calls. The response in the State Legislature was swift as well. Now, cases of suspected abuse and neglect must be reported to law enforcement authorities, and the state publishes violations of the rules governing care. The owner of one home and a caregiver, both of whom were profiled in the series, have been sentenced to jail.

Walter Robinson, a former investigative reporter at The Boston Globe and one of three judges for the prize, summed up the project: “Once again, a newspaper that cares deeply about the citizens it serves forced a government that had neglected its own caregiving role to move quickly to bring an end to the abuses.”

The 2010 prize was the 44th annual award. Family and friends of Worth Bingham created the prize in his memory in 1967. Bingham, who died at the age of 34 and had achieved prominence as an investigative journalist, was vice president and assistant to the publisher for The (Louisville, Ky.) Courier-Journal. ■

It introduced me to new techniques and platforms, and to journalists eager to share their own experiences and tips. I learned a lot about ways to build an engaging online presence and use different platforms to report and research stories. The tools may be new, but the journalism principles remain the same. However, by using social media tools, you can dig deep and enhance the work. You can also better reach the audience we serve.

“It was interesting to realize how

much I can build on my first steps as I navigate a new media world.”

Beena Sarwar wrote in March with news about her latest projects: “I am back in Cambridge, working online with Aman ki Asha, a peace initiative between India and Pakistan started by the Jang Group and Times of India. ... I am also involved with Citizens for Democracy (CFD), a group we started in Karachi in December 2010 as a platform for secular, liberal voices in

Pakistan, coming together on a one-point agenda against the use and abuse of the ‘blasphemy laws’ and religion in politics in general. Salmaan Taseer [the governor of Punjab province] was killed a few weeks later. We arranged a [memorial] for him that was very well attended despite the threats and the general atmosphere of fear. CFD has done several other events and petitions, and is working to break the silence around this issue, including a public signature campaign at which

2011 J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize Awards Announced

Eliza Griswold, NF '07, and Isabel Wilkerson, a former New York Times reporter, are among the recipients of the 2011 J. Anthony Lukas Prize Project Awards for exceptional nonfiction. The Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and the Nieman Foundation announced the awards for books published last year.

Griswold won the \$10,000 J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize for “The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches From the Fault Line Between Christianity and Islam,” published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. The judges called Griswold’s focus on reporting from countries that are home to more than half the world’s Christian and Muslims “a brilliantly original construct for examining one of the most important—perhaps the most important—conflicts in the world today.” Griswold’s travels throughout Asia and Africa over a period of seven years informed her conclusion that what’s happening inside Christianity and Islam, not the conflicts between

the two religions, is the driving force shaping the world’s future.

Wilkerson, a Pulitzer Prize winner, is the recipient of the \$10,000 Mark Lynton History Prize for “The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration,” published by Random House. The judges stated: “Wilkerson has created a brilliant and innovative paradox: the intimate epic. ... In different decades and for different reasons [blacks] headed north and west, along with millions of fellow travelers. ... In powerful, lyrical prose that combines the historian’s rigor with the novelist’s empathy, Wilkerson’s book changes our understanding of the Great Migration and indeed of the modern United States.”

Alex Tizon, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who has worked for the Los Angeles Times and The Seattle Times, is the recipient of the J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award, which provides \$30,000 to assist in the completion of a nonfic-

tion book. Tizon’s “Big Little Man: The Asian Male at the Dawn of the Asian Century” is to be published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. The judges commented: “The project takes readers on a personal journey of self-discovery that is also a deep exploration of what it has meant to be a man of Asian descent in the Western world from the earliest days of Asian migration.”

The Lukas prizes were established in 1998 to recognize nonfiction writing that exemplifies the literary grace and dedication to serious research and social concerns that characterized the work of the awards’ namesake, Pulitzer Prize winner **J. Anthony Lukas**, NF '69, who died in 1997. The Mark Lynton History Prize honors the late Mark Lynton, a business executive and author. The Lynton family has sponsored the Lukas Prize Project since its inception. ■

over 15,000 signatures were collected in one day. Details of all these events are available at www.citizensfordemocracy.wordpress.com.

“This is the Pakistan that needs to be strengthened and projected, the people coming out in public at risk to their lives, of their own volition, rather than the mullahs that organize sponsored rallies to which they herd their followers.

“I also write regularly for media in Pakistan and India—and upload most pieces to my blog Journeys to Democracy at www.beenasarwar.wordpress.com. I’m also on Twitter @beenasarwar.”

Brent Walth has been named managing editor of Willamette Week,

the alternative newspaper in Portland, Oregon. It’s a homecoming for him: He got his start as an investigative reporter at Willamette Week in 1986. He has been senior investigative reporter for The Oregonian, where he worked for 16 years. In his new job, Walth will direct the newspaper’s coverage and occasionally contribute stories.

“My early experience at an alternative newspaper made a huge difference in how I look at stories,” he writes. “Now, I feel very lucky to have this chance to help shape coverage and lead a paper as committed to investigative and watchdog reporting as Willamette Week.”

Walth is also the 2006 Nieman class correspondent, and he sent in the following updates:

Kim Cloete is working as a freelance journalist and television producer. Cloete’s work has included reports on global health issues for international news networks and current affairs for Carte Blanche, a newsmagazine program on M-Net, South Africa’s largest private broadcaster. Her blog, Cross Currents, examines African politics and economics, and appears on Moneyweb (www.moneyweb.co.za).

Margaret Kriz Hobson covers energy and environmental issues for Congressional Quarterly and writes a column for the Environmental Forum. Hobson built a national reputation for her environmental reporting during her 23 years at National Journal, which she left last year.

Mary Ann Jolley has once again

shared a Walkley award, Australia's top journalism prize, for her work with "Foreign Correspondent," the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's newsmagazine. As producer, Jolley and reporter Andrew Geoghegan investigated adoption practices in Ethiopia and the complicity and questionable practices of U.S. adoption agencies. She and Geoghegan won a Walkley the previous year for reporting on how Zimbabwe's cholera epidemic was made worse because of close ties between the government and a key United Nations official.

Takashi Oshima has rejoined Asahi Shimbun in Tokyo as a political news reporter focusing on Japan's foreign policy and security issues. He returns to Asahi Shimbun after leaving the newspaper in 2007. He previously worked as a reporter for TV Tokyo America in New York.

2007

Cameron McWhirter, a reporter at The Wall Street Journal, conceived a book during his Nieman year that is being published by Henry Holt in July. "Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America" is a narrative history of the season's deadliest riots and lynchings. McWhirter argues that it laid the groundwork for the civil rights movement.



Over a seven-month period, hundreds of people—most of them blacks—died in an unprecedented wave of lynchings and anti-black riots. Thousands were injured, and businesses suffered millions of dollars in losses from destruction and looting.

In the acknowledgements, McWhirter thanks Harvard University professors Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "for allowing a Nieman fellow to intrude on their graduate seminars

Crossing Paths in South Africa

After two years in the position of public editor, **Thabo Leshilo**, NF '09, left Avusa Media, publisher of the Times and Sunday Times, at the end of February to become CEO of Magna Carta Public Relations, the largest public relations firm in South Africa. The new public editor is **Joseph Latakomo**, NF '91.

The two have crossed paths before. Latakomo was the founding editor of the Sowetan; Leshilo subsequently was the paper's editor in chief. He praised the Sowetan under Latakomo's leadership for "its bravery in exposing the evils of apartheid and championing human rights."

Latakomo explained his new job in an e-mail to Nieman Reports: "The public editor must be an independent observer who answers to no one in editorial, who concerns himself with critical issues that are raised—and it does not matter who raises the

issues—and as long as the issues are legitimate and significant, they have to be dealt with. ... My role will also include monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the publications against set editorial and ethical standards, and to remind reporters and editors of Joseph Pulitzer's three rules for reporting: 1. Accuracy. 2. Accuracy. 3. Accuracy."

"It really is an honor for me and a privilege to be succeeded by someone of Joe's caliber," Leshilo wrote in an e-mail. "I have always held Joe in the highest regard as an editor and have come to respect him more for speaking out against moves by the ruling party to curb media freedom in South Africa. ... Ironically, it's Joe who now succeeds me in the role of helping ensure journalists in the Avusa stable maintain the highest standards in their practice of the noble craft." ■

and receive their insights on African American history and literature." He expresses gratitude to the Nieman Foundation and the 2007 class of fellows and thanks authors Anne Bernays and Justin Kaplan "for early encouragement."

2009

Kael Alford has received a 2011 Knight Luce Fellowship for Reporting on Global Religion from the University of Southern California's (USC) Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism. She was one of seven American journalists selected from more than 50 applicants. The stipends range from \$5,000 to \$25,000.

She will produce "a series of character-driven multimedia pieces, short photo essays and written stories

about the political and personal place of religion in the lives of Iraqis and the perceived role religion has played in Iraq's civil conflict since the U.S.-led war began in 2003. Alford, whose photo-documentary work has appeared in books, on television, and in art galleries, will further develop a model for the production of independent, multiplatform feature journalism," according to the announcement from USC.

Fatima Tlisova has teamed up with Voice of America (VOA) on a Russian language multimedia project called "Journalism in the Crosshairs" (Pressa pod Pressom). It gives journalists from the former Soviet Union and Central Asia a platform—free of censorship—to share the difficult stories that in their own countries they are often unable to pursue.

Videotaped interviews done by Tlisoa, who spent many years reporting on human rights abuses in the North Caucasus, are posted on VOA's Russian Service. In her inaugural interview, she and Russian journalist Vladimir Pozner discussed the climate of intimidation in Russia that leads journalists to censor themselves.

2010

Shankar Vedantam left The Washington Post in May to become a science correspondent for NPR.

"The move allows me to return to the themes and passions that have animated much of my recent work, including my 2010 book, *The Hidden Brain*," he wrote in an e-mail to friends and colleagues. "At NPR, I will focus on human behavior and the ways in which insights from the social sciences

speak to the news."

Vedantam had been with the Post for 10 years, the bulk of which was spent as a science writer for the paper's national bureau. He also wrote a weekly column about psychology called "Department of Human Behavior."

Since this past August, he had been based in Washington, D.C. covering immigration as a member of the paper's local reporting staff. In an e-mail announcing Vedantam's departure, the Post's local editor Vernon Loeb wrote, "Beyond his obvious talents as a journalist, Shankar will be greatly missed as a thoughtful and generous colleague. His presence enhanced our newsroom, and his easy demeanor and intelligent take on events made even a passing conversation with him something to savor. He is a class act we won't soon forget. We wish him well, and we have no doubt that he will soon become NPR's newest star."

2011

Hollman Morris's documentary "Impunity," which he codirected with Juan Jose Lozano, was the winner of the Camera Justitia Award for films that explore human rights and justice at the Movies That Matter Festival in The Hague.

"It is a deeply emotional film, which bravely accuses at least two countries of collusion with impunity for the perpetrators," wrote the jury about its selection. "Starting with a heartbreaking opening scene, the film skillfully follows the chronology of those seeking truth and justice, narrowing the complex range of issues down to a specific case, overwhelming the audience with the same desperation that threatens to crush the victims and survivors." ■

The Intersecting Lives of Nieman Fellows in Colombia

The Colombian presidential elections of 2010 were host to one of the more unlikely figures in Latin American politics: Antanas Mockus, a mathematician and philosopher who had served two colorful, nonconsecutive terms as mayor of Bogotá. As the presidential candidate of Partido Verde ("Green Party"), he introduced new ideas to the public discussion and helped spawn La Ola Verde ("The Green Wave"), a grassroots social movement.

Now two Colombian journalists have released "La Ola Verde: Antanas' Way," a film about the campaign. Directed by **Margarita Martínez**, NF '09, former Associated Press correspondent, and produced by **Juanita León**, NF '07, editor of the political news website La Silla Vacía, the documentary chronicles the final weeks of this "David and



Goliath" contest, as the film's website calls it. While Mockus had at one time led by 10 points in a poll of

voters, he lost the run-off election against **Juan Manuel Santos**, NF '88, by more than 25 points.

"Rather than simply documenting a campaign, I tried to focus on the magic, the dreams, the creativity, the values and the innovation that the Green Party, the 'green wave' movement and Antanas Mockus brought to Colombian politics," said Martínez, who has made two other documentaries.

"The documentary is an intimate, behind-the-scenes portrait of the Mockus presidential campaign," she continued. "It has a point of view, but it's a work of journalism."

The film has been screened in Washington, D.C.; New York City; and Cambridge, Massachusetts since its premiere in Bogotá where, Martínez said, "several activists from the rival campaign told me it was balanced." ■

Presenting the Nieman Class of 2012

The Nieman Foundation has selected 24 journalists from the United States and abroad to become the 74th class of Nieman Fellows. The class of 2012 includes the first fellow from Switzerland, bringing the number of countries represented by the program to 91.

The new class includes journalists who work for newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and online news organizations.

Bob Giles, NF '66, curator of the Nieman Foundation, said, "The class of 2012 includes journalists who have reported from around the globe on an extraordinarily wide range of topics and, in many cases, under dangerous circumstances. They will bring diverse interests and experiences that will enrich one another and the Harvard community. This new class of fellows holds great promise for leadership and advancing the practice of serious journalism in difficult times."

U.S. Nieman Fellows:

Jonathan Blakley, foreign desk producer, NPR.

Tyler Bridges, author and freelance journalist based in Lima, Peru.

James Geary, executive editor, Ode magazine, and freelance journalist based in London.

Anna Griffin, metro columnist, The Oregonian.

Maggie Jones, contributing writer, The New York Times Magazine.

David Joyner, vice president of content, Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc. He is the Donald W. Reynolds Nieman Fellow in Community Journalism.

Dina Kraft, freelance journalist based in Tel Aviv, Israel.

Kristen Lombardi, staff writer, Center for Public Integrity.

Megan O'Grady, literary critic, Vogue magazine. She is the Arts and Culture Nieman Fellow.

Raquel Rutledge, investigative

reporter, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. She is the Louis Stark Nieman Fellow.

Adam Tanner, Balkans bureau chief, Thomson Reuters.

Jeff Young, senior correspondent, Public Radio International's "Living on Earth." He is the Donald W. Reynolds Nieman Fellow in Business Journalism.

Nieman Fellows in Global Health Reporting:

Samuel Loewenberg (United States), freelance journalist based in Los Angeles.

Rema Nagarajan (India), assistant editor, The Times of India.

International Nieman Fellows:

Claudia Méndez Arriaza (Guatemala), editor and staff writer, El Periódico, and cohost, "A las 8:45." She is a John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Latin American Nieman Fellow.

Carlotta Gall (United Kingdom), senior reporter for Afghanistan/Pakistan, The New York Times. She is the Ruth Cowan Nash Nieman Fellow.

Carlos Eduardo Huertas (Colombia), investigations editor, Revista Semana. He is a John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Latin American Nieman Fellow.

Fred Khumalo (South Africa), Review section editor, the Sunday Times in Johannesburg. His fellowship is supported by the Nieman Society of Southern Africa.

Wu Nan (China), Beijing-based reporter. She is the first Nieman Fellow to be supported through Sovereign Bank and the Marco Polo Program of Banco Santander. She is also the Atsuko Chiba (NF '68) Nieman Fellow.

John Nery (Philippines), senior editor, Philippine Daily Inquirer. He is the first Sandra Burton Nieman

Fellow. His fellowship is supported by the Benigno S. Aquino, Jr. Foundation and honors the memory of Burton, who covered the Philippines for Time magazine.

Samaha Shafy (Switzerland), science reporter, Der Spiegel. She is the Robert Waldo Ruhl Nieman Fellow.

Pir Zubair Shah (Pakistan), reporter, The New York Times. He is the Carroll Binder Nieman Fellow and the Barry Bingham, Jr. Nieman Fellow.

David Skok (Canada), managing editor, Global News Online. He is the Martin Wise Goodman (NF '62) Canadian Nieman Fellow.

Akiko Sugaya (Japan), freelance journalist based in Boston. She is the William Montalbano (NF '70) Nieman Fellow.

The U.S. fellows were selected by **Amy Goldstein**, NF '05, social policy writer for The Washington Post; **Ernie Suggs**, NF '09, political reporter for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution; Robert Rotberg, author, former college professor and administrator, and president emeritus of the World Peace Foundation; and Ken Nakayama, Edgar Pierce Professor of Psychology at Harvard.

The Nieman Fellows in Global Health Reporting were chosen by Jon Sawyer, director of the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, and **Stefanie Friedhoff**, NF '01, special projects manager for the Nieman Foundation.

The Arts and Culture Nieman Fellow was selected by **Alicia Anstead**, NF '08, editor in chief of Inside Arts magazine, and Jack Megan, director of the Office for the Arts at Harvard.

Giles chaired the selection committees for the U.S., Global Health Reporting, and Arts and Culture fellows. He also selected the international fellows, with assistance from Friedhoff and **Boris Muñoz**, NF '10. ■

In a Time of Need, a Friend Indeed

‘I imagine [the memorial service for the Rev. Peter J. Gomes] was filled with people like me who needed to thank a man, a minister, who helped them believe again—whether it be in God, life, love.’

BY PATRICIA S. GUTHRIE

I don't remember the exact words on the sign, only that the title of the sermon sounded hopeful. Hopeful and a touch of humor—two things I needed as I began my adventure at Harvard as a Nieman Fellow. I do remember it was a Friday, one of those beautiful late September days in Harvard Yard, leaves crunching under my feet as I passed Memorial Church, sun slipping down, my thoughts far, far away.

I ended up back at the brick

and white church two days later, a bit better dressed but still lost in thought. At first, the spaciousness of the church's interior and grand engraved war memorial to Harvard alumni caught my attention. Then the sound of organ pipes jolted me to the fact that I was attending a church service for the first time in years on a day that was neither Easter morning nor Christmas Eve. Why? I had no idea. Until a soothing baritone voice sounded from the front

and a short, stout bespectacled man I could barely see took his place behind the pulpit. Oh, how I heard him—his New England cadence, his exacting phrases, his unusual mix of historical references, humorous remarks, and his oft-irreverent asides about the most revered of institutions he held so dear—Harvard.

I knew immediately that my first encounter with the Rev. Peter J. Gomes was not to be my last. He became an important aspect of my life as a Nieman Fellow, memories that came rushing back when I heard of his death on February 28 from complications of a stroke. He was 68.

Fifteen years ago, I became just one of Gomes's many fans on campus, the ones who were enthralled with the man and his many identities—black, gay, Yankee, Republican, Baptist. What? He was a man once quiet about such things who openly declared on behalf of students and others being taunted in 1991 that he was gay (but celibate); a Republican who prayed with presidents Ronald



The late Rev. Peter J. Gomes served in Harvard's Memorial Church for more than 40 years, preaching, teaching, and being a good friend to many on campus. *Photo by Kris Snibbe/Harvard staff photographer.*

Reagan and George H.W. Bush, then turned Democrat when his friend Deval Patrick ran for governor of Massachusetts; a descendant of slaves who loved his Anglo-Saxon Protestant hometown, Plymouth, Massachusetts and its Mayflower Society.

By refusing to be put in anybody's else's box, Gomes was perhaps "the freest man I have ever known," Patrick told a packed memorial service for the preacher who held forth at Memorial Church for four decades. I couldn't make it to that April 6 service. But I imagine it was filled with people like me who needed to thank a man, a minister, who helped them believe again—whether it be in God, life, love.

A Time of Loss

I don't remember exactly what the minister said back on that particular fall morning, only the feelings it evoked—feelings long lost to my struggle coping with the dual feelings of sorrow and elation, life and death, the past and the present. Niemanhood was supposed to be a break from deadlines, reporting and *Life as We Knew It* for me and other fellows. I had no trouble shaking off the daily news part—but the daily life proved challenging.

My brother and father had died within months of one another in 1995. In fact, I got the call from Lippmann House to tell me that I was a Nieman finalist on the day my brother died of a heart attack. At the time, I was living in my childhood home near Buffalo, New York, and packing up 40 years and six children's worth of memories for my parents. The plan was to sell the house and move mom and dad to a retirement home in Seattle, Washington where my older sister and brother had lived for decades, and then I would return in six weeks to my job at the Albuquerque Tribune.

Three months later I was still home and by that time I was parenting my own parents—a role for which I, at 35, was woefully unprepared. My mother had no desire to do anything; she had just lost her developmentally disabled

son who had lived in a group home three blocks away and visited whenever he could. My father faded before my eyes, slowed and angered by the ravages of congestive heart failure and symptoms associated with Parkinson's disease. A doctor and still mentally sharp, he knew time was running out but he never spoke of it—or of anything much at all, for that matter. He died June 24, 1995, just months after moving to a new state, city and home and months before I was to do the same.

I spent the first few weeks of my Nieman year walking and roaming and crying in the dark. I walked and walked around the neighborhoods near my apartment on Hancock Street long after the wining and dining and discussions of another Nieman day had

Gomes hugged, he laughed, he greeted each member of his congregation with such joy as they exited the church. I couldn't help but be affected by his sheer enthusiasm for life.

ended. So after that first sermon at Memorial Church I knew I had finally found someone to talk to.

Gomes hugged, he laughed, he greeted each member of his congregation with such joy as they exited the church. I couldn't help but be affected by his sheer enthusiasm for life. So I timidly approached him, revealing that I was a newcomer, a Nieman Fellow, and in need of grief counseling all in one rushed incomprehensible sentence. "Nieman" was the word he heard. It produced a hug and a classic Rev. Gomes response, "Well, a Nieman Fellow. They don't come by here too often! To what do I owe this great honor?" Now those words I do remember because I told him it

was his sermon sign that reeled me in.

He invited me to Sparks House, the big yellow house that I had passed by so often, and I experienced his formal weekly teas with proper china and manners and the most amazing collection of antique furnishings. At a private counseling session he spoke of fathers and daughters and unresolved issues. I talked, he listened. I stopped walking around in circles at midnight. And I kept a date with him most Sunday mornings. The sound of his voice, his laughter, his reading of Scripture, his delightful candor juxtaposed against the soaring windows, the white columns, the rising stir of choral voices, settled me and my sorrow. I looked forward to the quick hug and "Well, hello!" on the steps after the service.

I returned a few more times to Sparks House as part of the Wednesday afternoon teatime throng. And, as was his usual practice, Gomes extended an invitation to the entire Nieman class to tea and made a point of meeting each and every one. There once was a time when the Nieman curator would invite Gomes to be one of the weekly guest speakers at Lippmann House but Gomes told me that it hadn't happened in quite a while. Then with that Gomes gleam in his eye and conspiratorial chuckle in his throat, he said, on more than one occasion: "Probably has something to do with bringing a man of God into a den of journalists."

Bless his heart, as I learned to say in the South. And thanks be to that sign, whatever it said. ■

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