

NIEMAN REPORTS

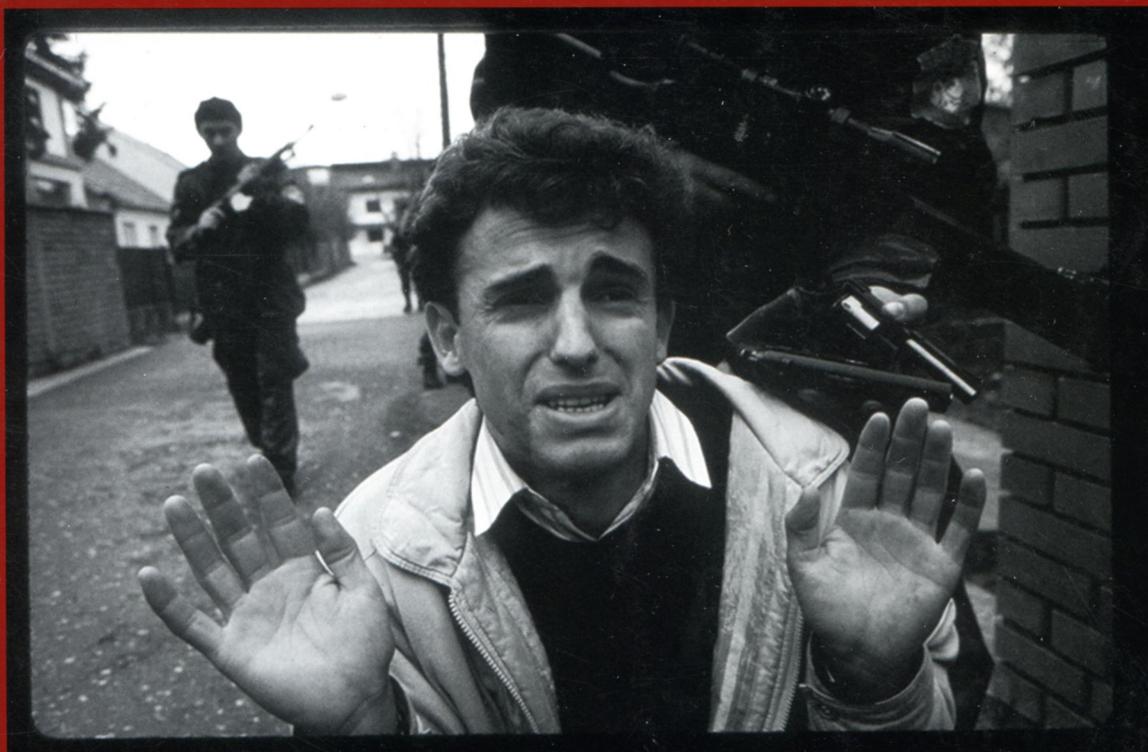
THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Five Dollars

Photojournalism

Pondering the Power of Images and
The Risks Taken By Those Who Make Them



Narrative Journalism:

Reporting and Writing in a Different Voice

'My editor's proposal: When the case went to trial, why not cover it like a serial narrative? Write it live, but treat each day's story like the latest chapter in an unfolding saga. No news ledes. No nut grafs. No concessions to the conventions of traditional newswriting. Just pure storytelling, delivered within the constraints of a daily deadline.'

— *Thomas French, St. PetersburgTimes*

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Cover photo: *A Muslim man begs for his life as he is taken prisoner by Arkan’s Tigers during the first battle for Bosnia in March 1992. He was later thrown from a third-story window during interrogation. [Haviv describes taking this photo on page 54.] Photo by Ron Haviv/SABA.*

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The Nieman Foundation's Unfinished Business

By Bob Giles

On my first morning in Lippmann House, I was given a thick green folder with lots of information to be quickly absorbed. Inside was a memo from Bill Kovach addressed "To My Successor."

"You poor man," I thought. "You gave 10 years of your life to creatively enlarging and improving the Nieman program and on the day you retired you did not know the identity of your successor."

Bill's memo began, "Congratulations. You've just begun one of the greatest jobs in the world of journalism. As you know you've also inherited an important mandate—to promote and elevate the standards of journalism—at a crucial time in the history of journalism."

As I read Bill's note I wondered how many different versions of passing the mantel had been played out in the transition from one Curator to the next. Bill served as acting Curator during the last months of Howard Simons' life and then was named his successor in June 1989.

In a warm remembrance published in the Summer 1989 issue of Nieman Reports, Bill wrote, "There is a special sense of loss here at the Lippmann House. An enormous energy is missing.... Howard found a way to preserve the unique character of the program while at the same time infusing it with a new vitality and sense of mission."

Bill is missed in much the same way, not only at Lippmann House but throughout the university. He has built on the legacy of Howard Simons, engaging the prestige of the Nieman Foundation to speak forcefully and authoritatively for journalism.

At the Nieman reunion last April, Harvard's President, Neil Rudenstine, spoke tellingly of Bill's work. "No one represents the ideals of the Nieman Foundation more powerfully than Bill Kovach.... He has consistently pointed out the dangers of recent mergers between entertainment and media organizations. As Chair of the Committee of Concerned Journalists, he has begun and sustained a national dialogue dedicated to strengthening the core values of a responsible free press.... The Nieman Foundation, under Bill, has become a kind of conscience for the press."

Bill also built on the vision of Jim Thomson and Howard Simons in enlarging the participation of international Nieman Fellows, who now comprise half of each Nieman class. The international fellows bring a global dimension to the Nieman experience and to the Harvard community. In many cases, they are journalists who have struggled to practice their craft under repressive regimes in countries where a free press is a fragile, emerging concept.

The state of journalism will forever be the unfinished business of the Nieman Foundation. The opportunity to participate in the discussion through the pages of this magazine, through conferences and seminars, through partnerships with other Harvard institutions and leading organi-

zations in the journalistic community, through the contributions of the fellows, through a global outreach and through the network of former Nieman Fellows is at once challenging, exciting and humbling.

To a considerable extent, the Nieman Foundation's ability to help raise the standards of journalism has been enhanced by the reach and potential of its Web site as an invaluable place to engage the Nieman family and the larger world of journalism in a continuing discussion about the state of journalism.

The mission to promote and elevate the standards of journalism is a purpose the Nieman Foundation shares with the larger journalistic community. We are but one of many leading journalism organizations and foundations that are striving to understand deeply held public concerns about journalistic practices. The public is troubled by the blending of entertainment and news and by what it observes when television enables viewers to watch reporters at work. When asked, members of the public willingly provide examples of reportorial arrogance and insensitivity and a failure to fully grasp the details as well as the nuances of stories. That this distrust of the press and its practices is a matter of significant concern has been amply documented in a myriad of ways—through surveys, conferences, studies, focus groups, conversations with readers and viewers.

In my recent work with The Freedom Forum, with its particular focus on fairness, I have developed a deep respect for the public's sophisticated understanding of how the behavior of individual journalists influences their perceptions of fairness in the news media. The public's definitions of what is fair and what is not fair are broader and deeper than those voiced by many journalists. When asked about fairness, journalists tend to talk about accuracy, balance and lack of bias. Readers and viewers mention racial and cultural insensitivity, overdependence on unnamed sources, reluctance to correct errors, and words reporters use to characterize individuals in stories.

As I have listened to reporters talk about fairness, and as I have participated with the American Society of Newspaper Editors and the Associated Press Managing Editors in a number of projects focusing on the performance of the press, I am reminded of the enduring commitment of journalists to do better, even though actual improvements don't always live up to this expression of commitment.

To each of those journalists and friends who has written to me in recent weeks, I have offered this wish: As I pursue the obligation to continue the direction Bill Kovach and his predecessors have established, I invite you to engage in our work through your thoughts and ideas about ways the Nieman Foundation might even more effectively advance the special purpose we share.

This is an invitation to all of our readers, as well. ■

Narrative Journalism

Mark Kramer, who directs a narrative journalism conference each year at Boston University, opens our series of articles by asserting that “narrative writing is returning to newspapers.” The reasons are as simple as the lure of storytelling and as complex as the business environment in which newspapers struggle to survive. In this issue, newspaper writers and editors, television correspondents and anchors, journalism professors and physicians write about narrative’s revival in the telling of news. Their words speak of possibilities, but also warn of the need for caution.

New York Times editor **Gerald Boyd** ('81 NF) writes that the Times, in its 15-part series designed to tell the story of how race is lived in America, deliberately chose a narrative presentation: “We thought race was far too complicated to handle any other way.” **Roy Peter Clark**, who teaches writing at the Poynter Institute, hopes the divide will narrow between those who embrace narrative and those who cling to the Five W’s and the H. **Thomas French** writes about his work in serial narratives at the St. Petersburg Times in which a news story develops drama and character more familiar to books.

Formerly a St. Louis Post-Dispatch editor, now Stanford journalism professor, **William Woo** ('67 NF) worries that narrative writing—which by its nature subordinates ideas to drama and conflict and requires superimposing a storytelling order on facts—might steer journalists away from their job to “just write what happened.” A panel of journalists, moderated by Atlantic Monthly senior editor **Robert Vare** ('97 NF), addresses such concerns. Then The Oregonian’s **Richard Read** ('97 NF), who won a Pulitzer Prize for his narrative series “The French Fry Connection,” describes why narrative journalism is not as easy to execute as it might seem. Philadelphia Inquirer reporter **Mark Bowden** traces the journey of his narrative series “Black Hawk Down” from the newspaper onto the Internet, where even more avenues for storytelling were found. **Rick Bragg** ('93 NF), The New York Times’s Miami bureau chief, contends that narrative can be “the most effective way to tell even a hard news story,” and he shares examples from his coverage of the Oklahoma City bombing. **Anthony DeCurtis**, contributing editor at Rolling Stone, looks through the lens of celebrity journalism and worries that invention might be replacing interpretation.

The use of narrative in television news has its own rationale and methods. **Ted Koppel** explains why he uses the approach of a storyteller to entice viewers to stay tuned. ABC News correspondent **Robert Krulwich** describes how he tries to get his stories to stick in peoples’ minds. Atlantic Monthly Editor in Chief **Michael Kelly** laments that the camera has usurped the writer’s descriptive mission. And **Carolyn Mungo**, a local TV reporter in Houston, shows how narrative can still find a home on the six o’clock news.

Writing a book reminded Washington Post writer **Laura Sessions Stepp** of the value of connecting narrative with analysis and information. University of Massachusetts professor **Madeleine Blais** ('86 NF) introduces her students to narrative nonfiction books to prepare them as journalists. And **Fitzhugh Mullan**, a physician and writer, infuses a health policy journal with narrative writing. ■

Narrative Journalism Comes of Age

Some find it hard to accept. Others embrace it.

By Mark Kramer

Narrative writing is returning to newspapers. No one has added up the reallocated column-inches to quantify this change, but nevertheless there are many signs of the increasing interest:

- The Associated Press has expanded its booming enterprise section to 20-plus world-wandering writers who are given time and space to develop the evocative stories they find.
- Each fall, at a conference I help organize at Boston University, about 800 self-identified newsroom renegades come together to learn more about narrative journalism from the likes of The Philadelphia Inquirer's Mark Bowden, The Wall Street Journal's Barry Newman, and the Poynter Institute's Roy Peter Clark.¹
- 5,000 reporters each year attend the Poynter Institute's National Writers Workshops, which emphasize, in sessions across the country, not just getting the story right, but also *telling stories* engagingly.
- Papers have, for years, run probing "series"—multi-day sequences of articles presenting facets of a large topic. Now, scores of papers are publishing "serials," many-part dramatic reconstructions of events.²
- A few dozen papers now identify and free up reporters with a storytelling knack, who not many years ago might have been kept on routine assignments.
- Narrative journalists win prizes. Many have won Pulitzers. One of National Public Radio's innovative narrative practitioners, David Isay,

Editorial interest in narrative has been stimulated in the course of a search for remedies to widespread current business problems: declining or stagnant newspaper circulation, aging readership, and decreased minutes spent reading papers.

has recently joined the distinguished ranks of MacArthur Fellows.

- An e-mail discussion group³ on non-fiction narrative, moderated by Jon Franklin (author of "Writing for Story," two-time Pulitzer-winner, science writer at The [Raleigh] News & Observer), attracts 350 reporters, who pay \$20 a year to join the non-stop conversation.

"I'm not sure there's *more* narrative in papers," says Bruce DeSilva, who, as the AP's News/Features Editor, heads the enterprise squad. "But when we do one at AP, the play is phenomenal. We're also getting a lot of play for short narratives."

This issue of Nieman Reports, on narrative journalism, shoulders a touchy topic. It aims at the heart of the profession, as it targets how news people pursue reporting and writing. The basic assertion is simple—news-papers might both improve coverage and retain more readers by employing storytelling techniques to convey news. But a discussion of this assertion leads to discomfiting questions about mission and practice and chain-of-command—most likely, some editors on any paper won't be able to or won't

want to help reporters approach stories narratively.

Editorial interest in narrative has been stimulated in the course of a search for remedies to widespread current business problems: declining or stagnant newspaper circulation, aging readership, and decreased minutes spent reading papers. The list of antidotes has affected the look and content of many papers over the past decade. It includes running more service pieces up front, more USA Today-like micro-stories, more color printing, investing in sleeker page design, more celebrity and sports reportage, fuller TV schedules, and companion Web sites offering updated news and interactive services. Narrative is on this remedy list too, because it engages readers; in this age of mega-corporate media saturation, Web sites and workaholism, readers still are attracted to stories in which people's lives and decision-making are vividly portrayed.

When you pause to consider the list, narrative is the "which-one-doesn't-fit?" item; it alone moves newspapers toward deeper coverage, toward fulfillment of the civic mission that distinguishes the worthy profession. This distinction makes narrative journalism of special interest to many editors and reporters, even as it raises questions about the skills and roles of reporters and editors who might try it out.

An unofficial "narrative movement" has coalesced. Into it has tumbled a

¹ This year's conference will be held December 2-3 and will include speakers such as journalist Tom French and author Tracy Kidder. More information can be found at www.bu.edu/narrative.

² Some of the finest newspaper narrative serials can be found at www.inkstain.net/narrative/.

³ This discussion takes place at writerL@telix.com.

small band of itinerant newspaper writing coaches, the often-lonely editors who push their papers toward narrative, a cluster of reporters who have mastered the art of serial-writing and won professional recognition, a few foundation leaders and conference planners who bring these parties together, editors of the handful of anthologies, a few name brand authors of book-length literary journalism who have crossed over to aid and abet, and most important, the growing ranks of reporters excited by the possibilities of such assignments.

Discussion among them moves beyond recitation of the virtues of storytelling to the on-the-job realities of adding narrative coverage. Satisfactory narrative won't end up in print until editors and reporters have come to some understanding about some basic issues, such as:

- On what sorts of stories they'll use narrative techniques
- The process of reporting for narrative
- Who among them should write and who should edit such copy.

Once narrative is assigned, those writing and editing it will come up against the limitations of the customary "news voice." And finally, while the editing is under way, questions of what to edit for—the "mission" questions—are bound to surface.

Here's a closer view of these steps in the process of bringing a narrative article into a paper.

Defining Narrative-Worthy News

Some months back, Boston Globe editors urged staffers to include more "feature ledes" in their stories. An in-house parody passed among some reporters there, a mock news story that didn't arrive at its banner-headline-worthy burden—"a tidal wave overwhelmed all of New England and part of New York State"—until paragraph

10 and instead began something like this: "Does your leg feel damp?" Mrs. Rosalie D'Amato asked her husband after awakening suddenly in their Duxbury home at approximately 4:15 this morning...."

Editors and reporters, even those more open to narrative, often fear man-

Almost any news story can benefit from a morsel of narrative, because sensory reports engage readers, drawing them into the pleasurable illusion of immediacy.

dated irrelevancy, having pursued for years a mission of sorting out the urgent, the essential, the basic. They don't want some commercial fashion, ordered by management, to push them to absurdly personalize plain ol' news. These editors voice concerns, as well—the more so after recent fabrication scandals—that in assigning narrative, they'll hand away the ability to check on factuality, as only reporters on the spot will have sensed and seen events. These fears run contrary to the ballast of tradition, which tilts toward depersonalized, sober accounting, and toward the prevalence of editorial good sense.

Perhaps more to the point, the prospect of writing narrative exhilarates many reporters and editors, but also makes them nervous. It exposes their craft to individual scrutiny. It's undeniably more fun to write, and to read, that "Clowns stumbled, lions pranced, and a glittering trapeze artist swooped over the crowd as trumpets blared Sousa marches yesterday. Bella the Clown has led his Big Apple Circus back into town again..." than it is to read "The annual visit of the Big Apple Circus commenced yesterday. According to spokesman Joe Doakes, this year's show includes the featured clown, Bella, as well as lions, costumed trapeze artists, and a live circus band."

Almost any news story can benefit from a morsel of narrative, because sensory reports engage readers, draw-

ing them into the pleasurable illusion of immediacy. And narrative also opens more material for reporting—the revealing, nuanced lives of not just the prominent, but of ordinary citizens. Dull but crucial stories can be invigorated. For example, tradeoffs involved in spraying pesticides in restaurants might be more readable in an article that includes a scene portraying an exterminator's visit than by simply quoting a dry report, and a narrative approach enables such coverage proactively, even when there's no new pesticide study to report.

In sum, there's no mandate to crowd away crucial news or present every blizzard from the perspective of a 90-year-old shoveler, and every fire from the perspective of a weeping child clutching a singed blankie. But narrative moments add a lot. Narrative articles and serials are powerfully engaging. But both expose editors and reporters to testing, and demand honing, of their skills. An editor who accepts the vision of a Page 1 that fascinates readers by moving in close to stories with human moments will lose sleep and gain a worthy life of hard labor.

Reporting for Story

It's surely different, reporting for story as well as for fact. It means paying attention to what Tom Wolfe terms the "status life" details about people—the clues to emotion and character and class in their outfits, turns of phrase, even their desk clutter. It means recognizing, while reporters are still in the field, potential story-tracks through events and identifying the set scenes that might lead readers through the general muddle of information. It also means doing richer background research, so that narrative foreground can be used emblematically. Narrative touches in shorter assignments need not take more reporting time; they just require more attention—a finer-grained, heads-up apprehension of the events at hand.

Who Should Write and Edit Narrative?

Heads-up apprehension implies personnel with the skills to discern and comprehend character and organizational structures. There's no question that reporting for story engages reporters' and editors' erudition, sophistication, discernment, even their wryness, more than conventional reporting for fact does. And that might prove a challenge to some. Obviously, reporters who have the knack, edited by editors who have the knack, should be the ones to work narratively. That requires an evolving, candid assessment of skills and consequent tampering with shifts, protocols of assignments and story quotas. Adjusting the chain of command so it's receptive to narrative is sensitive business, as old hands—and some young old-hands, too—just plain don't see the world narratively.

Infrastructure changes will help reporters working with narrative avoid conflict with editors averse to such work. In-house writing coaches, empowered editorially, have helped reorient some newsrooms. A few reporters will move away from assigned shifts and beats and function more independently. As this happens, the differentials in reporting time and role may create in-house tensions needing tactful resolution. However, a paper that makes clear that reporters might reliably do narrative journalism will have its pick of able employees. There's no mystery to the ways in which such reorganization can occur: It's been done in Eugene and Raleigh and in many other cities, and consultants can sketch and smooth the road.

News Voice and Narrative Voice

At some newspapers, changes such as these can loom large. Reporters and editors are trained to *report*, in the almost military sense that a police lieutenant might mean, ordering a patrolman to report facts about a house fire, pronto, excluding all trivia. The last thing on a police officer's or reporter's

mind when reporting is presenting the story artfully, so the audience might especially enjoy it, and so it might resonate with the profound nature of the event. To the contrary; the fire story that results reads like a memo to an insurance clerk:

A __alarm fire at __destroyed a __. There were __fatalities and __injuries. According to Fire Chief __, the blaze started at __o'clock and was caused by __. Damage is estimated at __.

Newspapers do also run features on fire-displaced families, backgrounders on firehouse life, even occasional spotlight articles on the politics of fire chief selection. But let's consider the default fire story itself, because its voice is diagnostic.

Reporters are sent out to get the information crucial to the orderly run-

bal skill. It enables sending reporters where needed, like police officers sent to changeable beats. In both cases, the workers' probity and devotion to duty count, intelligibility counts, but eloquence and imagination will be controlled, if present, by the superior officer on duty. News voice is intentionally bland, nonjudgmental, quirk-free, responsible and sober, a useful presence interested in names and affiliations and times and numbers. It's the voice of the town crier who once shouted "All's well" through the night.

If "style is personality," as the rhetorician Richard Lanham says, readers may detect little companionability in that persona. The news voice does not acknowledge the readers' savvy or know-how or sophisticated comprehension of motives, people, organizations or the world. It always starts ex-

Narrative touches in shorter assignments needn't take more reporting time, just more attention—a finer-grained, heads-up apprehension of the events at hand.

ning of the city, nation and world. They are neither artists nor social workers, nor need they be. They're guardians of the city and, as such, given special (albeit shrinking) protections under the law. They're trained to spot situations and facts that perturb civic life and to present them in order of degree of urgency—lucidly if possible. They also laud events that reinforce and improve civic life. The bureaucratic "report" tone springs from a wholesome tradition—that the press has a vested duty to guard the population. Reporters and editors have serious business to pursue, and that mindset is reflected in the official edge to the newspaper voice.

Its very "personalitylessness" makes the voice so handy—and thrifty. It can be imitated by any reporter (unlike the personal voices each reporter might use describing the same fire to buddies at a tavern down the street from the newsroom) and it can be deployed to good effect by writers of moderate ver-

planations from scratch. Its job is to record, explain, to create a record, report—hardly to entertain. For all its civic utility, the news voice also limits the newspaper as good company for readers. That tradeoff can be moderated by narrative, without threatening the crucial mission of newspapers.

Refreshing the Mission of Newspapers

The role of "entertainer" troubles many reporters, I suspect for at least two reasons. First of all, it involves dealing with non-official considerations—acknowledging the idiosyncratic natures of people (who are then not merely citizens) and situations (which are then not merely fire sites). Effective storytelling requires just that and not just for a feature lede's few paragraphs.

Still more alarming, narrative journalism requires an unofficial ambition

to make and hold personal contact with readers. It seldom demands first person—at least that's only called for in the occasional pieces about a reporter's unique experience (in one recent serial, a reporter recounts donating his kidney, over his family's objections, to an old friend). But a narrative writer must always set out to sculpt the *reader's* experience, from the first to the last paragraph, and to handle that control artfully and genially. In this sense, narrative can be seen as a method of engaging readers by portraying the stories of events.

Hardboiled reporters don't routinely seek to engineer the sequential emotional responses of readers. They don't mess much with their readers at all. Storytellers do. The two roles are in conflict. But the conflict has often been resolved, even by some of those hardboiled reporters. There's a compromise voice that Tom French [See his article on page 13.] and Jon Franklin and Roy Peter Clark [See his article on page 11.] know how to use, and it's on display in their effective serials.

A useful narrative voice for newspapers puts to work shared social knowledge, to the extent that such knowledge is our common, ever-developing heritage. That's more easily done in papers (such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, or weeklies such as *The Village Voice*) with delimited readerships. But it's been accomplished admirably in one-paper-for-all cities as well. The sense that writer and reader are sharing an understanding that the subject at hand might not be party to is the gist of the powerful literary device called *dramatic irony*. With it, a writer gains the freedom to put his or her whole intelligence into play while making readers feel in-the-know.

It's a given of newspaper narrative that the reporter can't reliably address the peculiar sensibility of any sub-group of readers and still address all readers. A story for everyone, slow or knowing, naive or sophisticated, politically correct or bigoted, pious or doubting, can't go just anywhere the writer wants without insulting or puzzling or boring some sector of readers. At that snag, a paper's mission to explain to all

...a paper that makes clear that reporters might reliably do narrative journalism will have its pick of able employees.

and its business interests part ways. No editor wants to abandon readers.

That "given" about readership may be minimized. Narrative stories, in general, use various "emotion sets." One that works well in newspapers can be termed a "civic" emotion set; other "emotion sets" that might work well in books, or perhaps in *The New Yorker*, where writers can appropriately play even with the concept of voice itself, may be termed "private" emotion sets.

"Private" emotion sets are as various as the inventiveness and natures of the writers who use them. They obviously can include emotions that might alienate newspaper readers—godless rage, impassioned piety, bitterness, prejudice, arrogance, shrillness, sneakiness, hazy softness—the list is instinctive and endless and subtle, and outside the mission of most newspaper stories. On their individual authority, book writers such as Tracy Kidder or Joan Didion may freely include levels of explanation that upset readers, that cleave instead of bind community.

"Civic" emotions are community-integrative. They include patriotic feelings, love of children and aged parents, respect for education, anger at criminals, praise for the charitable and job-providing, sorrow for the dying and ill, gratitude toward police and fire fighters, rage at corruption, and many other feelings. It is, in fact, a rich set of emotions, and everyone in town can share in them. They draw a town together. I don't slight work with this set of emotions. They're quite sufficient for the craft of building intense, gripping, revealing, accurate, useful and rewarding narratives.

Advertisers have long since stepped away from the bland voice of civic probity and explored the "civic emotion set" adventurously in making personal contact with audiences. Advertisers these days (Super Bowl ads on TV are an example) stay in touch with audiences by kidding around with personal fragility, by mocking lesser pieties, edging toward titillating taboos, in short, by admitting non-Hallmarkian, all-too-human truths everyone knows anyway—by belching on camera, then selling sneakers.

To date, not many news organizations have thought much about the personality of their publications, in spite of financial hardships brought about by not doing so. Until the "narrative movement," no one has taken the news voice toward emotional engagement with readers (at least since the days of yellow journalism), except for the odd story that shares outrage or warms the heart. The obvious and continuing casualty of this tardiness has been the *Sunday Magazine*. Its potential for adding substance and fascination and varied comprehension to newspapers has dissipated in awkward features while the number of *Sunday Magazines* has shrunk.

Engaging readers more deeply by presenting a braid of human stories is among the feasible remedies for newspapers' circulation woes. Any editor who has run a successful serial will assert that it builds and binds readership. By understanding the aspects of it that make them uneasy, editors can decide when to say "no," and so find their ways forward to offering readers good storytelling while improving news coverage. ■

Mark Kramer is professor of journalism and writer-in-residence at Boston University. He is a former Boston Phoenix columnist and contributes to many newspapers. He has also written three books of literary journalism ("Three Farms," "Invasive Procedures," and "Travels with a Hungry Bear"), co-edited the anthology "Literary Journalism" (Ballantine '95), and directs a conference on narrative journalism each December at Boston University.

Exploring Relationships Across Racial Lines

Narrative was the vehicle selected for this reporting journey.

By Gerald Boyd

Some days I thought we were crazy. We had embarked on one of The New York Times's most ambitious projects—to tell the story of how race is lived in America. It was a project that would take more than a year, involve more than three dozen reporters, editors and photographers, and result in a 15-part series that would appear in the Times during a six-week period that began in June.

I wondered often about what we had gotten into, in part because of the approach we'd chosen. We had conceived the series as a set of narratives that portrayed how individuals were relating across racial lines. These individuals whose lives we would enter would be black and white, Cuban-American, Mexican-American, Dominican-American, Asian-American, wealthy, poor, bureaucrats, soldiers and even journalists. Generally speaking, they were average Americans, whose lives were impacted by race almost daily, although they rarely thought of it that way. It was these daily, personal experiences that remained largely ignored by the media.

Narratives, we believed, would help readers linger and get a close-up view on how those of different races were relating.

From the start, we had opted to focus on relationships, hoping to bring new dimensions to the story of race in America. Much had already been written about race—from the impact of institutional racism to the role race played in public policy and in areas such as welfare, education, affirmative action, police brutality, and criminal justice. We wanted to offer something different.

We also wanted to produce a series that engaged readers, surprised and even challenged them. Instead of reducing our conclusions to the custom-

Narratives, we believed, would help readers linger and get a close-up view on how those of different races were relating.

ary nut graf or two, we wanted to let readers decide for themselves what conclusions they wanted to draw about the state of race relations in this country. We thought race was far too complicated to handle any other way, and the more we reported, the more convinced we became that this was the case. We learned that where race is concerned, there are no easy explanations. Attitudes are shaped by a variety of influences—background, experiences, income, peer pressure, fears and families.

This made it hard.

And our approach had its share of problems. First we had to find the right people in the right situations who were willing to expose their lives and thinking to the scrutiny of a ubiquitous reporter and then to millions of people. They had to trust our reporters enough to allow them enormous access, and yet, at some point, the reporters had to push them hard to share views many were uncomfortable talking about.

At the same time, we could not rely just on what our characters said about race. We had to see how they related to people of other races and see it repeatedly. Because this meant committing enormous time and resources, we knew there would be limits on what we could print and to what even the most enthusiastic reader would want to endure.

Thus, each story had to be original and instructive in its own right.

We explored a variety of possibilities, and we sought a mix that included racial situations that many people experience as well as those less common. Institutions, for example, such as churches, the military, schools and the police were obvious to us, provided we could find cooperative subjects. We wanted to see how race relations were at the top of the economic ladder and at the bottom. And we wanted to see how they impacted the media and the business world and how they were experienced in areas that we wouldn't automatically consider, such as a former plantation in the South or at an historically black college.

As Joseph Lelyveld, the Executive Editor, told readers recently in explaining our mission: "Public discussion of race today is pretty cautious and unrevealing. Race relations seem to be undergoing fascinating changes, though, and we wanted to report on the experiences of ordinary Americans, to tell the story of how race influences their daily lives."

The choice of race as a subject of a major Times's examination had been an easy one. Time and time again, as we discussed what issue the Times might take on, we found ourselves talking about race. And while the face of race was changing, it was still mired in a striking truth: that much as W.E.B. Du Bois had argued 100 years ago, "the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color-line."

The acquittal of O.J. Simpson brought that truth into sharp focus. Everywhere we looked blacks and whites saw the verdict in starkly different terms—in newsrooms, universities, police stations, and other workplaces where whites and people of color engaged each other. This represented a

paradox and it fascinated us.

Once we decided to tell the stories of relationships as narratives, the truly hard work began. Often we struck out after spending months pursuing a particular subject. We had worked to get access on one HBO show, only to be told months later that the main characters of our story would not be interested. We then focused on another show, this time successfully. What appeared an obvious relationship worth examining—two federal workers in a city such as Washington, D.C.—never happened because months of efforts to get access failed. Corporate America refused to open its doors, despite repeated inquiries at dozens of companies in all parts of the country. We were able to get access to the New York City Police Department, a critical story in the series, only after the executive editor and the writer of the article paid a visit to Mayor Rudy Giuliani.

Access was only the first step in the process. After spending months in the field determining where and how they could get close to willing subjects, reporters filed memos on what they saw as possible angles. Then they went back into the field to determine if,

We thought race was far too complicated to handle any other way, and the more we reported, the more convinced we became that this was the case.

indeed, their impressions and judgments about access held up. After additional reporting, they were asked to file outlines and first drafts, which became the focus of a meeting with a team of editors.

It was during these sessions that we began to shape and focus each story. “What does this story say about race?” we would ask. We also attempted to help reporters understand some nuances in their impressions that might be unfair. For example, we asked why a reporter described a black drill sergeant as “unthinking,” even though his educational achievement was higher than his white counterpart, who he

discussed more positively. Or when a white reporter said that some black immigrants did not have the same “racial baggage” as American blacks, could he see how some Americans blacks might regard that characterization as derogatory?

We also used such sessions to try to understand what our reporting was missing. Why did a dark-skinned Cuban-American have such a distrust of

At times, our efforts to force reporters back again and again met with skepticism and even outright resentment.

police? Why did his friend, a light-skinned Cuban-American, have such a resentment of blacks? The black Cuban had been stopped by police who pointed a gun at him shortly after he arrived in Miami; the white Cuban had been robbed by blacks while delivering beverages in Liberty City.

We could have stopped our reporting at this point, but we didn’t. The reporters returned to the field and

reported further. We then repeated the earlier process, a new draft, another meeting, more questions, and further focusing. Finally a rough draft was submitted, and after additional review and discussion, the writing and editing of the final draft took place.

We knew from the start of the project that the editing structure would be a major challenge—for both reporters and editors alike. After all, we all had our own attitudes about race and they varied considerably given our differing racial and ethnic backgrounds. (The team working on the series included seven editors, four white and three black; 16 reporters, four black, two

Hispanic, one Native American, and nine white; 14 photographers, two black, three Hispanic, and nine white. The graphics team was headed by an Asian-American.) In the end, our diversity was our strength, but it generated much probing of our own views and experiences about race.

The editing model we adopted stressed that there were no right or wrong views and that the most impor-

tant part of the process was honesty. So we talked and talked about what we were finding, trying at best to understand what it represented and what was behind it. And we disagreed a lot—black editors vs. other black editors; Hispanic reporters vs. white editors; black vs. white editors.

Once, for example, we spent hours arguing about what was critical to our story on hip hop. What exactly did we mean by “hip hop”? How much should we focus on a white character instead of a black character? Should the black character be representative of lower-income blacks or could he be from the suburbs? Such discussions went on constantly as we struggled time and time again with what we were trying to say and why.

Gathering information for the narratives was complicated by other factors. We suspected as we started our research that blacks and other people of color would find it easier to talk about race and their relations with whites. That proved to be the case, although talking did not necessarily mean that they were willing to share their deepest feelings. To understand how they really felt we had to observe how they related to whites and talked with family members and friends. Toward the end of the reporting, we confronted them with any inconsistencies we had seen and heard.

For the most part, whites were much more guarded. That presented a differ-

ent challenge. It was only after we had invested considerable time that they were willing to open up. To capture their deepest feelings, we had to interview them again and again.

At times, our efforts to force reporters back again and again met with skepticism and even outright resentment. But by challenging some of their initial impressions, we were able to create a much more complete picture. As one reporter, Dana Canedy, wrote later of her experience in reporting a piece on black and white columnists at the Akron Beacon Journal: "I initially had a negative reaction to my white character and struggled to understand why. In the end, I decided it was because he was macho and insensitive more than anything else. This is a man who once described his wife in a column, without her knowledge, as having the libido of man.

"His views on race troubled me, too. He considered being pulled over by the police for weaving in traffic similar to racial profiling.

"So I spent a weekend hanging out with his family, riding in his minivan to his kids' basketball games, admiring the new swimming pool in his backyard, chatting with his wife over iced tea in their living room. It worked. I came to see him as a loving father with an adorable family. And watching him shoot baskets during halftime with a young black girl on his daughter's team, I realized that he may be naive about race, as one of his colleagues suggested, but certainly not hateful. I could respect that. After all, none of us has all the answers when it comes to race."

Would I do it again? Right now, I'm not sure, as I recall how draining emotionally and physically the project has been.

Yet I and others here emerged with a greater understanding of the racial divide that runs through this country, including how deep and complex it remains. And we learned that it can be bridged with hard work and honesty, when and if we want to. ■

Gerald Boyd is deputy managing editor, news, for The New York Times, and a 1981 Nieman Fellow.

The False Dichotomy and Narrative Journalism

'Good writing and good reporting reinforce each other. Period.'

By Roy Peter Clark

A decade ago, I learned a valuable lesson from then-editor Geneva Overholser, one that I've applied to many problems since. "Avoid the false dichotomy," she said. It turns out that after this kind of alert, one discovers that the false dichotomy infects every issue important to journalists. It diminishes our conversations, limits our options, and divides us into camps, setting one orthodoxy against another; all of this violates the interests of those we serve.

How often do we see it happen?

- Give readers the news they want. No, give them what they need.
- Graphics are the answer. No, writing is the answer.
- This is a writers' paper. No, it's an editors' paper.
- Investigative journalism. No, civic journalism.
- Longer stories. No, shorter stories.
- Concentrate on writing. No, reporting.
- Improve quality. No, focus on profits.

These debates take on the fervor and parochialism of religious and cultural wars, the journalistic equivalent of pro-choice vs. pro-life, or phonics vs. whole language.

In the end, common territory is rarely found, often because the will to discover it amid the tyranny of the false dichotomy vanishes in the death of listening. The ideology of opposing views overtakes the necessity of having a shared mission.

A false dichotomy of the moment is one that pits narrative against traditional methods of news writing. At-

tacks on narrative journalism come from a variety of sources: editors who fear fabrication scandals; reporters who can't pull off the narrative style and would rather "diss" it or dismiss it than learn it, and time-starved readers who say they want their news fast and to the point.

Pro-narrative pugs are also in this fistfight. Among them are Thomas French, a Pulitzer Prize-winning storyteller for the St. Petersburg Times, and

A false dichotomy of the moment is one that pits narrative against traditional methods of news writing.

Don Fry, an affiliate of the Poynter Institute. Both men revile the inverted pyramid; they talk and write about it as if it were the source of all evil in journalism, a form so at odds with natural storytelling that it ties knots in the thread of potential yarn-spinners.

I love these two men as though they are brothers, but when it comes to the French/Fry perspective on the inverted pyramid, I can declare, with all respect and without equivocation, that, to use my father's favorite euphemism, they are full of donkey dust. Don and Tom, think about what you're saying—that a particular way of telling a story is evil. What's next, an attack on the sonnet or a harangue on the haiku? There is no

such thing as a bad story form. Perhaps we could all agree that a particular approach is misapplied or that it is poorly executed. But as long as it is kept short, the pyramid serves the purpose of writer, editor and reader, and is experiencing a revival in the new age of online journalism.

This false dichotomy of information and narrative can be framed anew, transformed into a spectrum of useful possibilities from which all good news writing can emerge. As Canadian journalism scholar Stuart Adam describes it, this spectrum extends from the civic to the literary, from providing a list of evacuation shelters to featuring dramatic stories about escapes from the hurricane.

In adapting the literary theory of Louise Rosenblatt to the uses of journalism, I argue that the reading or viewing of news is either informational or experiential. It all relies on language that either points you there or language that puts you there. Most news telling will be informational and explanatory, striving for clarity, directness, comprehensibility, relevance and utility. Writers who work well in this mode have a keen sense of audience,

Reporting with civic clarity is a journalist's primary duty, which leaves plenty of room for the telling of 'real' stories.

are able to transcend jargon, set a steady pace, eliminate clutter, compile lists, take care with numbers, and also discover and communicate the impact.

Reporting with civic clarity is a journalist's primary duty, which leaves plenty of room for the telling of "real" stories. And narrative strategies are tried

and true: setting scenes, developing characters, effectively using dialogue, and establishing point of view. To create vicarious experiences for readers or viewers, writers transform the fa-

**'Who' becomes character.
'What' becomes plot.
'Where' becomes setting.
'When' becomes chronology.
'Why' becomes motive.
And 'How' becomes narrative.**

mous five W's and the H. "Who" becomes character. "What" becomes plot. "Where" becomes setting. "When" becomes chronology. "Why" becomes motive. And "How" becomes narrative.

Master storyteller David Finkel of The Washington Post speaks of reporting for detail, reporting for the senses, and reporting cinematically, as if one were holding a camera up to the story to film a documentary. Where will the camera be pointed? At the beads of sweat on the forehead of the witness? At the 12 frowning jurors? At the statue of blind justice on the courthouse steps? Those are the decisions that reporters who take on the narrative style must make as they convey news to their readers and viewers.

To all ye who enter this craft, I say, abandon the false dichotomy of writing and reporting. Good writing and good reporting reinforce each other. Period.

Recently, we in the business have been acting as though the only cheaters in American journalism are the practitioners of narrative. In fact, narrative writers such as Walt Harrington, Tom French, Anne Hull, Mark Bowden, Tom Hallman, Jon Franklin, Isabel Wilkerson, and many others never need to "pipe" a story because of the power of their direct observation. Each of them engages skillfully in the practice of immersion reporting, gaining direct access to events as they unfold and the characters involved. The cheaters are more likely to be reporting from their desks or their heads, or not at all.

To encourage good writing absent this kind of orthodoxy does not mean the journalist lacks standards. Clear lines can be (and should be) drawn between fiction and nonfiction. No reporter should add to a story events or details that did not occur. Nor should a story ever intentionally fool the audience. An implied contract exists between reporter and reader that a reliable version of reality is being rendered with care and honesty.

Some might argue that not having a writing orthodoxy is another form of idolatry in disguise, a kind of "penteism." So be it. If such open-mindedness must have a name, then I'll worship at the altar of pragmatism, the spot next to tolerance as among the great virtues. Pragmatic journalists have dozens of tools and forms on their workbenches.

Depending upon the needs of the audience and the importance of the news, the writer can choose to use a neutral voice or a passionate one, a headline-grabbing lede or a blurb, the obit or the "brite," the pyramid or the nut graf. The clearest news story requires as much craft as the most powerful narrative.

If we focus on the needs of those we serve, instead of debating the methods we use, we'll all be better off. Embracing the false dichotomy while abandoning our overriding mission is not only foolhardy but shortsighted. ■

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The Verdict Is in the 112th Paragraph

In a narrative serial of a murder trial, news is differently defined.

By Thomas French

The idea was simple but subversive. Neville Green, my editor at the *St. Petersburg Times*, called one day and pitched it. There was a murder case in Tampa. Valessa Robinson, a 15-year-old girl from an upper middle class suburb, was accused—along with her boyfriend and another friend—of killing her mother and then fleeing across the country with the mom’s ATM card and minivan. After a dramatic chase and shootout on a lonely stretch of Texas highway, the three of them had finally been arrested.

The case struck a nerve with our readers, many of whom recognized their own families in the details surrounding the crime. The victim, 49-year-old Vicki Robinson, was a divorced real estate agent, trying to raise two teenage daughters and make a new life for herself. For years she and Valessa had waged the usual parent-teen battles; then Valessa had become obsessed with the new boyfriend and the conflict had escalated. A few months later, Vicki was dead, her body found stuffed in a garbage can, and Valessa and the boyfriend were in jail.

Neville’s proposal: When the case went to trial, why not cover it like a serial narrative? Write it live, but treat each day’s story like the latest chapter in an unfolding saga. No news ledes. No nut grafs. No concessions to the conventions of traditional newswriting. Just pure storytelling, delivered within the constraints of a daily deadline. Neville wanted three writers for the project. Aside from me, he was asking Sue Carlton, our veteran courts reporter in Tampa, and Anne Hull [Hull, a 1995 Nieman Fellow, now works at *The Washington Post*], one of our national reporters.

“What do you think?” Neville said.

“Sure,” I said, gulping.



Valessa Robinson and her mother, Vicki. Photo by Theresa Goscinski, courtesy of the *St. Petersburg Times*®.

The truth was, I was terrified. For the past 15 years, I had been assigned to serial narratives here at the *Times*. I had written about police investigations, high school students, preschool children, Southeast Asian immigrants, the love life of an exorcist. But in each of these projects, I had been given months, sometimes even years, to immerse myself inside the lives of my subjects and then try to capture some of what I found on paper.

Anne and Sue had also written serial narratives; one of Anne’s projects, chronicling the struggles of Mexican migrant workers, was a Pulitzer finalist this year. Both of them knew what it was like to assemble something so massive—some of the serials we’ve published are book length—and find a way to make it read.

Now Neville was daring us to try it without a net.

For years, he had heard me telling other reporters that the techniques used in serials—dialogue, scenes, ris-

ing and falling action—could be applied just as powerfully to daily journalism. Was that true? Valessa’s case would allow us the chance to find out. It would also give us an opportunity to test some hallowed assumptions about newsgathering.

In the months before the trial, in between other assignments, we educated ourselves on the case. We read the court file, interviewed anyone who would talk to us; Sue and Anne even rented a minivan and retraced the route that Valessa and her two friends had taken on their flight from Florida to Texas. When Valessa’s boyfriend went to trial first, we used it as a dry run, imagining how we would render each day’s action and how it would differ from a typical trial story. When the third teenager who’d been arrested changed his plea and agreed to testify for the prosecution, we interviewed him at length, looking for details that could be woven into our daily coverage.

Slowly our strategy took shape. Early on, we decided that our primary focus would not be Valessa and the boyfriend, not even Valessa and her mother, but Valessa herself. When in doubt, our eyes would be turned toward her. The other people in the story, especially Vicki Robinson, were all undeniably important. In the end, though, Valessa was the one whose behavior was the most inexplicable, the one whom everyone craned to see whenever she stepped into court. She was the mystery at the heart of it all, the unanswered question that drove the story.

We also decided that we weren’t going to hold anything back in the writing. If the judge or one of the lawyers let something controversial slip out in an offhand moment—the kind

of casual comment that reporters sometimes keep out of their stories, for fear of alienating sources—we were going to put it in. Those kinds of moments were exactly what we were after. We weren't just going to show the action in court; we would also let readers overhear what was being said in the hallways, in the defense attorneys' offices, even in the bathrooms outside the courtroom.

We wanted it all.

One other decision was critical. With the permission of Paul Tash, the newspaper's Editor and President, we agreed to let the events unfold in the stories the way they unfolded in court. If Valessa stood up late one afternoon and announced she was ready to testify, we would not describe that moment until late in that day's story. Whatever the "news" of the day was, it would be revealed gradually.

In the final weeks before the trial, we went into overdrive, finishing two lengthy chapters that gave the background of the case and established some of the themes we thought were most likely to be played out in court. These two chapters were published just as jury selection began. Then we plunged into the live reporting and writing.

The trial lasted for two weeks. At first, Sue and Anne and I tended to clump together, with the three of us sitting in court at the same time. As the days wore on, though, we learned to spread out. One of us was always in the courtroom, taking notes on the case as it was presented to the jury. Often, though, the other two were off somewhere else, pursuing the rest of the story. We hung out with the lawyers during lunch breaks and after hours; we sat in the halls and listened to the tears of Vicki Robinson's mother (who also is Valessa's grandmother). One morning, I met with Charles Robinson, Valessa's father, at dawn and rode with him as he drove to court, talking about his daughter.

We thought of each day as a chapter unto itself, with its own emotions and rhythms, crescendos and revelations. We looked for flashes of insight, moments that went against the grain, glimpses beneath the surface. We

thought, always, in terms of scenes—scenes that could open and close the different sections, scenes that defined, scenes that could anchor the entire day. We also kept an eye out for the daily title. With narrative, good titles are extremely important; they can set a tone, frame the action, invite the reader into the story.

One of our more effective efforts, I think, came early in the second week of the trial, on the day when the prosecution played an audiotape of Valessa's alleged confession to her mother's murder. As the jurors heard Valessa's voice, describing matter-of-factly how she had stabbed her mother, they looked across the courtroom and saw Valessa listening along. On the tape, she was talking about all the blood that had poured from her mother's throat; at the defense table, she was dressed, for the first time during the trial, in a soft white sweater.

We couldn't prove that her lawyers had purposely saved this outfit for the day the jurors would hear the tape. We didn't have to. Staged or not, the juxtaposition—the shocking red of the blood, against the virginal cast of Valessa's clothing—encapsulated the tension of the entire case. Our title for that chapter was "The Girl in White;" the photo that ran underneath it showed Valessa crying, her lead attorney comforting her like a surrogate mother.

Luckily for us, we had lots of help: a researcher, a transcriber, a designer, a team of extremely patient copy editors, plus two of the paper's most resourceful photographers. As for the writers, we tried to take advantage of our individual strengths. Sue, a terrific reporter who knew everything about everyone on her beat, down to the names of the lawyers' pets, had astonishing access; many people would talk to her, and no one else. Also, her encyclopedic knowledge allowed all of us

to write with authority. Anne, who has a gift for muscular, dead-on observations, energized every chapter with her descriptions. One passage, where she sketched a portrait of the unruly halls of the courthouse, was so electric it made me laugh out loud with pleasure.

As someone who loves story mechanics, part of my job was to come up with an outline for each day's chapter.



Valessa Robinson in court. *Photo by Jamie Francis, courtesy of the St. Petersburg Times*®.

Early every afternoon, usually by the end of lunch, I took whatever we had and broke it down into sections, with a clear beginning, middle and end. (At that point, some of these sections were just guesses, based on our understanding of what would happen later that day.) I pushed for us to start each installment quietly, with some small moment or scene, then let the action take off, ranging inside and outside the courtroom and back and forth between those who were on hand to support Valessa and those who had come to mourn Vicki.

Usually these outlines had to be

revised. Things changed; some parts of the plan simply didn't work. But by early evening, we always had a fairly detailed blueprint for the writing. We divided the sections among the three of us, then hurried to our computers and wrote. Usually we turned in our sections just in time for our first deadline at 9:30 p.m.; then, we would huddle over printouts and polish feverishly until the final edition deadline at 12:30 a.m. (or whenever the copy desk told us enough).

In the months of preparing for the story, we had worried endlessly about how to weave our different writing styles into one unified voice. But on deadline, when we were throwing it all together, there was almost no time to think about it. Something interesting happened, though. Without knowing it, we began to take on traces of one another's voices. Knowing that Anne would hector me into cutting any verb she considered substandard ("too cheesy," she'd say), I automatically worked harder on my word selection. Knowing that I would tell her to stop trying to cram too many points into each section, Anne automatically began to write her parts more simply. Somewhere late in the first week, we realized that somehow we had all begun writing in a hybrid voice.

Each day's story was anywhere from 2,000 to 3,000 words. Each started on the front page, then jumped inside, usually to a double-truck. Throughout the trial, we stuck to our original decision to never give away the day's action at the top. We did publish a brief daily summary of the testimony, but it was presented as a sidebar, on the jump. In the text of the stories themselves, we simply let events roll forward.

The biggest test of this approach came with the verdict story. We opened not with the verdict, but with a scene from a department store the evening before, where the defense lawyers shopped for a new outfit for their client. (How they presented Valessa in court turned out to be one of the more fascinating elements of the case.) Then we took the readers through the final hours of deliberations, the two sides waiting in the corridors of the courthouse, the 12 jurors locked in their

claustrophobic room, closing in on a decision. The verdict itself was revealed on the third jump page, in the 112th paragraph.

Some people in our newsroom, seeing the story, were aghast. Our readers, however, were enthralled. Although we had braced for an outcry from people who preferred a more traditional approach, in the end we re-

wanted to see what we could pull off under a daily deadline. Would we be able to organize each installment with any coherence or resonance? Would all the chapters hang together and read like one flowing story? The answer, we found, was yes.

You'll notice that I haven't told you the verdict. I also haven't revealed what happened to the boyfriend or to the



Assistant Public Defender Dee Ann Athan urges potential jurors to leave their opinions outside the courtroom. "Can you be a clean slate for Valessa?" she asked one during questioning. "I'm Valessa's voice." Photo by Tony Lopez, courtesy St. Petersburg Times®.

ceived hundreds of calls, letters and e-mails, praising the coverage. A grand total of two readers complained that we'd buried the news.

What did we learn? First, I think it's clear that we have more freedom to experiment than we realize, especially in a story like this, in which the case was covered exhaustively on TV and the Internet. By the time our readers picked up the paper, many of them already knew the crux of the previous day's action. We wrote our chapters accordingly.

The second lesson—the lesson that sticks with me—was that narrative holds possibilities that we have only begun to explore. True, it's great to have weeks or months to write; there are many advantages to that kind of time. But we

other defendant, why Vicki Robinson was killed, whether Valessa was telling the truth on the audiotape. Those answers are best left to the series itself, which can be found on our paper's Web site, at www.sptimes.com.

The story is far more compelling than my attempt here to explain it. As always, narrative is its own best argument. ■

Thomas French, a reporter for the St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times, was awarded the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing for a seven-part serial narrative.

'Just Write What Happened.'

Imposing a narrative structure doesn't always work.

By William F. Woo

Many years ago, in his book "Public Opinion," Walter Lippmann distinguished truth from journalism. His conclusion was not a happy one for journalists, and it remains particularly difficult—and cautionary—for those who would write in the narrative form.

The function of truth, Lippmann said, was to bring hidden facts to light and set them in relation to one another to produce "a picture of reality upon which men can act." By "act," I infer him to mean making the political, economic, social and personal decisions that are a part of the lives of free people.

want to explain the why and the how and the implications of the event and to provide background, context and detail. In other words, they want to do much more.

That is, even though the absolute truth is beyond them, good journalists want to organize and present the facts so readers can apprehend a reliable picture of reality. The journalist says, "These facts and the way I set them down tell you what went on when the school board met last night, or when two cars collided on Route 21, or when the plant shut down and moved to Asia. You can depend on it."

other sources for answers to the endless questions with which he probed my reporting. Finally, with deadline looming, he asked for my lede. Never having studied journalism or written anything more than a one-paragraph obituary set in agate, I confessed miserably that I did not know what one was.

Lyle regarded me kindly. "Bill," he said, "just write what happened."

So there in four words was Lyle's Law: Just write what happened. Sooner or later, he made it a lifetime's lesson for all of his reporters.

Lyle was not an epistemologist, but his mandate to just write what happened requires a journalist to make an expedition into the reality of the event at hand—the school board meeting, the fatal out on Route 21, the closing of the shoe factory. Unless you understand the *what* of the event, and can explain it in words that neither add to nor subtract from its meaning, you can never give readers a usable picture of reality. Never mind giving them the truth.

I said at the outset that Lippmann's concept was particularly difficult for journalists who would write in the narrative form. Certainly it does not preclude them from doing narrative stories that are powerful, honest and a joy to read. Some very good journalism is done that way. But if journalists imagine that all they need for an effective narrative is to apply to their reporting the sequence and elements of "storytelling," they are mistaken. Lyle's Law tells you why.

Narrative derives from the Latin "narrare," to tell the particulars of an event.

In this sense, narrative journalism coexists easily with Lippmann and Lyle. Telling the particulars is telling what happened, and the narrative form is one way to do it. But it is a limited way, fraught with difficulties.

...if journalists imagine that all they need for an effective narrative is to apply to their reporting the sequence and elements of 'storytelling,' they are mistaken.

Without having such a picture of reality provided, these decisions cannot be made with any confidence.

The function of journalism, Lippmann went on, was that of "signalizing events." Here, the dictionary leads me to conclude he had in mind making events known clearly or drawing attention to them. In a simpler way, I think of Lippmann's signalizing as the ways in which journalists take care of who, what, when and where.

When I said that Lippmann's formulation was an unhappy one for journalists, I wasn't implying that journalists assert a special claim on the truth. Good reporters and editors understand that the whole truth is always beyond them and that even fragments of truths are not easy to capture and represent accurately. But good journalists, too, are unsatisfied with merely "signalizing" who, what, when and where. They

Many reporters and editors know about Lippmann, the journalist-philosopher, but unless they worked long ago for the Kansas City Times they probably have not even heard of an Assistant City Editor named Ray Lyle who trained a generation of reporters. Lyle was unshaven, profane, cigar chewing (and spitting), and I wonder if he went to college. Certainly, he was as different from the urbane, Harvard-educated Lippmann as anyone could imagine. Yet Lyle's Law, as I call it, offers journalists a way of achieving Lippmann's objective of assembling facts into a picture of reality upon which people can act.

On a December night in 1957, I was a young reporter struggling over a complicated obituary that would be my first story on Page 1. For hours, Lyle had made me call the family, the police, the coroner, the fire department, and many

One trouble is that narrative journalism is not regarded as merely conveying the particulars of an event. Journalists know it as a form of writing aimed at storytelling. It is usually sequential and anecdotal, so as to introduce real people and their actual experiences. By its nature, it subordinates ideas (particularly those involving statistics and facts) to drama and conflict.

Since the narrative is aimed at storytelling, it is concerned with beginnings, middles and endings and plots developed through the action and dialogue—just like the well made short story that literature students study. Readers remember stories, journalists are told. Start them with a scene that holds their attention. Don't write, "A 17-year-old youth suffered head injuries yesterday while climbing a hill on his family's farm. A female companion also fell but was unhurt." Write, "Jack and Jill went up the hill..."

Even in the hands of the most assiduous and perceptive reporter, facts gathered are likely to be incomplete, unconnected and susceptible to many interpretations. The narrative strands necessary to reconcile all these things are not easily handled. This is why frequently the narrative approach is abandoned once the going gets heavy and why stories with anecdotal beginnings are so full of disposable people, characters thrown away as soon as their work of getting readers into the story is finished. You can think of them as the dusting maids who start a play. If Jack and Jill introduced a story about agricultural accidents, we might be left to wonder forever about them once she came tumbling after.

Further, though reporters may frame stories in a narrative form, they may not have been there at the beginning or the end of whatever they're writing about, and perhaps not much of the middle, either. Research can give them an idea of the beginning, and they can guess at the end. That, and what they saw of the middle, might be the best they can do.

What, for example, is the *story* of the recent changes in the welfare system? We might need to wait several generations to know it well enough to write about it in a truly comprehensive way.

If we allow ourselves to simplify the reality for the purpose of storytelling, then we run the risk of turning it into a cartoon or caricature. It might be entertaining, but it is scarcely a reality upon which anyone can act.

Even with individual experiences (those, say, of a single parent striving for economic self-sufficiency), the beginning may lie in murkiness or contradictions, and the end of the story may not be evident for many years. Writing what happened is not as easy as it might seem.

Lyle's Law imposes rigorous requirements on reporters who would attempt to bring their reporting to readers through narrative. They need to have scrupulous professional integrity and also intellectual humility. As reporters, we are almost always dealing with limited knowledge and even the most obvious story is often more complicated than it appears, the deeper we look into it. If we allow ourselves to simplify the reality for the purpose of storytelling, then we run the risk of turning it into a cartoon or caricature. It might be entertaining, but it is scarcely a reality upon which anyone can act.

For these reasons (and others), I also am skeptical of the so-called "solutions journalism." Serious problems—whether social, economic or political—rarely are solved quickly enough for the rhythms and pronouncements of daily journalism. We may imagine that the story ends, but time has its way of playing tricks with our conclusions. Think of penicillin. Not too long ago, journalists described it as a miracle healer. Now we hear constantly about all sorts of new drug-resistant bugs.

Journalists do not write the first draft of history. They write about a slice of events from one of many perspectives of time and space. The good news is that sometimes this gives readers a useful sense of at least a part of what happened. We need, though, to be careful of the inherent claims we make for our work. Readers (and the editors who assign stories) may well prefer

"this works and that doesn't" to "it's much too soon to tell, but this is what's happened so far," but the latter is more faithful to Lippmann and Lyle. And more honest, too.

If you think that these reflections are leading to a rousing reaffirmation of the old pyramid news story, you would be wrong. As the linguist Georgia Green pointed out in a report several years ago to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the disjointed structure of the standard or traditional news story often makes it hard to understand. In imposing an order on a set of facts, the narrative technique is an effort to make stories more understandable—and hence more interesting. That's all to the good. Journalism badly needs clarity.

We mislead our readers, however, when in the name of producing an interesting story we superimpose an arbitrary order on an incomplete selection of facts and present it as *the* reality—as the *what* that happened. In doing so I think we also can mislead ourselves into imagining—and even worse, believing—that life divides neatly into beginnings, middles and ends and plots and characters that develop as events unfold.

That is not a reality upon which journalists should act. It is the way novelists and short story writers produce their realities about the human condition, but the last time I checked, we, as journalists, were still supposed to be about nonfiction. ■

William F. Woo, a 1967 Nieman Fellow, was a reporter and editor for 39 years before retiring as editor of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in 1996. Since then he has taught journalism in the Department of Communication of Stanford University.

The State of Narrative Nonfiction Writing

On May 6, 2000, the Nieman Foundation and Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism convened a panel of journalists to discuss narrative journalism. This event occurred during a two-day conference focused on nonfiction writing that was part of the 2000 Lukas Prize Project Conference. This project honors the work and life of J. Anthony Lukas, who won two Pulitzers, the second for his narrative book "Common Ground," in which he explored the personal and political dynamics of Boston's school desegregation crisis through the lens of three families' experiences.

Robert Vare, senior editor at The Atlantic Monthly who teaches a seminar on narrative nonfiction writing at the Nieman Foundation, moderated a panel discussion about narrative writing in books, magazines and newspapers. Participants on the panel included Walter Kirn, contributor to Time and literary editor of GQ, Alma Guillermoprieto, author and staff writer for The New Yorker, Michael Kelly, editor in chief of The Atlantic Monthly, and Jack Hart, writing coach for The Oregonian. Edited excerpts from their remarks follow.

Robert Vare: Welcome to the third and final panel of the J. Anthony Lukas Prize Project Nonfiction Writers Conference. Our panel will attempt to assess the health and well-being of long-form narrative writing in the worlds of books, magazines and newspapers.

Each member of this panel, I think it's fair to say, is deeply committed to narrative journalism. But each is also fully aware that this most challenging of nonfiction forms is also tremendously difficult to shepherd into print. We'll attempt to explore some of these challenges and also try to raise some key questions: What is the current marketplace for narrative nonfiction writing in books, magazines and newspapers? Is there an audience for narrative? And if so, who is that audience? Who are the writers, and what are the publications, that can be considered standard-bearers of this narrative form? And finally, what is the future of narrative writing? What new directions does narrative writing seem to be taking?

First, let's try to get one troublesome piece of business out of the way as quickly as we can. What do we mean by the term "narrative nonfiction"? And is it the same or different from other terms that are in use, like "literary journalism," or "creative nonfiction," or "extended digressive narrative nonfiction"?

To me these semantic wrestling matches that go on are a complete waste of time. I think what each term suggests is that this is essentially a hybrid form, a marriage of the art of storytelling and the art of journalism—an attempt to make drama out of the observable world of real people, real places, and real events. It's a sophisticated form of nonfiction writing, possibly the highest form that harnesses the power of facts to the techniques of fiction—

constructing a central narrative, setting scenes, depicting multidimensional characters and, most important, telling the story in a compelling voice that the reader will want to hear.

Nabokov, it will come as no surprise, had the most illuminating remarks about narrative. He wrote, "The term 'narrative' is often confused with the term 'plot,' but they're not the same thing. If I tell you that the king died, and then the queen died, that's not narrative; that's plot. But, if I tell you that the king died, and then the queen died of a broken heart, that's narrative."

So then, narrative nonfiction bridges those connections between events that have taken place, and imbues them with meaning and emotion. And this is the genre of nonfiction writing that Tony Lukas cared so passionately about and so classically embodied in all of his work—in newspapers, magazines and books.

The current publishing climate for long-form narrative nonfiction, it seems to me, is a decidedly mixed one. To sum up, one of narrative writers' two traditional sources of support, the magazine industry, has been undergoing some unhappy cultural shifts of late. General interest magazines, in particular, have been weakened and show few signs of rebirth as a sanctuary for the narrative form. On the other hand, prospects for narrative nonfiction writers in the other traditional source, book publishing, are exceptionally strong right now, as any glance at the weekly bestseller list over the last five or 10 years will attest.

And in an equally exciting development, newspapers, which are energetically looking for ways to reinvent themselves and halt declining readership in an age of new media and the Internet, are increasingly embracing the narrative form, dedicating more and more space to features and multi-part series that put a premium on storytelling.

First, let's deal with the magazine picture. There are exceptions, of course. On occasion, the better regional publications like Texas Monthly and Philadelphia magazine still manage to publish narrative writing. Outside magazine, once you negotiate all that service material about backpacks and hiking boots, is also a fairly reliable source of high-quality narrative with such contributors as Jon Krakauer, David Quammen, Tim Cahill, and Sebastian Junger.

Every once in awhile a national magazine will spring a major narrative surprise, like Rolling Stone a few years ago, with this haunting piece by a writer named John Colapinto about the tragic life of an intersexual called "The True Story of John/Joan," which recently was published as a full-length book. Then there was Michael Paterniti's wild cross-country car ride a couple of years ago with a large chunk of Einstein's brain encased in formaldehyde in the trunk of his car, while the Princeton pathologist who had stolen that brain during an autopsy in the 1950's rode in the passenger seat. They were on their way to deliver the brain to one of Einstein's nieces who lived in Berkeley, California, who by the way didn't seem at all interested in repossessing this organ. That, too, is now a book, and American road literature will never be the same.

And whenever I think of exemplary narrative writing of the last few years in the magazine world, I think of David Foster Wallace's dazzling tours de force in Harper's, in which he relates his angst-ridden experiences aboard a cruise ship. He takes a seven-day cruise and pays an incredible psychic price as a result. And then at the Illinois State Fair, Wallace also examines the notion of fun, and poses the question, "Can manufactured fun ever really be fun?"

Besides Harper's and Outside, other magazines that occasionally venture into the narrative arena are Esquire, which has been somewhat revitalized

under a new editor in recent years, and an unlikely place, but one which has consistently published high-quality narrative nonfiction over the years, *Sports Illustrated*. Earlier this month, *Sports Illustrated* was once again honored at the National Magazine Awards for a feature writing award to the talented Gary Smith, who I think is one of the most underappreciated writers in this country because he's sort of pigeonholed as a sports writer. But this was a piece that grew out of his examining a photograph of the Texas Christian University locker room before a climactic Cotton Bowl game against Syracuse and the great Jim Brown who was playing for Syracuse. Smith went and interviewed everybody who was in that photograph in the locker room and talked to them about how their lives had decisively changed from that moment as they left the locker room. It was just a brilliant piece of narrative writing.

But, in general, magazines have been letting down the cause of narrative for years, as general-interest publications, which were once the driving force behind America's fascination, you might even say love affair, with this kind of writing seem to be making a retreat from long-form storytelling. In the 60's, 70's and 80's general-interest magazines with major national audiences—*The New Yorker* under William Shawn, *Esquire* under Harold Hayes, *Harper's* under Willie Morris, *Rolling Stone* under Jann Wenner—all provided fertile breeding grounds for narrative writing. Norman Mailer's "The Armies of the Night," David Halberstam's "The Best and the Brightest," Michael Herr's "Dispatches," Tracy Kidder's "The Soul of a New Machine," to name just a few of the many examples of narrative writing from those years, were all major works of narrative nonfiction that actually originated as magazine pieces. Now we seem to go the other way where it's the book contract that initiates the narrative nonfiction, and magazines pick up excerpts from those about-to-be-published books.

So I think it would be hard to argue with the conclusion that magazines have essentially abdicated their traditional role as custodians of this form. Part of the reason is certainly economics. For a long time, general-interest publications have been shrinking, and in some notable cases, dying off altogether. And of those that are left, few are financially self-sufficient. In response to dwindling ad pages and correspondingly pinched editorial space, editors are redefining their magazines around articles that are shorter, faster and, therefore, cheaper to produce, more reactive to the news. Topicality is becoming de rigueur. And magazines today are much more unapologetically preoccupied with the worlds of power and celebrity than they used to be.

They seem increasingly reluctant to afford their writers the big blocks of total-immersion reporting time that are essential to produce ambitious narrative work. As Richard Ben Cramer, the author of a great piece of political narrative, "What It Takes," a book about the 1988 presidential campaign, once put it to me in that wonderfully gruff voice of his, "The dirty little secret of magazine publishing today is that nobody wants to pay for the reporting. And that's why most magazines today aren't worth a damn."

Another factor in the de-narrativizing of magazines has to do with changing perceptions about readers and their attention spans. Many magazines editors have just decided that readers are simply too busy, overloaded by too many competing claims on their schedules. And that these readers will have neither the time nor the inclination to wade through slow-building, dramatically building narrative stories.

To cite perhaps the most notable case in point of this somewhat unhappy trend, I think that *The New Yorker*, which once virtually owned the narrative nonfiction field, subsidizing the elegantly written, exhaustively researched efforts of its impressive roster of narrative talents—John McPhee, Joe Mitchell, Jane Kramer, William Finnegan, and Susan Sheehan. *The New Yorker* has, with a few exceptions, I think, backed away from publishing journalism that is driven by long-form storytelling.

In book publishing, conversely, narrative nonfiction shows every sign of

being in the midst of something of a golden age. Anyone scanning the book reviews and bestseller lists of the last few years will encounter one example after another of strong narrative nonfiction, from Jon Krakauer's spellbinding adventure tales, "Into Thin Air" and "Into the Wild," to Jonathan Harr's compelling portrait of that Byzantine world of plaintiffs' attorneys in "A Civil Action." To Simon Winchester's fascinating account of the making of the Oxford English Dictionary, "The Professor and the Madman." To Mark Bowden's electrifying reconstruction of the battle of Mogadishu in his book, "Black Hawk Down." [See Bowden's article about transforming this newspaper series into an Internet narrative on page 25.] To Sebastian Junger's disaster-at-sea drama, "The Perfect Storm." And to the rich portrait of Savannah's gay subculture in John Berendt's "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil," which, notwithstanding the author's troubling admissions about playing fast and loose with chronologies and facts, occupied a lofty position on the bestseller list for a record-shattering five years.

Each of these books combines strong commercial appeal with assured writing, suspenseful storytelling and provocative insights into human behavior under the most stressful of conditions. Add to these examples two path-breaking books in the literary memoir genre, Frank McCourt's "Angela's Ashes" and Mary Karr's "The Liar's Club." Those two books certainly touched off, for better and, in many cases, for worse, a virtual self-revelation industry in publishing. But I think with all these books we see a very clear demonstration that contemporary readers, despite all the competition for their time, do and will respond to true tales that are well told.

All of these books generated broad, popular interest and, for the most part, critical success as well, providing substantial rewards not only for their authors, but for the cause of narrative itself. The upshot, I think, is that narrative nonfiction writers today have much less trouble getting their work published in books than they've ever had in the past. And certainly much less trouble than they do in the magazine world.

On the newspaper front, the last decade appears to have been a healthy and even exhilarating time for narrative writing. Many newspapers, though certainly by no means all, are now freeing up their best writers to work on a single ambitious article or series of articles—to devote weeks, and sometimes even months, to research and reporting, structuring and conceptualizing, writing and rewriting. Even in an era of budget tightening, newspaper editors seem increasingly willing to subsidize the time and travel costs of these projects and to give writers a wealth of space to tell their stories in depth.

And, I think, for their part, newspaper writers are so eager to break away from inverted pyramids and tired feature writing formulas, they seem to be responding to their newfound freedoms with some unusually creative uses of narrative. And, I think, with the most recent Pulitzer announcements we saw two examples: Kate Boo's series in *The Washington Post* about the treatment of the mentally handicapped in group homes in Washington; and J.R. Moehringer's piece in the *Los Angeles Times*, a long piece about a Southern community inhabited by the descendants of slaves. Both of these pieces were shot through with narrative technique.

So, just to conclude, if the 1980's defined a streamlined razzle-dazzle newspaper era of USA Today-style news bites and factoids and charts and graphs, where the sidebar became the main event, the hallmark of the last decade has been a growing fascination with long-form storytelling. These newspapers are essentially putting back the word "story" into the term "newspaper story," restoring what newspaper writing had for so many years lacked—action, true-to-life characters, point of view, and voice—a lot of those good things and writing techniques that, I think, only the shortsighted think belong exclusively to fiction.

[Edited excerpts from the panel discussion follow.]

Talking About Narrative Journalism

Jack Hart [writing coach for *The Oregonian*]: We ran a narrative series last week about a basketball coach and his problems with crack cocaine. My girlfriend was at a meeting of women who were putting together an event to honor high school athletes at the local high school, and she said they talked about that series through the entire evening. She said, “You know, in five years that I’ve been going to those things, that’s the first time I’ve ever heard anybody talk about a story.” I think there are some universal human themes in good narratives that take real events in the real world and make them meaningful to all of us. In newspaper stories, [these themes] bring in not just the public affairs-oriented, older readers who are the traditional backbone of the newspaper, but attract a much broader audience, maybe the folks who have been feasting on “junk narrative,” who finally get a chance to deal with a real narrative.

Michael Kelly [editor in chief of *The Atlantic Monthly*]: There does seem to be an increase in audience for fiction and nonfiction narrative among younger readers. We have been experimenting on our Web site, *Atlantic Unbound*, which is mostly literary in nature, with some politics, but also a good deal of writing and talking about writing narrative. It’s very popular with a much younger crowd than reads the print magazine. In fact, it drives subscriptions to the print magazine at a very interesting clip, like 300 or 400 new subscriptions each month. These are what we think of as quality subscriptions, people who actually want to get the magazine, care passionately about it.

Walter [Kirn] talked about people’s hunger to get away from this awful bombardment of topicality, and to be told what they used to be told: stories about things they didn’t already know. And there’s a whole range of stories out there. *The New Yorker* used to own [this kind of story], especially with the kind of stuff that Joe Mitchell would go out and do. He would go to a sea turtle farm or would go and spend time with a street corner preacher who was waging a campaign to get rid of vulgar language in New York City, a failed campaign, as it turned out. These were stories that had absolutely nothing to do with topicality, had nothing to do with celebrity news in any conventional sense, and were only nonfiction in the most generous sense of the term. They were as much fiction as nonfiction, I think, and stood on their own legs simply as stories and were, by definition, fresh to everybody. No one knew any of it before. And the immense confidence that *The New Yorker* had then to simply tell stories and let them stand on the strength of storytelling and the magazine’s understanding that this would be terrifically rewarded, that’s still true today.

What isn’t true [any longer] is that people are given those stories, at least, as often as they used to be. It is much harder, I think, for a writer to go to an editor at most magazines now and get a story [assignment] about nothing in particular, except, “I want to go to a sea turtle farm and write it up.” I found as a writer immense resistance by editors in all sorts of areas. Generally, many editors are resistant to anything that could not be packaged as a profile of some sort, centered on one person of news interest. I think magazines, writers, editors, who recover what Walter was talking about, the sense of telling people stories they don’t already know, will be terrifically rewarded. There’s a great audience out there waiting for that.

I think the great competitor for the reader’s time is video rental. Aside from the fact that people spend a lot of the time they used to spend reading watching a movie at home, the kind of open-ended attention that they used to

give a magazine like *The New Yorker*, when they said, “Tell me about something I don’t know and transport me,” that kind of open-ended attention they’re now giving to the movie. You’ll rent a movie and check it out, and if it’s kind of boring, well, you’ll stick with it until it’s time to go to bed. But you don’t do that anymore with a magazine. You expect a written article to deliver much faster and much more sharply, I think, than you used to, or one used to as a reader.

Robert Vare [senior editor, *The Atlantic Monthly*]: Some critics suggest that most of the narrative nonfiction techniques that are in use today differ very little from those that were practiced in the 60’s and 70’s by Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion, and Gay Talese. Do you buy that proposition? Are we in an era of kind of an experimentation gap or an innovation gap? Or are writers out there that are really shaking things up and doing interesting things with this form? Or are we really kind of stuck in a revivalist mode at the moment?

Walter Kirn [contributing writer to *Time* and literary editor of *GQ*]: It’s my contention that we don’t live in a very experimental time, literature-wise, in fiction. How could it be that radical in nonfiction? I mean, the 60’s and 70’s were times of invention of meta-narrative. We had Goddard films that took everything, cut it up into a million pieces, and threw it up in the air. We live in a very conventional time, aesthetically, when it comes to storytelling. I’ve noticed this in novels, and I think it’s probably true in nonfiction. . . . I don’t know that we have a healthy and confident enough atmosphere in general to support much real innovation. It’s going to be a while. As Michael [Kelly] said, once we’re fully engaged in telling stories again for their own sake, and once the audience has once again been trained to respond to storytelling form, we’ll have people who shake it up. But a little neoclassicism first wouldn’t hurt. I wish I could be the one who’s out there in the avant-garde discovering strange new narrative geniuses. But they don’t seem to be out there, probably because they’re not indulged, and probably because the aesthetic culture of the culture in general doesn’t support them. . . .

I think we live in a fairly politically and culturally complacent and quiescent time. I don’t think those edges or borders are being pushed yet. . . . A lot of this is a feature of not having great stories to tell. There is not a Vietnam War going on. You have to seek far and wide to find some of these stories now. There is not a march on the Pentagon or a riot at the next political convention. Political convention reporting as a barometer of nonfiction narrative in general is probably a good thing to look at. You had an entire genre of books that was generated out of going to the convention and telling the story of the candidates and the deals, and so on. And just as the political conventions have ceased to have much of a story to them, so has the writing about them. Naturally, you can’t detach the storytelling from the stories. And if our stories are less complex and perhaps less gripping and overwhelmingly emotional, so will the writing be. That’s a matter of history, not any lack of effort.

Alma Guillermoprieto [author and staff writer for *The New Yorker*]: I want to disagree strenuously. We’re all a bunch of old fogies sitting here, all from the previous millennium. And if there is an innovative storytelling form going on, we don’t know about it because we’re not on the Internet.

Walter Kirn: I’m always on the Internet. . . . I don’t think there is anybody extraordinary out there. It’s too new. But when the new narrative storytelling

takes place and revives and gets its wings and gets its strength, it's going to happen on the Internet, I think, not in newspapers. We're all holding down the hatches. . . . I think there are fantastic stories out there, but we don't know how to even begin covering them. We don't know how to begin covering the reproductive revolution, the genetic revolution, and the information revolution. What do we know about political conventions? And there's all this other stuff, and it's changing the way the world is going to be. And how do we deal with those stories?

Michael Kelly: I like the idea of some sort of brief return to the neoclassical approach. I think we've done plenty of experimenting in the last 30 years, in magazine writing at least, and I think lately it's about as much as the reader can bear. I know I can't read another magazine profile that turns out to be largely an exploration of the writer's inner psyche and his deep, deep inner joy of being in the presence of an actually beautiful movie star lady, at lunch briefly, where she pretends to be interested in him. [See story by Anthony DeCurtis about narrative celebrity stories on page 31.] We've had an awful lot of indulgence on the part of writers in magazines. And it's causing great pain and suffering among readers.

Jack Hart: In the newspaper world, I think we are doing some very new things. And it's not so much with forms, although you see newspaper writers using indirect characterization now, where Richard Harding Davis would have used direct characterization. So there are more modern techniques at work. One of the most exciting stories for me to read lately was on molecular genetics. It was written by Jon Franklin at The (Raleigh) News & Observer called "To Make a Mouse." It's a narrative story of one graduate student's quest that taught me more about what's going on in inner cell genetics than anything I'd seen in the way of straight-ahead reporting on that kind of thing. Tom Holman has written stories about a mentally retarded boy who moved out and got his own apartment. He's written stories about a deaf and blind woman who went to go to guide dog school to see if she could get her own guide dog. He's written stories about a man who took his children, who had been raised in the inner city, back to see if they could find their rural roots in the Mississippi delta.

All those stories don't sound like much of great significance if you just list the topics that way, just like a story about the odyssey of a French fry doesn't sound like much. [See story by Richard Read about his Pulitzer award-winning narrative series about French fries on page 23.] But that's not what they're really about. The French fry story was about the Asian economic crisis. And those other stories were about very universal human themes that were tremendously significant. And in terms of the lives of readers, I think, as significant as the Vietnam War or any of those other big, high-profile political stories that some of us lived through in the 60's.

Audience members were invited to ask questions of the panelists.

Wendy Kaminer [author and contributor to The Atlantic Monthly and The American Prospect]: I have a comment, not a question, but I would like to hear the panel react to it. I think there is a downside to storytelling and to journalistic storytelling that hasn't been addressed and that is the creation of an anecdotally driven public policy. I'm not saying that there's no important role for such stories, even in political writing. Anthony Lewis, I think, does a really good job of alerting people to the inequities of immigration law by telling stories about its victims. Maybe even the Elian saga has a silver lining in that it helped Republicans discover the Fourth Amendment.

But there are a lot of places where this becomes kind of dangerous. We have sex offender registration laws that are named after children who are

killed. It's much easier for a legislator to vote against a sex offender registration law, if he thinks there are some inequities in it, if it's called a sex offender registration law than if it's called Megan's Law. Suddenly, he's voting against a little girl and against the family of a little girl. There are a lot of examples of this. You can take a story and use it to help people understand or think about a larger issue, or you can take a larger issue and reduce it to a story or an anecdote.

And I think that's one of the dangers of this.

Michael Kelly: The Clinton scandals were trivialized, in my estimation, by their reduction to soap opera-type stories. I think that a template was placed over that set of events in which an affair between an intern and the President, and their romantic adventures, and its discovery by a puritanical prosecutor, all of which replaced that which was of real import in the story. And so I agree that story in its most popular and broad sense often obscures important matters that might otherwise be explored. At the same time, I wonder what else it is that motivates people. Bottom line, you talk about policy driven by anecdotes. Well, we came out of a period in which policy was driven by science or research or study groups, and I don't know that it's that awful that it be driven by something else for a change. But I do see a way in which journalism gets together to impose broadly appealing narratives on what are complex and difficult matters that it prefers not to organize in more interesting ways, and the result is a Monica Lewinsky affair.

Lori Olszewski ['00 Nieman Fellow and reporter at the San Francisco Chronicle]: Jack, you named a couple of writers at your paper and a couple of writers at other papers who we have all heard of as models on this. And I just wanted to express a little bit of a concern that I see as a trend in our business in recent years. We tend to give those [writers] the resources to do a narrative piece. Most papers are only doing a couple of those pieces a year, and it's a handful of people who get those resources. I say this as one of those people who has gotten those resources. But I see that that very process suppresses the unusual voice, the thing Michael Kelly was speaking of. Before there were so many more people contributing to that that you were more likely to develop a young talent. I just wondered what you all could offer as perhaps a better model because I don't think that the model we're using is tapping all the talent out there. I think most beat reporters are totally overlooked, and we only target a few of the stars at each paper for these resources.

Jack Hart: That may be true at some papers. I certainly don't think it's true at mine. We do all kinds of writing, some narrative, some not. Very often we do a lot of deadline narratives when there's a dramatic event. About a year and a half ago, we had a terrible flood in a wilderness valley that killed several white-water rafters and stranded a number of others, and created the need for some very dramatic Coast Guard rescues. Two young writers jumped in and did a narrative reconstruction with a young editor who was doing her first narrative reconstruction. The accident happened on Tuesday and the story ran in the Sunday paper on A1. At the same time, another team of reporters was doing a narrative reconstruction of the ordeal of the parents of one of the Mormon missionaries who was taken hostage in the former Soviet Union. There were a lot of people involved in narrative storytelling that we thought was meaningful for our readers. And you can do a narrative that's daily, too.

Lori Olszewski: But what I'm asking about is how many people get the six months or four months, usually, a year?

Jack Hart: Well, thank God, not very many, because we don't want to fill the paper with that kind of thing.

Lori Olszewski: How many long-form narratives would you run a year?

Jack Hart: Maybe 15. But that's plenty for a paper our size.

Peter Howe [reporter with *The Boston Globe*]: One thing that Jack said really resonated with me. The *Boston Globe* is definitely trying to get the narrative wave, usually with considerable success. But the point Jack made that an inverted pyramid story that's slightly off is palatable, but a narrative attempt that misses is screamingly awful. It seems like there's a little bit of an operating assumption that all narrative writing is good. And certainly there are some examples of bad writing out there. I'd be very interested to hear thoughts from some or all of you for tips for avoiding bad narrative writing, examples you've seen, why it went wrong, how it could have been done better. Just guidelines for people to keep in mind to make this work.

Michael Kelly: I have some personal expertise in bad narrative writing, so I could start. When I worked at *The Cincinnati Post*, I worked for a managing editor who lusted after the Pulitzer with every fiber of his being, every hour of the day. And I was one of those sort of pets in the newsroom who was plucked out to do Pulitzer-worthy narratives. I did four or five of them. . . . And my greatest bad narrative happened when the opposition paper, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, ran a pretty good narrative: 24 hours in the life of the Greater Cincinnati Hospital emergency room. People were dying and things. It was sort of like "ER." And one of my editors thought we could imitate that or top it. And I did, with a team of reporters, but I was the proud lead writer; 24 hours in the life of the Greater Cincinnati International Airport. There is a flaw that you will quickly get at in this idea: unless a 747 actually crashes on that particular day, what you have is what I wrote. Sort of like, "5:02 a.m.—It's quiet here in terminal C. No one here but Mabel Schwartz, mopping the floor." And then a quote: "'Not much happening,' said Mabel." So I don't know what that tells us about tips to avoid it. But you are right that not all narrative writing is good, and when it's bad, it is simply awful. It's the reason editors should be scared, I guess.

Andreas Harsono ['00 Nieman Fellow and Indonesian freelance journalist]: I would like to address the question to Alma Guillermoprieto. When I came here last year from Indonesia, I was pretty surprised to realize that there are so many magazines like *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, etc., here in the United States. Indonesia has no such kind of magazine, not even a single one. Of course, there are smaller, the equivalent of *The Atlantic Monthly*, but their subscription is pretty small, 1,000 or 1,500. You told us that in Mexico City there was an effort to set up these kind of magazines, but it failed because the market is pretty small and the cost is pretty expensive. This means that a country of 100 million people, of Mexico, or 220 million people in Indonesia, cannot afford to have these kind of magazines. My question is pretty simple. What can we do? Or perhaps, is it not important to have this kind of magazine?

Alma Guillermoprieto: I think it's tremendously important to write stories and to have narrative and to have forums where narrative can take place, and that's why I do it. By the way, similar efforts in Colombia and similar efforts in Argentina haven't failed. They're kind of stumbling along. And I think to the degree that they survive, now they're feeling the biggest hurt in the lack of writers of narrative who can provide the kind of sustained, long, well written material that these magazines could publish. That's one of the reasons why I've begun writing in Spanish and why I've begun trying to publish first in Spanish and then in English. Because the economics of the situation are such that it's much easier for this would-be magazine, would-be *Vanity Fair*, would-

be *New Yorker* in Colombia, say, to simply reprint translations of things that have already been written in the United States. And somehow to me that isn't a satisfying alternative. And I think what has to happen is that maybe you would like or would be interested in going back and starting writing these pieces and publishing them and not charging very much for them. Because that's the only way it's going to happen. That's the only way you're going to create some kind of a following.

How clear can I make it that this is not a presumptuous thing to say? I want somebody to read me in Mexico and say, "My God, I would want to do that. I would want to write a story like that. I would want to make my living like that." Just to create the kind of excitement and the possibilities, and to generate the writers, and the form of looking, and the discipline of looking at things in a nonfiction, honest and disciplined way. I don't think it's easy. I think the economics are against it. I think we're poor countries, and this is a rich country. Everything I said before was just to say you live in a very rich country, and you have that enormous privilege, and that's what allows you to do what you do.

Carol Eisenberg ['00 Nieman Fellow and a reporter at *Newsday*]: I agree there has been a rebirth of narrative form in newspapers, and that when it doesn't work, it really doesn't work. I think you were talking stylistically. As a beat reporter, I've also seen people working under very tight deadlines with what Michael was talking about. [These are writers without] an innate or disciplined or seasoned feel for narrative, who go into deadline situations and in a very short time attempt to write a narrative form about something that has occurred, recreating dialogue and thoughts. When I know something about [the topic], I have huge ethical problems with what's been done. It's often not only not good writing, but it's terrible journalism. We're also in a different time speed now. Bill Kovach has a book called "Warp Speed," and I think competition from the Internet, from cable, has quickened news cycles so you're seeing people attempt to do this without a lot of background or experience, and sometimes news background, in very quick news cycles, and getting it all wrong.

Jack Hart: Well, there's a lot of bad journalism out there, and some of it is narrative. It's been our philosophy that exactly the same ethical standards apply to writing narrative as apply to any other form of journalism. Manufactured dialogue is beyond the pale. . . . Whenever possible we will do observational narrative. We'll be there and see what it is we are describing. I know when I'm editing with a narrative writer, the most frequently asked question—it is just a drumbeat—is, "How do we know this?" We make every effort to explain to our readers how we gathered information for a story. We will, at the risk of destroying the sort of dramatic force of the narrative, attribute, when necessary. I just do not think that slipping into the narrative form relieves you of any of the customary journalistic responsibilities.

By the same token, I think a lot of journalists who are seeing new forms in their newspapers and in other newspapers are tremendously suspicious of them, and they are rightly skeptical. And they sometimes apply standards that probably ought to be applied to some of the more traditional journalism that is already appearing, much of which would be found wanting. So I think we can do good narrative storytelling in newspapers that meets the very highest of ethical standards, the most stringent of standards of evidence, and do them very well. And I guarantee you there will be plenty of bad and ethically wanting narrative done in newspapers just as well. The only thing you can do about that is to be an extremely intelligent consumer. ■

‘Narrative Writing Looked Easy.’

It wasn't, but with help the writer used French fries to explain Asia's financial crisis.

By Richard Read

Classic nonfiction narratives have a protagonist, a quest, and a set of obstacles. I had all three ingredients in 1998, although I confess I didn't know enough about narrative theory to express it in even these most basic terms.

The protagonist: me, a freshly minted Nieman alumnus, easing back into *The Oregonian's* newsroom after a magical year at Harvard.

The quest: to explain to our readers the Asian financial crisis, a looming debacle that appeared remote and forbiddingly technical to most Americans.

The obstacles: The first one emerged immediately in the puzzled expression of an editor, when I announced that to tell this story I wanted to follow French fries halfway around the world.

I imagined that the protagonist of this story-behind-the-story was well qualified. In fact, my credentials were flawed. Sure, I knew a fair amount about Asia from eight years of reporting in the region during its economic boom. And yes, for an English major, I knew at least something about economics after studying at Harvard with professors such as Dwight Perkins and Ezra Vogel. But I had never tried to write a long-form narrative series, let alone the hybrid explanatory narrative that I proposed. Scene setting, for me, was something I did as a cub reporter in pyramid-style stories from the scenes of crimes.

Heck, narrative writing looked easy. Tom Hallman, the master of the form in our newsroom, spun out compelling narratives on everything from a salesman who persisted despite cerebral palsy to a deputy district attorney who prosecuted a drunken driving case. But editors twice rejected my proposal to explain the Asian crisis by tracing the path of a potato from a

farmer's field to a fast-food outlet in the Far East.

The rejections were disappointing because it all made perfect sense to me. French fries were a \$2 billion Northwest industry bound to suffer as Asian markets tanked. The fries' main customers in Asia were members of the region's emerging middle class, which was crucial not only to economic development but to the growth of democracy. And after all, anyone—even a sleepy morning newspaper reader—can relate to a French fry.

In time an ally emerged, as happens to fortunate protagonists, in the form of Therese Bottomly, a managing editor, who rescued my proposal. Soon Jack Hart, *The Oregonian's* writing coach and Bottomly's colleague as managing editor, surfaced as editor for the project. Hart puzzled over the concept because it didn't fit the usual narrative format.

There was no main character, unless it was the inanimate spud. He advised picking a particular container of French fries to follow wherever it went. This would at least make the story specific and real.

On a visit to the J.R. Simplot Co. French fry factory, I found a batch of fries headed for Indonesia, the nation hardest hit by the financial downturn. A shipping clerk located the growers of this particular lot, using a computer tracking system established to trace



A potato farmer in Dapu, China, about 240 km northwest of Beijing, guides his cart full of manure along a small plot of land and places small piles for fertilization. Simplot hopes to have potatoes grown locally for their plant that opened in Beijing in 1995. Photos by Kathryn Scott-Osler®/*The Oregonian*.

worldwide sources of food poisoning. A colony of Hutterites, members of a Germanic sect reminiscent of the Amish, turned out to have nursed my spuds from seedlings. Gaining access to the remote colony was tricky, but not as difficult as penetrating the public relations walls around McDonald's, which bought the fries.

I rode to port on the French fry truck, which as luck would have it was driven by a Vietnam veteran. He described Asia during the era before battlefields became trade zones. I interviewed the ship's captain and met the vessel in Hong Kong, encountering drama during a storm. I winced when McDonald's diverted this shipment of fries to Singapore, avoiding deteriorating conditions in Indonesia. But I soon realized that the unexpected turn gave my story a good real-world twist.

Photographer Kathryn Scott-Osler and I waded into the dark freezer of a McDonald's outlet in Singapore to find our potatoes' code number marked on

the boxes. We interviewed customers, who were startled by our interest in French fries as financial clouds whirled around this normally placid city-state.

The French fry narrative began to take form. Still relying on these potatoes as the story's connective thread, I could explain stark contrasts among countries in a region that can appear homogenous from afar. The story could



Simplot uses a storage complex in Zhuo Lu outside of Beijing. The storage holds about 3,000 tons of locally grown potatoes, and this worker earns about nine yuan per day for hauling potatoes on his back and loading them on a truck.

show that while French fries are the ultimate uniform global product, the worldwide cast of characters producing and marketing them could not be more diverse. The potatoes' journey could take the reader to the heart of the growing Asian crisis.

From Singapore, we traveled on to Indonesia, arriving in time to cover the riots that led ultimately to President Suharto's resignation. In Jakarta, a Simplot manager paid a wide-eyed trucker to drive a fuel tanker through mobs and fires to power a generator that kept McDonald's fries frozen.

The Oregonian, a regional paper, lacked foreign bureaus to cover daily developments in the Asian meltdown. But that disadvantage gave us the luxury of stepping back and putting the financial collapse in context for readers who didn't follow the breaking news. As Curator Bill Kovach said during our Nieman year: "These days, the context is almost as important as the story."

I caught the last plane out of riot-torn Jakarta to head home. Soon I set

out to write the story and quickly discovered the writing of long-form narrative journalism can be about as challenging as surviving a revolution. Good storytelling can lull you into thinking that narratives are merely a bunch of color interspersed with facts. Write a piece that way, and you'll end up with a bedtime story.

Hart helped me outline the piece in scenes and points. Each scene had to have a point, or we cut it. Hart also imposed discipline in limiting the number of characters for maximum effect. He made sure that we constantly oriented the reader in time and place. He curbed my temptation to include fascinating French fry trivia at every turn.

I tried, however crudely, to emulate John McPhee. This was a story about French fries, much as

McPhee once wrote a book about oranges. And yet it wasn't really about French fries. We used the spuds to pull the reader along, but we traveled intentionally out on numerous tangents. Each digression aimed to teach the reader something about the global economy, about currency flows, about the differences between Asian countries or effects of the financial crisis on people in the United States. Creating such a meandering trail was full of risks. Go too far out on a tangent and suddenly you can almost hear a reader say, "Huh? I thought this was a story about French fries. Hey Martha, is 'Jeopardy' on yet?"

I discovered that

after having completed the outline of a narrative story, I would need to re-report much of the action. Editors who haven't worked on narrative projects might not realize the amount of time and effort this re-reporting requires. The problem is that a writer reporting a narrative story doesn't know what scenes will ultimately be used. So I didn't know until later to ask the farmer what he wore the day he planted these spuds, or what he taught the colony's kids that morning in German class. I returned to the Hutterite colony and spent a day riding a wheat combine with the farmer. I asked him so many seemingly irrelevant questions that he might well have ejected me into the 104-degree field.

I struggled especially to write reconstructed narrative, the sections in which we worked to recreate scenes that had occurred before I entered the French fry factory and began observing events first hand. I found myself confusing summary narrative, which condenses events, with dramatic narrative, which presents vivid scenes that allow readers to experience the story with the characters. These indelible scenes carry the full force of narrative storytelling, whether fiction or nonfiction. Done well, they pull a reader into a story so far that he forgets his surroundings and remembers the point long after recycling the newspaper. To create such scenes, journalists must think like fiction writers, considering plot, point of



Lola DuPuis has been a Simplot employee for 20 years, sorting through freshly cut potatoes on their way to becoming French fries bound for McDonald's worldwide.

view, atmosphere and tone. That's challenging for those of us reared on traditional news writing.

The narrative approach doesn't fit every story, or even many stories. And it raises a new set of ethical issues: By seeing events through the eyes of a main character, are we shortchanging other viewpoints? By arranging plot points and scenes, are we bending reality to fit a preconceived narrative structure?

If I had written the story you are now reading in narrative, it might culminate with a scene at the Pulitzer Prize awards luncheon. [Read won the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for explanatory reporting for his series "The French Fry Connection."] There I met McPhee, who won a Pulitzer in the same year. But my

own conclusion is far from written.

I've struggled lately to fuse narrative writing with investigative reporting, a pursuit that makes French fries seem relatively easy. Novelists don't confront characters who decline to be identified or who announce halfway through the book that they won't participate.

But daily newspapers can harness the power of narrative writing. Consider the difference between perusing a traditional news account of a hurricane and reading, or viewing, the harrowing scenes of "The Perfect Storm." The vast gulf between the two approaches contains rich territory for journalists.

For inspiration, I have only to look to my daughter, who was an infant when I chased potatoes through

Jakarta's flaming streets. Jerome Stern, in "Making Shapely Fiction," says that like a child in a tantrum, when you want everyone's attention you "make a scene," using the writer's full complement of "dialogue, physical reactions, gestures, smells, sounds and thoughts." At almost three years of age, my daughter resorts less often to this form of expression as she learns to summarize experience in words. But I hope she won't forget, as I might have, that there are virtues in making a scene. ■

Richard Read, The Oregonian's senior writer for international affairs and special projects, reported and wrote "The French Fry Connection," which can be read at www.pulitzer.org.

Narrative Journalism Goes Multimedia

On the Web, 'Black Hawk Down' enhanced its credibility and the readers' experience.

By Mark Bowden

Three years ago I wrote an extended series of articles for The Philadelphia Inquirer entitled "Black Hawk Down," a detailed account of the tragic battle on October 3, 1993 between elite American Rangers and the heavily armed citizenry of Mogadishu, Somalia.

While the battle had been a dramatic turning point in U.S. foreign policy, particularly military policy, the full story of what happened that day had never been told. Eighteen American soldiers were killed and 73 were wounded. Estimates of Somali casualties numbered over 1,000. No American reporters had been in Somalia to cover it, even though it was the most severe combat involving American soldiers since the Vietnam War. I set out to capture both the drama and the importance of the episode and thought the best way to do that would be to write a narrative account, to tell the story of

the battle through the eyes of the men who fought it.

In the three years since, "Black Hawk Down" has become a bestselling book, and is on its way to becoming a feature film. Its success has far happily outstripped any of our expectations. But one of the most remarkable things about the project, and one of the big reasons for its ultimate impact, is the pioneering way it was presented on the Internet.* Assembled by Editor Jennifer Musser of Philly Online, the Inquirer's official Web site, the daily unfolding of the series in cyberspace during 28 days in November and December of 1997 drew in hundreds of thousands of readers from all over the world. At its height, the electronic version of the story was getting 46,000 hits

every day.

The Web site's rendering of the story featured the full text of the series along with photographs, video and audio-tape snippets of the battle itself and interviews with key participants, maps, graphics, documents. As the article moves forward, readers can click on a variety of these hyperlinks to consult a map or hear an interview from which I extracted a quote or read a document that I refer to in the text. Its interactive "Ask the Author" feature nearly wore me out. But the Philly Online display offered a powerful glimpse of this medium's potential for journalistic storytelling, both heightening the experience for readers and significantly enhancing the strength and credibility of my reporting.

* "Black Hawk Down" can be found at www.philly.com/packages/somalia/nov16/default16.asp



American soldiers in Somalia shield themselves from the wind created by a helicopter as it takes off. *Photo courtesy of The Philadelphia Inquirer.*

I'd like to say that I planned it this way. I am an old-fashioned newspaper reporter, one who blanched 25 years ago when the editors first announced plans to replace our beloved typewriters, scissors, paste pots and Wite-Out with computers. Five years ago, when I started working on "Black Hawk Down," I hardly knew what the Internet was, other than some vague technological tide that someday, we were told, would sweep away the practice of printing words on paper. By then I figured to be long retired, if not dead and gone. My only concern for "Black Hawk Down" was to report and write it in such a way that it would read like good fiction, but would be rigorously and demonstrably true. I envisioned it as a newspaper series for the benefit of readers in the Philadelphia area and then a book that might reach a broader audience. None of us at the *Inquirer* foresaw the story's ultimate reach.

When we began planning the series' publication at the *Inquirer* in the summer of 1997, I never even considered how the story would be presented on the Internet. Max King, then the newspaper's executive editor, and Bob Rosenthal, then his deputy (now executive editor), decided that if the newspaper was going to run a series during

an entire month it ought to exploit the story in every way possible. King envisioned it as a multimedia event. He drew in the *Inquirer's* film department, K-R Video, which primarily made short video clips for Philly Online, and producer Chris Mills began creating a documentary film to be aired on the local PBS affiliate, WHYY, in conjunction with the series. Public Broadcasting had an impressive history of tying together documentary TV and book publishing, and I viewed working on a film companion to the series as an exciting and different opportunity.

In those early meetings I remember seeing Philly Online's editor, Jennifer Musser, at the table quietly taking notes, and assumed she had a simple job—mounting the text of the series on the *Inquirer's* Web site. To the extent I thought about it at all, I thought the Web site would give readers who picked up the series in midstream an opportunity to go back and catch up on the earlier installments, which would be particularly beneficial because the story was such a long, dramatic narrative.

To make the documentary, Mills sent cameramen to Somalia, which I had already visited to interview those who fought against American soldiers, and dispatched crews around the country

to reinterview some of the scores of soldiers I had tracked down. He also obtained from the Pentagon snippets of videotape from the battle itself. We worked together to fashion a narration for the film, and Mills hired a professional voice to read it. I divided my time between working on the documentary and huddling with David Zucchini, my editor, to get the series in shape for the newspaper. We were pushing to get the series in the paper on time and had already decided to begin it without having the last few parts finished.

Sometime that fall, Musser stopped by my desk to ask if I had any resource material she could use.

"What do you want?" I asked.

"Audiotapes, documents, photos, maps...everything you've got," she said.

There were plenty of maps, documents and photos in my files. Soldiers had been sending me snapshots they had saved from their service in Somalia, and Peter Tobia, an *Inquirer* photographer, had traveled with me to that devastated country and brought back an amazing portfolio. I handed them over. As for audiotape, I had piles of it. When I began the project the year before, I had taped my interviews with the soldiers. I eventually stopped, because the sheer number of interviews made transcribing the tapes too time-consuming, but I still had shoeboxes filled with cassette tapes at home. I had even managed to collect bits of audiotape from the radio transmissions of soldiers during the battle, sounds that captured the frenzy and terror of the fight. So I swept all the tapes into a bag and dumped them on Musser's desk the next morning. I expected her to complain.

Instead, she was thrilled. She asked to see my handwritten transcriptions of the tapes and began painstakingly studying them, finding and highlighting some of the most dramatic passages, then locating them on the audiotapes. I still didn't have a clear idea of what she planned to do with all the material. Weeks before the series was set to run, as Zucchini and I still worked to finish it, Fred Mann, the Director of Philly Online, asked me if I would mind answering questions from readers on

the Internet as it unfolded.

"We'll probably get about a dozen or so," he said.

I agreed.

The series debuted on Sunday, November 16th. The Friday before, I sat with King in his office discussing it. "I don't know how this is going to be received," said King, who had invested an unprecedented variety of resources in the series. "If nobody is interested, we're going to look pretty foolish with a series running day after day for a month. But you know what? If a story like this doesn't sell, then I'm not sure I want to be involved in journalism anymore."

He needn't have worried. Sales of the newspaper jumped by 20,000 during the month the series ran. Every day my desk was piled with letters and phone messages from excited readers. The head of the Inquirer's circulation department paid a rare visit to the newsroom, asked to meet me and shook my hand.

But this turned out to be only the smaller part of it. Jennifer Musser's presentation of "Black Hawk Down" was exploding on the Internet. Prior to this series, the most heavily read story on the Web site had been an account of the death of Richie Ashburn, the Phillies baseball great and popular TV announcer, which had collected 9,000 hits in a day. "Black Hawk Down" debuted with numbers higher than that, and with each day it kept growing, to 15,000 a day, then 20,000 a day, then more. When the number of hits hit 40,000, the Web site's overworked server crashed, forcing them to go out and buy another to handle the demand. The online division tracked the sources of those hits to military bases, government offices, universities and headquarters for some of the largest corporations in the military-industrial complex. These were all places where workers, students, soldiers, sailors and cadets were computer literate and had access to high-powered, fast computer connections.

The outpouring was easy to understand. Whatever the drama and importance of the story itself, Musser and her team—designer Ches Wajda, photo editor John Williams, and programmer

Ranjit Bhatnagar—had created an extraordinary way for readers to experience the story of "Black Hawk Down." The technology of the Internet, paired with the creativeness of the editing team, meant that far more could be offered online to the reader than by the series in the newspaper. On the Web site, the story became part illustrated book, part documentary film, part radio program. It was all these things and more, because it allowed readers (who at times became viewers) to explore the story and its source material in any way they chose.

Those who arrive at the Web site can read the story straight through and then go back and view the audio, video, photos, etc., or they can click on hyperlinks as they read and just explore at will. All of the source material, things usually simply noted in agate in a bibliography or endnotes, were on display. Unlike the maps in the newspaper, those on the Web site, designed by Matthew Ericson, were animated. Ericson created one that showed the whole plan for how the Ranger raid was supposed to have unfolded, with helicopters flying in over the target house, Rangers roping to the street, and trucks pulling up to load up prisoners and soldiers and drive them away. There was a copy of the stirring handwritten letter sent by the American commander, General William F. Garrison, the day after the fight.

Even more remarkable, when the series was launched, was the interactive aspect. Those "dozen" questions from readers? They flowed in by the hundreds daily, from men who had fought in the battle, from soldiers at military bases all over the world, from appreciative and critical readers. I sat for hours every morning while the series ran answering them one by one. Inquirer Managing Editor Gene Foreman, concerned that the final parts of the series had not been finished, walked by my desk one morning and announced how pleased he was to see me writing away so furiously.

"Is that the last part?" he asked, hopefully (no doubt with visions of my being hit by a truck and the paper being left with its highly popular story unfinished).

"No, Gene, I'm answering the e-mail. If I don't do this every morning I'll never keep up with it."

For the rest of the month I was completely swept up in this Internet phenomenon. The Web site vastly improved the story in several ways. It gave readers all over the world a chance to instantly comment—and correct. Military experts are notably finicky about getting the details of weaponry and equipment exactly right, and I was given a great number of helpful corrections. And because the story was mounted in cyberspace, instead of merely running a correction and apology the next day on an inside page of the newspaper, we could immediately correct the story. Readers who pointed out errors returned the next day to find them corrected, with an e-mailed apology and thanks from me.

This greatly enhanced the account's credibility. Instead of dealing with the reporter as a distant "expert," and speculating on the reasons for mistakes or omissions, readers saw my own eagerness to simply get the story right, something which in my experience is the primary motivation of most reporters. Those who sent e-mail messages offering more information on key points in the story were contacted immediately, by phone or e-mail. Interactivity helped to break down the normal wall of suspicion between soldiers and reporters, and I found myself suddenly offered whole new sources of information. I struggled to take advantage of them as the series unfolded and later spent months plumbing these new sources for the book version. It also made the process of running the story memorably fun. Instead of leaning back and wondering how the work was being received, I was in an arena with my readers, explaining, defending and correcting the story as it unfolded. I never had so much fun with a story.

Credibility was enhanced in another way. Stories written in a dramatic, narrative fashion, as I tried to write "Black Hawk Down," typically dispense with the wooden recitation of sources. If you write, "according to so-and-so" in every sentence, in the manner of old wire copy police stories, storytelling

quickly loses its pace and clarity. Often writers who avoid this kind of belabored source-noting in the text are accused (and in some notable cases have been guilty) of embellishing the truth, filling in gaps of knowledge with flights of fancy, or rearranging time sequences and other details to smooth out the narrative. It's easy to see why. Without clear delineation of sources, even careful readers can't tell where the reporter has gotten the information, so they tend to be suspicious of it. Hyperlinks solved that problem.

If a reader, for instance, wondered how I could possibly know exactly what was in Staff Sergeant Matt Eversmann's head as he slid down the rope into battle, then they could click on the hyperlink to Eversmann's name and listen to him explaining what was in his head. That was one of those audio clips Musser lifted from my interview tapes. In some cases, because of the work Mills and his documentary crew had done, there were video clips of interviews. Because readers could listen to some of the hundreds of interviews and view some of the broad documentation that was the foundation for this simple, fast-paced story, it gave the account weight it might not have had, had it run only in the newspaper. Along with the finished product, discerning readers could inspect the building blocks of the story, could see how it had been assembled. These audio-visual features not only added to the fun of reading the story, but grounded it more firmly in reality.

Philly Online's presentation of "Black Hawk Down" won the Editor & Publisher Award for the best journalistic series on the Internet in 1997. I have felt free to brag about it ever since because not only did I not create it, it didn't occur to me to do so, and if it had, I wouldn't have known how to do it. What Musser, Mann, Ericson, Will-

The screenshot shows a web page layout for the article "Black Hawk Down" on Philly.com. At the top, there's a banner image with the title "BLACKHAWK DOWN" in large, bold letters. Below the banner, the page is organized into several sections: a "THIS CHAPTER" section with a sub-header "Reliving a firefight: Hail Mary, then hold on", a "Chapter 1" header, and a main text area. The text starts with "STAFF SGT. Matt Eversmann's last name was fully obliterated on the rope...". To the left of the main text, there are navigation links for "OTHER CHAPTERS" and "PHILLY.COM". At the bottom of the page, there is a "Notes" section with a small icon and a link to "Read the entire article".

iams, Wajda and Bhatnagar had done was groundbreaking, and suggested to this old typewriter hacker how amazing this new media soon will be. Because of limitations in the speed of computing and Internet connection, the most "Black Hawk Down" could offer were tiny windows of video and small samplings of audio. Imagine what such an experience will be like when full-screen color video and audio can be accessed instantly. Multimedia presentation of news stories, investigations, history, sports will offer storytelling opportunities no solitary medium can match.

Imagine, just for fun, an Internet presentation of a Super Bowl. Within hours of the game's end, an enterprising journalist could combine written accounts of the game with video, so that as a reader goes back to look at a key play, he could click on a hyperlink

and watch it on screen from a variety of angles. He then could click on another hyperlink to hear the players involved talk about that play in post-game interviews, or hear coaches and commentators break it down critically. Such a display could offer the complete seasonal history of every player in the game, breakdowns of every game played by each team, etc. A serious fan could spend days wandering happily through the site. Or imagine a work of history presented complete with all its source material, historical reading, background material, commentary and analysis available at the click of a mouse. Such a presentation would combine the authority of a book with the entertainment value of a film and give scholars not just advice on where to go for more detailed information, but the information itself. In the future, I suspect, nonfiction writers will routinely consider how to present their work with sounds, images and source material as well as their own well chosen words. I know I will

never again write a major work without doing so.

Still, the medium is in its infancy, and by any standard I'm a dinosaur. Whatever uses I can imagine for Internet journalism will seem narrow and dated to those who grow up using computers. By definition, creative minds will come up with ways of using this new medium, combining sound and image and text in ways that we cannot yet foresee. ■

Mark Bowden, author of "Black Hawk Down," "Bringing the Heat," and "Doctor Dealer," has been a reporter at The Philadelphia Inquirer for 20 years. He is at work on a book to be published in March 2001 by The Atlantic Monthly Press, which will debut as an Inquirer series and Web page. It is scheduled to run in November.

Weaving Storytelling Into Breaking News

‘A little bit of narrative, like sugar, just makes everything better.’

By Rick Bragg

In Birmingham, Alabama, I had a senior editor named Clarke Stallworth who had one basic rule of good writing: Show me, don't tell me. Let me see what you see. Paint me a picture. Then, I'll follow you anywhere, even past the jump.

But when you hear people talk about good narrative writing, they usually talk about year-long opuses and long Sunday features and soft features on section fronts, but in breaking news, in hard stories that must be riveted together on deadline with the telephones jangling and a red-faced editor leaning over you, worried about your word count and his hypertension, it seems less appropriate, somehow.

And the readers suffer.

Narrative is not just a pretty lead that can be cobbled onto a hard news story, or a way to get into a sidebar that appears on page A46—far enough back in the paper that it will not embarrass the city editor.

It can be the most effective way to tell even a hard news story.

All you have to do is convince your boss of that and, while you're at it, see if he wants to buy a crate or two of snake oil.

But as the reporting of news becomes more and more a 24-hour process, and the consumption of the facts becomes so arbitrary, it seems like the way to present that news in more traditional mediums would be through powerful, descriptive language.

Because is it really breaking news when it broke at breakfast, yesterday?

In perhaps the hardest breaking news story I have ever worked on, the Oklahoma City bombing, The New York Times allowed me to do a front-page story on the scene. The story was written in less than two hours, because it had to be.

It is not the best story I ever wrote or

the prettiest, but it was the most important, perhaps.

As I sat there in front of my laptop, I had no time to craft pretty sentences. I just had to reach into my mind for the sadness I had seen and the irony of the situation, and it wrote itself:

OKLAHOMA CITY—Before the dust and the rage had a chance to settle, a chilly rain started to fall on the blasted-out wreck of what had once been an office building, and on the shoulders of the small army of police, firefighters and medical technicians that surrounded it.

They were not used to this, if anyone is. On any other day, they would have answered calls to kitchen fires, domestic disputes, or even a cat up a tree. Oklahoma City is still, in some ways, a small town, said the people who live here.

This morning, as the blast trembled the morning coffee in cups miles away, the outside world came crashing hard onto Oklahoma City.

“I just took part in a surgery where a little boy had part of his brain hanging out of his head,” said Terry Jones, a medical technician, as he searched in his pocket for a cigarette. Behind him, firefighters picked carefully through the skeleton of the building, still searching for the living and the dead.

“You tell me,” he said, “how can anyone have so little respect for human life.”

The shock of what the rescuers found in the rubble had long since worn off, replaced with a loathing for the people who had planted the bomb that killed their friends, neighbors and children.

One by one they said the same thing: this does not happen here.

I don't even know if that is what pure narrative is supposed to be, but it was the best I could do. I found the images, the detail, the grim, dark color of it, to be just as much a part of hard news reporting as the body count.

Some time later, on the same story, I waited in a hotel in Oklahoma City for a jury in Denver to decide the guilt or innocence of Timothy McVeigh.

I don't get shook very easy, on breaking news. I have done it more than half my life. But I was nervous then because of the terrible import the story held. This was a man who had wrecked a city, wrecked lives. My story had to carry that import. It would have failed, otherwise. But I also did not want to overwrite it, to lend drama to a story already so dramatic. It would have been like putting a scary mask on a face already horribly disfigured.

So I thought the best thing to do was borrow a snippet, a snapshot, from every tale of great sadness I had heard since covering the story. Let that be the picture the reader saw:

OKLAHOMA CITY—After the explosion, people learned to write left-handed, to tie just one shoe. They learned to endure the pieces of metal and glass embedded in their flesh, to smile with faces that made them want to cry, to cry with glass eyes. They learned, in homes where children had played, to stand the quiet. They learned to sleep with pills, to sleep alone. Today, with the conviction of Timothy J. McVeigh in a Denver Federal court, with cheers and sobs of relief at the lot where a building once stood in downtown Oklahoma City, the survivors and

families of the victims of the most deadly attack of domestic terrorism in United States history learned what they had suspected all along: That justice in a far-away courtroom is not satisfaction. That healing might come only at Mr. McVeigh's grave.

"I want the death penalty," said Aren Almon-Kok, whose daughter, Baylee, was killed by the bomb one day after her first birthday. Pictures of the baby, bleeding and limp in the arms of a firefighter, became a symbol of that crime, of its cruelty. "An eye for eye. You don't take lives and get to keep your own."

Mrs. Almon-Kok saw the announcement of the verdict on television at her mother's house, then went immediately to the site of her daughter's death, where she was joined by some people who had lost children in the bombing, by others who had just felt drawn there. She said how happy she was with the verdict, but her face was stricken, haunted.

"I cried, and I cheered," Mrs. Almon-Kok said.

That story was not a pure narrative, certainly, but it married the styles, and it was written in just a few hours. The narrative actually made the writing faster, because it created a rhythm for the story. And it was powerful. The so-called nut graf was in the second graph, which should have pleased even the most narrative-hating editor.

And sometimes, the narrative makes the difference between a story that is read and one that is merely glanced at. For instance:

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI—The legend was that if you touched Robert Johnson you could feel the talent running through him, like heat, put there by the devil on a dark Delta crossroad in exchange for his soul. It is why Claud Johnson's grandparents would not let him out of the house that day in 1937 when Robert Johnson, his father, strolled into the yard.

Robert Johnson, the famous, almost mythical blues man, had come to Lincoln County, Miss., to see Virgie Jane Smith, a young woman he had been intimate with, and a son he had never seen.

"We were living in my granddaddy's and grandmama's house," Claud Johnson said. "They were religious people, and they thought that the blues was the devil's music. People back then believed that.

"They told my daddy they didn't want no part of him. They said he was working for the devil, and they wouldn't even let me go out and touch him. I stood in the door, and he stood on the ground, and that is as close as I ever got to him. Finally, he said, 'Well, I might as well go on.' He wandered off, and I never saw him again."

Mr. Johnson has always wondered what would have happened if he had run across that porch to him, so that everyone would know he was Robert Johnson's son. Now, the Mississippi Supreme Court ruled that he is the son and legal heir of....

I don't know if I would have read that story if it had begun: Today, the Mississippi Supreme Court ruled....

A little bit of narrative, like sugar, just makes everything better. Narrative conveys emotion. Narrative shows, not tells.

Sometimes, of course, the editors simply will not let you weave that color into a straight news story.

When I was covering the Susan Smith trial, a massive thunderburst came just as the jury announced its verdict, and a hot, dry spell vanished in a torrential rain.

Got my lead, I thought.

But the lead story in the Times will probably never have a lead that uses that metaphor—the washing away of sin, and so on—and the editors insisted on a straight lead. This is what they got.

UNION, S.C.—A jury today decided that Susan Smith should

not be put to death for the drowning of her two young sons, and instead should spend the rest of her life in prison, to remember. It took the jury two and one-half hours to reject the prosecution's request for the death penalty and settle on the life sentence. The jury's unanimous decision saved Mrs. Smith, 23, from death row, but left her alone in a tiny cell with the ghosts of her dead children, for at least the next 30 years, her lawyer said.

"This young woman is in a lake of fire," said the lawyer, David Bruck. "That's her punishment."

Mr. Bruck had argued that Mrs. Smith was so distraught over the deaths of her children, Michael, 3, and Alex, 14 months, that she did not want to live. But as the jury's verdict was read, she gasped, and slipped her arm around Mr. Bruck's waist to give him a quick, firm, hug.

Mrs. Smith, at the center of a murder case that first drew the sympathy and later the loathing of the nation, was convicted last Saturday of murder.

To reclaim a lover who said he did not want a relationship with a woman who had children, the prosecutor contended, Mrs. Smith drove to a dark lake on the night of Oct. 25 and sent her car rolling into the water with the two little boys strapped inside in their car seats.

It was the phrase, "to remember," that added a tiny something, a mental image, I hope, of that woman sitting in her cell, thinking of her dead children. But that is more hoping than writing.

The thunderburst made the story. After the jump. ■

Rick Bragg, a 1993 Nieman Fellow, is the Miami bureau chief for The New York Times. He is the author of "All Over But the Shouting" and "Somebody Told Me."

The Perils of Lunch With Sharon Stone

When the Five W's aren't appetizing, some reporters stir in a bit of fiction.

By Anthony DeCurtis

“Sharon Stone is late for lunch”: That cloying, made-up lead is how an *Esquire* writer I once met summed up the phony sense of drama, the elevation of the mundane into seeming significance, that is so much a part of narrative feature writing, particularly when it involves celebrities. Of

ethical problems of narrative writing. However typical or even inconsequential such fudging may be—and in the end, who cares if Sharon Stone was having lunch or was punctual?—it's wrong. It's remarkable that this needs to be pointed out, but the most fundamental element of the journalist's pact

own experience, a well-known “new journalist” once interviewed me for a piece that ran in a prestigious publication and, in the course of our conversation, casually mentioned that certain aspects of the story would be handled by composites. Envious of the breezy aptness so often displayed in the work of this writer and that school, I smiled and thought, “Ah, so that's how they do it.” As the career of Janet Malcolm has so capably shown, reporting is a dream when you simply allow yourself to make up both the quotes and the context.

Those excesses, however, don't mean that the assault on objectivity wasn't long overdue. Any narrative story of length involves so much interpretation and editorial shaping that “objectivity” becomes not merely a slippery ideal, but an inappropriate one. I prefer terms like “honesty” and “fairness.” To me, it's perfectly acceptable to write from a particular viewpoint or ideological stance, as long as you make clear in the piece that you're doing so, and you represent counterpositions fairly. Readers then are reminded that what they're encountering is your reading of events and personalities—which is always true, in my opinion, even in so-called “objective” reporting. In my

...the most fundamental element of the journalist's pact with the reader is that what you're reporting in your story actually happened—whether you are covering a presidential campaign or a day in the life of a movie star. If you make stuff up, even little stuff, how is anyone to believe anything you say?

course, in my writing for *Rolling Stone* and other glossy publications, I've turned that trick a time or two. It's an alluringly easy route to take—partly out of genuine enthusiasm, partly out of a desire to engage the reader, and partly out of an effort to drum up you-are-there immediacy.

Such writing is a little silly, to be sure, but is it ethically compromised? Obviously not, assuming that the writer was, in fact, having lunch with Sharon Stone and that she was, in fact, late. But don't believe everything you read. I've had plenty of conversations with writers who wouldn't hesitate to say, “Well, I was meeting her at a restaurant late in the afternoon for coffee, but I thought it would sound cooler if I described us as having lunch together.” Or, “She wasn't really late, but I thought it would better capture her air of diva hauteur if I set the scene as if she were.”

So, now, we're getting into the real

with the reader is that what you're reporting in your story actually happened—whether you are covering a presidential campaign or a day in the life of a movie star. If you make stuff up, even little stuff, how is anyone to believe anything you say?

The willingness to meddle with real-

The pervasive feeling is that no one is playing by the rules any longer. You may want to take the high road, but your competitors (and their numbers are legion) are surely entertaining no such scruples.

ity is the inevitable result of the assault on objectivity that has characterized the past 40 years of journalism, particularly in magazines, and particularly among writers of a literary bent. In my

view, all writing is a kind of criticism.

Anyone who's ever worked with transcripts running into tens of thousands of words knows that it often just makes more sense to condense the repeated

instances in which a subject comes up into one clear statement—or one confused statement if that was ultimately the subject's state of mind. As an editorial judgment call, that seems no different to me than determining which part of a quote you're going to use verbatim and which you're going to paraphrase—

crux of my work, and it rarely involves breaking news or any of the strictures involved in reporting of that kind. When you're writing about popular artists, "how" is almost always far more important than who, what, when, where and why. How do they go about doing the work they do? How did they get to

the other way, or even encourage such embellishment. The pervasive feeling is that no one is playing by the rules any longer. You may want to take the high road, but your competitors (and their numbers are legion) are surely entertaining no such scruples. Editors are sweating in the heat of vanishing readerships and the pressure of the cultural predominance of television and the Internet. They've got their eyes on the glittering prizes that ambitious narrative pieces rake in year after year. So if those quotes seem uncannily perfect or that vignette almost otherworldly in its evocative power, it's far more convenient to believe that such gems are merely quotidian miracles of the sort strong reporting can sometimes perform. Why ask questions that might make your budding star reporters—or you yourself—uncomfortable? Those same editors are, of course, shocked—shocked!—when scandal breaks out.

The vast majority of journalists are honest, of that there can be no doubt. But few of the dishonest ones who

For better or worse, there is an art to constructing a long, narrative piece, and a certain amount of artifice is unavoidable in getting to the heart of the matter.

and how exactly you're going to paraphrase it. Obviously, in matters that involve legal issues or government policy, it's essential to present the subject's language as rigorously accurately as possible—regardless of how repetitive, unfocused or irrelevant it may be. In other contexts, the writer's own discretion can play more of a role.

Conversations have an emotional character that raw transcripts never capture. Invariably, people who are shown transcripts of their own speech are stunned at how inarticulate they seem, even if, as a listener, you would judge those people verbally adept. Reading someone's words—or even your own words—can be excruciating. It is a vastly different experience from hearing someone speak, and bridging that yawning gap is a critical part not merely of narrative journalism, but of intelligent editing. For better or worse, there is an art to constructing a long, narrative piece, and a certain amount of artifice is unavoidable in getting to the heart of the matter.

Most journalistic conventions are based on news reporting, where content—narrowly defined as the Five W's—is the ultimate measure of a piece's worth. But the "content" of the sort of pieces I typically do is a more complicated matter. When I tell people about a story I'm working on, whether it's traveling with U2 or spending a night in the studio with the Wu Tang Clan, the question I'm invariably asked is, "What was it like?" Conveying that far more nebulous reality is the very

where they are? How do they move in the rarefied worlds they occupy? How do they handle the strange, unsettling transitions their lives often go through? This is what my readers want to know, and rendering those processes requires as much interpretive skill as conventional reporting ability.

But interpretation is not the same as

Any narrative story of length involves so much interpretation and editorial shaping that 'objectivity' becomes not merely a slippery ideal, but an inappropriate one. I prefer terms like 'honesty' and 'fairness.'

invention, and once the wall of objectivity crumbled that distinction grew more difficult to maintain. Writers, eager to escape the grind of daily newspaper writing or routine magazine profiles, yearn for the freedom to stretch, long for the professional cachet that comes from being known as a literary journalist. Book contracts, movie deals, and television appearances beckon. So when the golden opportunity arises, it's tempting to give that key scene the manufactured oomph that lifts it from the dreary realm of mere reporting into the shimmering world of artistic expression. And if that means reordering events or supplying a few telling details spun from air, what's the harm?

The industry's nasty little secret, unfortunately, is that editors often look

were caught in recent years have suffered any meaningful consequences. As long as that remains the case, careerists and cheaters will run the risk of falsifying aspects of their stories for the significant gain and glory to be had. And, regardless of her actual dining schedule, the gorgeous Sharon Stone, her heels clacking as she enters the room and all eyes stare, will endlessly be late for lunch. ■

Anthony DeCurtis has written for Rolling Stone, where he is a contributing editor, for 20 years. He is the author of "Rocking My Life Away: Writing About Music and Other Matters," and he holds a Ph.D. in American literature from Indiana University.

Lulling Viewers Into a State of Complicity

‘The approach of a storyteller seemed more apt. . . .’

By Ted Koppel

Roone Arledge, the legendary broadcaster who invented ABC’s “Wide World Of Sports” and “Nightline,” may be unaware of his debt to Mark Twain, but it exists nevertheless. The great American humorist once observed that “we are all ignorant; just about different things.” That could very well have been the inspiration for the fashion in which Roone began so many of his “Wide World” segments.

Back in the days when ABC had access to none of the major sports events; when football, basketball and baseball contracts were sewed up by the other major networks, Arledge fashioned a hugely successful series out of the arcane and secondary sports that received little or no attention anywhere else. Since almost nothing was known about the champions of ski jumping or downhill racing, let alone the masters of hurling or the luge, Roone created an introductory segment that he called “up close and personal.” The theory was simple: Give the public a video sketch of these unknown athletes, let us see their training methods, introduce us to their families, and we would have an investment in their success or failure. We would bring a level of interest to the events in which they competed. The concept worked brilliantly.

Among the virtues of a good idea are its portability and adaptability.

When we began “Nightline” in 1980, I took Mark Twain’s admonition to heart and stole Roone’s idea from “Wide World of Sports.” We would assume

The approach of a storyteller seemed more apt than that of a hard-news journalist. And there is no more seductive approach to telling a story than to elicit from the listener a sense of mild curiosity.

that people knew nothing about our nightly subjects. Hence the five to seven-minute produced video segments that are, to this day, the hallmark of what we call our “classic” “Nightline” for-



Ted Koppel anchors an ABC News “Nightline” town meeting on issues involved in the case of six-year-old Cuban refugee Elian Gonzalez. Photo ©2000 ABC News.

mat—or what an irreverent woman staffer in our early days referred to as “an opening piece, Ted and three white guys in suits.”

What does all this rambling background have to do with narrative writing for television? Or, more specifically, what does it have to do with the introductory page in which I try to set the tone for each evening’s program? It is, from my highly subjective point of

view, an example of both.

There are, sometimes, nights on which we cover a late-breaking news event; something that has not yet appeared elsewhere. On these occasions, the time-tested formula of answering the “who, what, where, when and why” questions still serves. On most nights, however, we are asking the viewer to invest half an hour of his time in a subject with which he is largely unfamiliar and which seems, at first glance, to be of less than earth-shattering importance. This, at a time of night when sex, sleep, reading, Letterman, Leno and a variety of other television options compete for his attention. The time of night and the diverse competition led me, early on, to the conclusion that the viewer needed to be lulled into a state of complicity. The approach of a storyteller seemed more apt than that of a hard-news journalist. And there is no more seductive approach to telling a story than to elicit from the listener a sense of mild curiosity.

When I do it reasonably well, it brings you to this point. ■

Ted Koppel is anchor and managing editor of ABC News’s “Nightline.”

Sticky Storytelling

‘I want to create a pattern that is instinctively unfamiliar...’

By Robert Krulwich

I tell stories on television. I tell them long (on “Nightline” and “Frontline”), I tell them medium (on “Prime Time Live”), and I tell them short (on the evening news), and like any storyteller, I want my audience’s complete attention while I am on the screen. But what I really want is a couple of hours after I’ve finished, I want some of them, half would be nice, to remember what I’ve said; not all of it, just the gist, and if not the gist, maybe an image, a thought, something sticky enough to carry my message a couple of beats past my performance.

Everybody knows TV news is ephemeral. But the sad truth is news on network TV has become so smooth, so polished, the typical story moves through the audience like a suppository. In. Out. “What did he say?”

I will be standing on a street corner, waiting for the light to turn, and somebody with a big smile will come up to me and say, “I saw that thing you did on TV yesterday about the—”

I wait. I tense.

“About the—”

About half the time what the person recalls, I never said, or some other reporter said, or it was sort of what I said but skewed in some unfathomable way, or whatever memory sparked this exchange flickers, dims, and ends: “That thing, you know, you said yesterday, it was—” (long pause).

“Well, thanks,” I say, unhelpfully.

On the radio (I used to work for National Public Radio), this is not a problem. Radio reporters learn to write with calculated vividness, pushing the listeners to paint images in their own heads so they unwittingly become co-authors of the story. On the radio, a story well told sticks for days, years.

TV is harder. Good television reporters have to learn how to work the room. On television, the audience is two, five, seven, 15 feet away staring

back across a couch, a bed, a kitchen table. This distance matters. Consider: A newspaper reporter puts words on a page and that page is usually 18 inches from the reader’s nose. How many children, spouses and pets can squeeze into those 18 inches? Between the TV and the viewer there can (and will) be a Barnum & Bailey carnival of “Watch me instead!” distractions.

What’s he going to do, say, now?

Every good television reporter knows the real job is to grab the audience’s eyes and hold them tight through the storm.

How do I do that? I begin with an observation: TV news has a very familiar form. It is authoritative, cadenced, smooth, dispassionate, articulate. It doesn’t gulp or waffle or giggle. It is a speech pattern that carefully announces that it is *not* normal conversation; it is News. News on TV has a sound, a sound designed to create credibility. I talk this way, it says, because what I am saying is True and Important. Now listen.

The problem is that sound has become so familiar that at some level that composers would understand, it has become very easy *not* to listen. We know these tones, this writing style, these image sequences so well, we don’t have to pay attention. We know the beat.

The opportunity here is obvious. If most reporters are modeling themselves on Walter Cronkite and Jane Pauley, what I do is model myself on no one. Instead, implacably, incorrigibly, I try to sound like myself, like the ordinary me.

If I were sitting next to you on a bus

and we got to talking about something that I know about, something exciting (to me) like a tax proposal, a scientific discovery, something difficult, but something I’d want to explain, on television I try to sound exactly as I would on the bus. True, on TV I have the advantage of pictures and graphics and snippets of interviews, but I work hard to create a sequence that feels as improvised, fresh and intimate as an accidental encounter.

This means: a) whenever I sound too much like Pauley or Cronkite (who are good, by the way, icons, even), I consciously shift down, to take the “News” out of my voice, and b) I cut and arrange my images so that they do not flow normally. I want surprise. I want to create a pattern that is instinctively unfamiliar, so that at a level the audience may not be aware of, there is a touch of suspense. What’s he going to do, say, now?

Sometimes this works. A few months ago, I was on the A train in New York City, my home town, three o’clock in the afternoon, when the guy across from me, in full hip hop garb, the gold chain, three earrings on the right lobe, big pants, leans over and he says, “Hey, didn’t I see you on TV talking about the—”

“Yes?”

And he delivers a perfect condensation of a story I did on Dolly the cloned sheep’s cells. He remembered the whole thing. It is moments like these that make me want to dance off the train, bow deeper than I ever would for an Emmy, and touch the hem of Stephen Jay Gould. It doesn’t happen often, maybe three out of every 10 encounters, but on TV (as in baseball) .333 is a pretty good average. Way good enough for me. ■

Robert Krulwich is a correspondent with ABC News.

Has the Camera's Eye Replaced the Writer's Descriptive Hand?

An editor laments the demise of the narrative. And welcomes its return.

Michael Kelly

The Nieman Foundation and Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism convened a panel of journalists to discuss nonfiction narrative writing during the annual conference that honors the work and life of journalist and Pulitzer Prize-winning author J. Anthony Lukas. Speaking as the new editor in chief of The Atlantic, Michael Kelly described how he intends to oversee "at least some rebirth of serious or ambitious narratives in at least one magazine." He then commented on some assertions about narrative writing in newspapers and magazines.

The first assertion is that most people who write for newspapers or for magazines cannot write a narrative. And the reason is that they cannot or have not learned to write that which is at the core of narrative, which is physical description and dialogue. The second assertion is that it has to some degree always been thus, but that it has gotten more so in this century and particularly in the last 30 or 40 years. And the third assertion is that the reason boils down to the lamentable, in this context, invention of the camera.

This century has been, among other things, a century of the camera. I think one effect has been to encourage writers and editors, at least subconsciously but pervasively, to adopt a kind of group belief that the great traditional role of the correspondent, as the observer of things who describes what his or her senses perceive, need no longer be fulfilled by a writer. There was no point in fulfilling it because the camera—first the still camera and then the moving camera—would do it better than we could. And we, in our role, in our 19th century role as correspondents, as people who would go to places and send back dispatches saying, "Here's what the battle looked like," or, "Here's what the eruption of the volcano looked like," and so on, that we had sort of lost our reason, or that reason, for being.

This is not universal. It's certainly not articulated and certainly not everybody believes in it. But I think that it has come to be a pervasive thing in America's newspapers and magazines, and I've seen it in my own life. When I wanted to go off and write dispatches on the Gulf War, I had a very simple model in mind. I wanted to write the classic correspondent's dispatch: to simply go to wherever I could go, see what I could see, hear what I could hear, and write

only that. I would not attempt any analysis of the war, not attempt any reporting beyond that which grew directly out of the events before me, and to file it in dispatch form for whomever would buy it.

When I went flogging this idea around to various agents and editors, it was pretty roundly rejected, and not only because I was an unknown writer and it was a perfectly reasonable idea to reject me, but because, as various people said to me, frankly, the whole idea was wrong. That this was a war that was going to be filled with cameras. The first night of bombing, there would be cameras there. There would be cameras throughout the war. Everything that could be described would be seen in many cases in real time, so the idea of filing a dispatch that a reader might read a week or even a month later was pointless, and sort of an anachronistic idea.

I see this also in the writing that comes to me as an editor. The thing that I most lament, and causes me most grief in manuscripts that come in from professional writers, from good writers, is the stunning lack of physical description. A writer will go to some interesting, fascinating and dangerous place, and will file a piece that will contain a great deal of terrific reporting on all sorts of levels—interviews, analysis and so on—and the story will simply be bereft of physical description, of the colorful, vivid scene painting that readers continue to love. It's a myth that readers have turned away from this and that in the age of the picture and now the age of Internet, that readers don't want it.

Readers of books, but also of magazines, every chance they get to reward this kind of writing, they show it over and over again. They do want descriptive writing, but very few writers—or relatively few, even in the kind of manuscripts we see at The Atlantic—seem to know how to do this. And this leads me to what I think is one of the long-term unfortunate effects of the camera on writing and that is the institutional effect on newsrooms.

I think Robert [Vare] is right to say that in newspapers today there is some renaissance of narrative writing. There are pieces, there are serious projects that are narrative and that are excellent. But it's notable that when Robert talked about that he spoke exclusively in terms of projects, big ambitious projects that newspapers undertake. These are projects that are intended to attract attention, to showcase the newspaper, maybe to win some prizes, and so on. What he didn't talk about was the day-to-day structure, the intellectual structure, if you will, of the city room. And that, I

think, has changed. I don't think there's been much of a renaissance in that and, even if there is, it will take years to reverse what I see as the damage.

My father was a newspaper reporter, a tabloid man at the old Daily News in Washington, and he was very much of a sort of writer that newspapers used to be filled with and used to greatly encourage and to treasure. He was somebody who would wander into work, sit around cracking wise with other people cracking wise, and then go off and cover a set event that other reporters would be at. But he'd do so with the understanding that he was to come back with the angle, the funny story, the feature treatment of it that would set his piece apart from the straight news guys. Or he'd just go off and wander around the city and come up with some story, some slice of human life feature.

There were three papers in Washington in those days, and there were half a dozen people who did exactly this sort of work. One of them was Tom Wolfe. And every day readers were treated to this kind of sketch writing; this was the shortest form of narrative, and readers loved it. And the people who ran newspapers knew that readers loved it, and they encouraged these people whose essential talents were not as reporters but as writers, physical description guys, and dialogue. They encouraged them and rewarded them and valued them.

I used to go and watch my father at work on some days. I'd go down there on Saturdays when he would do essentially nothing for most of the day. He'd talk to his friends, drink a few beers, then go to the circus, come back, and write up 800 words. Everybody would laugh, and then he would go home. This is why I went into journalism. It seemed to be the ideal life and neither my father nor anyone else told me I was witnessing the vanishing of an era, as if he was a buggy-whip manufacturer, and that had seemed to me a good line of work to get into.

Newspapers, I think, at least in part because of this sense that the camera does this kind of work, somehow over the years quit valuing, promoting, encouraging, hunting for this kind of talent, the sketch writer. And the result, you can see, I think, in every paper you pick up as a reader, in almost every story. In my father's time in newspapering, not every political reporter who worked in every paper in the country could, to put it mildly, write the kind of stuff, in terms of physical description, that [A.J.] Liebling wrote in "The Earl of Louisiana," in which he catches this marvelous picture of Earl Long mopping his brow with a handkerchief dipped in Pepsi-Cola on a hot summer night in the South.

And, of course, not everybody, not anybody could do that. But newspapers were filled with people who thought that's what they were supposed to aspire to. And the political columnist for even a second- or third-rate newspaper knew that when a presidential candidate came through town, and he went out to cover the speech, that one of the things that he was supposed to do was to paint some kind of theme of what this man looked like and what he sounded like and something to capture the spirit of the crowd and so on. You could read through a year's worth of political writing in the presidential year we're now in, read across the country,

newspaper to newspaper, and not find that.

This is true also in feature writing, in the kind of quick-profile writing such as the movie star who comes to town and you catch a quick interview and so on. And the result of this institutionally, in no intentional or planned way, has been to sort of destroy what was a kind of literary farm system in which all around the country there were people who were trying, aspiring to what Liebling could do, consciously or unconsciously. Whether they were thinking of Liebling himself, they were aspiring to this. They were learning this craft in small newspapers, and then, if they were good, the system that valued them would find them, would reward them, and would promote them. They would get to a better paper and a better paper, and if they kept learning the craft and they kept getting better they would end up in magazines, where they were greatly valued, and they could make a great deal of money and become stars.

The entire system told people who wrote for a living, in the journalistic sense, from the first day of the job, that they could chart a course on the strength of their writing, on the strength of their ability to describe things in a way that other people couldn't, describe them with more color or more wit, describe them in a way that was funnier than other people could do. And that if you did this, this would be quite systematically rewarded and encouraged and lead you up to a path to magazines and ultimately books. That farm system, somewhere along the way, broke down.

I hope that it is coming back to some degree in newspapers, but I think judging from what I see in manuscripts, it is a long road back. I know an awful lot of people who write professionally who simply don't understand that if you're describing, you know, a couple of Serb paramilitary thugs sitting in a room drinking slivovitz and talking, that you need to do something more than write that they're sitting there and drinking slivovitz and talking. You need to tell people what everything looks like.

The almost mechanical nature of doing this is something that many writers that I talk to don't know. For instance, they don't know that if you want to describe something in physical exactitude, and you're going to be writing days or weeks or, in some cases, months later, that you need a notebook that is filled not just with people's words but with physical descriptors. You need to have described the person's face and his clothes and everything about it or else you won't be able to do it later. It is almost as if a kind of school for writing, at least for narrative writing, has been lost because of the loss of this core talent, the ability to describe things.

I hope it gets better. ■

Narrative Storytelling in a Drive-By Medium

A local television reporter finds ways to go beyond the usual coverage.

By Carolyn Mungo

It seems the goal of local television news is to get the story fast, tell it first, and be done in less than a minute. Some may wonder if there is any room for storytelling. Is the art of the narrative a thing of the past on television news? Eleven years and four local television stations later, I submit that the craft of storytelling is not dead. The challenges are greater, but so are the rewards.

I am a general assignment reporter at a local TV station in Houston, Texas. It is a news operation striving for balance between the fast-paced action of fires and drive-by shootings and the critical need for in-depth reporting about the community around us. I was hired six months ago with a resumé tape that showed no coverage of fires, murders or car accidents. The sample of my work included stories that demonstrated my strengths as a reporter—my ability to get close to subjects and people in ways that make the viewer want to take notice of their stories. Among those I selected for this tape was an in-depth report on a 14-year-old girl. She was a drug addict, newly pregnant, and trying to decide how to handle the challenges that were ahead.

Where do I find such stories? I found that one on the top of my husband's dresser one fall afternoon. It was a crumpled-up piece of paper. It came from a student in his eighth-grade class. It read, "Dear Mr. Niezgoda, I just got back from the hospital after being treated for an overdose. I also found out I am 2 months pregnant. Well gotta go. Angie."

That note was the beginning of a process in which I followed a 14-year-old recovering methamphetamine addict on her journey toward giving birth. Getting written consent from her mother was a challenge, but not as big of a challenge as getting my managers to allow me to follow her during the



Videotape images capture the emotions of a pregnant 14-year-old and a young boy in detention. *Courtesy of KPNX-TV.*

course of seven months. Remember this is "local" television news. I was told I could do it, but I would have to work around other daily assignments if I wanted to capture the critical moments I knew I needed. I would not be

able to shadow this girl's life as documentary reporters are able to do.

Nonetheless, I felt this was an important story to tell as a way to get at a lot of broader issues involving teenagers and sex and pregnancy, and be-

lieved that this approach was the way to tell it. Since Arizona—where I was then working at KPFX in Phoenix—has the highest rate of births to teens in the nation, I was convinced this was a story viewers would connect with. Yet given my position as a local TV reporter, I realized that I was about to take on a massive hit-and-miss project with the outcome unknown. Although this story was not going to go forward in precisely the way I wanted, I knew that I could connect with this 14-year-old and eventually be able to carry the process through. Such decision-making requires an inner confidence and, yes, a little bit of an ego.

Some shoots were scheduled during my normal workday. Those shoots were done when there were plenty of reporters available to cover the news of the day. On those days, I pitched my plans to the executive producer. My photographer and I then followed Angie at school, after school, and watched as she tried to convince her boyfriend and the father of her child to stay off drugs. But other shoots were done between my work on daily stories. My photographer and I squeezed in some shoots instead of taking a lunch break or after a five o'clock live shot on a daily story. We'd drive to Angie's and capture whatever was going on at the time. Did we have to do it that way? No. We wanted to do it that way. We saw these compelling moments in her life and knew our audience would want to see them, too.

We also taped counseling sessions for pregnant teenagers and daycare centers at local high schools. In my narration, I was able to weave in facts about teen pregnancy and services that were available, even though Angie refused to participate in any of them. In fact, she dropped out of school and her boyfriend's life became what defined her world. During this narrative piece,



Videotape image of Sister Alice Potts with patient. *Courtesy of KHOU-TV.*

I told Angie's story but I also told the story of what happens to so many young girls who find themselves in a situation like hers.

We were right about the powerful drama of this story. Angie's last-minute decision not to give her baby to an adoptive family but to raise the child in poverty was an element that literally took our breath away. Two months later, Angie voiced those same emotions in front of our camera: "I don't know where the diapers are going to come from. I had to use a washrag this morning."

Our teen pregnancy hotline following the documentary lit up for hours after the segment aired. At each commercial break, we showed our hotline number and urged those who felt they needed help to call. Phones had been set up in our studios and were staffed by counselors and social workers during and after the broadcast. By the response we received, we knew Angie's story had touched a nerve.

I used to think that good storytelling in local television happened only if a reporter was given a lot of time to do the story and a lot of time to tell it, as was the case in the story about Angie. But I have learned since then that is not always the case. When I set out to tell the story of several nine-year-old boys in a juvenile detention facility, I was able to work on the story for five days and still tell it in a narrative form. Much of the work during those five days

involved negotiating with the facility's managers to gain the kind of access we'd need to shoot the children's faces. The negotiations were tough and we did not win on every point. But in the end we gained the access we needed to three boys, and their stories helped to move my reporting forward.

Ten thousand kids in Maricopa County, Arizona, walk through the doors of detention every year. An increasing number of them are eight and nine years old.

I believed it was important to try to learn as much as we could from them about why this is happening. And then I wanted to explore what their stories tell us about the community we live in and the ways in which children are being raised and looked after. I have found that one important ingredient in narrative stories is taking viewers into places where they rarely go and giving them the ability to understand the experiences of those who are there. When this story was aired on our 10 o'clock news broadcast, it shocked quite a few of our viewers who had no idea little white, blonde-haired, blue-eyed boys were being locked up in a little room night after night, sometimes for months on end.

We called the piece "The Littlest Suspects." It was not told in a minute. Instead, the station allocated four minutes. Once the station managers saw the rough cut of the story, they recognized the power of the piece they were about to air. I no longer had to fight for time to tell the story; the story, itself, earned the extra minutes.

I've also come to understand that how much time a reporter is given to tell the story is not the critical issue. What is most important is having a character whose story and presence is compelling enough to take viewers to these places they have never been so they can see things in ways they haven't seen them before. I was in Houston three months before I met Sister Alice

Potts. She is a chaplain at the world-renowned M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. Instead of doing a series of on-camera interviews with colleagues and patients who could tell me how great she and the work she does are, I had the camera follow Sister Alice. That's all. At 75 years old, she's been a chaplain at the hospital for more than a quarter of a century. Her spunk, her style, her outlook on cancer, definitely provided a story worth telling.

I shot the Sister Alice story in one day. It aired the same night that a shooting and a fire and a lot of other bad news appeared in our newscast. The piece came on after the first commercial break. In my opinion, it was a much-needed breather from the dismal way in which the other news portrayed the city that night.

Great stories are told when reporters find the right people. It is through their eyes and experiences that the best stories are told and remembered. Finding such voices and fitting their words into a broader context of under-

standing doesn't happen standing in front of the emergency room doing a live shot for the 10 o'clock news. It happens when a reporter goes behind the emergency room doors and reaches the people who work on the other side. It might not be a story for that night's broadcast. But it might become an unforgettable story for some night in the future.

In the changing media environment, local television news is confronting many new challenges. Being a reporter in the newsroom, I don't know every detail of what our industry is facing. But I think I do know something about what people like watching.

It seems ironic to me that the audiences who often complain about negative coverage are the same ones who are seemingly drawn to the murder-of-the-day approach to telling the news. I realize ratings cannot be maintained without doing what it takes to pull in that core audience, but I suggest that local news stations strive for a balance.

Weaving words and pictures to-

gether is something television relies on. Yet, too often what gets put on local newscasts are pictures of disastrous events, selected because of the emotional punch the images deliver and ease by which they can be gathered. Words often seem to be irrelevant, sort of interchangeable except for the location each night. Sadly, one fire story blends in with the next, when in reality there are very different and compelling stories to tell, stories about people and what will happen to them now. This kind of reporting takes longer, requires creativeness and perseverance, but in the end gives us, as reporters, greater satisfaction and gives our viewers the kind of news coverage they will long remember. ■

Carolyn Mungo currently works as a reporter for KHOU, the CBS station in Houston. A nine-time Emmy award-winner, she has twice been honored with a World Medal by the International New York Festivals.

Combining Narrative With Analysis

By grounding stories in a broader context, their messages are better understood.

By Laura Sessions Stepp

My new book, "Our Last Best Shot," began as a personal quest. My son Jeff, then 11, was showing signs of early adolescence—you know, big feet and a mouth to match—and I hadn't a clue how to react. What did I need to know to guide him successfully through the next few years? If adolescence was typically a time of turmoil, as I had heard, how would I know when he was really in trouble?

Unable to find a book to help me—those in my local bookstores and library focused on older teens—I decided to write what I could not find. But what form should the book take?

I considered adopting the feature style of most newspapers, telling stories of kids in traditional narrative fashion. But would that be enough? Au-

thors often ask (or should ask) for whom they are writing. An equally important question is what the needs of those readers are.

I had read books about kids by several fine narrative journalists including Alex Kotlowitz, Tracy Kidder, and Edward Humes. Their stories had moved me as a reader but didn't satisfy me as a parent. I wanted to know how experts would analyze the accounts of the children's lives. I also wanted to hear what they, as gifted observers, had concluded about the kids they covered and whether as a working mother I could use any of what they had learned. I didn't have time to ponder or try to read between the lines. I found the explanatory notes at the end of such books, which some authors provide, unwieldy.

I knew from covering children and families for The Washington Post that top scientists were beginning to pay attention to kids from age 10 to 15. But their findings, some of them startling, were neither easily accessible nor very readable. I realized I could play a helpful role by translating their results in ways parents and other adults could understand and use.

I also knew from writing for the Post's Style Plus, a daily page focused on stories affecting ordinary people, that readers devour issues presented up close and personal. So I abandoned the traditional writing approach and break up each narrative with scientific explanation and personal analysis. As I set out to report and write, on leave from the Post, I had no idea of the size of the task I had assumed.

Letting Youngsters Tell Their Stories

In an effort to appeal to a broad readership, I sought kids in three very different communities: urban Los Angeles, medium-sized Durham, North Carolina, and rural Ulysses, Kansas, a town of 6,000. I looked for diversity in the kids, also, using measurable tools such as family income, race and ethnicity, family composition and school performance. I avoided extremes.

I observed 18 youngsters from August 1996 through July 1997. When I started writing in the subsequent year, I narrowed the group to 12. It was tempting to base the book on one child only, one family or one community. Any of those three approaches would have made the reporting and writing easier but also made it more likely that readers would dismiss my findings as exceptions. To identify the assets all kids need to pass successfully through early adolescence, I had to cast my net as wide as I could and still be able to write with intimacy, clarity and drama.

Reporting “Our Last Best Shot” required sustained, focused observation of minute details. As any nonfiction writer knows, such things as physical appearance, tone of voice, even photographs displayed at home can flesh out, reinforce, or contradict what a subject says. Chip Thomson of Durham swore to me during one visit that he was no longer using drugs, but his red eyes and chafed, runny nose told a different story. Angela Perales of Ulysses

them. On my first visit to the state hospital outside Durham where Chandler Brennan stayed for four months, I jotted down descriptions of the playground and kids’ bikes outside. Those notes came in handy later as I wrote about Chandler’s father Daniel driving onto the hospital grounds one afternoon for a visit, and weeping in memory of the sweet, compliant little girl Chandler once had been.

I spent hours and hours with families so that they would learn to relax around me. Sometimes this included staying overnight in their homes, my notebook tucked away in a suitcase. On one such evening in South Central Los Angeles, I watched eight hours of action adventure movies on TV with a boy, his mom and dad. The next morning, Dad puttered around the kitchen in a worn, navy blue bathrobe—a sign that I had succeeded in putting him at ease.

The kids preferred being observed and interviewed away from home: in a school classroom, at a pizza joint, at the mall. I learned a lot when they were gabbing with their friends, probably because they forgot I was there. It was in a Los Angeles mall’s food court, for example, listening to Libby Sigel and two other seventh-graders discuss the meaning of “blow jobs,” “jacking off,” and other sexual terms, that I first began to truly grasp how adolescent friends define for each other the dynamics of human relationships, and how important such conversations are to kids as they learn how to convey new feelings.

her about my parents’ divorce. This past spring, four years after our initial conversations, a reporter asked Alana why she had talked to me so candidly. “We have a lot in common,” Alana replied. “Her mother left her, too.”

In between trips to the three sites, I combed through science journals, specialized publications and local newspapers, attended conferences, and interviewed experts in the sciences. I hired graduate students to help with the reading, reminding them that our focus was to answer my chief question of what makes young adolescents do well or poorly.

My research also took place in my own house, at my son’s school, and on the bleachers of the ballpark. I shared my observations and findings freely with friends, acquaintances and teachers, listening for their corroboration or disbelief, shaping my emerging conclusions. If this sounds like a 24-hour-a-day project, it was, almost. Blessedly, I rarely dreamed about it.

Using Explanatory Journalism as the Book’s Thread

By the second year, when I began to write in earnest, I had decided that young adolescents spend most of their time and energy figuring out four things: what kind of person they are, how and whether they fit in with their friends, what they are learning, and how they can both distance themselves from and remain connected to adults. I decided that each of those four pursuits would become its own section in the book and selected three kids—one from each community—to illustrate each aspect of their journey.

Each child’s story consisted of four long anecdotes (the narrative), told in chronological order. Between each anecdote I did what I once wished other writers would do: I analyzed the anecdote for what it revealed about the particular child and about children in general. I discovered that such explanatory journalism forces a writer to think harder than any other kind of writing. It’s like spinning out one nut graf after another.

Book writing taught me to be a keener observer and a more careful listener. It also reinforced the importance of keeping an open mind about my subjects.

didn’t have to describe how deeply she depended on her friends; the 50-plus pictures on display in her bedroom were all the evidence I needed.

I took notes on everything, unsure which scenes I would want to recreate later or the meaning I would attach to

In order to elicit intimate details from these families, I had to be willing to share my own experiences as a child and a parent. Angela’s sister Alana, for example, was reluctant to talk about her mother abandoning her and Angela when they were young until I told

Since I could not be present at all the key events in each of the kids' lives, nor know in advance which occasions might become significant later, I re-constructed some of the anecdotes. I alerted readers early in the book that some events and dialogues were based on firsthand accounts of others, as well as on interviews and written records.

I consulted several people in order to write most scenes and was always glad that I had. For example, when I finally tracked down Alana's and Angela's mother, her version of why she left her daughters at ages three and five differed from what they and the

myself weighing whether certain potentially embarrassing details were absolutely necessary to make a point. If they were, I would write and rewrite to soften the hard edges.

Before I turned the book in, I read each chapter to the child and family involved. On the few occasions where objections were raised, I discussed my reasons and made changes that satisfied us both.

Early into the project I had wondered what voice I should assume. Would my voice be that of a detached observer? Or would I assume the role of a passionate advocate? The affection I came to feel for these families,

combined with the problems with which they struggled, provided the answer. I adopted with readers the same role I tried to play with my subjects, that of a trusted, hopefully clear-eyed friend. My readers became the proverbial neighbors at backyard fences whom young journalists are told to address when figuring out their stories. I wrote the last chapter, entitled "From My Home To Yours," particularly in this spirit, putting away notes and writing from the heart what I had learned about young adolescents.

Returning to the Newspaper Beat

Chronicling the lives of the rich or famous is a sexy beat. It wins reporters spots on the front page, not to mention dinner party invitations. But it's not nearly as personally rewarding, in my view, as writing about ordinary people. I'm now back at the Post writing about the ordinary with more confidence and flair. (At least that's what my editors tell me.)

Book writing taught me to be a

I considered adopting the feature style of most newspapers, telling stories of kids in traditional narrative fashion. But would that be enough?

keener observer and a more careful listener. It also reinforced the importance of keeping an open mind about my subjects. When I'm inclined to make a snap judgment, I recall the afternoon I accompanied a Ulysses' girl named Shannon to her basketball game. Prior to the game, Shannon sat with her mother a few yards away from her teammates. I assumed she was too shy to mingle but she corrected my impression months later. She had hung out with Mom because "I'm more into the game, and Mom is too. All these other girls do is talk about boys and they don't even watch."

"Our Last Best Shot" is selling well, reinforcing my belief that journalists' stories, long or short, need to have a point and make that point clearly. Our prose may be as lyrical as a Keats poem, but if our readers have to guess what we're trying to say we shall lose many of them. As I write each section of a newspaper story now, I ask myself more consciously than before, "Will this surprise my readers?" "Will it change the way they think or act?" "If not, do I need it?"

As seasoned reporters who know our beat we should not shy away from speaking with authority. This comes, as Poynter Institute leader Chip Scanlan says, by not only getting the facts right but choosing the right facts.

And then not being afraid to say what they mean. ■

Laura Sessions Stepp is the author of "Our Last Best Shot: Guiding Our Children Through Early Adolescence" (2000, Riverhead Books). A staff writer at The Washington Post, she chairs the board of advisors of the Casey Journalism Center for Children and Families at the University of Maryland.

...to elicit intimate details from these families, I had to be willing to share my own experiences as a child and a parent.

girls' father had told me. They had not been comfortable confiding that she had been a drug addict. She told me right away.

Since the anecdotes that best illustrated key issues for my book were not always dramatic, the temptation to exaggerate for effect was sometimes great. Fortunately, I usually had enough striking events to work with because, over time, crises and struggles occur in even the most outwardly placid lives. I remember one farmer in Ulysses agreeing to a first interview but warning me, "We're pretty boring." Five months later, his wife received a telephone call from a daughter she had given birth to 19 years earlier when she was unmarried and dating her first love. She had released the baby to an adoption agency and not heard from her since. Her four children did not know they had a half-sister, and she decided to tell them. Boring, indeed.

Time also meant that I became attached to the kids and some of their family members. The reporter in me wanted to write about their lives, no holds barred, but the mother in me wanted to protect their privacy. I found

Literary Nonfiction Constructs a Narrative Foundation

In college classes, students read great storytellers and learn how to tell a story.

By Madeleine Blais

Just about every fall, I teach a course called “Readings in Journalism” to sophomore pre-journalism majors at the University of Massachusetts and to visiting students from Amherst, Smith, Mt. Holyoke and Hampshire Colleges. Similar courses with titles such as “Creative Nonfiction,” “The Literature of Fact,” “The Writer in Society,” and “Writing in the Documentary Tradition” are taught at colleges throughout the country.

My students often have only the vaguest notion of what has drawn them to this subject matter, and questionnaires that I have them fill out on the first day always confirm that I have my work cut out for me. Some choice responses from over the years: Philip Caputo: “a famous sportscaster.” Homer Bigart: “old time movie star.” The New Yorker: “a magazine my aunt gets, about, I think, New York.”

From this unpromising beginning, it would be tempting to create a syllabus that rectifies such wholesale ignorance from the ground up and to include every worthy work of nonfiction I can think of, but no one course could possibly take on the burden of so much prose. My hope is that the narrative style these authors employ will resonate with the students as they move along in their preparation to be journalists. Although many of them might end up recognizing that such sustained projects are not for them, at least they will have developed a taste and admiration for the best in this burgeoning tradition.

It’s easy enough to create a wish list of all the books I’d like to expose my students to during a given semester so I ensure that they emerge from the class with a sense of this wonderful hybrid form. My hardest job is winnowing selections down to a meaningful assortment that produces conversation

My hope is that the narrative style these authors employ will resonate with the students as they move along in their preparation to be journalists.

among the students about the ways in which these authors approached writing and a discussion about the larger cultural context of their work, as well.

Literary nonfiction has a deep American backbone, fixed in the democratic notion that real stories about real people are worth telling. Literary nonfiction not only honors all the shibboleths of classical storytelling, but it also welcomes the best of other disciplines into the mix, giving it melting pot inclusiveness. Consider the great workhorses of the genre, books such as “Common Ground” and “Hiroshima,” “In Cold Blood,” “The Executioner’s Song,” “Dispatches,” “A Rumor of War,” and “Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.” Then, contemplate how these authors broke apart the boundaries between history and biography and sociology to create a whole new coinage.

This fall I will teach Norman Mailer’s “The Executioner’s Song.” It’s long, more than 1,000 pages, but accessible. I find the story of Gary Gilmore, the two-bit two-time killer who demanded that the state live up to its obligation to execute him, is as compelling now as it was 20 years ago when the book was published. One of the most fascinating exercises would-be journalists can do while reading this book is look at the stunning variety of ways in which information is obtained to piece together the narrative. This work should have particular appeal in the fall of 2000, thanks to a presidential election in which the wanton use of the death

penalty is the unspoken running mate of one of the candidates. My students will also read the essay “The Hanging” by George Orwell as part of the course and, I hope, get some sense of Mailer’s other writings along the way, in particular his political reporting with its icon-smashing brilliance.

Although I don’t want to make crime and punishment the overwhelming focus of the course, Ted Conover’s “Newjack,” in which the author posed as a prison guard at Sing Sing for a year, will be required reading. An Amherst college alum, Conover is going to be in the area for guest lectures and classroom appearances in October, and nothing makes a book more vivid than the opportunity to meet its author. In all of his work, Conover relies on a certain kind of immersion journalism, often going undercover. For “Newjack,” he got a job as a corrections officer. He has also passed himself off as a hobo, a caterer and an illegal immigrant. What are the ethics of such subterfuge? Does it always yield the best story?

I especially enjoy teaching when the examination of one book leads gracefully to the examination of another, and the Mailer/Conover dyad should yield a nifty one-two punch. When “The Executioner’s Song” was published, Joan Didion’s review of it was featured on the front page of The New York Times Book Review. The students will read that, as well as an essay or two from “Slouching Towards Bethlehem,” before taking on Didion’s book “Mi-

ami,” which will have added urgency thanks to the Elian crisis. This discussion will be supplemented by our reading Tim Golden’s first-rate piece in *The New York Times* in April about the extended Gonzalez family. Perhaps I’ll add some video snippets from “The Buena Vista Social Club.” (“Videocillin,” we call it in the classroom, a wonder drug that wakes up even the sleepest students).

I worked in Miami for many years, arriving there when it was still a pastel backwater brimming with retirees who lived for their early-bird specials. The Cubans in the mid-70’s were still considered a quaint subculture, what with their piñata shops, their thick high-octane coffee, and their elaborate coming out parties called “quinzes” for their 15-year-old daughters. It was assumed that they would be returning any minute to their island paradise. Didion’s “Miami” documents the thwarted efforts of Cuban-Americans to reclaim their homeland. An interesting companion piece is an essay James Agee wrote for *Fortune* in the fall of 1937; it is called “Havana Cruise,” and in it he describes the journey of a group of middle class tourists to Cuba.

Most of the students appreciate a book or two that speaks to or about their age group. “Remembering Denny” by Calvin Trillin is one of my all-time favorites in this regard. It is the author’s very middle-aged recollection of a golden boy from Yale in the 50’s who was twice the subject of major adulterous pieces in *Life* magazine, but who led a shadowed life that not only fell short of its glittering early promise but ended in a mostly unhailed suicide. Trillin’s evocation of his Yale, of that time and place, is oddly captivating for students, leading them inevitably to thoughts about how they would capture their collegiate experience and to queasy conjecture about whether there exists someone they know now about whom they might write a similar book in 30 years.

“Our Guys,” about the rape of a retarded girl by a group of athletes in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, also holds their attention, but the writing is a bit cumbersome. Sports is always an easy sell, especially Buzz Bissinger’s “Friday

Night Lights” and Doris Kearns Goodwin’s “Wait Till Next Year.”

Last year, the University of Chicago Press published a terrific collection of Mike Royko’s greatest hits called “One More Time.” The students love his punch and honesty and any discussion of his work leads inevitably to columnists Patricia Smith, Mike Barnicle, and now Jeff Jacoby of *The Boston Globe* and the shared fate of their chastisement for not living up to standards of journalistic practice. Would Rokyo make it at the *Globe* today?

Just as the four sisters in “Little Women” believed that Christmas without presents isn’t Christmas, a course in literary journalism without the heavy-duty presence of *The New Yorker* would be fatally flawed. The short character studies in “In the Old Hotel” by Joseph Mitchell provide a perfect starting point. Lillian Ross’s collection, “Reporting,” is also brilliant, especially the portrait on the high school kids from the Mid-

west on a field trip to New York City and the profile of Hemingway. I am also thinking of requiring Susan Orlean’s “The Orchid Thief” as a primary example of how a writer can take a small subject and make it sing.

In our short time together, there is not time for us to read and talk about many of the great narrative writers. But they are out there, waiting to be discovered by this next generation. And perhaps, as some of them begin careers as journalists, voices from the pages of these books will echo in ways that inspire them to mesh what is best about the narrative tradition with what is the essential mission of journalism. ■

Madeleine Blais, 1986 Nieman Fellow, teaches at the University of Massachusetts. She is the author of several books, including the forthcoming “Uphill Walkers: Biography of a Family,” to be published by Grove Atlantic in the spring.

Me and the System: The Personal Essay and Health Policy

By Fitzhugh Mullan

A new section called “Narrative Matters” began appearing last summer in Health Affairs, a bimonthly policy journal. As Founding Editor John K. Iglehart wrote, “I never regarded publishing material that emphasizes the personal, the subjective, and the autobiographical as its reason for being. But through a confluence of factors, I have come to believe that we could enrich the journal by nurturing a form of health policy writing that affords greater opportunity for new voices to contribute to future debates.” In its July/August 1999 issue, Fitzhugh Mullan, a physician and clinical professor of pediatrics and public health at the George Washington University and staff physician at the Upper Cardozo Community Health Center, introduced the new section with an essay entitled “Me and the System: The Personal Essay and Health Policy.” Mullan now serves as the editor of “Narrative Matters.” Excerpts from his essay follow.

The personal essay as a policy piece has a strong tradition in medicine. Atul Gawande, writing “When Doctors Make Mistakes” this year in *The New Yorker*, and David Hilfiker, writing “Facing Our Mistakes” in the *New England Journal of Medicine* some years ago, raise the difficult and troubling issues about physicians’ shortcomings as seen in their own practices. The eloquence of these candid reflections and the fact that this is an area about which few physicians write combine to make these narratives classics.

Natural as it might seem as an art form, the writing of the personal narrative is not without hazards. Its very spontaneity can be a problem. To work, the essay must be an intimate document in which the writer shares observations and thoughts with candor. Yet

our own spontaneous inner voices do not always make good copy. They can wander, suffer from mean-spiritedness or naiveté, groan under the load of ego, or arrive on the page as trivial

ponents of the personal essay. Although personal observation holds a time-honored place in the history of science, the subjective characteristics of the personal essay are not prominent values

sonal, frequently dramatic, and always laced with controversy. It is a rich domain for chroniclers who draw on the personal and the subjective—fiction writers, TV producers, and cinematographers—as well as for the writer of the first-person narrative. The personal narrative is indisputably a compelling vehicle for transporting perspective and opinion about health policy issues. The first-person essay, in fact, can lend perspective and vitality to issues that are appropriately and simultaneously being explored and written about in a quantitative and analytic fashion. Personal reflections can add dimension and depth that will make the issue both more lucid and more interesting. The challenge for a journal whose principal product is analytic and not literary is to find writers who can steer their way between the hazards of ego and introspection on the one hand and pure editorializing on the other....

Human beings have always had sto-

The best first-person essays are unobtrusively first person, creating a comfortable atmosphere for the reader where the message of the narrative is not obscured by the personality of the messenger.

despite our previous belief that they were visionary. This problem is compounded because the personal essayist writes not only about himself but about other people. The essayist must find a voice that is candid enough to sustain the personal quality but is simultaneously fair to others involved in the story—patients, spouses, family and colleagues. Calibrating the role of the “I” in the first person is difficult as well. First-person narratives are effective because the reader wants to see inside the life of another person, to compare lots, to identify with or, on occasion, reject being identified with the writer. Yet “I” and “me” can easily become oppressive, turning the reader off and undercutting both the art and the import of the piece. The best first-person essays are unobtrusively first person, creating a comfortable atmosphere for the reader where the message of the narrative is not obscured by the personality of the messenger.

The Power of Anecdote

Writing about one’s own experience is an exercise in subjectivity. The very power of the personal essay comes from the view of the world as seen through the eyes of the writer who is unapologetically the arbiter of fact and significance in the narrative. The circumstances reported and the valence they are given are the sole and unchallenged domain of the writer. Anecdote, attitude, prejudice, and point of view are prominent and important com-

ponents of the personal essay. Although personal observation holds a time-honored place in the history of science, the subjective characteristics of the personal essay are not prominent values

in clinical medicine. Yet, important as the arguments are for the use of quantitative science to inform clinical and policy decisions, the anecdote—the report of life events from an unabashedly subjective vantage point—remains a powerful tool for focusing the human mind. The historian and health policy commentator Dan Fox is fond of saying that, for better or worse, “The plural of anecdote is policy....”

The question then may well be asked about the appropriateness of the personal narrative, with its cargo of subjectivity, in a health policy journal. Health care—giving it, getting it, administering it, teaching it—is a realm of human enterprise that is often per-

...the anecdote—the report of life events from an unabashedly subjective vantage point—remains a powerful tool for focusing the human mind. The historian and health policy commentator Dan Fox is fond of saying that, for better or worse, ‘The plural of anecdote is policy....’

ries—and always will. Health (and health policy) is a quintessentially human realm, and its stories are as vivid and revealing as those from any area of human endeavor. Even as we move to put decision-making in health on a firmer, more quantitative basis, our stories can help to maintain perspective and promote wisdom. That is the mission of “Narrative Matters.” ■

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Photojournalism

James Nachtwey's book "Inferno" is a collection of 382 photographs depicting the horrific brutality and suffering of people who are entrapped by war, famine or political unrest. Its publication offers an opportunity to reflect not only on his extraordinary and courageous career as a photojournalist but on how, in this time of visual onslaught, images such as these are absorbed and their messages acted upon.

In his Los Angeles Times review of "Inferno," David Rieff, co-editor of "Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know," challenged those who view Nachtwey's photographs to consider the following: "...whether the level at which photographs touch their viewers, which as Nachtwey points out is 'more visceral, more elemental, closer to raw experience,' is one that really gives them the information they need to make the political judgment in order to mitigate the horrors Nachtwey's pictures chronicle... [T]here is something dangerously simplistic about simply demanding a response to the sufferings of victims without specifying what that response should be."

Several writers and photographers consider this question, among others, in essays that accompany images taken by Nachtwey and others photojournalists. Nachtwey's views are heard in quotes excerpted from interviews.* Photographer **Michele McDonald** ('88 NF) reviews "Inferno," calling it "the most unbearable book I have ever looked through." Images of death and terror still inhabit the dreams and wakefulness of **Steve Northup** ('74 NF), who covered the Vietnam War as a UPI staff photographer. Yet he deplores the relative absence of such photographic images now due to Pentagon policy and journalistic compliance. "We have sanitized war, or its images... this is a terrible disservice to all of us..." Novelist **Philip Caputo**, who as a foreign correspondent covered several major conflicts, finds no reason why those who photograph war need to justify the images they send home. Imparting information, he believes, ought to be enough.

Brent Staples, writing in the Editorial Observer column in The New York Times, described his reaction to seeing an exhibition of lynching photographs. "There is an unbearable measure of horror here," he wrote, "that I have no interest in learning to endure." His unwillingness to look long at these images led him to conclude: "With these horrendous pictures loose in the culture, the ultimate effect could easily be to normalize images that are in fact horrible."

Three war photojournalists then describe—in words and photographs—what it is like to do their jobs on the frontlines of ethnic struggles in a panel discussion sponsored by The Crimes of War Project and The Freedom Forum. "Basically we're alone," said **Ron Haviv**, "left up to our own wits." **Mary Kay Magistad** ('00 NF), formerly National Public Radio's Beijing correspondent, writes about her friend, journalist Kurt Schork, his death by snipers in Sierra Leone, and the risks journalists take to cover war. And former **Royal Marines** talk about how they teach journalists to be safer while reporting conflicts.

*Quotes are from interviews Nachtwey gave to the Lehrer NewsHour, The Boston Phoenix, The Capital Times, and the Dartmouth Alumni magazine. Excerpts were also taken from the Afterword he wrote for "Inferno." ■

James Nachtwey Photographs

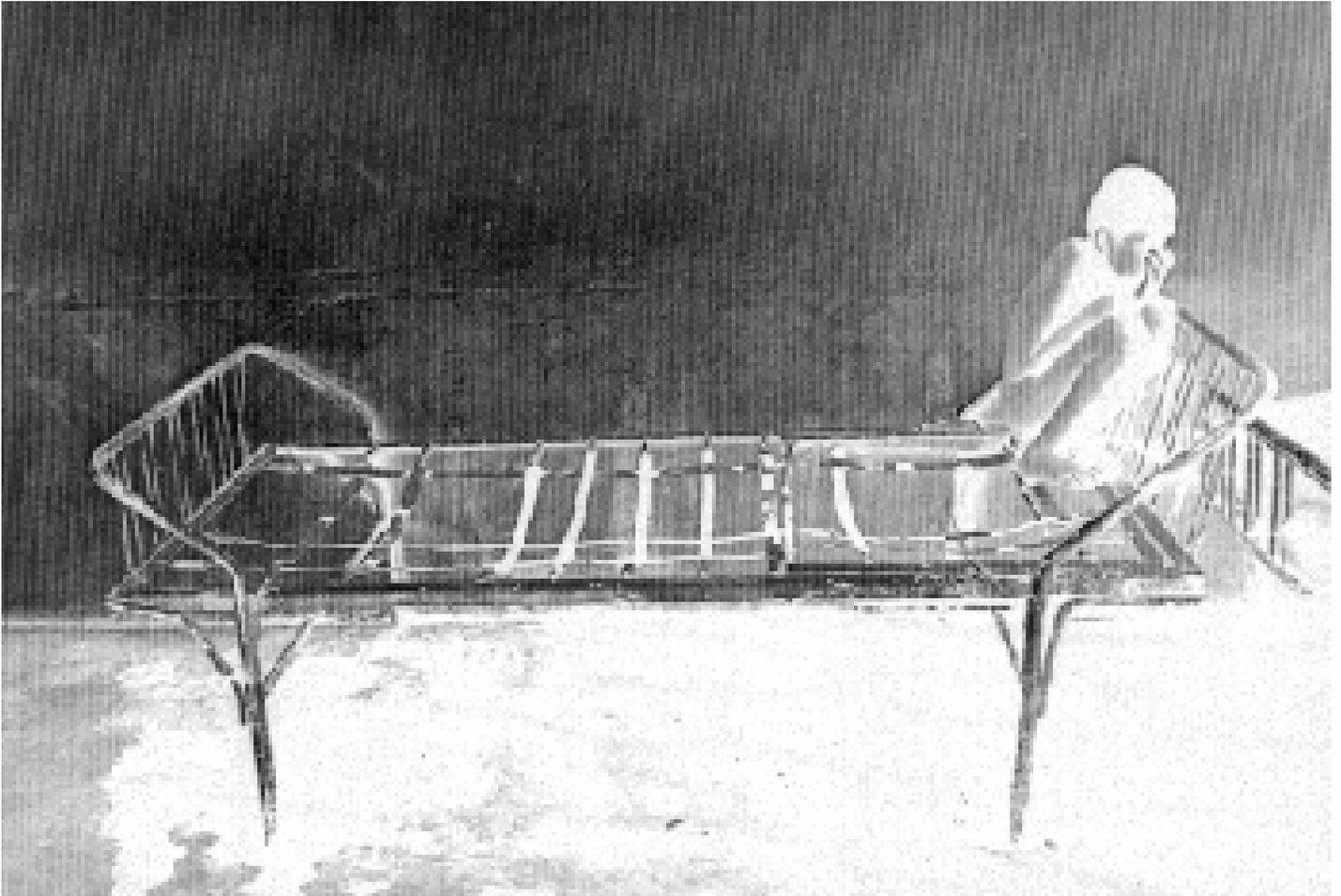


A Hutu man who did not support the genocide had been imprisoned in a concentration camp, starved, and attacked with machetes. He managed to survive, and after he was freed was placed in the care of the Red Cross. © James Nachtwey/courtesy Phaidon Press.

“There’s a tension between the objective and subjective in reporting. The feelings you have about what you’ve witnessed—anger, disbelief, compassion—those feelings have to be channeled into your photographs. In front of you are objective facts, but photography is a process of selection: how you perceive the light, what you leave out of the frame. These are all factors in creating a certain effect, and I want to create an effect.”

— Nachtwey

“I deal with raw evidence, but I want it to have a sense of deeper emotion. Compassion is the unifying force in this book—compassion in the face of injustice, struggle, tragedy and loss.”— Nachtwey



Romania, 1990. Inside an institution for “incurables.” © James Nachtwey/courtesy Phaidon Press.

“If I cave in, if I fold up because of the emotional obstacles that are in front of me, I’m useless. There is no point in me being there in the first place. And I think if you go to places where people are experiencing these kinds of tragedies with a camera, you have a responsibility. The value of it is to make an appeal to the rest of the world, to create an impetus where change is possible through public opinion. Public opinion is created through awareness. My job is to help create the awareness.” — Nachtwey

“I don’t want to let people off the hook. I don’t want to make these pictures easy to look at. I want to ruin people’s day if I have to. I want to stop them in their tracks and make them think of people beyond themselves.” — Nachtwey

The Unbearable Weight of Witness

Vivid images of war and famine make human misery impossible to ignore.

Inferno

James Nachtwey

Phaidon Press. 480 Pages. \$125.

By Michele McDonald

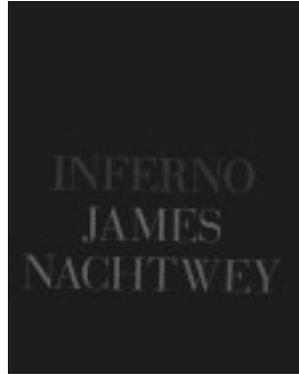
“Inferno,” James Nachtwey’s new collection of photographs, is the most unbearable book I have ever looked through. His 382 black and white photos are so visually striking and so awful in the suffering, pain, inhumanity and death they show that many say such pictures are better not taken.

Some accuse Nachtwey of exploiting the suffering of others, of being a voyeur of the worst sort. I say, “Buy this book.” Give a copy to your library, to your synagogue or church if you have one, to every high school and college in the country. If you can’t endure looking at the photographs yourself, then at least you will leave it for others to confront, as you have, the horrors that humans are capable of enduring but also of perpetrating on each other.

His photographs do not offer solutions even as they starkly illuminate the brutalities that war and famine and other disasters create. Nor do these images explain the political complexities of the agony and despair and courage that they capture in Romania, Somalia, Sudan, Bosnia, Rwanda, Zaire, Chechnya and Kosovo. (The photos from India portraying the daily lives of “untouchables” seem misplaced in this book of horrors.)

But do images such as these need to perform these roles? Do photographs of human struggle need to do more than provide us a window through which we can witness what so often we shield ourselves from seeing? I think not.

Nachtwey is a stunning photographer. His photographs are beautiful, compositionally complex, almost too perfect. One wonders how he holds his camera steady, sets the exposure right, creates a striking, even elegant, composition when faced with a naked, starving man crawling towards an emergency feeding center as he did in Sudan? Or when he photographs disabled children in unbelievably degraded conditions in Romanian orphanages? Or when he lies next to



*“There sighs,
lamentations and loud
wailings resounded
through the starless air,
so that from the
beginning it made me
weep.”—Dante Alighieri,
“Divine Comedy:
Inferno”*

a Chechen rebel shooting from a destroyed building on the frontline? As a photographer, I don’t know, but he does it, again and again.

The raw content of his photographs clashes with their controlled form and this magnifies how terribly disturbing they are. The book itself physically reproduces this clash. It is an expensive (\$125), massive black book, weighing in at just under 10 pounds with huge photographs—many double spreads are a single picture just four inches shy of two feet long, gorgeously printed on creamy white paper. Given the vivid and horrifying content of the pictures, it isn’t surprising people react so vehemently to this presentation. Who would not shudder at the thought of looking at such images in what appears to be an art book?

But “Inferno” is not an art book. Nachtwey is bearing witness. With all the considerable intelligence and talent he possesses, he photographs the evil that might be within our power to correct. He cannot control our response or lack of one to his pictures. In the end, however, his book demands of us to look, to see what he has seen, to acknowledge the existence of these specific men and women and children. That is far from enough, but it is also far better than ignoring or forgetting. ■

Michele McDonald, a 1988 Nieman Fellow, is a freelance photographer based in Boston.

“With ‘Inferno’ I am seeking a deeper and broader treatment of events—something with a narrative, cinematic quality; something that possesses not only a structure integral to the single image but also the connections between images.... It is an attempt to create a path that viewers can negotiate in order to come to a personal understanding of events by piecing them together from various moments and perspectives.”—Nachtwey

Photographers Can't Hide Behind Their Cameras

Images of war are raw, dirty, ugly, personal and disturbing. And they ought to be.

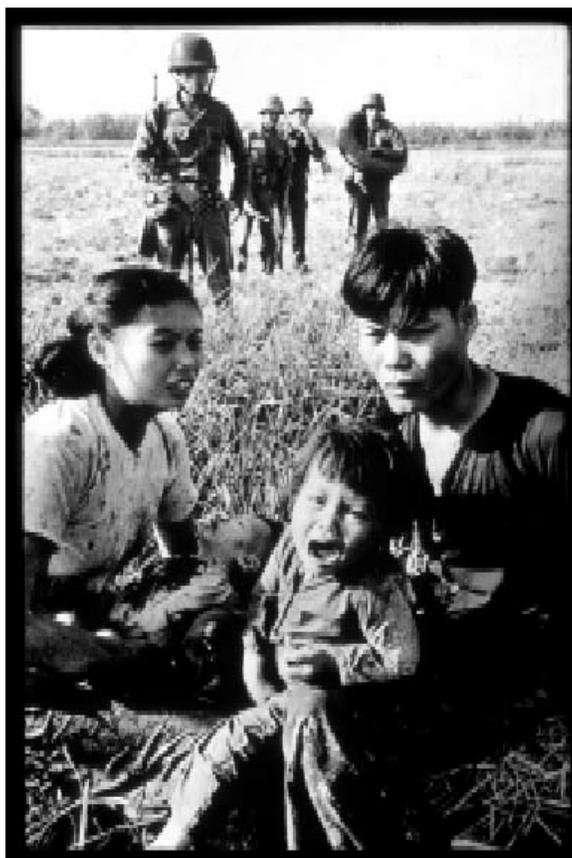
By Steve Northup

I proudly admit that Jim Nachtwey is a friend and has been for many years. Bias aside, I am very happy we have him on the planet. His work is a true gift to humankind. He holds a caring, relentless mirror on our species, and the images he creates disturb. And they ought to.

I looked through “Inferno” at a local bookstore, then spent the rest of the day in serious depression. It’s not that the photographs are disturbing and occasionally brutal. It’s just that we have been presented so very little real-life context in which to view them. If the only photographs we ever see of Africans are of fly-covered starvation victims, that image soon becomes what we picture as the norm. And, in time, it becomes what we expect to see.

This isn’t Jim’s fault. It’s the fault of editors (and bean counters) who ignore the rest of the world to bring us all-Elia all the time, O.J. without end, and Monica ad nauseam, and think it’s news. Last night, it was green catsup. Get serious. Until we are exposed to realistic coverage of the planet by witnessing people’s daily, productive lives, the tender moments of them loving their children, caring for their neighbors, tending to their crops, smiling, then for God’s sake, we have no idea of their actual existence. One can go for weeks without hearing the word “Africa” on American news broadcasts.

As painful as it is to view, this kind of work is even more difficult to produce. We, the viewer, see only tiny slices of



Vietnam 1965, photos by Steve Northup.

time. The photographer sees it all, hears it all, smells it all, and can’t hide behind the camera. When you are photographing terrible things you have to pay extra attention. You become one with the scene; the camera almost disappears.

Images of death and terror I made in Vietnam 35 years ago still inhabit my dreams and wakefulness. The cries of one small girl, whose baby brother had been killed, whose father was captured and soon to be taken away, whose mother was left with half a family and little hope, will always be with me. Vietnam was the most photographed war in history, and this act of frontline witness will not be repeated. Thanks to the course devised by Ms. Thatcher in the Falklands, our fellows in the Pentagon have made sure that the American public will never again be bothered by scenes of their loved ones killing or being killed. We have sanitized war, or its images, and all but a few of the major players in American journalism were only too happy to oblige. “Please throw us

into that pool,” most of them begged.

This is a terrible disservice to all of us, for we are the ones paying for these wars with the blood of our children, the gold of our treasury, the name of our nation.

It was not only the Vietnam photographs shot by the professionals that changed hearts and minds. Almost every GI carried a camera (every PX sold them cheaply) and they carried them everywhere. At almost every small outpost I went to, some GI would come over and want to show me his

“Pictures of famines and war have to be uncompromising. You can’t pull punches when you’re trying to show people what’s going on. I don’t want to make generic images that just show that something is happening out there.”—Nachtwey

“I want people to feel, I suppose, what I feel, which is anger and compassion, a sense that what’s happening is not acceptable.”—Nachtwey

snapshots. And nine times out of 10, they were truly disturbing. Body parts, mainly. Bits and pieces, not only of the enemy, but of friends and fallen comrades. "That's Hank," one GI told me, exhibiting a vivid splash of red against the green jungle floor.

War is about death. These young soldiers in Vietnam captured it in dying color, vividly, graphically and horribly.

Edwin Land once said that we photograph things so as not to be afraid of them. These GI's proved his point. I think it was these photos sent home if not to Mom, then to younger brothers, uncles, best friends, that brought the real horror of Vietnam into the American home. Our journalistic efforts were self-censored, and we tried to show facets other than death: the soldiers' courage, the war's tedium, even the beauty of the country that became our battlefield made it into our coverage. These GI's used no such filter. In their images, through their eyes, the war was raw and dirty and ugly and personal, and they sent it home in tidy little stacks of four-by-six inch prints.

There was also another dark side to photographing in Vietnam. While we went into combat unarmed, we could also leave any time we had had enough. Well, not just any time, but we could make a dignified retreat on outgoing helicopters. And when you started out on the day's march, one thing weighed in your mind: If you were going to make any really good images that day, something would have to happen; people would have to be hurt or killed. Otherwise it was just another long hot walk. These are not good thoughts to carry in one's head, and they have always induced guilt.

I liked the men I went to war with, both Vietnamese and Americans, and didn't want anything terrible to happen to them. My strongest memory of that place was one of sorrow: I felt sorry for everyone, on all sides, all the time. One other photograph of mine sticks in my mind. It is a sort of a peaceful one: a young Marine private, nestled up against a



gravestone in a Vietnamese cemetery in a hard rain. He was cold, wet, scared and 10,000 miles from home and, in his wallet, next to his photos of folks back home, he carried a small card given to him by his government. It told him the 10 reasons he was there. I pray we will never again send our children into a war where such a card is needed.

Lastly, the question arises, did we, as photographers of that war, do any good? I think so. I doubt we moved masses of minds, but our photographs have a lasting effect on individuals. And they help with the healing. A few weeks ago, as part of a week spent as an instructor at the Santa Fe Photographic Workshops, I presented a slide show of my favorite works. I started out with about 40 images from Vietnam. At night's end, a fellow walked up to me as I was going to my pickup. "I want to thank you," he told me. "I spent two years in that terrible place and I want to tell you that tonight, you reminded me of what photography is all about. Please keep showing the pictures."

I will. ■

Steve Northrup covered Vietnam as a staff photographer for United Press International in 1965-1966. He later served as a photographer for The Washington Post and Time magazine. He is a 1974 Nieman Fellow and lives in New Mexico.

"At the very beginning, I think I was still interested in the dynamics of war itself as a kind of fascinating study. And it evolved into more of a mission whereby I think to present pictures of situations that are unacceptable in human terms became a form of protest. So I found that my pictures were actually specifically trying to mitigate against the war itself." — Nachtwey

Do Images of War Need Justification?

No. Imparting information ought to be enough.

By Philip Caputo

A dirty little question preoccupies war photographers and war correspondents: Am I a voyeur? Certainly every journalist who has covered wars, if he or she has a conscience, has to wonder if recording modern conflicts, in words or pictures, is some kind of pornography. Pictures more than words, because words are mediators between the reader and the thing described; they appeal to the mind first, the senses second. Photographs, on the other hand, go directly to the emotions, to the heart and the gut, and the one who makes them is eventually going to question if presenting people with graphic images of blood and mutilation and death does anyone any good, or if it's merely a titillating appeal to the base fascination of the grotesque.

I covered several major conflicts in my journalism career—the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, Vietnam, Afghanistan, the Lebanese civil war, and the Eritrean rebellion. Just recently I returned from southern Sudan, where war has gone on for so long that it's not a phenomenon but a condition. The album of my memory is filled with snapshots of corpses, wounded men, terrorized civilians, burned villages, blasted cities, of arms and legs and heads detached from their former owners, but two memories are most vivid.

One is of the Golan Heights in October 1973—hundreds of Israeli and Syrian tanks destroyed, some 8,000 bodies, many burned beyond recognition as anything once living, much less human, decomposing in the sun. You could smell the battlefield from five miles away when the wind was right, and as I wandered through that smoking abattoir, taking notes, interviewing soldiers, a voice murmured in the back of my mind, "What in the hell are you doing here? Do your readers have some sacred right to know what's happened here? Isn't this all just some kind of unholy thrill, for you and for them?"

The second memory is of the moment when I ceased to be an observer of war and became one of war's victims. I was shot in the left ankle, the left leg, and the right foot by Muslim militiamen during the street fighting in Beirut. The shocking scarlet of my own blood, as it spilled out of my boot onto the concrete, made me see war as it had been seen by the countless millions of casualties, military and civilian, who suffered in the century just past. I was, for the first time in my life, compelled to share in the anguish that I had previously

recorded. I'm not sure that I would have wanted a picture of my wounded self on a front page or on a TV screen. I'm not sure what I would have done or how I would have felt if a photographer had pointed a camera at me then, or if a reporter had tried to interview me. I do know that there is no pain like the deep bone pain of a serious bullet wound. It is profoundly isolating. It is profoundly private. It is not for public consumption, because there are no words, no film, no videotape that can communicate it.

I've never heard of photographers who try to justify taking pictures of political conventions or crime scenes or fires or plane crashes or shaggy dogs. Conventions and crimes and fires and plane crashes and shaggy dogs are news. Wars also are news, so why is it that images of war so often seem to need some justification beyond their news value, some high, transcendent purpose? I took this photo (or wrote this story) to make people aware of man's inhumanity to man. To provoke outrage. To move people to act. This is generally nonsense, and when it isn't nonsense, it's dangerous. Act in the name of what? Act how? The very explicit still photos and footage coming out of Somalia in the early 90's moved the outside world to act—stupidly as it turned out—while equally explicit pictures and stories of Sarajevo only seemed to numb the public's sensibilities, so that nobody did anything until it was almost too late.

Seventeen years ago, I wrote a novel, "DelCorso's Gallery," about a combat photographer who becomes so obsessed that he uses his camera to wage war on war. He cannot see the paradox of war—that it is both a crime and the punishment of a crime—and pays for that blind spot with his life. None of this is to say that reporting wars is or should be morally neutral. It is to say that the morality lies not in how or whether an image, footage, or story affects human action; it lies, rather, in the imparting of information. Information, as playwright Tom Stoppard once wrote, is light, and the light, so long as it's true, is enough. ■

Philip Caputo was a foreign correspondent in the 1970's and early 1980's for the Chicago Tribune and Esquire magazine. He is currently a contributing editor for National Geographic Adventure and is the author of eight books, of which the most recent is a novel, "The Voyage."

"Being a witness, I think it is very important to be honest, to be eloquent, and to be powerful."

— *Nachtwey*

"It's meant to be a kind of visual archive, so that this work will enter into our collective conscience and our collective memory." — *Nachtwey*

The Perils of Growing Comfortable With Evil

By Brent Staples

Editorial Observer, April 9, 2000

The New York Times

Most of us have witnessed things that we would be better off never having seen. The writer Susan Sontag applies this distinction to the Holocaust photographs she stumbled upon in a bookstore at the age of 12 in 1945, years before she could conceptualize what the Holocaust even was. Writing of the experience in her landmark book “On Photography,” Ms. Sontag recalled that when she looked at those photographs “Some limit had been reached and not only that of horror...something [in me] went dead; something is still crying.”

The modern era takes it on faith that images of suffering

stimulate sensitivity to that suffering. But Ms. Sontag argues that little good comes of viewing photographic horrors that you can barely imagine and have no power to relieve. A few photographs retain their power to shock, becoming moral reference points, she writes. But in general, repeated exposure to photographed horror inures us to that horror, leading us to view even the most grotesque images as “just pictures.”

This warning came immediately to mind recently as I toured The New-York Historical Society’s exhibition “Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America,” which



The lynching of Jesse Washington, May 16, 1916, in Robinson, Texas. From the exhibition “Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America.” *Photo courtesy of The New-York Historical Society.*

opened last month and runs through July 9. The photographs mainly depict black men with hideously elongated necks, swinging sometimes in threes and fours at the end of ropes tied to light poles, trees or gallows. One of the most frightening pictures shows hundreds of well-dressed men in a field, pressing forward for a better view of a naked black man who has just been hanged and is now being mutilated and burned on a pyre.

Like the 12-year-old Susan Sontag in that bookstore, I reached my “limit” quickly and left the room. I returned briefly to take some notes and was on my way, never to return. There is an unbearable measure of horror here that I have no interest in learning to endure.

Lynching scholars tell us that the scenes in this exhibition were repeated thousands of times—often before the entire citizenry of a given town—and were common throughout much of the country until the 1940’s. These “lynching bees” or “Negro barbecues” were often cast as carnivals, to which the residents of nearby towns brought picnic baskets and their children—some of whom are shown in these photographs posed and smiling next to disfigured black corpses. The pictures in this show were mainly postcards that commemorated the “entertainment” and were sent regularly through the mail until it became illegal to do so.

The show opened under the name “Witness” this winter at a small gallery in Manhattan, and consisted mainly of photographs without explanation, mounted on the gallery walls. The Historical Society’s version of the show includes lengthy descriptive captions and an added section on the figures in the anti-lynching movement who eventually brought this horror to an end, among them James Weldon Johnson, W. E. B. Du Bois and the heroine of the movement, Ida Wells-Barnett. Looking at this new section of the exhibition, I was reminded that Ms. Wells-Barnett was sparing in her use of pictures or even illustrations, understanding that likenesses of these events were a form of brutality in themselves. Her

“I really hope people will not deny their own emotions or shut them off because the images might be disturbing. It very important that viewers not shut down, but instead engage their own emotions.” — Nachtwey

first three works on lynching—“Southern Horrors,” “A Red Record” and “Mob Rule in New Orleans”—relied for their power on forensic descriptions of the burnings and lynchings and shared only a single photograph among them.

The Atlanta collector James Allen, who found these photographs, had hoped that they would provoke a discussion on the public nature of racial brutality in the early 20th century and the role that era played in shaping the racial attitudes of today. In particular, Mr. Allen had hoped for a probing inquiry into the nature of what he calls “community violence,” which leads to the bloodlust shown in the pictures. The written material that was added to “Without Sanctuary” has given the exhibition some depth, but not enough to produce the thoughtful meditation Mr. Allen had wished for.

Instead, as he told me recently, “White people feel guilty and reticent; black people look at these pictures and just get angry.” Having worked with these pictures for years, Mr. Allen is less susceptible to their horror and was surprised when I told him that I could not bear seeing them.

A sober inquiry into racial violence has failed to materialize not just in the galleries, but in much of the news coverage as well. Some people were upset when news magazines reprinted the photographs with too little historical context—essentially repeating the acts of those who took and distributed the pictures in the first place. Mr. Allen had hoped to sensitize us to long-buried horrors of America’s racial past. But by choosing to do this through photographs, he chose the most unwieldy method of all. With these horrendous pictures loose in the culture, the ultimate effect could easily be to normalize images that are in fact horrible. ■

Brent Staples writes editorials on politics and culture for The New York Times and is author of “Parallel Time: Growing Up in Black and White.” Column © 2000 by The New York Times Co. Reprinted by permission.

“I’ve probably seen thousands of dead people, and it does not get any easier. It gets more difficult. You become more sensitized, not less sensitized. Suffering gets more difficult to witness.” — Nachtwey

‘Basically We’re Alone. Left Up to Our Own Wits.’

War photographers describe what it’s like to do their jobs.

In May of this year, The Crimes of War Project, chaired by Newsday correspondent Roy Gutman, and The Freedom Forum co-sponsored an Arlington, Virginia conference called “The World of Conflict.” Panelists and audience participants discussed topics related to the coverage of war by writers and photographers. One panel consisting of three war photographers—Ron Haviv, Gary Knight, and Steve Leberman—described experiences from the frontlines of battles and talked about their work as journalists. Susan Moeller, a contributor to Nieman Reports and author of “Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death,” moderated this panel. Edited excerpts from it follow.

Susan Moeller: “Images, of course, are how most of us experience conflict. And for those of us who haven’t been on the frontlines or haven’t been on certain frontlines, the way we learn about the world, the way we learn about war crimes, particularly, is often through the camera.

“Yet the images the photographers take, even by those within the media, are often taken too much for granted. They are used as illustrations. And I use that word in a pejorative sense. They are used as attention grabbers. But they often are not considered as thoughtfully as the text that accompanies them.

“There is often little integration between the text and the images. And I would suggest that this problem has only worsened and is particularly a problem on Web sites, on traditional news institutions that are going online....”

Ron Haviv [Newsweek contract photographer]: “Arkan was one of the more famous warlords of the wars in Yugoslavia. [H]e was responsible for killing thousands and thousands of people. And I was fortunate or unfortunate enough to travel with him and his unit called the Tigers into the first battle of Bosnia. We moved through town basically fighting from street to street, and we then arrived at the center of town at one of the mosques. And they immediately broke into the mosque and went upstairs, took down the Islamic flag, hung up a Serbian flag, and defaced some different property and things like that inside the mosque.

“There was still a lot of shooting going on outside. I was inside at the time photographing the soldiers inside the mosque. And I heard sort of a higher level of shooting, and I walked outside and I saw the soldiers bringing out people from a house across the street. They first brought out a man and were shouting at him in Serbian. I still don’t know to this day exactly what they were saying. And then they brought out a woman who was his wife and she started to scream. And a couple of shots rang out, and the man went down. The woman screamed some more.

“Meanwhile, while this is all happening, several soldiers are looking at me. Well, I’m standing there with my cameras watching and wondering when they are not looking at me so I can actually take a photograph, and they’re screaming at me in Serbian, ‘Don’t take any photographs. Don’t take any photographs.’ So the tension level obviously was quite high for me. From previous experiences in the other wars in Yugoslavia, I had witnessed two other executions at which I



Arkan’s Tigers fight during the first battle for Bosnia in the town of Bijelina, March 1992. Photos by Ron Haviv/SABA.



The wife of a Bosnian Muslim tries to help her husband as he lays dying after being shot by Arkan’s Tigers. The woman was later shot as well. Both died.

had a gun pointed to my head, and I was not allowed to photograph it.

“I had made a promise to myself that the next time I was in this situation I would do my best not to leave without a photograph, because otherwise there’s really no reason that we’re there. I mean, we’re there to document that, and I was going to do my best to get this on film. So there’s a crash truck parked in the middle of the street. And during the commotion I sort of walked very, very slowly, like inch by inch, so it kind of didn’t look like I was moving too fast, and hid by part of the truck where the soldiers couldn’t see me because my view was blocked. But I was able to see the man and the woman, and I was able to photograph the two of them together as he lay dying.

“Within several minutes, some more shots rang out and they shot the woman. And they brought out another woman and then, of course, she was killed. And all three are lying dead on the street. Now, I know I have a photograph of the people, but I don’t have a photograph of the soldiers with the people, which is what I need to prove that these Serbian soldiers were the ones that killed them. I mean, aside from my word, I wanted to have it actually on film.

“The unit decided to leave, and most of them left. There were three guys behind. And I went and I stood in the middle of the street. This time I was completely exposed. And I wanted just to get a photograph of the soldiers walking past the bodies. So as they came past the bodies, I raised my camera. And as they came past, one of the soldiers, cigarette in his hand, sunglasses on his head, brought back his foot and kicked the bodies. And I was able to take several photographs of that. And luckily for me, they didn’t see me, because two were looking to their left and one had his back to me as he was kicking the bodies.

“I took the pictures, I put my camera down, and I said to the soldiers, “Let’s go, great job, let’s go.” And we ran off like trying to hope that they wouldn’t have any idea what had happened.

“They had taken another prisoner at the same time and this guy was still alive, and as we were running up the street, I wanted to try and get a photograph of this prisoner. So I ran ahead to the soldier that was holding him and I said, ‘I want to take a photograph.’ So he grabbed the prisoner, put him down on the ground, and the photograph is of the prisoner with his hands up in the air, with the gun to his head and several soldiers in the background.

“For me it was very difficult because his hands are in the air and he’s begging for his life. But he’s begging me to try to save him, and there was nothing at that time that I could do. And this is a situation that I’ve been in, other people have been in, and these are very difficult situations for photographers and journalists and cameramen. And when do you decide to intervene if you can, and what influence can you have over the situation?

“They brought that prisoner back to the headquarters or house that they had taken over. They were interrogating him. I was standing outside waiting to see what happened and I heard a great crash. And I looked up and out of a third-story window, the prisoner came flying out of the window and landed at my feet. Then a couple of soldiers came out and they started kicking him and beating him, and I started taking some more photographs of that. And then they dragged him back into the house. A few minutes later, Arkan arrived, he came back from directing the battle from a different part of the city. They told Arkan that I’d taken these photographs, and Arkan knew immediately that this was a problem and asked for my film.

“I then proceeded to get into an argument with Arkan about how valuable the film was to the Serbian cause and things like that, to which he replied that he would process the film and edit the film and whatever pictures he thought were okay he’d give back to me. I replied, ‘Well, the labs aren’t very good in Belgrade. The quality isn’t good. Let me process it myself and then I’ll give you the pictures and you can use them.’ While this was being done, I was hiding



Arkan’s Tigers with the two women and a man that they had just shot during the first battle for Bosnia in March 1992. All three were killed. *Photos by Ron Haviv/SABA.*



A Muslim man begs for his life as he is taken prisoner by Arkan’s Tigers during the first battle for Bosnia in March 1992. He was later thrown from a third story window during interrogation.

several of the rolls of film that I'd already taken before and was able to save most of the film. Unfortunately, I had to just give one roll to Arkan, and that roll was of the prisoner falling out of the window.

"The next week, the photographs were published in Time magazine and several others. What's interesting about these photographs is that this was a week before the war officially began in Sarajevo. And these pictures were published by American magazines and seen by American politicians, as well as German politicians and French politicians. I was always quite sad that there was no reaction by the politicians to these photographs. They had seen that this ethnic cleansing had started and they still had an opportunity to stop actually what was going to happen three weeks later in Sarajevo.

"As for myself, there was a big backlash. Arkan got into a lot of trouble for letting me take these photographs. Milosevic was quite upset. There were some internal documents that were actually published a few years later from Milosevic to Arkan about this attack and their strategies and stuff like that. I was put onto a death list by the Serbs and I had a great deal of difficulty in the following years covering the story, always wondering who was looking for me, trying to avoid Arkan in all possible cases. I wound up in Kosovo missing him twice in the lobby of a hotel.

"This is an indicative story, maybe a little bit of an extreme one, but I and all of my colleagues have gone through these types of situations in many different scenarios. We've all been threatened to different degrees. Several people have been captured, myself included on a different story, mock executions, things like that. Basically we're alone. Left up to our own wits. If we lose our equipment or we get wounded, it's often up to the freelance photographer to protect himself or herself...."

Moeller: "I want to ask the three photographers to speak a little bit about some broader issues, particularly to the role that Ron mentioned of the photographer as an observer and a witness. [We know] there's been a general retreat from

international coverage. And there also has been, of course, a decade-plus of media mergers, particularly in photography. This has hit hard; right now, we have effectively five major corporations that control photography: AFB, AP, Reuters, Getty and Corbis...."

Gary Knight [Newsweek contract photographer]: "There are fewer young photojournalists coming through. We're all 34, 35, 36, and considered, you know, the young kids on the block.

"And there are very, very few people who are in their 20's coming through in this industry, and I think that's very, very scary because I, for one, will not be doing this in another 30 years, I can assure you.

"[A]s editors you really have to address these issues. Where are you getting your pictures from, and are you really getting a fair reflection of what's going on? And I would suggest that you have been, but you might not be in the future."

Steve Lehman [photographer and founder of Firsthand Media]: "Specifically, you look at news on the Internet and more and more it's coming from the same sources which are very, very narrow sources. And so when I look around at visual imagery, it's all coming from Reuters and AP.

"So essentially you have, on a particular story, one or two individuals covering that story for the entire world. That makes me nervous. The more eyes you have out there, the more different perspectives you have. And the more chances of finding and uncovering important stories. On one hand we have this enormous consolidation going on in terms of visual content industry, but also we as individuals are being empowered, too, where for the first time we can access an audience directly through the Internet. We don't necessarily have to go out and build a television station. We don't have to print a magazine each week. And the barrier to entry as far as the news business is concerned is a lot lower. And hopefully it will encourage a new type of journalism.... I'm trying to be optimistic. I'm hoping that this will create new



Images of war in Kosovo. Photos by Gary Knight®.

avenues for photojournalists and videographers or multimedia journalists.

“As photojournalists, we’ve pretty much been relegated to the role of illustrators. I think the new technologies will help empower us. For so long we’ve had a print-dominated media. I think in the next few years that it’s going to change in a very dramatic way. What I’m trying to do is embrace those changes and bring photo, text and video journalists together to forge a new type of programming, a new type of communication. And so I want to be optimistic about it, but at the same time it’s a tough battle that we have, and it’s something that we all should recognize because nobody wants to spend money on international news.”

Haviv: “Speaking from my personal experience and from stories that have been told to me by colleagues, text editors seem to look at photography quite often, unless it’s something incredibly dramatic, as illustrations. And I think that most photographers feel that we’re not often given the respect given to the traditional journalists. The concept of the photojournalist does not seem to have gone through all the different levels that exist at newspapers, magazines and wire services.”

Audience members then commented.

Audience comment: “I’m only a consumer of the news you cover. When I think of the power that photography has had in shaping public opinion in this country about wars, I think it’s probably the most important thing that has changed and molded public opinion. The Sarajevo market, for example, or Somalia, or that Time magazine cover of refugees fleeing in Bosnia and a woman is walking and...nursing a baby trying to do the most simply ordinary human task that is possible to imagine in the middle of this. I think these photos moved so many people. And I’m sorry that you guys don’t really think you’re appreciated, because I will tell you at least in this precinct here you are really appreciated.”

Audience comment: “I work for a paper that’s really driven by photographs and I’ve had world stories that I wanted to get on Page 1 that didn’t get there because there wasn’t a good enough photograph. And I’ve had other world stories that got out there because there was a great photograph and there was really something else I wanted to put out. So it’s moving in your direction.”

Audience comment: “I, too, have been a photographer in combat and have also written a book about war photography, and we are talking about illustrations and how they do not have any impact. What we are talking about, at least what I am talking about, is that these photographs are not integrated into the story and the event as a whole, and that they are often a gross simplification of what is happening. The classic example is a famine where you see pictures of the starving babies and with which you certainly get people’s attention. But you lead people to the assumption that you feed the babies and the crisis is over, when most of us in this room, I am sure, are well aware that famines are much more complicated than that. So I think that’s the dilemma that photographers wrestle with.”

Audience comment: “If you look back at the history of photojournalism and magazine reporting during the 1950’s and 60’s there was much more integration between the photographs and text. In those days a photographer and a writer were sent out together to do a story, and they would spend a month or six weeks and go out and work together. They had the time and they had the money to do that. Today, because of financial constraints, people don’t want to pay us to go out for a month. They want to get that in a day or two days or three days because it’s expensive. It’s really an expensive thing to send a photographer off on an assignment or to send a writer on an assignment. If you have to send both of them, then it doubles the cost. I think that is a very significant reason why there is not that integration. But it also has to do with the power structures at magazines or newspapers and how people view the different mediums.” ■



Photos by Gary Knight®.

Dying to Get the Story

A journalist reflects on which risks are necessary.

By Mary Kay Magistad

It was a sunny May morning when I was scrolling through the latest wire reports and saw the headline, “Two journalists killed in Sierra Leone.” I winced, as I do whenever I hear of fellow journalists paying the ultimate price for doing their job.

I scrolled down further and suddenly felt the wind knocked out of me. One of the reporters killed was Reuters correspondent Kurt Schork, an old friend from a decade ago when we were both freelance journalists in Southeast Asia. Kurt had come to the region with his then-girlfriend and my colleague, National Public Radio correspondent Deborah Wang, ditching his public sector job to try his hand at journalism, at the age of 42. From the beginning, Kurt struck me as being thoughtful, funny, skeptical and wise. He threw himself into his new calling with energy and discipline.

Then came a day in August, not many months after Kurt had taken up journalism. He and I and Deb were in a car coming back from Vietnam’s border with China, where we’d been reporting a story on black market trade. Kurt had his ear to his short wave radio, trying to decipher the crackle as the car bumped along the dirt road, weaving around cows and bicycles.

“Hey, Iraq has invaded Kuwait!” he exclaimed. We all strained to hear, and when we’d lost the signal, we specu-



In October 1992, Reuters correspondent Kurt Schork rushed a 13-year-old boy to a car after a mortar exploded in Sarajevo. *Photo by Peter Kullmann, Reuters*®.

lated about how the United States might react. Four months later, Deb and Kurt were on their way to cover the Gulf War, and from there Kurt began his rapid trajectory to becoming, by many accounts, the most respected journalist covering Bosnia—the gold standard against which other reporters judged whether they’d gotten the story right.

Kurt’s death, at age 53, and the death of his friend, Associated Press camera-

man Miguel Gil Moreno, age 32, shook many foreign correspondents deeply. Both men were admired for their courage, their integrity, and their judgment, and respected for their considerable experience in war zones. True, on this particular day they were reporting in notoriously unstable Sierra Leone, where 15 journalists have been killed since 1997 (by the count of the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists). And true, as wire service reporters, they chose not to report the story from the relative safety of Freetown.

But having decided to venture out, they took the usual precautions. They traveled in a group for safety and for companionship, with Reuters’ photographer Yannis Behrakis and Reuters’ cameraman Mark Chisholm. They proceeded with caution on unknown roads, asking at a checkpoint whether the road was safe ahead. They were told it was. Not long after, a group of about a dozen militiamen in T-shirts ambushed the convoy. Kurt and Miguel, both of whom were driving, were shot and killed instantly. Yannis and Mark were wounded, but escaped into the bush. Four of the armed government soldiers traveling with them, as escorts, were also killed.

The Guardian’s Julian Borger, who had reported with Kurt and Miguel in Bosnia and East Timor, wrote that they and the two other journalists traveling with them “were all brave, but aware of

the risks involved in their work and alert to the need to reassess them and control them at all times. Any reporter who knew them would have felt confident to have accompanied them.”

“But risks can never be calculated entirely,” Borger said. “The ground can shift beneath your feet without warning, especially in as fluid and unpredictable a place as the Sierra Leone bush.... They would have known that, too, as they set out to do their job.”

Each journalist has his or her own calculus for risk, based on experience, commitment to the story, and something far more personal. In the late

1980’s and early 1990’s, when I was covering the Cambodian civil war and ethnic conflicts in Burma, I saw young freelance photographers—many in their early 20’s—spend as much time as they could on the frontlines and then brag over beers about how close they’d come to being shot. They seemed to feel exhilarated by the experience, convinced that they were invincible, and eager to rush in for more. I wondered at the time whether they were taking on more risk than necessary, whether what they were doing was more reckless than brave.

I asked myself the same question

after staring down the barrel of a revolver in eastern Cambodia, after the U.N.-sponsored 1993 elections. The ruling party had proven to be a sore loser, with one of its factions announcing a “secession” of the eastern provinces. The ploy lasted only a few days and gained the party what it wanted—a significant share of power. But meanwhile, supporters of the victorious royalist party were killed. A U.N. helicopter was shot at. The “secessionists” threatened to kill U.N. workers unless they vacated the eastern provinces.

It was in this setting that I, with the BBC’s Ian Simpson and Australia ABC’s

Journalists Learn How to Protect Themselves in War

At a May 2000 conference called “The World of Conflict,” co-sponsored by The Crimes of War Project and The Freedom Forum, former soldiers who now teach journalists how to assess risks while covering wars spoke about aspects of this training. Known as the Hostile Environments Training Course, it was developed with the help of journalists and is mandatory for every BBC reporter going into a conflict zone. Former Royal Marine Paul Rees, director of Centurion Risk Assessment Services Ltd., one of the companies which does this training, and Jon Seward, also a former Royal Marine and Centurion’s chief instructor, spoke about the program. Edited excerpts from their remarks follow.

John Owen [director, The Freedom Forum European Center]: “Britain has become the center for what is known as the Hostile Environments Training Course, a rather large mouthful that says basically that journalists are being given the benefit of courses that I think most people feel are helping to keep them alive, or at the very least giving them many more smarts in the field about how to stay alive.

“The courses came about in part because the BBC took leadership in this area after one of their journalists, John Schofield, was killed in Croatia.

We now have training courses developed by two major groups, Centurion and AKE, and the leading group, Centurion, is with us today.

“[I]t is often said that journalists are being taught to be soldiers, that this is sort of journalists become soldiers of war. And articles written about these training courses often make this mistake as well. The critical point is that these courses were developed by journalists in conversations with these former soldiers. The important point is the control is rested in the hands of the journalists. And when you hear that these are courses teaching journalists how to be soldiers, please try to correct the record.

“The other thing is what is happening with Centurion and the other group, AKE, is that these courses are for the first time being taught to local journalists. Going back to late November of 1998 in Tirana, Albania, 20 journalists were brought together and given courses that gave them some of the expertise that Western journalists get before they go off to the war zones. It is a policy now in the BBC that no journalist can go to a conflict zone unless they’ve been through this course.

“The local journalists who took that course in Albania told me later that they thought it had kept them alive. One journalist said this because they

were able to identify land mines in their treks getting out of Kosovo. Another pointed to the first-aid training that they got. They said that when one of their colleagues was hurt, they were able to apply what they learned in the course.”

Paul Rees [director of Centurion]: “[W]e were approached from the BBC when I was still serving in the Royal Marines and asked if we could come up with a program for journalists for hostile environments. What was the hostile environment at that time? Well, at the time it was the former Yugoslavia. They wanted to do something about safety training. So with our knowledge from being ex-Marines and with the knowledge of journalists, senior journalists, senior media workers, camera crews, reporters, we have come up at the present time with a real good course for journalists.... Every time somebody signs up for the Hostile Environments Course, they think on the first day it’s flak jacket on, helmet on, and we’re off. It’s not. It’s a general awareness course that covers everything from personal security, from you walking down the street in any city through to the full-blown war zone where the bullets and the bombs do happen.

continued on next page

Evan Williams, arrived in Prey Veng. We interviewed frightened U.N. workers taking shelter in the back of their building while U.N. soldiers in flak jackets and helmets kept a wary watch at the front. U.N. vehicles had already been trashed and windows shattered. To get the other side of the story, we tried to walk down a nearby road to the place where we knew the secession leader, Prince Norodom Chakrapong, was holding a rally.

The two soldiers and one plain-clothes bodyguard standing at our end of the street had other ideas. As we walked toward them, shouting in

Khmer that we were journalists, the soldiers waved at us to back off. When we didn't immediately stop, the bodyguard scowled, looked directly at me—the one who was speaking in Khmer—pulled his revolver and swiftly leveled it at me, marksman style. I was just a few paces away, and for one heart-stopping moment he did not look to any of us like he was going to let me off with a warning. I froze. He kept the gun leveled. I backed off, slowly. He kept the gun trained on me until we were all in our car, driving away in the other direction.

To many a war correspondent, this

story is nothing special. Each day of reporting a conflict involves risk and, occasionally, facing down a gun. I had been in other conflict situations, before and since, but had never felt shaken in the same way. The difference, I suppose, was that this post-election period wasn't meant to be a conflict and, until then, Westerners in Cambodia rarely had been targets. But as Julian Borger put it so well, "the ground can shift beneath your feet without warning," even after years of covering a country and believing that you know the risks.

Did that Cambodian story on that

*Journalists Learn How...
continued from previous page*

"We are firm believers from our past experience that we only learn or we learn greater when we're on the ground and we're under pressure, when we have to go to these scenarios, get our hands bloody. So that's why our course, a lot of it, is outside.

"We talk about the importance of identifying hazards to reduce the risk to the lowest possible level. Flak jackets, do you take them, do you not take them? Again, that is up to the individual. Some people may not even be given them, cannot afford one, they have old ones—are they worth taking? These are the risks that they are trying to assess prior to going, and we discuss all of these all the way through.

"[I]t's all to do with risk assessment, and I do emphasize on the course we don't tell you what's black or white, it's just to give you the options. The way we give them the options is show hundreds of clips and let the people in the course be the judge of what can happen. So when we go on and do the scenarios, they have loads of other options to think about."

Jon Seward, Centurion's chief instructor, began his remarks by praising the work of the three photographers who spoke earlier at the

conference about the calculated risks they take to do their job in the midst of conflict. Excerpts from their remarks can be found on page 54.

"I'd like to say, as a former professional serviceman and having served throughout the world in various conflicts and probably the longest current terrorist threat in the Western world at the moment, I take my hat off to the three photographers [Haviv, Knight and Lehman]. They have my utmost respect. Considering the fact that I had a weapon in my hand all those times and they just basically had their wits, their common sense, and maybe dare I say their sense of humor, undoubtedly they have the greatest of respect.

"When we talk about ballistics, what do we mean by ballistics? Basically we mean anything, whether it be shoulder launched, held in your hand, or fired from artillery, tanks, aircraft even down to cruise missiles. When you look at the advent of technology where we can be hit from, you're talking about ranges anything out to 300, maybe 400 miles away. If you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, you're not going to really appreciate that until that cruise missile can come up a Beirut street and turn left or whatever the case is.

"Fundamentally, though, what we actually look at is how the small arms affect you as the individual on the front-

line. What we try to make you appreciate is the fact that wherever you are the target, if you are the target, [we want you to] have an appreciation of what's being fired at you and from where it's being fired at you. And if you are in the actual killing zone itself, [we want to] give you an appreciation of what these weapons can do and at the same time what you can lie behind, sit behind, crawl behind, or whatever the case is, to avoid being hurt, even if it's only for a couple of minutes or a couple of seconds in some extreme cases. Then, hopefully, we are giving you some sort of appreciation of where you can and, more importantly, where you cannot go, and if you go into that area, how long you can actually stay there for.

"We show you exactly what you can hide behind and what you can't hide behind by taking the journalists down to a range just outside London. We actually fire small-arms ammunition, whether it be from handguns, shotguns, assault weapons, machine guns, sniper weapons, to give you an appreciation of what will stop a round. Alternatively, particularly with machine guns, [we show] how long you can afford to stay behind a brick wall, a house door, or whatever the case is before those rounds actually penetrate and come through on top of you." ■

particular day need to be told? Absolutely. Did we need to defy Cambodian soldiers who were already in a bad mood, by continuing to walk toward them? Probably not. There were other routes to the rally, other ways of getting the information we needed. In this particular case, as in other unpredictable and dangerous situations, the safest journey between two points may not be a straight line.

In an article posted to Kurt's memorial page, journalists Stacy Sullivan and Ed Vulliamy of *The Observer* in Britain, said that many of Kurt's friends were "angered as well as saddened by his death." They questioned whether Kurt really had to be on that particular road on that particular day, whether he really needed to be covering another war at all. After all, he had finally moved back to the United States with his Bosnian girlfriend, had bought a house in the Washington, D.C. area and had spent months fixing it up, was working on a long-awaited book on Bosnia, and was planning to cover the Summer Olympics in Australia. Why the need to take one more extreme risk?

Both Kurt and Miguel had their own answers to that question. Miguel had been the sole international cameraman to stay in Kosovo during NATO's air campaign. It was his pictures that showed the world how thousands of Kosovar Albanians were being crammed



Kurt Schork. *Reuters*®.

Another journalist I liked and respected, 30-year-old *Financial Times* stringer Sander Thoenes, felt a similar commitment. He was killed in September 1999, riding on the back of a motorcycle on a reporting expedition to villages just outside the East Timorese capital of Dili, trying to give terrorized East Timorese civilians a chance to be heard. The East Timorese motorcycle driver said that as he and Sander approached a military checkpoint, Sander worried about the driver's safety and told him to make a U-turn. The men—in military uniform—shouted for them to stop and then opened fire. One bullet hit the motorcycle's rear tire. It fell over. The driver ran into the bushes.

...I have no doubt that these journalists took the risks they took because they believed so strongly that the world needed to hear about the atrocities being committed against civilians, and that governments had to be prodded to act.

into trains and deported. Kurt had been known to say that he felt a moral obligation to stay in Bosnia, to get the story out and make the world take notice. He was known for his idealism and his relentless pursuit of the facts on the ground. If civilians were still being slaughtered and maimed in Sierra Leone, Kurt would likely have felt compelled to tell the story.

Sander lay on the ground. From the bushes, the driver later said, he could hear the men approach. He heard one of them say, "Kill him." Sander's body was found nearby, a day later. He'd been stabbed, repeatedly; his face was badly mutilated.

In both cases, I have no doubt that these journalists took the risks they took because they believed so strongly

that the world needed to hear about the atrocities being committed against civilians, and that governments had to be prodded to act.

From what I knew about Kurt and Sander, they were too professional to take shortcuts, but they were not reckless. They, and Miguel, and many others like them over the years, have been killed because they were doing their jobs the best way they knew how, even if it meant putting their own safety on the line. Their deaths should not make any of us back away from taking necessary risks but, perhaps, could give pause to reflect on which risks are necessary. The answer is different for each individual and for each situation, but the

Each journalist has his or her own calculus for risk, based on experience, commitment to the story, and something far more personal.

goal remains the same—to get the most complete story possible and to be around to tell it. ■

Mary Kay Magistad, a 2000 Nieman Fellow, opened National Public Radio's Beijing bureau. She was NPR's China correspondent (1995-99), Southeast Asia correspondent (1993-95), and a Bangkok-based contributor to The Washington Post, The Boston Globe, and other media (1988-92). She also covered the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide and is currently working on a book on the legacy of trauma in societies that have faced violent social implosion.

The death penalty is under the journalistic microscope. Scrutiny of prosecutions and court procedures, along with new testing of DNA evidence, is illuminating ways in which the legal system—from the cops to the courts—does not always arrive at a just conclusion. **John Painter** ('77 NF), a court and public safety reporter for The Oregonian, peers inside the pages of a recently published book, "Actual Innocence," to shed light on some critical questions crime reporters sometimes forget to ask. He provides vivid examples of how misconduct by police and prosecutors resulted in incorrect verdicts and shows how crime reporters can avoid writing "the easy story" which might be profoundly wrong.

Chicago Tribune legal affairs writer **Ken Armstrong** ('01 NF) asked some of the critical questions raised in Painter's review. He invites us to follow him and fellow reporter Steve Mills as they extensively probed the subject of wrongful convictions in three series that the paper published between January 1999 and June 2000. Their investigative articles focused on misconduct by prosecutors, the death penalty in Illinois, and the death penalty in Texas. Illinois Governor George Ryan cited findings from the Tribune's coverage as he declared a moratorium on executions two months after their articles were published.

Michael Gartner, who won the 1997 Pulitzer for Editorial Writing, reviews "The Hunting of the President," and finds the book's spotlight focused on questionable actions of the Washington press corps. "It is a depressing book," he writes. "For news people, it is especially depressing." **Robert Manning** ('46 NF), former editor of The Atlantic Monthly, reflects on "An American Album," a collection of 150 years of articles that appeared in Harper's, with thoughts about why Harper's and The Atlantic Monthly have survived during a time when so many other magazines have vanished. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill journalism professor **Philip Meyer** ('67 NF) introduces us to the views of various contributors who tackled the question of "What's Fair?" in a book of the same name, edited by Nieman Curator Robert Giles and Robert W. Snyder. "If truth is whatever works for you," Meyer concludes, "there is no need for journalism."

Journalist and author **Anne Driscoll** writes about why she refused to sign a new contract with The Boston Globe that required freelance writers to surrender their control of and rights to compensation for reuse of their work, including use on the newspaper's Web site. How emerging ways of transmitting news will affect the ownership rights of those who produce it is an issue that will inhabit the lives of 21st century journalists. ■

Questions Crime Reporters Sometimes Forget to Ask

In murder cases, the ‘easy story’ to report might be profoundly wrong.

Actual Innocence

Five Days to Execution, and Other Dispatches From the Wrongly Convicted

Barry Scheck, Peter Neufeld, Jim Dwyer
Doubleday. 298 Pages. \$24.95.

By John Painter, Jr.

It is the nightmare of nightmares. Cold, deadly, lethal. Busted, tried, convicted and condemned to death.

But you are truly, really, totally innocent.

That’s what “Actual Innocence” is all about. It is a compelling account of the wrongfully accused, wrongfully convicted, wrongfully imprisoned and—whew!—finally vindicated.

The authors are Barry Scheck and Peter Neufeld, of the Benjamin Cardozo School of Law at New York’s Yeshiva University and co-founders of the now-nationally renowned Innocence Project, joined by two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Daily News columnist Jim Dwyer. Their work should give all journalists—particularly those covering courts and cops—the willies.

Subtitled “Five Days to Execution, and Other Dispatches from the Wrongfully Accused,” the book is a chronicle of injustices that involve lying cops, corrupt prosecutors, false or coerced

victed rapists and death row inmates by proving them factually innocent.

Critics of “Actual Innocence” scoff that it is overblown; that the authors are unrequited bleeding hearts. More than a few prosecutors who vocally support the death penalty dismiss those cases in which innocent defendants end up in prison or on death row by observing that you can’t make an omelet without breaking a few eggs.

The book quotes Kevin Doyle, the capital defender for the state of New York, who observed, “Some people think that an error rate of one percent is acceptable for the death penalty.” But, he continued, if you asked the FAA to approve an airplane that would kill or injure passengers every 100th time it landed, “people would say you are nuts.”

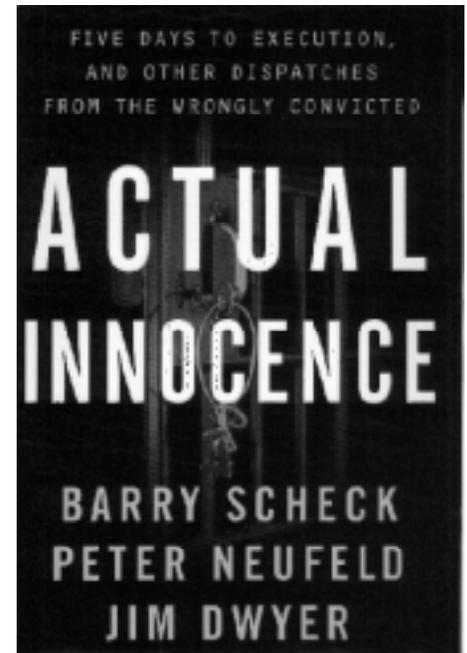
Moreover, the book’s case studies show that prosecutors strain mightily to break the eggs needed for the omelet. Indeed, among the charts at the end of the book one is about misbehavior by prosecutors. Among the miscon-

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the willies.**

confessions, rigged lab tests, incompetent defense lawyers, perjury by jailhouse snitches, mistaken eyewitnesses, and hair evidence that proves exactly nothing. The individual stories in the book are compelling by themselves. They detail in some cases how the new science of DNA testing has freed con-

duct: suppression of exculpatory evidence, knowing use of false testimony, improper closing arguments, false statement to juries, evidence fabrication, and use of coerced witnesses.

One case the book describes is that of Tim Durham, who on May 30, 1991 had driven five hours from Tulsa, Okla-



homa with his dad to a skeet shooting match at the Dallas Gun Club. As nearly a dozen shooters enjoyed their day, 11-year-old “Molly M,” who was home alone in Tulsa, was assaulted and raped by a red-haired stranger with a pock-marked face.

The assault got big play in the Tulsa media. In time, police focused on 29-year-old Tim Durham, who matched the pedophile’s physical description. Despite Durham’s solid alibi, he was charged and tried. Not only did Molly M convincingly identify him as her assailant, but also the prosecution further bolstered its case by using “junk science” hair evidence—and, the clincher, DNA evidence.

Durham was convicted and sentenced to 3,220 years in prison, which an appellate court later cut to 3,120 years. But after the Innocence Project got involved it proved that the DNA tests by a Texas laboratory called GeneScreen “were riddled with quality control problems” so severe they turned “solid science into junk.” Retesting by Dr. Edward Blake at the Forensic Science Associates laboratory

unequivocally excluded Durham as the source of the sperm left at the crime scene.

Durham was freed after spending five years in prison where he was beaten by inmates who believed him to be a child molester.

The book castigates appellate court findings of “harmless error,” which upholds convictions even when misconduct by police or prosecutors are exposed. “Lies,” Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz calls them, “Testalie”—those times when police provide untruthful testimony under oath to assist a case. Also, cheating in lower courts is excused by higher ones, the authors say.

Commonly nothing ever happens to the police or prosecution liars after they have been exposed. Cops and snitches who get caught lying under oath almost never receive any sanction, formal or informal. Only rarely is a faulty search warrant suppressed in pretrial motions. Prosecutors also usually escape the consequences of their misdeeds. But the ordinary citizen gets slammed for identical behavior, as do defendants. The cops, prosecutors and incompetent defense lawyers usually walk away with their feathers intact.

The book indicates that reporters covering cops and courts need to be wary of confessions. Few reporters know that many police receive formal interrogation training. They are often taught with a widely used police textbook, “Criminal Interrogation and Confessions,” by Fred E. Inbau, John E. Reid, and Joseph P. Buckley. In its introduction, the authors assert, “We are opposed to the use of any interrogation tactic or technique that is apt to make an innocent person confess.” But, they continue, “We do approve, however, of such psychological tactics and techniques as trickery and deceit that are not only helpful but frequently indispensable in order to secure incriminating information from the guilty, or to obtain investigative leads from otherwise uncooperative witnesses or informants.”

One of the most bizarre cases of false confessions occurred in Portland, Oregon. In January 1990, the body of Taunja Bennett, 23, of Portland, was

discovered on a bluff in the picturesque Columbia River Gorge just east of the city. She had been strangled, and the rope was still around her neck. Soon, the lead investigator in the case, Detective Alan Corson of the Oregon State Police, had a suspect. His name was John A. Sosnovski, an alcoholic who has been in trouble with the law.

The book indicates that reporters covering cops and courts need to be wary of confessions.

He was fingered by his off-again, on-again girlfriend, Laverne Pavlinac.

At first, Pavlinac’s accusations that Sosnovski was involved in Bennett’s murder didn’t hold water. But the more she was questioned, the more she learned about the case from detectives. So her confessions became more and more convincing. The last straw came when Pavlinac, then 62, said that she held a rope around the victim’s neck as Sosnovski raped her.

At one point, Pavlinac, wearing a police wire, tried to persuade Sosnovski to confess by telling him he killed the victim during an alcoholic blackout. Though he eventually pleaded guilty to murder to escape the death penalty, he maintained that he could not remember the killing. Pavlinac went to trial, but dramatically changed her story. She testified that she made up the confession; that she was just trying to get Sosnovski, who was abusive, out of her life. Nonetheless, she, too, was convicted of murder. Both defendants received life sentences.

Then, in 1994, long after Pavlinac and Sosnovski had been forgotten, *The Oregonian* received an anonymous letter. The writer claimed responsibility for five murders, including Bennett’s. The letter contained drawings of smiley faces. In a series of articles, the unknown murderer was dubbed “The Happy Face Killer.”

In March 1995, Keith Jespersen, 40, of Selah, Washington, was arrested for the murder of Julie Ann Cunningham, whose strangled body was found dumped alongside the Columbia River.

Jespersen eventually confessed to Rick Buckner, a Clark County [Washington] sheriff’s detective. As Jespersen was being questioned, detectives obtained a letter he recently had written to his brother. In it, Jespersen confessed to eight murders. I was covering the case at the time and got a copy of the letter. The unique handwriting matched ex-

actly the distinctive lettering in “The Happy Face Killer’s” confession sent to *The Oregonian*.

Jespersen eventually admitted killings in Oregon, California, Wyoming and Florida, including Bennett’s. However, the prosecutors who convicted Pavlinac and Sosnovski didn’t believe he had killed Bennett until Jespersen led them to the blackberry thicket where he said he threw her purse. An excavation of the area turned up Bennett’s picture identification.

Two factually innocent people were in prison. Getting them out was an arduous process, but eventually the pair was freed. And even though the prosecution conceded the innocence of Pavlinac and Sosnovski, Corson would not. The day before Jespersen was transferred to Wyoming to plead guilty to murder there, Corson visited Jespersen in the Oregon State Penitentiary, where he was serving several long terms for Oregon killings.

Corson tried to get Jespersen to sign a statement that he had falsely confessed to Bennett’s slaying and that Pavlinac and Sosnovski were the real killers. Jespersen viewed Corson with disdain and said as much in letters to news reporters. In a December 9, 1997 letter, Jespersen wrote of Corson, “I just gave him enough line to hang himself. [He] claimed Mike Schrunck [the district attorney whose office convicted Pavlinac and Sosnovski] will drop the 30-year [murder] sentence...and even drop the 37 1/2 year one [a different slaying], too. He is a total pain in the ass.”

Professors Elizabeth Loftus and Richard Ofshe are outspoken critics of contemporary police procedures involving both eyewitness identification and confessions. They urge that all lineups, picture throwdowns and questionings by police be videotaped. Typically, police only tape-record the final, solid version of a confession and almost never make any recording—visual or audio—of eyewitness identifications.

Loftus is a professor of psychology and an adjunct professor of law at the University of Washington, who is one of the world's experts on eyewitness identification. Ofshe is a professor of sociology at the University of California at Berkeley, an acknowledged expert on police-induced false confessions. Loftus has done basic research into eyewitness testimony. When she began her inquiry into memory, the universal belief was that eyewitness testimony was as reliable as a videotape or a home movie. Loftus found the opposite.

When interviewers asked questions, Loftus discovered, the queries themselves had influence, and even the specific words in the questions significantly affected the answer. For example, the question, "How fast were the two cars going when they hit each other?" will induce witnesses to give slower speed estimates than "...when they smashed each other?" By carefully phrased questioning, Loftus found her subjects were helped to remember stop signs as yield signs. Indeed, in a Loftus video of a car crash that I watched, almost all of the viewers, myself included, misreported what they actually saw. In her research, Loftus has discovered—again in contrast to common beliefs—that violent events decrease the accuracy of memory. She found that memory is weakest at both low and high levels of stimulation, as in sleepiness or shock, and concluded it is brittle, suggestible and can fade as time passes.

Translated into real-life crime situations, the premises are clear. People who witness violent crimes, when questioned by police and detectives—who themselves have a theory of "their" case—may not end up reporting the

truth. When reporters quiz police about confessions, Loftus says, "one thing you want to ask about for sure is the non-identifications. Were there other witnesses who made no identification, or even better, said, 'It's not him.?"

Reporters also should ask police "details about their procedures," Loftus says. "You're looking to see if they gave the witness an admonition before the identification, such as, 'The guy may or may not be in there,' or, 'It's just as important to exonerate the innocent as it is to get the guilty party.' They should be doing that, but they don't always."

Scheck, Neufeld and Dwyer use charts to show instances of race and misidentification. The biggest mistakes were in the identification of African-Americans by whites, in which 35 percent were wrong. But the second largest mistake category—28 percent—was whites misidentifying whites and the third largest category—24 percent—was African-Americans wrongly identifying African-Americans.

In a study of DNA exonerations, the Innocence Project found that 84 percent of the wrongful convictions rested, at least in part, on mistaken identification by a victim or eyewitness, the authors write. In analyzing the role of police misconduct in wrongful convictions, the authors show that nine percent involve coerced confessions; 33 percent involve allegations of undue suggestion in pretrial identification procedures; nine percent are evidence fabrication; 36 percent, the suppression of exculpatory evidence, and nine percent involved the alleged coercion of witnesses.

The book illuminates the necessity for even the most beleaguered court reporter to look twice at the official presentation that is provided the media in serious criminal cases. Except in the most sensational or curious cases, police investigations are conducted without any media scrutiny. Arrests for major crimes are reported unhesitatingly. The charging documents—indictments or informations [charging documents requiring that probable cause must be established to bring the case to trial]—are generally received without question. Loftus ob-

serves that "the state is the official version" of crimes." And, she points out, "the easiest person to convict is someone who has done something else."

For most reporters, access to the inside of the case really doesn't occur until the defense begins receiving the evidence against the defendant. After the initial flurry of arrest and charging, prosecutors typically dummy up, justifying their silence by citing bar-press guidelines or the desire to avoid prejudicial pretrial publicity. The silence is particularly deafening in the two areas about which reporters need to be especially skeptical—confessions and eyewitness identification.

How reporters can obtain critical information about those pivotal areas in high-profile prosecutions is a constant challenge. Even reporters with "solid gold" police/prosecution sources cannot reasonably expect them to serve up a corner-cutting colleague. Cultivating communication with the defense is a critical, if complex, necessity, but can illuminate flaws in the "official" scenario of the alleged crime.

Ironically and unfortunately, probing media inquiries into actual innocence almost never begin until after a conviction. And, contemporaneously, the investigation generally occurs through a group other than the news media—the Chicago Tribune, of course, is a conspicuous exception. [See article by Chicago Tribune reporter Ken Armstrong about that paper's series of stories on death penalty convictions on page 66.] Folks like the Innocence Project or the Northwestern University School of Law class has secured the release of wrongfully condemned inmates in Illinois.

Hard-news reporters covering too many crimes with too little time need to take this book to heart. The "official version" may be the easy story, but it also may be the profoundly wrong one. Reporters need to do all they can to make sure the facts they print are indeed the right ones. ■

John Painter, Jr., a 1977 Nieman Fellow, is a court and public safety reporter for The Oregonian.

Dead Men Talking

Chicago Tribune reporters highlight fault lines in the justice system.

By Ken Armstrong

On January 31, 2000, Illinois Governor George Ryan took the historic step of declaring a moratorium on executions, making Illinois the first state to suspend the march of condemned inmates to the death chamber. The announcement by Ryan, a Republican who supports the death penalty in principle, resounded throughout this nation and the world.

At the Coliseum in Rome, golden lights flickered on and burned through the night in celebration. In Washington, President Clinton praised Ryan's courage, while members of Congress proposed a moratorium on federal executions. The New Hampshire legislature voted to abolish the death penalty, although that measure was vetoed. Governors in Indiana and Maryland ordered studies of their own systems of capital punishment. In Virginia, Christian Coalition founder Pat Robertson expressed doubts about the death penalty. So did conservative columnist George Will and a variety of other unexpected voices. New polls showed significant declines in capital punishment's public support.

In Chicago, where Ryan made his announcement before a thicket of microphones and cameras, the moratorium provided an exclamation point to a five-part series that ran in the Chicago Tribune two months before. The series, published in November 1999 following an eight-month investigation, detailed the failure of the death penalty in Illinois. Fellow reporter Steve Mills and I attended the press conference and had the unusual experience of hearing the governor recite statistics



Bernon Howery, sentenced to death for the murder of four children, three of whom were his, in a 1989 house fire, is being held at the Kankakee Detention Center. *Photo by Heather Stone, courtesy of the Chicago Tribune.*

from our series, including our findings on the high number of sanctioned defense attorneys and the prevalent use of jailhouse-informant testimony in capital cases. In describing the need for a moratorium, Ryan cited the Tribune's findings and the state's abysmal track record of exonerating more death row inmates than it has executed.

For Steve and me, Ryan's announcement helped validate our approach to reporting on criminal justice issues and reaffirmed that "the power of the pen" is not a hollow cliché.

In three series that the paper published between January 1999 and June 2000, the Tribune tackled the subject of wrongful convictions, determined to learn why our nation's courts repeatedly convict innocent people, and even condemn them to die. The trilogy consisted of investigations focusing on misconduct by prosecutors, the death penalty in Illinois, and the death penalty in Texas.

Our goal was to move beyond the kind of anecdotal reporting that so often defines the media's coverage of

criminal justice issues. An in-depth account of a single case can certainly make for a gripping story. But stranded without context, these isolated miscarriages of justice can be, and often are, dismissed as mere aberrations. A comprehensive approach, one that quantifies those elements that regularly contribute to cases of wrongful conviction, assumes a power and significance that reporting on a single case simply cannot acquire.

In our investigation of the death penalty in Illinois, we examined all 285 cases in which a person had been sentenced to death since Il-

linois reinstated capital punishment in 1977. Our reporting included reviewing Illinois Supreme Court and federal court rulings, appellate briefs, trial transcripts, trial exhibits, affidavits and other supporting materials used on appeal. That research helped us isolate particularly compelling examples of justice gone awry while also uncovering how certain fault lines run through dozens or even scores of capital cases.

Here is some of what we learned by meticulously working our way back through these court records.

- At least 33 times, a defendant sentenced to die was represented at trial by an attorney who has been disbarred or suspended, sanctions reserved for conduct so incompetent, unethical or even criminal the lawyer's license is taken away. In one case, a judge appointed an attorney to defend a man's life a mere 10 days after the attorney got his law license back. The attorney had just served a nine-month suspension for failing a string of clients through

incompetence and dishonesty.

- At least 35 times, a defendant sent to death row was black and the jury that determined guilt or sentence was all white. This is a racial composition that prosecutors consider such an advantage that they have removed as many as 20 African-Americans from a single trial's jury pool to achieve it. Of the 65 death penalty cases in Illinois with a black defendant and a white victim, the jury was all white in 21 of them, or in nearly a third.
- In at least 46 cases in which a defendant was sentenced to die, the prosecution's evidence included a jailhouse informant. Such witnesses have proved so unreliable that some states have begun warning jurors to treat them with special skepticism.
- In at least 20 cases in which a defendant was sentenced to die, the prosecution's evidence included a crime lab employee's visual comparison of hairs. This type of forensic evidence dates to the 19th century and has proved so notoriously imprecise that its use is now restricted in some jurisdictions outside Illinois.
- Errors by judges, ineptitude by defense attorneys, and prosecutorial misconduct have been so widespread in Illinois death penalty cases that a new trial or sentencing hearing has been ordered in 49 percent of those cases that have completed at least one round of appeals.

A couple of weeks before Governor Ryan declared a moratorium on executions, Cook County prosecutors dropped charges against Steve Manning, an inmate whose case we investigated in our series while exploring the corrosive effect of jailhouse-informant testimony. That made Manning the 13th Illinois death row inmate to be cleared. This is one more than the state's total number of executed inmates since the death penalty was reinstated. Manning and his attorney credited the Tribune's investigation with his exoneration.

After Ryan suspended executions in Illinois, Texas Governor George W.

Bush said he saw no reason for his state—the nation's busiest executioner—to follow Illinois' lead. Bush, the Republican candidate for President, expressed unwavering confidence in the fairness and accuracy of his state's system of capital punishment. That statement prompted Steve and me, along with a third reporter, Douglas Holt, to head to Texas and apply our systemic approach to death penalty cases there. We examined 131 cases in which an inmate had been executed while Bush has been governor. Four months of investigative reporting produced some stunning results.

- In 43 cases, or nearly one-third, a defendant was represented at trial or on initial appeal by an attorney who has been publicly sanctioned for misconduct.
- In 40 cases, defense attorneys presented no evidence whatsoever or only one witness during the trial's sentencing phase. In at least 29 cases, the prosecution presented a type of dubious psychiatric evidence that the American Psychiatric Association has condemned as unethical and untrustworthy. We also found that jailhouse-informant testimony and hair-comparison evidence are just as prevalent in Texas as Illinois.

Working on these three series has left me with some reflections about the role journalists can play in examining contemporary social issues. History

...we sometimes forget that numbers hold power.

doesn't belong to historians alone. Journalism is not history's first rough draft and nothing more, as some people contend. We are allowed to do subsequent drafts, too. In the Tribune's series on prosecutorial misconduct, we examined cases going back to 1963. In our series on the Illinois death penalty, we went back to 1977. Stories don't lose their importance or impact by reaching back in time. Besides, the

kinds of systematic problems that we isolated in our reporting plagued our courts then and continue to do so now. That continuum shows how deeply ingrained such problems are.

Statistics can resonate. In a time when anecdotal leads dominate news pages and the emphasis is often on using a single event, person or case to illuminate a larger story, we sometimes forget that numbers hold power. In announcing the moratorium on executions in Illinois, Governor Ryan relied on statistics, not individual stories.

In writing about the criminal justice system, issues of fairness should not be discounted as legal esoterica. We sell readers, listeners and viewers short when we assume they care only about questions of a person's innocence. The Tribune's findings on the shortcomings of sentencing hearings in Texas' capital cases said nothing about innocence or guilt, but spoke volumes about the system's fairness.

Those findings, and many others, reverberate among our readers and in other media accounts of our series. Too often, journalists don't pay heed to what's going on in our midst. We simply miss the big picture. For example, the number of exonerated inmates has climbed dramatically in recent years, thanks largely to the emergence of DNA testing and its role in exposing wrongful convictions. But for the most part, members of the media have covered each miscarriage of justice in isolation, bypassing the opportunity to learn from the mistakes common to them all.

Some stories deserve extraordinary commitment. The Tribune has expended an incredible amount of time and resources on the subject of wrongful convictions. Several reporters have worked on the story, and I've personally spent four years navigating electronic databases, conducting research in law libraries and sifting through hundreds of court files. It's been money and time well spent. ■

Ken Armstrong is the Chicago Tribune's legal affairs writer and is a 2001 Nieman Fellow.

An Indictment of the Washington Press

Two journalists give thumbs down to coverage of the Clinton scandals.

The Hunting of the President: The Ten-Year Campaign to Destroy Bill and Hillary Clinton

Joe Conason and Gene Lyons
St. Martin's Press. 413 Pages. \$25.95.

By Michael Gartner

Here's how to read this book about the Clinton-haters by Joe Conason and Gene Lyons:

Get a huge sheet of paper and title it "Cast of Characters." Then break it down into columns. They might be headed, "Immoral people." "Unethical people." "Vicious people." "Lying people." There would be famous and infamous, notable and notorious in each category. And, sadly, there would be journalists in each category, too.

For "The Hunting of the President" not only chronicles that vast right-wing conspiracy—and there was indeed one—that set out to destroy the Clintons, but also chronicles how the press were co-conspirators, some wittingly and some half-wittingly. It is a depressing book; for news people, it is especially depressing.

You don't want to believe it. You don't want to believe that reporters from big newspapers were playing footsy with prosecutors who had become persecutors. You don't want to believe that reporters from big newspapers were sometimes ignoring one side of the story. You don't want to believe that reporters from big newspapers were lying to their readers.

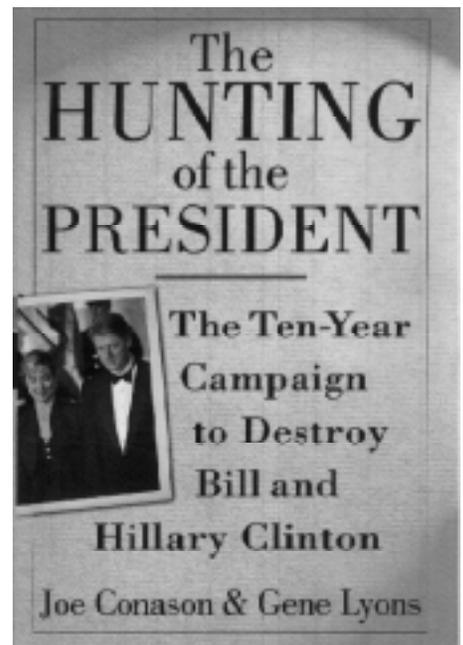
"Lying" is not too harsh a word. That's been made clear by the recent trial in Washington where Charles G. Bakaly III faced charges of criminal contempt of court. Bakaly was the spokesman for Kenneth Starr, the independent counsel who finally turned to investigating the President's sex life after investigations into his financial and political life turned up nothing.

The Bakaly case is as misguided as the whole Clinton prosecution. Bakaly

faced trial because a federal judge was incensed about leaks to newspapers about the deliberations in the independent counsel's office. But misguided or not the case clearly shows, among other things, that The New York Times lied to its readers during the Whitewater-Lewinsky impeachment doings. A Times story about the views of various people in Starr's office said that Bakaly "declined to discuss" the matter. But this summer's trial proved that Bakaly had indeed been a source for the Times on the story.

That's outrageous, but it gets worse—if there is anything worse than lying to your readers. "The Hunting of the President" makes clear that often the papers told just one side of the story, the side being peddled by the office of the independent counsel and by the ragtag team of Clinton-haters who were living high on Richard Mellon Scaife money as long as they could dream up ever-more-bizarre tales about the President and his wife. These were tales that the press often bought into without checking them out.

It was a time of what Conason and Lyons call naive cynicism, "in which a reporter remains naively ignorant of basic information while cynically assuming the prevalence of corruption." On occasion, reporters traded information with those who worked the seamy side of the street, "Arkansas yokels who tried to con the big-city sophisticates." A Los Angeles Times's reporter had "an oddly symbiotic relationship" with two of these peddlers. One bragged that he had a videotape of the President sitting next to a bowl of cocaine. The New York Times



and The Washington Post "almost instantaneously transformed" Little Rock judge and bogus businessman David Hale "from a recalcitrant embezzler into a credible source."

Another time, "documents leaked to The Washington Post had made their way into the hands of an embezzler under indictment [Hale]—an embezzler who then utilized them, in concert with unscrupulous political operatives, to concoct charges against the President on national TV."

Yet facts exonerating the Clintons were all but ignored. In June of 1996, the news side of The Wall Street Journal (whose reporters should in no way be identified with the fabulists on the editorial page side) printed a story that a special report being prepared by a San Francisco law firm that was hired to look into the Clintons' Whitewater investment "corroborates most of President and Mrs. Clinton's assertions about their Whitewater real-estate investment." Others papers made no mention of it at the time.

The report, commissioned by the Resolution Trust Corporation, came out in December. On December 18,

The Wall Street Journal again ran “a straight, clear summary of its findings.” According to the book’s authors, the report “in hundreds of minutely detailed pages, thousands of footnotes, and documentary exhibits...demonstrated that the premises of the Whitewater ‘scandal’ had no factual foundation.” The Washington Post mentioned the report only briefly; the Times waited a week, until Christmas Eve, “then hid Stephen Labaton’s perfunctory summary on page 12.”

By the time of the impeachment, write Conason and Lyons, “most Americans intuitively understood exactly what was happening. As the most powerful and largely unaccountable institution in American public life, the Washington press, appeared to have joined forces with a partisan prosecutor to void the results of two presidential elections.” Most Americans, Conason

and Lyons say, realized they were watching “a ratings-driven coup d’etat.”

Oddly—on second thought, it’s not odd at all—many newspaper reviews of this book don’t mention that it’s an indictment of the press as well as an indictment of the office of the independent counsel. The case against the press is strong. While Conason, who is a columnist with The New York Observer, and Lyons, a columnist with the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, deal in opinions, they work with facts. The facts they have compiled are devastating.

Indeed, if Watergate is to be thought of as bringing out the courageous best in reporting, then Whitewater must be listed as bringing out the careless worst. The episode was not a proud time for the nation, nor was it a proud time for the press.

Footnote: None of this is meant as a defense of the morality of President

Clinton. While “The Hunting of the President” proves that the President and his wife did nothing wrong financially, further proves that enemies old and new ran a vicious crusade to destroy him, and finally proves that the office of the independent counsel was anything but independent, it makes no attempt to defend or deny the President’s sexual behavior.

But there’s a difference between impeachable and impeccable. Conason and Lyons know the difference. Many others in journalism don’t seem to. ■

Michael Gartner has been editor of papers large and small and president of NBC News. In 1997, he won the Pulitzer Prize for Editorial Writing. He now is ombudsman for Brill’s Content Magazine.

Harper’s Magazine: A Survivor!

An American Album

One Hundred and Fifty Years of Harper’s Magazine

Edited by Lewis Lapham and Ellen Rosenbush

Franklin Square Press. 712 Pages. \$50.

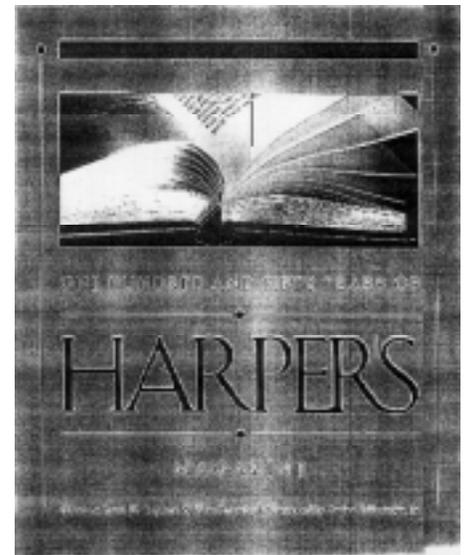
By Robert Manning

The crowded racks on newsstands and the torrent of junk mail deliveries seeking subscribers testify to the superabundance of magazines being published in the United States. Some are even worth reading. The relative “old-timers” are a few decades old; some are mere infants facing high mortality rates. The journalistic landscape is littered with the bones of thousands of others, among them the esteemed monthlies Century, Scribners and McClure’s, all long gone, and such once prosperous latecomers as Life, The Saturday Evening Post, Look and Colliers. How long before Time, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report drown in the cyberspace sea?

There are, though, two tough-

skinned survivors whose history dates back to before the Civil War. They are Harper’s Magazine, which was launched in 1850, and The Atlantic Monthly, born in 1856. So this is Harper’s 150th birthday year, a time for toasts and celebration. Without waiting for the rest of us to raise a glass, Harper’s has done so itself, with a fat and handsome volume, an impressive taster’s menu for each of the 15 decades the magazine has been nourishing people who care about good prose and intellectual protein—a devoted but, alas, small crowd.

A stylish and lively, if sometimes polemical, introduction by Lewis Lapham sets the table for the album’s feast. Lapham was Harper’s editor from



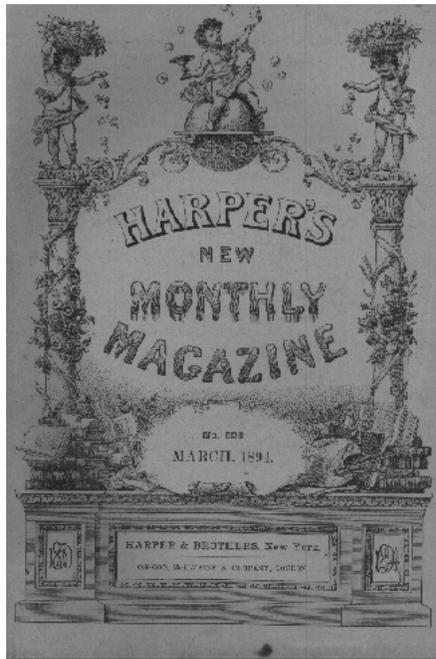
1975 to 1981, one of four editors during a turbulent few years in the magazine’s history. He returned to the job in 1983 to restructure the magazine and pilot it into the 21st century. He and his collaborator Ellen Rosenbush must have labored long into the night to extract some 140 articles, short stories, and poems from 1,800 issues of Harper’s and tailor them for

this collection. Those who pick and choose among the pieces in “An American Album” (it is too heavy to be read in long sittings) should be grateful for their efforts.

After I became editor of *The Atlantic* in the 1960’s I was struck by the number of people who confused *The Atlantic* with *Harper’s* and vice versa. When confronted with this confusion by a reader, or when traveling on the road to seek writers for the magazine I resorted, with a smile, to a paraphrase of Mark Twain’s remark: “Rudyard Kipling and I share all human knowledge. Kipling knows all there is to be known and I know all the rest.” *The Atlantic* of course was Kipling. Willie Morris was then editing *Harper’s*. We were competitors but also friends, so lest he be offended I dropped Willie a note saying that I wouldn’t be offended if he used the same quote and reversed the names.

Reading this volume, or just its table of contents, one can understand why the confusion persisted. From their beginnings until the mid-1980’s the magazines’ content was remarkably similar, *Harper’s* a bit more political perhaps, while *The Atlantic* listed more to the literary. They shared many authors—Melville, Hawthorne, Twain and Henry James, to name a few in the early days; Walter Lippmann, James Thurber, Katherine Anne Porter, John Kenneth Galbraith, James Dickey, John Updike in more recent years. *The Atlantic*’s first editor, James Russell Lowell, later became a *Harper’s* contributor. William Dean Howells went from being editor of *The Atlantic* in Boston to author of *Harper’s* famed Easy Chair column in New York. For many years after World War II, the magazines sold their advertising through a jointly owned company, Harper-Atlantic Sales. Readership overlapped by less than 10 percent, offering advertisers twice the package that the magazines could provide individually.

For all this seeming incest, the two magazines were always intense if friendly competitors, reaching out for the same kind of readers, trying to snare the best among recognized writers and discover the finest new talent, each editor rejoicing at his journalistic



A March 1894 cover. *Courtesy of Harper's Magazine.*

coup and envying the other’s.

Survival has not been easy. The coming of television and the takeover of Madison Avenue by young people who didn’t read plus rising postal and paper costs decimated the mass circulation publications. The two monthlies held on because their owners expected little or no profit and they had to produce only a few hundred thousand instead of millions of magazines. In the 1970’s, after it had fallen into the incompetent hands of John Cowles, Jr., of the Minneapolis Star-Tribune, Cowles and Editor Morris made the mistake of investing virtually all of his editorial budget in a handful of name writers (e.g. David Halberstam, Norman Mailer, the Texan Larry King). *Harper’s Magazine* went into a serious decline. While critical of Cowles’ publishing decisions, Lapham in his introduction lays much of the blame on Willie Morris and his small coterie of writers.

The new publishing strategy, Lapham writes, “matched the go-go expectations of the Age of Aquarius, and for two or three years it seemed to hold out the promise of astonishing success. Morris published Mailer’s dispatches from the riots in Miami and Chicago, the literary criticism of Alfred Kazin and Irving Howe, Halberstam’s

excoriation of the deluded government officials...mismanaging the war in Vietnam. The magazine was much talked about in New York, proclaimed a wonder of the age on the Upper East Side. Elsewhere the reviews were not so kind. West of the Hudson River subscribers departed in droves, the advertising revenues declined, most of the newsstand copies were being shredded or returned. The poor result reflected the several degrees of separation in the nation’s attitude toward the Vietnam War, drugs, radical college students, black power, free-form feminists, and long hair.” This is an overly harsh criticism, in my estimation, but an accurate description of what happened to the magazine’s readership.

By the end of 1970 the magazine’s annual loss had soared to \$700,000 and circulation had fallen to well below 300,000. Blaming each other for the decline, Morris resigned and Cowles accepted. Then came about a dozen years of drift and a parade of editors. By 1980 the loss was close to \$2,000,000 and the situation was so parlous that “the owners declared the magazine extinct.” Just in time came the blare of the U.S. Cavalry bugle: The MacArthur Foundation in Chicago agreed to save the magazine. John R. MacArthur, a bright, energetic grandson of the foundation’s founder, instituted the recovery operation and stepped in himself to become the publisher and remains so today. He brought Lew Lapham back to reconstitute the magazine as the smaller, deliberately lower circulation, nonprofit journal it is today, with a slim staff and relying less on commissioned articles and in-depth reporting than the old *Harper’s*. Its circulation is about 217,000 and, says Lapham, it “is now sustained by its own advertising and subscription revenues.” His invention of the monthly *Harper’s Index* of obscure and often startling facts and figures has proved to be more addictive to many readers than nicotine, without any of the poison.

No longer is there reason to confuse the new *Harper’s* with *The Atlantic*. The latter continues to be the kind of magazine it has always been, originating its own material and offering journalism in depth (though not so inter-

minably as William Shawn's New Yorker) across the broad spectrum of literature, culture, science and public affairs. It suffered its own problems during the rude 1970's as it became more expensive to attain subscribers and deliver magazines and to compete with far wealthier publications for articles and short stories. Seeking a much-needed infusion of cash to finance the magazine's ambitions, the company sold to the real-estate operator Mortimer Zuckerman. The results were unpleasant for me and for some of my associates but good for the magazine's future.

Zuckerman hired a good replacement as editor, plowed money into the product, beefed up the staff and salaries. If he hadn't gone on an ego trip to waste perhaps millions on inflating the circulation of the magazine he might have moved it toward solid if limited profitability. The magazine's claimed circulation of more than 460,000 was grossly diluted by cut-rate subscriptions. Known as a real whiz in the real estate business, Zuckerman proved to be an inferior publisher. He let the business side and the advertising sales force deteriorate. He capitulated last year, selling to a new publisher who

seems to know what he is doing and a new editor who seems determined to keep The Atlantic Monthly's flag flying proudly.

So here's a toast to both those hardy survivors: Long may they continue. ■

Robert Manning, a 1946 Nieman Fellow, was the editor of The Atlantic Monthly from 1964 until 1980. Prior to that he was Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs during the Kennedy administration, a senior editor and foreign correspondent for Time, and United Nations bureau chief for the United Press.

Can Journalism Be Fair?

'If truth is whatever works for you, there is no need for journalism.'

What's Fair? The Problem of Equity in Journalism

Robert Giles and Robert W. Snyder, Editors
Transaction Publishers. 171 Pages. \$21.95.

By Philip Meyer

In the summer of 1985, while I was writing my own book on journalism ethics, I had a brief conversation at Columbia University with sociologist Herbert Gans. "How do you avoid sounding sanctimonious?" he wanted to know. A good question.

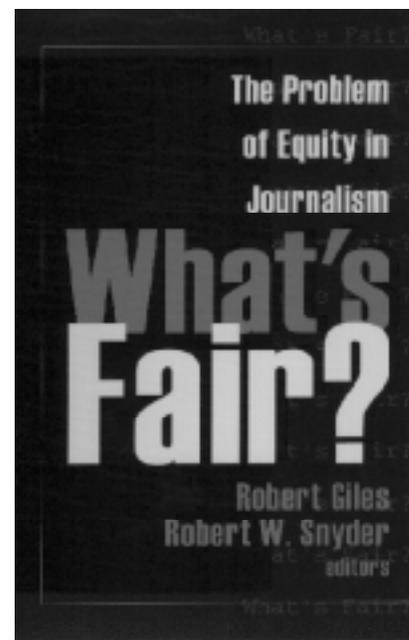
My answer then, and the solution adopted by the editors of "What's Fair?" is to include a critical mass of confessional material in the treatment. When I teach ethics to journalism undergraduates, I regale them with tales of my own misdeeds and angst as a practicing journalist. This convinces them that both I and the problems of which I speak are authentic. A just person, theologian Donald W. Shriver, Jr. reminds us as he quotes the 15th Psalm in the closing chapter of "What's Fair," is one who "swears to his own hurt."

And so the opening section of this volume is devoted to confession. Former Editor of The Boston Globe Tom Winship recalls how his admiration of John F. Kennedy clouded his news judgment and made him run a

premature headline "Kennedy Wins" in the newspaper when the victory in fact was very much in doubt. Los Angeles Times media critic David Shaw recounts his humbling discovery that he had used more unnamed sources in the past than he wanted to remember. Walter Anderson, President and Publisher of Parade Magazine, agonizes over his unintentional hurt of an innocent source when he was a young reporter.

Robert Giles is the new Curator of the Nieman Foundation and Robert W. Snyder, now with Rutgers University, was the Editor of the Freedom Forum's Media Studies Journal when these 25 chapters first appeared in 1998. This diverse collection of articles would make a fine introduction to media ethics for undergraduates in journalism if only because of its eclecticism.

Some linkages between the different perspectives are provided in an historical section. Sociologist Michael Schudson shows how the development of what professionalism journalism has



become was the outcome of a business model that sought to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. But he wonders if the outcome in this country is really better than in Europe, where narrower, party-oriented journalism still prevails. And his colleague at the University of California, San Diego, Daniel Hallin, a professor in the Department of Communications, worries that the confluence of historical factors that led to the birth of professionalism in what he calls the "high-modernist

era” was a fluke that is already being undermined by new technologies and postmodern political currents.

These fellows are optimists compared to Jim Squires, who throws up his hands at the mere idea of fairness. His experience at the Chicago Tribune convinced him that the system has already been too corrupted by the profit motive to be capable of ideals at all. “It is already midnight in the garden,” Squires declares poetically, “and far too late to worry about fairness.”

If I were using this book in the classroom, I would make it a starting point for discussion of two issues, one intellectual and one commercial. The former is fairly easy to deal with. We need to examine where the postmodern trend is taking us.

Several of the authors refer to this intellectual current that, at least in some of its forms, refutes the Western ideas that brought the Enlightenment, modern science, and the First Amendment. Reality, the postmodernists say, is socially constructed and the holders of power, including the owners of the media, use it to create realities that benefit them at the expense of the powerless.

Because, as journalists, we like to root for the underdog, critical theory has its attractions. But in negating the possibility of objectivity, social constructivism moots the issue of fair-

ness. If truth is whatever works for you, there is no need for journalism. This trend is worth watching because a fair amount of scholarship in schools of journalism and mass communication now follows the social constructivist model. While I have not seen it infect the news-editorial craft courses, teaching our young to be spin doctors has become an accepted goal for journalism education.

The commercial challenge to fairness is more interesting. As technology takes away the natural monopolies enjoyed by the few who buy ink by the barrel, is it possible to find a business model that will reward fairness and trust? Former editor and publisher Mark Trahan, in one of three chapters looking at the 50-year-old work of the Hutchins Commission, doesn't see why market pressures can't “be an incentive for innovation, self-examination and a challenge to be better than we are now.” The trick is figuring out how.

Social scientists and biologists alike have begun to believe that moral values are a product of evolution. Trust means predictable behavior. As such, it has economic value, and social entities—from insect swarms to nations—that manage to capture it are more likely to survive, prosper and reproduce themselves. But the payout time is too long for media accountants, who look instead for fast rewards like the

gain from slicing a few millimeters off the edge of a page to save newsprint.

And, yet, trust itself could be the source of a natural monopoly attractive to a rational profit seeker. None of us has the time or patience to rely on multiple suppliers of any good, from haircuts to banking services. When we find one that satisfies us, we stop paying attention to the rest. Couldn't it be the same for information providers? If everyone is so concerned about fairness, it must have economic value, and there ought to be a way to capture that value in some kind of a media product whose owners will do well and do good at the same time.

One step in that direction would be a more formal professionalism with systems of peer review designed to publicly identify specific unfair practices. It is important to keep traditional journalism separate in the public mind from the corrupting influences of both postmodernism and the money-changers. Swearing to our own hurt in a visible way would be a good place to start. ■

Philip Meyer, a 1967 Nieman Fellow, is a professor of and Knight Chair in journalism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His current project is a fourth edition of “Precision Journalism,” first published in 1973.

Freelancers Confront New Challenges

In a contract battle, many argue their work shouldn't be used for free.

By Anne Driscoll

No one knows when the first news went from one person to another or how that news was transmitted. But the earliest known—and most primitive—method of sharing the news was via drums. Humans, having gathered in tribes, heard news bulletins of a shared danger or the death of an elder transmitted through the language of commonly understood percussive beating. The drummers who

dispersed the news in this way could arguably be considered the first freelancers, gathering tribal news and then communicating it, perhaps on a drum of their own making.

Since this decidedly low-tech reporting method was first devised, evolving technology has markedly improved the efficacy of journalism. There was the development of the written word, the Gutenberg press, the linotype, and

most recently the introduction of the computer into the modern newsroom. Now, through the existence of the Internet, news from anywhere and everywhere is instantly available. However, oddly enough, it is the advent of this technology that threatens the livelihood of many freelance journalists today.

Freelancers have always been mavericks in the news business. By defini-

tion, they are independent. By nature, they are free-spirited. Working alone, they choose their stories, their markets, their audiences, but their work is not unprotected. Under existing United States and international copyright law, freelancers are able to peddle their ideas, their research, their words, to an interested buyer, and still own their handiwork. They are free to revise, reuse or resell their work as they wish.

In spite of their name, freelancers don't work for free. Or, at least, they shouldn't have to. However, that is exactly what The Boston Globe (and other news organizations) has recently demanded of its freelancers—to have their work to be used without paying for it. In April, the management of The Boston Globe sent letters to 1,000 of its freelancers—writers, photographers and graphic artists who have regularly contributed to The Boston Globe in the past—stating that if they did not sign its newly devised “license agreement” by July 1, 2000, they would be barred from working for the paper. The contract called for the newspaper to assume the freelancers' worldwide electronic rights, as well as the worldwide right to republish the freelancers' work in any form under The Boston Globe brand, without either compensation to or control by the freelancer.

The contract is also retroactive, permitting the newspaper to control, use and profit from any work the freelancer has ever done for The Boston Globe. Furthermore, the contract extends the life of the copyright 70 years after the freelancer dies. In other words, when a freelancer signs this contract, he/she is giving The Boston Globe permission to profit from the past and future archive of his/her work in any electronic media that exists or ever might be developed without sharing even a penny with the person who produced the work.



Jonathan Tasini, President of the National Writers Union, during a July 2000 picket line of freelance photographers, writers and illustrators protesting The Boston Globe's freelancer contract. *Photo by Christopher Fitzgerald, BGFA (Boston Globe Freelancers Association).*

This is wrong. The “free” part of our name refers being free to work as we wish. Or, as in this case, respond as we wish. And many of my colleagues have. According to union estimates, more than half of The Boston Globe's freelancers refused to sign what they perceive to be an onerous, unfair and perhaps unlawful contract. [The Globe reports that 70 percent signed.] In time, the Massachusetts Superior Court will rule on the contract's lawfulness since a class action suit on behalf of freelance writers, photographers and graphic artists has been filed against the newspaper. The lawsuit, which is supported by the National Writers Union, Graphic Artists Guild of the International Union, the United Auto Workers, and the American Society of Media Photographers claims that The Boston Globe has used unfair and deceptive business practices to bully freelancers into giving up what is lawfully theirs.

This case is potentially precedent-setting, a fact that is not lost on seven members of Congress from Massachusetts who recently wrote The Boston Globe's publisher, Richard Gilman, expressing concern about the fairness of the newspaper's contract offer. Several signed a joint letter to the publisher, while Representative Barney

Frank, who serves as the ranking member of the Judiciary Committee's subcommittee on courts, copyright and intellectual property, sent his own message.

The National Writers Union recently prevailed against The Boston Globe's parent company in a landmark lawsuit, *Tasini vs. The New York Times*, which established work contributed by freelancers cannot be reused electronically or in any other format by a publisher without the creator's consent. The New York Times and The Boston Globe, along with other publications, face the risk of legal action for having routinely violated copyright law. So keen is The

Boston Globe on obtaining these rights that the company has remained resolute in its refusal to negotiate in any way with any of its freelancers. Its message is clear: our way or no way.

The Boston Globe maintains that the contract allows freelancers to retain their copyright and the right to resell their work to other news outlets in New England after a news embargo that varies from 24 to 48 hours, and so the contract is actually a favorable one for the freelancers. However, a significant number of freelance journalists—including many who signed and will continue to write for the newspaper—criticize the contract as a blatant grabbing of their rights and a way for the paper to profit by reaching into the pockets of its freelancers. Others contend that the claim of writers retaining copyright is spurious since its value is much diminished.

For the 450 who have signed the contract, few are happy about giving away their work but many felt forced to acquiesce. They sound resigned to this changed circumstance, saying that getting something is better than nothing. Many signed under duress, unhappily, unwillingly and warily. And, no doubt, those who opted not to sign, as well as those who have, are hoping for a favor-

able court decision that would restore their right to retain ownership of their work. Most freelancers I know would prefer to remain independent agents if they can be paid fairly for their work, instead of being indentured to a company that treats them poorly and attempts to depict that poor treatment as though they are doing them a favor.

So how does this sign-or-sever situation impact freelancers?

Freelancers who sign can work for The Boston Globe, although the contract explicitly states that the newspaper is under no obligation to accept their work, even though it gains access to it. In exchange for their signature, it is increasingly likely they'll forfeit a significant source of earnings in the future. Some newspaper executives predict that increasing revenues will come from electronic sources. Freelancers who have signed will receive no benefit or derive any profit from this burgeoning market since they no longer control their electronic rights.

While these freelancers retain the copyright, their work loses much of its market value if The Boston Globe is able to compete more effectively and efficiently than individual freelancers. For example, if the newspaper decides to publish "The Best of The Boston Globe," what chance does the freelancer have of interesting another publisher in using the same articles? In some cases, The Boston Globe is going to be able to grab the rights to a backlog of as many as 20 years or more of a freelancer's work without compensation. In many cases, the paper will assume control of work that originated before the Internet existed. By doing so, the newspaper reaps the rewards of the writer's labor without ever having had to provide benefits, as they would to staff whose work the paper can reuse as they desire.



Linda Weltner, freelance columnist for The Boston Globe, speaks to freelancers at an informational picket line on July 2000 outside the newspaper's offices. *Photo by Christopher Fitzgerald, BGFA.*

For freelancers who do not sign, the most immediate impact to them is a direct—and, in some cases, quite significant—loss of income. In the six zoned editions of The Boston Globe, the first of which was launched in 1986 and the last nearly a decade later, about 80 percent of the content is contributed by freelancers, who, in many cases, were recruited from full-time staff jobs at other newspapers. [Overall, freelancers contributed about 25 percent of the newspaper's articles.] After futile attempts at negotiations with The Boston Globe, these reporters' refusal to sign the contract has resulted in a total cutoff of assignments and contact. But it is not only freelancers whose lives are being upended by this situation. Readers are affected, as well. Since it is the most successful freelancers who have the most to lose under the terms of such a contract, many of them have chosen not to sign. Therefore, the creative ideas and perspectives of these successful freelancers are not being used.

As things stood before this new contract, Boston Globe freelancers earned a fraction of the pay of full-time staffers, as well as not having access to company-subsidized health insurance, vacation or retirement benefits. Under this new contract, they'll receive even less. Who can blame them for not wanting to become cyber-sweatshop work-

ers? Perhaps in all of this, the most unsettling aspect is the worry a lot of us have about the pernicious affect this might have on other news organizations. For The Boston Globe to succeed in erasing the long-standing practice by which writers hold on to their property rights, then surely other publications will follow, as some already have. [Other professions are facing this problem, as well. For instance, some musicians are fighting the challenge to their copy-

right protection because of the development of music-sharing Web sites such as Napster, which allow users to download music for free.] In time, contractual arrangements such as this one undoubtedly will dissuade many talented, independent-minded journalists from pursuing this kind of work, thus limiting the perspectives of reporting and writing upon which our civil society depends.

It matters if writers own their words. And it ought to matter more than to just the writers themselves when their words are taken by someone else without proper compensation. While the Internet expands our ways of getting to new banks of knowledge, these banks shouldn't be stocked with what is not rightly theirs to give away. ■

Anne Driscoll was a freelance weekly columnist and reporter for The Boston Globe for 10 years, until her refusal to sign the new contract ended her work with the paper. She has been a freelance writer for 20 years, working for The New York Times, Baltimore Sun, People, and others. She is the author of a series of books for girls called "Girl to Girl."

The Boston Globe was offered the opportunity to write an article on this topic, but declined.

International Journalism

Africa is the focus of this issue's international journalism section. It is a continent too often ignored by Western media and a place where in too many countries those who are journalists confront challenges in their work that their U.S. peers could not even imagine. In several African nations, intimidation and legal confrontations with government officials are common forms of journalistic censure; for some reporters, torture and imprisonment are a consequence of their job.

From South Africa, **Mathatha Tsedu** ('97 NF), deputy editor of *The Star* in Johannesburg, explores the transitory terrain that black journalists now inhabit as they are called upon to report on the nation's black government. At a time when the government-appointed Human Rights Commission has been holding contentious hearings about racism in the media, Tsedu argues that the uppermost challenge for black journalists rests within each of them. "The challenge is to decide on what is right and wrong and sometimes national priorities might interfere with what ordinarily would be good journalism," Tsedu writes. **Dennis Cruywagen** ('00 NF), former deputy editor of *Pretoria News*, reviews Benjamin Pogrud's book, "War of Words: Memoir of a South African Journalist," and reminds us of the journalistic courage displayed by some white reporters during South Africa's apartheid era.

From Zimbabwe come two stories describing a nation where the independent press is struggling mightily to survive. Freelance journalist and novelist **David Karanja** provides an insightful overview of problems that members of the Zimbabwe media confront. And **Mark G. Chavunduka** ('00 NF), editor of *The Standard*, illustrates the personal price paid by enterprising reporters with his recounting of the torture and imprisonment he endured because of a story his newspaper published. But he also describes his triumph in court when a section of a law used to intimidate the media was ruled unconstitutional.

Wilson Wanene, a Kenyan-born freelance journalist, reviews journalist Robert M. Press's book, "The New Africa: Dispatches from a Changing Continent," and concludes that its message—often overlooked by journalists—is "Take time to really understand Africa." This message resonates with the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize-winning organization **Doctors Without Borders**/Médecins Sans Frontières. In its annual listing of the top 10 underreported humanitarian stories, critical situations on the African continent comprise a majority. In an article that accompanies this list, **Susan Moeller**, author of "Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death," examines the process by which members of the press decide where and when to shine their searchlights in distant places. Moeller also tracks evolving media interest in the AIDS crisis in Africa. "... [A]t least, now, they are covering the story," she writes. "It remains to be seen whether they will stay with it." ■



Journalism in Transition in South Africa

For black journalists, the threat is their conscience.

By Mathatha Tsedu

About three years ago, a black journalist for a Sunday newspaper broke a story about an arms deal that South Africa was about to conclude. Essentially, the story, quoting highly placed government sources, said that the South African government had struck a deal to sell arms worth R30 billion (\$4 billion) to Syria. At the time, the arms industry was a depressed sector that was shedding jobs and the deal would have turned the tide and created hundreds of much needed jobs. However, after the publication of the story, the government was forced to take a defensive line, denying that such a deal had been sealed. South Africa, with its short history of trying to maintain a high moral ground internationally, was perturbed by inferences that by selling arms to Syria, a country believed to be supporting “Islamic fundamentalists,” that was involved in fighting the Jewish state of Israel, it was therefore supporting anti-Semitism.

Consequently, the deal was scuppered. A huge debate ensued over whether Cyril Madlala, the journalist, had not forsaken national interest for a scoop. He stood by his decision to carry the story. This, in a nutshell, could perhaps sum up one of the challenges facing black journalists working in the post-apartheid and democratic South Africa. During apartheid, this story would have been easy for any black journalist. Anything that embarrassed the apartheid regime was a must-carry story. It was easy to defend the publication of such a story on moral and political grounds. Clearly, apartheid South Africa could not be allowed to sell arms because it would be breaking an arms embargo and, in addition, whatever the pariah state did was illegitimate. But above all, the profits generated would be used to strengthen the state that had to fall.

However, the ball game has changed, and the players in government are different. They have a mandate of the majority of people to improve the quality of lives. In pursuit of such a goal, the country had to compete with other countries in business, including the sale of weapons that might eventually fall into the wrong hands.

A patriotic black journalist might ask himself or herself whether writing such a story under the new political dispensation would not amount to undermining the broader interests of the country. On the other hand, the journalist inside the patriot would keep on screaming to report on such an important story. That Madlala went ahead is an indication of the attitude of many, who while understanding their responsibilities as citizens, will not allow that to deter them from reporting on an issue as crucial as that. In actual fact, the threat to journalists, unlike during the hey days of apartheid repression, is their conscience. The challenge is to decide on what is right and wrong and sometimes national priorities might interfere with what ordinarily would be good journalism.

This is especially so when opposition parties that are vocal are white and attack the black government from a point of view generally seen as race-based, as if to show that indeed the failure or perceived failure of the black government is because it is black. In such situations, black journalists face a crisis of decision, of conscience. But they have acquitted themselves well, maintaining high standards set by their predecessors who went to prison to defend the right to remain silent when authorities demanded names of sources.

Exposing corruption is another area in which black journalists have excelled, debunking the myth that because they

are black and the government is black, they would therefore spare them the rod. Mzilikazi ka Afrika, an investigative writer for *The Sunday Times*, edited by a black person, too, has been responsible for more exposés that have seen senior officials tumble than any other journalist on his or her own. However, there have been a few cases of what has been regarded as government interference with the freedom of the media. In one such instance, the police went to court to force reporters to make available their video footage of a crime scene in order to secure prosecution. After several meetings between editors and government officials, an agreement was reached that in the future such matters would be raised with editors before the police could request the court to order reporters to give evidence which was collected in the process of news gathering.

While the use of the Criminal Procedure Act’s section 205 is regretted, the government’s attitude is no different from what exists anywhere else. Attempts to use laws to procure prosecutions are found throughout the democratic world. Bouts of mudslinging and accusations of interference with media freedom and counter-accusations of the absence of patriotism are characteristics of a developing relationship and are not unique to South Africa.

Recently, the government’s Human Rights Commission held hearings on racism in the media. While this was generally accepted by black journalists who felt that the process was likely to expose the racism in the industry and in the process recommend remedial action, for most white journalists the hearings amounted to the harassment of the media in its crudest form. Steps taken to undo the legacy of decades of legalized racism in which the media played their own role in protecting and

supporting the racist government have elicited reactions that are in the main dictated by whether the journalist is white or black.

But be that as it may, the challenge for black journalists today is also to understand the intricate transition underway and move ahead with as little skills and experience as they have. This is because political freedom has been one of the biggest threats to journalism in South Africa. Let me explain. Just prior to the 1994 watershed elections, companies started recruiting senior black journalists into their corporate offices as directors and executives. Companies then wanted to show the world that they had “our own black” and how better than to hire journalists who came with high profiles.

Following the democratic elections, government made similar raids. And more and more black journalists with experience and skills left for work in government offices. The result has been that while a decade ago the average experience level in any newsroom would have been more than 10 years, today it is less than three years.

And yet, the story is even more complex. This less-experienced staff has to

grapple with South Africa’s interface with globalization, both political and economic, its integration within the Southern African region, and its own internal stabilization process as it wades through transformation. To deal with this story in an environment in which “elders” are present to provide back-up is difficult enough, but to do so without that elderly hand, is almost impossible.

Thus, today we find in South African journalism stories without context, arising out of these circumstances.

Being black also means carrying the flag for the race, as well as dealing with stereotypes and fighting them. Examples of this dilemma are many. For example, any story about AIDS which needs visual enhancement will have a black face on it, perpetuating the impression that like in the United States earlier with gays, the disease is affecting black people only.

Black journalists have to guard against perpetuating this kind of stereotype, without being seen as denying the obvious. And news stories about black people involved in accidents continue to be published without names or contexts of family background or of

the weeping relative. Black areas are still seen as areas of crime stories. Publishing breasts and nipples of black women is easy while people will go into all kinds of elaborate permission-seeking exercises if the breasts and nipples are white. These are entrenched histories at many publications, and being a black journalist in South Africa today also means undoing them, fighting them, and refusing to buy into the old context and instead fighting to create a new one that brings dignity to the way black people are covered.

In the end, however, the challenge as always is how to tell the story of this evolving nation. And that, as we all know, starts with knowing one’s Five W’s and the H, researching, introducing context to the story, and abiding by the ethics of journalism. And having done that, being ready to stand by your story and defend it. Black South African journalists are doing just that, under very complex conditions. ■

Mathatha Tsedu, a 1997 Nieman Fellow, is deputy editor of The Star in Johannesburg, South Africa.



A Story of Courage in South African Journalism

Blacks accepted the white-owned Rand Daily Mail as their champion.

War of Words

Memoir of a South African Journalist

Benjamin Pogrud

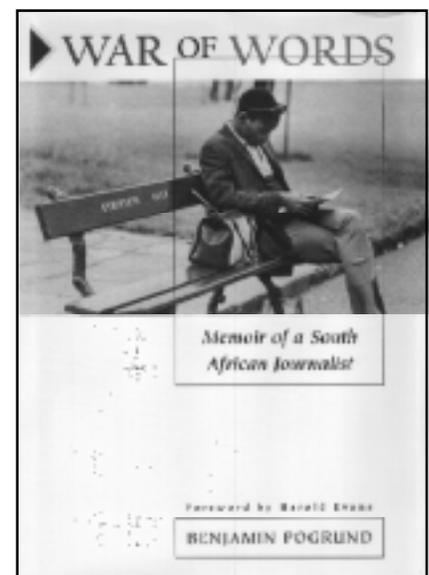
Seven Story Press. 381 Pages. \$26.95.

By Dennis Cruywagen

I did not know Laurence Gandar. I was barely a year old when he began his stint as Editor of the Rand Daily Mail on October 1, 1957. By the time he was fired 12 years later, he had made his mark on history and had probably become the editor most hated by the ruling National Party. I was finishing primary school and looking forward to high school when his employers dismissed Gandar in an obvious attempt

to silence the most left wing (by South African government standards, at least) of newspapers.

At that time I was unaware of his or his paper’s existence. In our household, going without a daily newspaper was just another fact of life as for millions of blacks in apartheid South Africa. I did not know then that the Mail, as his paper was known, was published in Johannesburg and had become the



most vociferous critic of the white minority government. There were more important things than newspapers for many black folks to consider.

Later, much later, I began to learn about Gandar and the role he'd played in the old South Africa. Sadly, his contribution to press freedom in our country is not widely known. That's why Benjamin Pogrund's book is so important, even if it's essentially about Pogrund's beloved Mail and his life as a reporter, a journey which would not have been possible if Gandar had not been at the helm at the Mail when it started.

Although Gandar fought in North Africa and Italy in World War II and held the rank of captain as a brigade intelligence officer in the Sixth South African Armored Division, he was not considered to be a courageous visionary. Perhaps those who appointed him and thought he would perform a rescue operation were blinded by the fact that he had been recruited from public relations. If this were the case, they should have looked instead to his service in the army. This was a brave man who took his newspaper to new heights, changing it from a publication written by whites for whites into one which blacks accepted as their champion.

No wonder, then, that when the Mail was closed in 1985, Thami Mzwai, one of South Africa's most radical and influential black journalists, wrote: "From one's high school days the Mail had a special place in the hearts of the black community. It was the first paper to regard them as human beings. It fought for them. Its blend of inspirational and aggressive writing was the talk of the times. For one to be seen tucking it under his arm was a sign of intellectualism. Whether one could read or not did not matter. Even reporters from the Mail were at some stage regarded as a cut above other reporters. If you announced yourself as from the World (a black newspaper) people would look at your feet. When from the Mail you stood a good chance of getting a free drink and unbounded hospitality. The Mail as a flagship of black aspiration had made its mark."

This epitaph might as well have been

written in honor of Gandar. He fulfilled his dream of changing the Mail into a beacon of light, an instrument of change, and engine of reform because, as he told Pogrund, it "was absolutely essential to help keep up the spirits of the small embattled forces of liberal-minded people who might otherwise have been crushed, to demonstrate to blacks that there was at least one sizeable white institution that understood and was prepared to fight for the removal of their grievances, and to show the outside world that there were still some upholders of Western norms and values alive and kicking in South Africa."

But standing up for the rights of those whom the government of the time viewed as subhuman exacted a price: Whites, the Mail's traditional readership, deserted in droves as they were unable to stomach Gandar's hard-hitting editorials and his efforts to bring the realities of South Africa home.

According to Pogrund, Gandar was left bereft by the death of his wife, Isobel, in 1989 after 45 years of marriage. He contemplated suicide, but was excited by the birth of a grandson and the collapse of the Soviet Union, and chose life. Thank God he did. Although he died at age 83 in 1998, he had lived to see the release of Nelson Mandela, the birth of a truly democratic South Africa, and the demise of the National Party. Laurence Gandar was a great South African, a newspaper editor who was ahead of his time.

As I read Pogrund's memoirs I became acutely aware of Gandar's hand in shaping South Africa. Given all the changes that have taken place in South Africa since 1990, it's so easy for contributions such as his to be forgotten. Pogrund reminds us of our debt to people such as him.

So, what about the rest of the Pogrund's book? I found it an easy read, a book which those interested in South Africa will enjoy. While Gandar was scaling new heights as an editor, Pogrund was making a name for himself as a courageous reporter who was imprisoned, hounded by the South African security police, and spied upon by some colleagues. He had what most

reporters yearn for—credibility. He enjoyed the confidence of Nelson Mandela and Robert Sobukwe, founder of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). Scoops became synonymous with his byline. Here are a few:

- He was in the black township of Sharpeville on Monday, March 21, 1960 when the PAC staged a protest. Police fired on the crowd, killing 68 and wounding 186. The majority of them were shot in the back. He reported this story as it happened, not as the police wanted it to be reported.
- He was the first to report on Nelson Mandela's belief that it was futile to talk peace in light of the South African government's show of force and intimidation.

Pogrund's honesty and perception shine through. For instance, he thought then that Mandela was not a scintillating speaker, but one who impressed people with his sincerity and quality of his speaking.

One should not forget that Pogrund was seeing South Africa through white eyes from a liberal white newspaper's point of view. This is understandable. However, writing from this perspective, or indeed from the black one, may blind an author. Pogrund says that the Mail's exposé of conditions inside South African prisons led to an improvement of their plight. Though the investigation excluded Robben Island, the infamous prison where South Africa incarcerated political prisoners, he implies that its publication helped them as well. I'm not too certain if all of them would agree with this.

Still, I was impressed by Pogrund's book. Sadly, it reminded me how much black journalists owe it to themselves, history and their country to write about their experiences. Their books might read differently than Pogrund's. ■

Dennis Cruywagen, a 2000 Nieman Fellow, is former deputy editor of Pretoria News, the only English daily newspaper published in the South African capital.



In Zimbabwe, the Independent Press Struggles to Survive

Legal maneuvers and financial hard times challenge press freedom.

By David Karanja

One day in 1988, an angry Enos Nkala, Zimbabwe's Defense Minister, called *The Chronicle*, a government-owned regional daily newspaper, to order the editor and his deputy to report to his office. If they failed to respond to his summons, he warned, he would send soldiers to drag them out of their offices.

Geoff Nyarota and his deputy, Davison Maruziva, didn't go to the minister's office. Instead, they intensified their investigation on the issue that had earned them the wrath of the minister. The paper had been investigating irregular deals at the state-owned Willowvale Mazda Motor Industries, a car assembly plant, in which ministers and other senior government officials were abusing their office to gain from the public corporation millions of dollars. They would buy cars cheaply, as they were officially entitled to do, but would then resell them at exorbitant prices, depriving government of revenue and enriching themselves unfairly.

The *Chronicle's* investigative reports were so embarrassing to the government that President Robert Mugabe appointed a judicial commission of inquiry to investigate the matter. The commission's findings vindicated the newspaper's reports and several ministers resigned in disgrace. Enos Nkala was among them.

Willowvale, as the scandal came to be called, earned the two journalists dire retribution. Nyarota was "promoted" to a management position (as director of public relations) which was specially created for him in the Zimbabwe newspapers group. The journalists who had worked under him in the Willowvale stories were also reassigned.

Zimbabwe's Free, But Can the Press be Free?

The country, which gained independence from Britain in 1980, has during the last decade experienced the birth of a vibrant independent press which has found its niche in a market that is still dominated by state-controlled news organizations. The government controls Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), the nation's only radio and television broadcaster, Ziana, a national news agency, the Community Newspapers Group (CNG), which publishes several regional newspapers, and Zimbabwe Newspapers Ltd. (*Zimpapers*), which publishes *The Sunday Mail*, *The Herald*, *The Sunday News*, *The Chronicle*, and *Kwayedza* (A Shona-language weekly).

The growth of the media has been aided by Zimbabwe's advanced level of literacy. With a population of 12.5 million, it has the highest literacy level (85 percent) in Africa. The country's journalism is fairly sophisticated and many newspapers have adopted modern publishing technology, including online editions.

Mugabe's government accuses those who work for independent media of engaging in sensational and irresponsible reporting that is harmful to the state. Early in 1999, Zimbabwe came under sharp international focus when two journalists working for *The Standard* were arrested, illegally detained by the military, and tortured for publishing a story alleging a failed coup plot. Editor (and Nieman Fellow '00) Mark Chavunduka and his senior writer, Ray Choto, had to seek treatment in London after their release. [See accom-

panying story by Mark Chavunduka on page 82.] Shortly after this episode, the editor and publisher of *The Zimbabwe Mirror*, Ibbo Mandaza, and his reporter, Grace Kwinjeh, were also charged for publishing an alarming report. The previous year the paper had published a story alleging that a Zimbabwean soldier had died in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and his body had been brought back to the country without a head for burial. The charges were later dropped.

The government is determined to get its way and maintain a firm grip on what is published.

Who, If Anyone, Will Control the Media?

Last year, the Ministry of Information prepared a draft bill to control the media. The bill, which was presented to the Cabinet for approval, has not yet been tabled in Parliament to be passed into law.

The new media policy framework proposes the formation of either a statutory or non-statutory body to define media ethics and standards and to accredit journalists. It also deals with the issue of media ownership and stipulates that foreigners should only own between 20 and 25 percent of Zimbabwe's media and that they should not sit on editorial boards. If the framework passes, it will also be a crime for a foreigner to use a Zimbabwean as a front to establish a media business in the country. The bill further requires any foreigner who wants to invest in the country's media to declare his financial capacity before being autho-

alized to make the investment.

Those who work in the independent press have condemned the proposed law. They have dismissed it as a government attempt to enhance authoritarianism. Members of the press have proposed coming up with a mechanism of self-regulation. Senior editors from the mainstream media have formed a committee to look into ways of forming a body that will carry out this task. "We prefer self-regulation by the media because the government cannot be trusted to have the interest of the media at heart. The regulation they want to put in place is not sincere," says Trevor Ncube, group editor in chief for The Zimbabwe Independent.

Ncube believes journalists should establish a press complaints council to handle concerns of those who feel individual reporters, the corporate world or the government has unfairly treated them. The council should not be mandated to punish offenders but it should have "enough teeth" to compel offending members of the media to apologize or correct stories if they are proved to be inaccurate.

The Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ), the trade union, has also condemned the government's proposed law. "Media workers should use all means necessary to ensure that all oppressive laws are discarded. If it means throwing stones to get press freedom, we have to do it to render certain pieces of legislation unconstitutional," says Basildon Peta, ZUJ's Secretary General. The union has come up with its own proposals in which it calls for a provision in the constitution to guarantee freedom of the press. It suggests that a media council be formed with members drawn from the media, the government, and stakeholders from other sectors. The union says the council should be funded by the government and answerable to Parliament. Its mandate should include issuing of licenses and handling complaints against media organizations that engage in wayward and malicious reporting. A separate independent broadcasting authority should be set up to govern operations of the electronic media.

Issues that the press-proposed media council would be expected to address include guidelines about how members of the media should relate to the public and among themselves. Corruption among journalists is another issue which the council is expected to deal with. In the past, journalists have been accused of receiving bribes from individuals, institutions and government in exchange for positive coverage. In 1998, two journalists working for The Sunday Mail were arrested while in the act of receiving a Z10,000 (U.S. \$240) bribe from a Harare restaurant owner so that they would give his business positive coverage. They are now facing extortion and corruption charges.

The government defends its proposed media law by saying it is not aimed at muzzling media freedom but at regulating it to safeguard the interests of the public. "Although the government wants the media to operate in a favorable environment, it is necessary to retain some laws which act as checks and balances against journalists who report irresponsibly," says Willard Chiwewe, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information.

Difficulties in Trying to Reform the Media

Amid discussion about how the press in Zimbabwe might be monitored, some independent evaluations are already identifying problems in how news is being conveyed to the public. The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) is a media advocacy body whose mission is to foster free, independent and diverse media throughout Southern Africa. It has chapters in several countries including Zimbabwe (MISA-Zimbabwe). Under the aegis of MISA, the Media Monitoring Project was established in 1999 to act as watchdog of the performance of the press in Zimbabwe. In its first report, the project castigated the performance of the public media, accusing it of being unprofessional and harboring a deliberate agenda to misinform the public.

There are some in Zimbabwe who

feel that the present media growth has not been broad based enough to be of maximum benefit to the society. Dr. Tafataona Mahoso is the head of the Division of Media and Mass Communication at Harare Polytechnic, the leading training ground for journalists. He believes that lack of resources and a cultural bias have made Zimbabwean media urban-based and therefore not fully people-centered. "The media in Zimbabwe reflects the world-view of urban dwellers, the middle class, while giving no voice to the rural folk. The media is supposed to be a catalyst of human development. It can only do this effectively if it makes a conscious attempt to reach everybody."

Mahoso has had a chance to implement his vision. In 1997 he landed a presidential appointment as chairman of the board of directors of Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation. He was, however, booted out after barely a year in office after he unearthed corruption and tried to root it out. His board discovered many irregularities, including fraudulent hiring practices that gave birth to unprofessional practices. A report released at the beginning of 1999 by a 12-member parliamentary committee set up to investigate the fiasco revealed a series of vices including corruption, nepotism, political patronage, and sex abuse in the hiring of staff.

Mahoso's experience illustrates the dilemma facing senior staff working for the state-owned media. They find themselves at a crossroads, struggling to maintain professional ethics and at the same time remaining loyal to their bosses. As a result, senior editorial positions have had to be given not necessarily to people who are professionally competent but to those who will be amenable to the state's manipulation.

Economic Troubles Doom Some Publications

The fight for media freedom now focuses on a campaign to ensure the eradication of draconian laws that the government uses to stifle freedom of

expression. The Law and Order Maintenance Act (LOMA), which was enacted in 1960 by the colonial government to contain the struggle for self-determination by blacks, has been broadly criticized. It outlaws publication of material that is likely to cause fear, alarm and despondency among any section of the public or to bring the country's leader to disrepute. In 1998, Parliament reacted to public criticism by passing the Public Order and Security Bill (POSB) to replace LOMA. Journalists and human rights groups condemned the new bill, saying it contained many elements of LOMA. President Mugabe refused to sign it into law and referred it back to Parliament for further discussion. In an accompanying letter to the Speaker of Parliament, he said that the bill didn't deal adequately with journalists who might publish unsubstantiated reports.

Chavunduka and Choto successfully challenged a section of LOMA in the Supreme Court, arguing that it contradicts the constitutional guarantee for freedom of expression and therefore it should be declared null and void.

Another focus in the battle for media freedom has been to lobby the



Headline from a Zimbabwe newspaper.

While the government's media crackdown presents plenty of cause for concern, perhaps the most immediate and greatest threat to the press is their economic viability. At the beginning of the 1990's, Zimbabwe, which had been pursuing socialist economic policies,

media boom. Several weekly papers, monthlies and periodicals were born. But the most significant product of this boom was a new daily newspaper, The Daily Gazette.

Hopes were high that this boom would lead to a radical transformation in the country's media. Instead, Zimbabwe experienced a severe economic slump that shattered this dream. Consumer power was eroded. People didn't have disposable income to buy the new products. Advertisers didn't have money to spare. The little they had was used to advertise in the traditional government-owned media whose circulation they could count on.

With inflation pushing cost of production up, new media companies had a rough ride. Many eventually became casualties in the battle for survival. The Daily Gazette was an instant hit when it was established in 1992. At the peak of its success, it was selling 60,000 copies a day. For a new publication, this was impressive, especially when compared with the 130,000 daily copies of The Herald, a paper that had been published since 1891. This new daily infused freshness into the country's media scene and offered readers a new source of news absent of government vetting. But the unfavorable economic climate forced the paper to cease publication after only three years.

Last year the media scene was altered when the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ) was established. The company, which has 60 percent foreign ownership, launched five regional weeklies and capped this by launching Daily News in March 1999. ANZ poached the best journalists through offers of high salaries, and it was tipped to succeed where The Daily Gazette had failed to challenge the monopoly of the government in the daily press.

But the company soon plunged into a financial crisis. Less than a year after its launch, it shut down three weeklies. Investors admitted that their ambitious media venture faced collapse unless \$1 million (U.S. dollars) was urgently injected to raise new operating capital. Last November, the Southern Africa Media Development Fund (SAMDEF),

Readership of Zimbabwean Newspapers:

Sunday Mail	1,190,000
The Herald	550,000
Kwayedza	540,000
The Financial Gazette	366,000
The Zimbabwe Independent	262,000
The Zimbabwe Mirror	170,000
The Standard	117,000

SOURCE: An independent survey released in 1999 by the Advertising Research Foundation. ■

government to end its monopoly on the electronic media. By law, only ZBC is allowed to operate TV and radio broadcasts. Human rights and democracy activists say a more open society can only be created if all forms of media are liberalized. But the government has rejected the suggestion.

adopted the IMF/World Bank reform program. Coupled with the abandonment of plans by the government to pass a law declaring Zimbabwe a one-party state, an era of economic and political liberalization was ushered in. In this relatively relaxed environment, the birth of new publications created a

a Botswana-based non-governmental media organization that was established to strengthen the region's media so they can become self-sustaining, independent and pluralistic, invested that amount of money in the company.

But it is not just the private press that is going through financial tribulations. During the last three years, the Zimpapers' profit has fallen drastically and Ziana is on the verge of collapse due to the government's lack of funding. Africa Information Afrique, a donor-funded international news agency, ceased operations last December.

Currently, only The Zimbabwe Independent and its sister, The Standard, appear to be on firm financial footing. Their success has widely been attributed to patronage by white-owned businesses that constitute more than 80 percent of the country's economy. The government has often accused these newspapers of being used by whites to bring it down and possibly revive white rule.

Ncube angrily denies this link. "That is not true. We get 70 percent of our advertising support from black-owned companies. Our success has come about because we produce a high-quality product," he says.

Mugabe's government watches with silent glee as the independent press swims in the stormy seas of financial turmoil. The ruling party functionaries have continued their crusade against foreign investment in the country's media, saying it is dangerous to national sovereignty.

Some journalists who have endured the difficulties of government interference and financial hard times still see a bright future. "Zimbabwe's media will weather the storm and become one of the most vibrant in Africa," says Ncube. "The present battles are inevitable in media development in any society."

If his positive forecast turns out to be right, Zimbabwe could soon join the league of sub-Saharan countries such as Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa where the media, having fought similar battles, appear right now to be the victors. And given the results of the parliamentary elections in June, in which the opposition gained an impressive number of seats, it now appears more likely that the media in Zimbabwe might be headed for a radical transformation.

Just before the elections, which were

marred by violence, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) took ZBC to court seeking an order to compel it to give fair coverage to all contestants. The order was successful, and the court ruled that the state broadcaster, which was accused of criminalizing the opposition, should air balanced reports on the activities of anti-Mugabe activists. Despite the court's ruling, this did not happen.

After the election, Mugabe made 30 constitutional parliamentary appointees, thus inflating the ruling party's slim electoral victory. Because of this, Parliament might not provide the opposition with a very influential voice. But the new multi-party Parliament will no doubt result in greater political liberalism, and this might, in turn, result in the country crossing the threshold of a new era of media freedom. ■

David Karanja, a Kenyan novelist and freelance journalist, lived in Zimbabwe for 13 months. His novel, "The Girl Was Mine," was published in 1996. A second, "A Dreamer's Paradise," will be published next year by Kwela Books, South Africa.



Imprisonment and Torture of Journalists in Zimbabwe

Eventually the courts ruled the law that jailed them was unconstitutional.

By Mark G. Chavunduka

Those of us who are journalists in Zimbabwe have witnessed under President Robert Mugabe's 20-year rule a situation in which the government has become increasingly hostile to and intolerant of the independent press. Against newspapers and journalists whom it regards as troublesome, both legal and extra-legal measures have been taken.

Not so long ago I became one of the government's targets. Personally and professionally, I bear the scars of this encounter.

In January 1999, The Standard published an article giving details of an attempted coup against Mugabe's government. As editor of this newspaper, I insisted that we do all of the necessary checks before publishing this story. To do this, we held the article for an entire week to allow the government an opportunity to respond before we went to print. Despite many assurances that we would receive an official response, we heard nothing and went ahead and published the story.

Two days after the article was published, I was arrested illegally by Zimbabwe's military. I was held and brutally tortured for nine days at military establishments in the country. My chief writer, Ray Choto, was also arrested and beaten. Throughout my illegal detention, my captors emphasized that they did not dispute the substance of the article. What they wanted us to tell them were the names of our sources in the military. Not unlike the disgruntlement that is so evident in civil-

ian society, many in the military were upset at how various matters of state were being handled. During our detention, it became clear to us that the country's leaders were desperate to identify and plug what they said were increasing leaks to members of the independent press from within the military and intelligence communities.

Our torture was barbaric. It included having live electric wires applied to all parts of our naked bodies and being suffocated underwater in a process we later learned has a name within the military, "submarine." Still, we did not reveal our sources, and to this day they remain protected despite an extensive search by the government within the army.

Our newspaper obtained court orders to try to win our release. And as word of our situation reached journalists and organizations throughout the world, international pressure was applied. This and, I believe, the realization that no information would be forthcoming from us, meant that after nine days of torture by the military, we were handed over to the civilian police. Subsequently, we appeared in court on charges of "publishing information likely to cause public alarm and despondency."

In Zimbabwe, several laws impinge on what the press can do. Many of these laws date back to the 1960's and were promulgated to stem growing political instability. In its election manifestos issued in 1979, the present government tried to remove these laws from the statute books. However, they remained in effect and have been used by this same government that once sought to repeal them.

Among these laws are the Official Secrets Act, the Powers, Privileges and Immunities of Parliament Act, the Prisons Act, the Defense Act, the Censorship and Entertainment Control Act, and the most dreaded, notorious and all-embracing law, the Law and Order Maintenance Act. It is this final piece of legislation that was used to charge Choto and me.

We decided to challenge the constitutionality of the section of that law under which we were charged. That

section said that "publishing information likely to cause public alarm and despondency" was a criminal offense, regardless of whether the published information was correct or not. Had the law and the charges against us been upheld, we would have each faced seven years in prison, a fine of \$20,000, or both. However, in a court case that lasted 16 months, we were finally able to receive a favorable ruling by the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe. By ruling that this section of the law is unconstitutional, not only did the charges against us fall away but this part of the law is no longer in effect.

It is our hope that in time the entire Law and Order Maintenance Act will be challenged successfully in the nation's courts. From my perspective, the threat to be most feared by Zimbabwe's independent press—and the country's society, in general—is the increasing politicization of our criminal justice system. Public offices, which are supposed to be impartial and apolitical—such as the Attorney General and Commissioner of Police—are systemically being staffed with political appointees. Instead of finding neutral administrators in the criminal justice system, political incumbents fill many of the jobs. Their decisions to arrest and prosecute people are not based primarily on the law or on tangible evidence that a crime has been committed but in the interest of settling a political score by party and government leaders.

Today, journalists and publications that are viewed as troublemakers are routinely harassed and victimized, even when it is clear that prosecution against them cannot be successful. What happens is that court cases are continuously postponed or eventually withdrawn. But the strategy is to weaken the individuals and organizations by straining them with heavy legal costs. In some cases, publications have nearly collapsed under the weight of these financial strains. This is particularly true of smaller, less established publications. This strategy by the government is both cunning and effective and leaves the authorities with "clean hands" when so-called opposition papers fold.

Another disturbing trend to observe is the growing impunity with which court orders are ignored by the government. Because the state chooses which judgments to respect and which to ignore, a mockery is being made of the entire judicial system. In my own case last year, the government ignored three orders from the Supreme Court that were issued within a space of five days, ordering my release from military custody.

It is not just for the sake of the press and press freedoms that the absence of integrity within the court system is worrisome. This affects all sections of civil society; ultimately the nation itself is bound to become lawless and ungovernable, as we've witnessed recently during the brutal, sometimes deadly takings of land.

Although I look enviously at my American friends, with their ability to call upon the Freedom of Information Act and sunshine laws, I refuse to be pessimistic. Recently, citizens in this country—including those in our case—have won some important cases in the courts, and we have also succeeded in changing, a bit, the political dynamics at the ballot box. Zimbabweans are, by nature, a hard-working and peace loving people, and I would hope that we can keep moving forward to a time when an environment of normalcy replaces chaos, in which a free and vibrant press can thrive. ■

Mark Chavunduka, A 2000 Nieman Fellow, is founding editor of The Zimbabwe Standard, a Sunday newspaper published in Harare. He worked his way up from cadet reporter to news editor at the weekly Financial Gazette, and later became the editor of Parade magazine, Zimbabwe's largest monthly newsmagazine. Chavunduka was the first Zimbabwean journalist to be named a Nieman Fellow.



Lessons Learned in Africa

A reporter replays history so past mistakes don't become future policy.

The New Africa: Dispatches from a Changing Continent

Robert M. Press

University Press of Florida. 380 Pages. \$24.95.

By Wilson Wanene

Every so often an American foreign correspondent will wrap up a tour in Africa and decide to put the whole experience into a book. For readers in the United States who follow news reports from the continent closely, the account becomes a more personal way to know the journalist. It's also an opportunity to see favorite topics and personalities in a fleshed-out form.

Robert M. Press's "The New Africa: Dispatches from a Changing Continent" is a new addition to the list. Assigned to the Nairobi bureau office of The Christian Science Monitor from 1987 to 1995, he mainly covers West and East Africa. He writes at a time when sub-Saharan Africa has undergone some major political changes that began in 1989. He applauds how, after the Cold War ended, local dissent bubbled up more forcefully. Civilian and military autocrats throughout the region came under unprecedented pressure to legalize opposition parties and, consequently, expand the space for criticism. Some leaders fell from power; others held on but had to work harder.

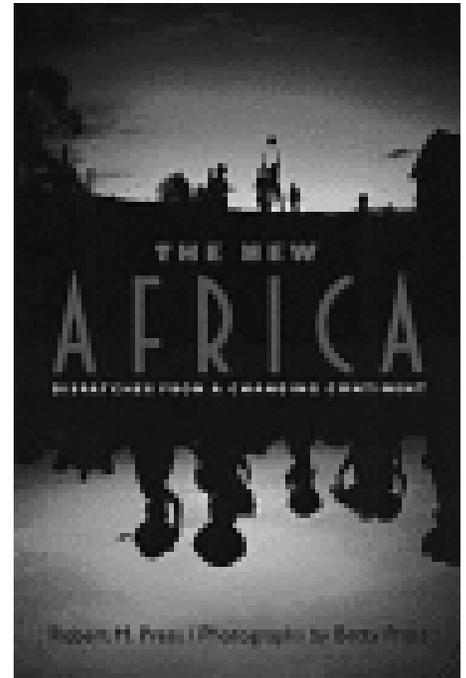
In Kenya, for instance, Press narrates the major events along that nation's bumpy road to a pluralistic political system. Daniel arap Moi, President since 1978, was compelled to change the constitution in 1991 and allow opposition parties to get established. By then, his government had increased corruption to an unprecedented level, in a country considered an African success story during the 1960's and 1970's. And according to Africa Watch, the regime was responsible for instigating ethnic violence, which began in 1991 and continued sporadically in subsequent years, to

discredit competitive elections. This resulted in some 1,500 deaths and the displacement of 300,000 people. Multiparty elections had not been held since 1966. They finally took place in 1992 and fell short of being completely free and fair. Moi won over a fractured opposition with 36 percent. He was reelected in 1997 with 40 percent.

Press's storytelling method relies more on the eloquent power of the characters he chooses to highlight than on critical sketches of Moi and his aides. However, Press does make two minor errors in his Kenya chapter. First, he states that Kenneth Matiba, a wealthy businessman who finished second after Moi in the first election, ran again in 1997. He did not. Second, he claims that most of the killings took place in Central Province. They were actually in the Rift Valley, Moi's home province, and were mainly carried out by his Kalenjin ethnic group against Kikuyus and other Kenyans who had settled there from other regions. Nevertheless, Press is, on the whole, well-balanced and informative.

The author also tries to capture the less dramatic side of Africa. His concluding chapter takes readers into the lives of a select group of Africans who are quietly trying to change their lives for the better. "Such individual efforts may depend on assistance from government," he writes, "but the desire for greater economic and social freedom does not.... The stories of such individuals seldom make the news and thus go unnoticed by most Africans and non-Africans alike. Yet they make up an important part of what is happening in Africa today."

"The New Africa" contains more than



100 photographs taken by Press's wife, Betty, a photographer. The book as a whole is different from, for example, "The Africans," by David Lamb, published in 1983, or "Africa: Dispatches from a Fragile Continent," by Blaine Harden, published in 1990. Both reporters were stationed in Nairobi by their respective papers: Lamb by the Los Angeles Times and Harden by The Washington Post. While both wrote in an engaging and very readable style, one still had the sense of journalists who, when all was said and done, would move on. In "The New Africa" there's a more lingering feeling.

With Press, the pace is slower, the observations more calmly noted, and the general style of presentation is journalistic with an academic flavor. Of special importance to him is the humanitarian and political strife that broke out while he reported from the continent—especially in Somalia and Rwanda—and the grim lessons they held for the United States. For instance, he carefully reconstructs how in 1993 about 100 elite U.S. soldiers, already

stationed in Somalia, were flown by helicopters to try and capture warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed and his top aides at a house in Mogadishu where he was supposedly meeting. The warlord led one of the feuding clan factions in the civil war that erupted after the ouster of the country's leader, General Mohamed Siad Barre, in 1991. Aideed was wanted because his men had killed 24 Pakistani U.N. soldiers in Mogadishu four months earlier.

When the troops got to their sites, what originally seemed like an operation that would succeed quickly turned into a 14-hour battle. Americans took heavy fire from men "in wraparound Somali skirts and flip-flops," according to Press, who hid in the nearby build-

ine-hit regions, amid a country in civil war and with no functioning central government. The sad fact, as Press warns, is that when Americans look back at Somalia they are likely to remember the 18 Americans who lost their lives, not the thousands of Somalis who were saved from starvation.

The Somalia legacy went on to exact a heavy price for Africa, as later crises in various African countries failed to stir Washington into any meaningful action. Press sums up this legacy best in his chapter entitled "Genocide Ignored: Rwanda." Of Somalia, he writes, "This was a turning point in U.S. foreign policy: the United States, at least under Clinton, would no longer send its troops on peacekeeping missions that

did not directly affect its national security—regardless of the humanitarian needs." In 1994, in tiny Rwanda, about a million people were killed. Most of the victims were Tutsis who were killed by fel-

low citizens who were Hutu. The United States, United Nations, Africa and the rest of the world stood by and did nothing. According to Press, the world had not heeded the lesson of the Holocaust.

The book's no-frills approach in explaining Africa is reminiscent of Sanford Ungar's "Africa: The People and Politics of an Emerging Continent," which came out in 1978. Ungar, currently the Director of the Voice of America, is a former host of National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" and dean of the School of Communication at American University. Both writers are short on colorful language but effective if one isn't looking for a quick read. The advantage of this approach is that when they hit upon a particularly crucial topic, it gets the coverage it deserves.

The message that comes through in reading Press's account is straightforward, yet his advice is often overlooked: Take time to really understand Africa. Americans, before they landed in Somalia, should have been educated to understand that this was a society steeped in tradition. Its community leaders, Press points out, were almost

always men, and were held in respect by the people. Family and clan relationships were more highly valued than official titles. And this same society, comprised of individuals as diverse as desert nomads, entrepreneurs and scholars, rose up and kicked out General Barre. The despot, as a means of staying in power, had set one clan against the other. In other words, Barre tried to undo the important ethnic ties that actually held the country together and had dangerously politicized clan awareness.

When American troops went after Aideed, they suddenly lost their neutrality and appeared—to the warlord's clan and allies—intent on preventing him from becoming the nation's leader. This is when the mission took an especially dangerous turn. Also, Press contends that the search for peace was flawed. The United States and U.N. paid too much attention to Aideed and his main rival, Mohamed Ali Mahdi, the interim president. Other potential leaders, who might have helped to negotiate an agreement, were left out. All these points now seem particularly worth studying given how the Somalia experience inhibited action in Rwanda.

Whether the world is now ready to confront the next conflict that threatens to become another Rwanda remains to be seen. What was the lesson, this past May, from Sierra Leone? There, the Revolutionary United Front, a rebel group trying to seize power, held 500 ill-equipped U.N. peacekeepers hostage and stole their weapons, equipment and personnel carriers. What would have happened if Britain had not sent in troops? Is peacekeeping without any risk of losing lives realistic? What's considered a fair expectation of America's peacekeeping role as the world's remaining superpower? Do partisan disputes in Congress over appropriating money to pay the U.N. to confront far-flung hot spots unintentionally embolden warmongers? These questions deserve continued debate in a dispassionate manner. Press's book enriches the discussion. ■

Wilson Wanene, a Kenyan-born freelance journalist in Boston, has lived in the United States since 1978.

The message that comes...is straightforward, yet his advice is often overlooked: Take time to really understand Africa.

ings. One helicopter was downed, another one crashed. When the fighting was over, 18 Americans were dead and the naked body of one of them was dragged through the city's streets. The grisly scene was captured on camera and immediately flashed around the world. Understandably, there was a harsh public outcry back in America. President Clinton, who inherited the operation from President Bush, had never given Americans a clear explanation as to why the United States was engaged in combat in Somalia. He quickly ordered the troops to be returned home within five months.

The painful episode, furthermore, prompted the U.S. government to produce Presidential Decision Directive 25 in 1994, which had the effect of reducing the possibility of committing American forces in future U.N. operations—especially those that held the potential for casualties and humiliating media coverage. All this resulted from an operation in which almost 26,000 Americans had gone in, not as combatants, but as a means to ensure that relief convoys made it to the fam-

Doctors Without Borders

Top 10 Underreported Humanitarian Stories

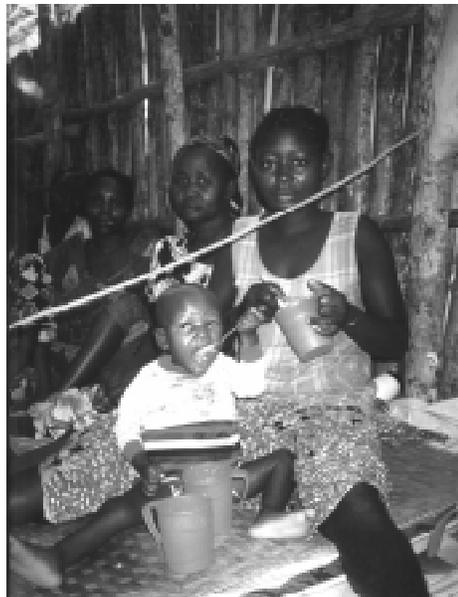
In December 1999, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières issued its second annual top 10 list of underreported humanitarian stories. Doctors Without Borders compiles this list to call attention to stories it believes are largely ignored by the U.S. media. The list, which is based on events witnessed firsthand by the organization's volunteers, is not intended to be absolutely comprehensive, and the stories are not presented in any particular order.

Congo Republic: A Forgotten War Rages

There is mass displacement of persons seeking refuge from conflict between government and rebel forces, resulting in widespread malnutrition, the use of refugees as human shields, and the systematic rape of women and children.

Afghanistan: War Enters 20th Year; Toll on Civilians Escalates

This country has the worst maternal mortality rate in the world, and women's access to health care is severely restricted. Chronic malnutrition stunts children's physical and mental development.



Feeding center in Kisangani, Democratic Republic of Congo, January 2000. Médecins Sans Frontières©.

Angola: Displacement, Landmines, Hunger Threaten War Victims

The 30-year civil war resumed in December 1998. Since then, 800,000 people have been displaced, with food, clothes and medicine being denied. In the first six months of 1999, there were 354 landmine injuries.

Millions Die from Lack of Access to Medicines

Treatable communicable diseases are still the leading cause of death in developing world. Patent protection keeps effective treatments prohibitively expensive; diseases like malaria and sleeping sickness are not researched because drugs for such illnesses are not profitable for pharmaceutical companies.

Democratic Republic of Congo: Health Care System in Ruins

Civil war divides the country, as nearly one million citizens are either internally displaced or refugees in neighboring countries. The only health care structures are those supported by foreign agencies. Plague, cholera, measles and meningitis outbreaks are frequent, malnutrition is common, and 50,000 new cases of sleeping sickness are reported each year.



Dr. Darin Portnoy examining a TB patient in Uzbekistan, 1999. TB is one of the target diseases of the Access to Essential Medicines Campaign. Photo © Gary Calton/MSF.

**Colombia:
Danger and Threats Plague Medical Staff
and Aid Workers**

Most victims of this undeclared civil war are civilians. Medical staff avoid dangerous areas where the need among the indigenous population is greatest. Hundreds of medical staff have been attacked and violence has spread to cities.

**Mozambique:
Cholera Epidemic Strikes**

Cholera epidemic began in December 1998; by May 1999, 62,000 were infected and 2,000 had died. This epidemic puts strains on limited health care resources and makes treatment of malaria, AIDS and tuberculosis more difficult.

**Sri Lanka:
Civil War Intensifies**

The country's 16-year civil war escalated in November 1999. Many civilians injured by bombing and shelling, yet the government prevents displaced civilians from fleeing the impending assaults. Medical care and transport of medical supplies greatly restricted.

**Burundi:
War and Displacement Leave Civilians
Without Health Care**

Since the beginning of civil war in 1993, 800,000 persons have been voluntarily or forcibly displaced by government. In summer 1999, the government moved 300,000 people into 50 regroupment camps, then prevented aid agencies from entering all but 19 of them, thereby hindering their ability to treat malnutrition and epidemics.

**Somalia:
Civilians Face the World's Neglect**

International commitment decreasing as the country engages in a decade-long civil war. Health care is currently at its lowest level since 1991. There are constant epidemics and food shortages due to natural and human causes. Infant and maternal mortality rates are high and cholera, meningitis, measles are prevalent. ■



The regroupment camps in Burundi, 1999. Photos © Médecins Sans Frontières.

From Darkness Into Blinding Glare

What does it take to get the press to shine its searchlight in distant places?

By Susan Moeller

To make it big in a culture driven by images, there are clear advantages to being photogenic. These days, news reporting seems little different.

And with news, it doesn't hurt, either, if the essence of an event can be distilled down, à la Hollywood, to a succinct, tabloid-like phrase, such as "Terror Twins," or "Kid Guerrillas," or even "War as Child's Play."

These headlines were trumpeted by the newsmagazines—Newsweek, Time and U.S. News & World Report—in their February 7, 2000 issues. The news, Time's inside headline told us, was about "Leading God's Army: The bizarre tale of boy twins with reputed mystical powers who command a rebellion." The reason for the coverage, suggested the article, was a photograph: "the picture that shocked the world...the one widely broadcast of Johnny [Htoo] and the cigar-smoking Luther, still at large."

There was a legitimate news peg. A splinter group of ethnic Karen rebels had crossed the Myanmar-Thai border and taken patients and staff hostage in a Thailand hospital. The small Karen force had commandeered a public bus and seized the hospital to protest the shelling of some Burmese hill tribes by Thai military units acting in cooperation with the military government in Myanmar. Within a day, Thai commandos stormed the hospital 75 miles west of Bangkok, killed the handful or so of Karen fighters, and released hundreds of hostages.

But what propelled this 50-year-old ethnic conflict story into all three newsmagazines and onto all three of the network evening news programs

was not the hundreds of hostages, nor their rescue. It was the riveting image of the Janus-faced twins—a month-old photograph of two 12-year-olds who, while the leaders of the 200 or so youthful Karen tribesmen who comprise the force called "God's Army," were not actually among the masked gunmen at the hospital.

The photograph pictured two boys looking more like six-year-olds than 12-year-olds, one child feminine in appearance, with long hair and a soft face



Johnny Htoo, left, a 12-year-old Karen boy, watches as his twin brother, Luther, smokes a cigar during a meeting with the Associated Press at their jungle base in Myanmar in December 1999. *Photo by Apichart Weerawong, courtesy of AP Photo.*

and expression, the other defiantly masculine, with shaved eyebrows and hairline and smoking the stub of a cigar. Although these youngsters' images drove the coverage, most media outlets did not take the occasion to reflect on issues relating to children and war, even though earlier that same week the U.N. protocol agreement prohibiting the use of child soldiers in war finally won passage in Geneva, after the United States dropped its longstanding opposition to establishing 18 as the minimum age for sending soldiers into combat.

The media's herd coverage of the story was not in response to any new understanding of the increased use of child soldiers during the last decade or even to a new interest in the chronic Karen conflict. Most news outlets ran with the story because of their love for gee-whiz items. They counted on viewers' emotional reaction to the image of the twins.

The compelling photograph also allowed the media to touch on a cultural ambivalence about children in the news. As New York Times reporter Keith Bradsher wrote in 1999 about the public's response to children who are violent: "Americans are caught between two contradictory impulses: to preserve childhood as a time of innocence and to deny that children who commit crimes are indeed children," Bradsher observed.

Dramatic pictures, especially of children—big-eyed children staring into the camera, children hurt, children fearful, and children dying—can drive coverage. Visual images of child refugees in Kosovo, of swollen-bellied infants in Somalia, and even vivid verbal descriptions of Kuwaiti newborns thrown from hospital incubators (although later shown to be false) can open wallets, prompt politicians to call for humanitarian intervention, and push a story up the news agenda.

Yet, at times, good old-fashioned news values—without an accompanying glitzy photograph—will win a story a place on the front page. One such example was Seth Mydans' article about the Thai security forces' rescue of the hostages from the band of Karen guerrillas. His piece received front-page treatment from The New York Times

even before the famous image of Johnny and Luther Htoo surfaced. In fact, it was Mydans himself who called the photo to his editors' attention. The bulldog edition of the paper came out with another AP photo, a more standard one of the Thai security forces. As Mydans, who is stationed in Southeast

Asia, described the decision: "We don't usually consult about pictures but in the morning here—evening there—during discussions of my story I asked if they were running the twins' shot. They seem to have missed it. They went and found it and put it in. As for that editorial decision, once you see the

picture you don't have to think twice."

Most international crises have to claw their way into the public's view, except for those crises involving American troops or those crises that have put—or may put—Americans at risk, such as a mad cow or an Ebola epidemic. Last year, after receiving the Nobel Peace

Coverage of AIDS in Africa: The media are silent no longer.

If you had to plan an AIDS conference and you wanted to command the world's attention, you might have chosen the city of Durban in the South African province of KwaZulu Natal for the meeting.

South Africa is one of the few sub-Saharan countries covered well outside the region. Its struggles under apartheid brought it infamy; its post-apartheid political and religious leaders, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, brought it prestige and honor. What was less reported on by the world's press was how hard AIDS had struck. In South Africa, one in five adults is infected with the HIV virus. Durban has an infection rate approaching 40 percent.

Deciding to hold an AIDS conference in Durban thrust the 12,400 delegates and hundreds of attendant journalists into the epicenter of the epidemic. "There's nothing like being in the middle of it to understand what that means," said Sandra Thurman, Director of the White House Office of National AIDS Policy, immediately before the start of the 13th International Conference on AIDS this past July. "What we're going to walk away with is the enormity of the problem and the huge gap in resources available to deal with it."

And astonishingly, that is essentially what happened. Astonishing, because recognition of the crisis in Africa by both politicians and the media has been exceedingly delinquent. As Nelson Mandela said during his speech which closed the conference: "AIDS today in Africa is claiming more lives than the sum total of all wars, famines, and floods, and the ravages of such deadly diseases as malaria."

In 1998, death from all wars in Africa killed 200,000 people. AIDS killed 10 times that number. The statistics are numbing: Six Africans each minute are stricken with the HIV virus; in 10 years the number of AIDS orphans in Africa will reach 29 million, and AIDS is expected to kill between one-third to one-half of today's 15-year-olds.

Yet it was only in January that the U.N. Security Council—in a session orchestrated by U.S. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke and chaired by Vice President Al Gore—declared that AIDS in Africa is a threat to global political stability. Gore's statement that it was the world's moral duty to "wage and win a great and peaceful war" against AIDS marked the sudden recognition by the Clinton administration that action in Africa was needed. This year it has been common to hear National Security Advisor Sandy Berger and Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers speak publicly about the epidemic. Both have pressed for greater foreign aid earmarked for AIDS.

Consistent attention to AIDS in Africa has been a long time coming. In 1997, international donor countries spent just \$150 million on AIDS prevention in Africa—less than is spent on a single Hollywood blockbuster. Washington Post reporter Barton Gellman, in a searing article written immediately before the Durban conference, indicted "those with power," especially the international aid organizations, for the neglect. Turf wars and the politics of "demand management" have resulted in the World Health Organization committing only nine professionals to full-time work on AIDS out of a secretariat of 2,000, he noted.

The West did not heed its own early projections of infection rates and death tolls (which tended to be roughly accurate). It lost its sense of urgency about the disease when it became evident by 1990 that there was not going to be a heterosexual epidemic in the United States, Gellman charged. Racism led to inattention when AIDS was perceived as being "no longer a threat to the West." And in 1996, when the cocktail of anti-retroviral agents was discovered to be effective at staving off the fatal complications of the virus, many convinced themselves that a global pandemic would be escaped "without grave results." This conclusion was reached despite the fact that the cost of bringing the drug cocktail to Africa and the rest of the developing world was unthinkable.

Just as the diplomats and politicians avoided

dealing with AIDS in Africa, so too did most in the media. A few, such as Mark Schoofs of *The Village Voice*, made major reporting commitments, but for most the story never rose to crisis stature. The tiny news hole for international coverage rarely seemed to have space for a chronic problem troubling the African continent. But when the political climate changed in January, so too did the media's attention to the story—a trend that accelerated in April after Schoofs won both the Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting and an Overseas Press Club award for his eight-part series.

The media turned en masse to AIDS coverage in the weeks before the Durban conference. Startling statistics often led the pieces, when heart-rending anecdotes did not. Suddenly journalists were employing dramatic language—such as "plague," "apocalypse," "holocaust," "ground zero," even "heart of disease's darkness"—and using emotional images such as abandoned infants and orphaned toddlers to draw attention to the epidemic. Stories drew connections between the African victims of the virus and American sufferers. Articles and tape packages focused on the rapaciousness of drug companies that price their therapies well beyond what the world's poor can afford.

In short, most in the media are now doing what they normally do when an international crisis is inaugurated: They are flocking to cover the emergency now that it is government-certified. They are emphasizing the sensational (easy to do in this instance!). And they are dwelling on the risk factors and ramifications for American individuals and companies. But at least, now, they are covering the story. It remains to be seen whether they will stay with it. ■

—Susan Moeller

Prize for its humanitarian work, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières [MSF] took advantage of its brief time in the media spotlight to highlight the crises that members of the press continue to all but ignore. [Please see accompanying list on pages 86-87.] “Victims of chronic conflicts are continually neglected by the media,” said Joelle Tanguy, executive director of the U.S. office of Doctors without Borders. The prolonged wars in Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, the Congo Republic, and Sri Lanka made the list, as did treatable medical emergencies such as cholera, tuberculosis, meningitis, pneumonia, malaria and sleeping sickness.

Certainly these chronic cases deserve worldwide attention. Such exposure would serve to educate Americans and much of the West and North about these situations. And that exposure would likely be helpful to those who are affected—a key concern, of course, of MSF. Yet, it is very unlikely news editors or producers will be sending off reporters on such stories any time soon. The reasons for such inattention are related to the bottom-line business decisions of owners of news organizations, many of whom in this brave new world of media mergers do not come out of a journalistic tradition. Other reasons for the invisibility of these stories are related to the logistical and bureaucratic imperatives of the news business.

Certain global events are reflexively covered in the American media. These are the no-brainers—“tape at 11”—that even freshly minted editors recognize as meriting front page, top-of-the-news coverage. Such events include the assassination of the Israeli head of state, a massive earthquake in Japan, the ascension to power in South Africa of a former imprisoned black leader, the downing of a plane by terrorist bomb over Scotland.

Then there are other kinds of crises. Sometimes the bottom-line costs for coverage are assessed as being too great: Stationing or even parachuting correspondents into a geographically or psychically remote country for a (presumably) short-term crisis is often seen by the bean counters as not sufficiently

cost-effective. Sometimes the personal risks to journalists to cover events appear too great and the story not significant enough to merit such risks being taken, such as during the leveling of Grozny, for instance.

Sometimes, as MSF observes, crises are too chronic; they might be qualitatively at a crisis level, but so static at that level that the immediacy or even the notion of crisis has dissipated for the American audience, such as the ongoing conflict in Algeria. Sometimes events, which are critical in the life and politics of their own nations, do not resonate for the U.S. press because the events take place in regions which fall below the radar of U.S. media notice: This is the case with many events that occur in Africa. Sometimes access is difficult, visas can be denied or even, when print reporters can get in, cameras are forbidden. This has been the case in Syria, for example, and was the case in apartheid South Africa for several years during the 1980’s.

And sometimes sensational breaking news—especially domestic, but on occasion international—will jostle an otherwise “newsworthy” international story off the news budget. It’s harder to get such news on the front pages during the high season of the American election cycle, for example. Even during quieter news moments at home, current media attention to one world crisis will tend to keep other global crises in the dark. This is especially true if the crises can be stereotyped into an analogous category: another ethnic war, for instance, or another famine, or another massacre.

Without the drama of an arresting image, a photo or videotape, either to bring a critical mass of recognition or to reinvigorate a “dying” story (as in the recent case of the video documenting Russian war crimes in Grozny), even those crises which receive coverage in one media outlet typically fade away, having made little impression on the public consciousness. On very limited budgets, many responsible media institutions, such as National Public Radio and a number of the major metropolitan newspapers, try to regularly revisit countries and regions that are typically out of sight. But diligent re-

porting of an obscure crisis by one or even several journalists can get easily lost in the maelstrom of the constantly churning news cycle.

With the general cutting of news budgets, the media (television especially) can’t afford to cover all the crises in the world. So they choose chauvinistically. Coverage of international affairs is often viewed through the lens of “What does this mean for us?” When there are no obvious or direct repercussions, news items can be struck from the budget, resulting in the situation where distant disasters remain distant and prosaic diseases, such as malaria and virulent diarrhea, which kill thousands and millions every year, are all but invisible.

Not every distant story has a Johnny and Luther able to pose for the camera, able to seize the imagination of the media gatekeepers, able to encapsulate a moral complexity of our time. Walter Lippmann wrote in 1922 that the press was “like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision.” From blackness into blinding glare, then back into blackness. It’s a problematic way of covering the world. But as distorting as it may be, those crises that for some reason do manage to have their moment in the light are the fortunate ones. “Lucky are the people in Yugoslavia and Somalia, for the world is with them,” wrote a missionary in a letter smuggled out of southern Sudan. “It may be a blessing to die or get killed in front of the camera because the world will know.” ■

Susan Moeller is the author of “Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death” (Routledge, 1999). She is currently a fellow at the Joan Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics and Public Policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, writing a book to be called “A Hierarchy of Innocence: Images of Children in the News.” Moeller is the director of the Journalism Program at Brandeis University.

Nieman Notes

Compiled by Lois Fiore

Reading Between the Lions

By Judith Stoia

We had just finished up work on a film tracking a homeless couple over five years of their remarkable and disturbing lives. The resulting documentary won a bucketful of awards and was seen by fewer people on PBS than I would have liked. I was thinking already of the follow-up, maybe two years down the line. In the clutter of notes on my desk the next day was one from a vice president at WGBH in Boston, where I work, wondering if I might take on a new project: overseeing the most ambitious and expensive series WGBH had ever attempted.

At WGBH, one of the country's most overachieving broadcasters, an ambitious series usually means a documentary project in public affairs, science, history or the arts. And this new project would be—a series to help children learn to read. Right. I looked at the background materials I'd been given:

- Forty percent of American children read below grade level.
- A child who is not a competent reader by age nine might never catch up.
- One of the most critical indicators of a child's later academic success is whether or not he or she is read to at an early age. Nearly half are not.
- Level 1 is the lowest, barely functional level of reading skills. Forty million Americans are at Level 1. Discount non-English speaking Americans, and it's still 30 million.
- Semi-literate children grow into adults who cannot read newspapers, books, or magazines; who cannot fill out job applications or follow instructions; who cannot read to their own children.

Would I move to New York and oversee the project? I believed I would.

"Between the Lions" is the product of a rare partnership including WGBH, Sirius Thinking, a company formed by gifted veterans of "Sesame Street" and Henson Productions, the top reading specialists in the country, the U.S. Department of Education, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, five foundations, and two corporate underwriters.

"Sesame Street," which I admire, teaches numbers and letters to preschoolers. "Lions" is for "Sesame Street" graduates. Aimed at children about to read or those just starting, "Lions" unravels the mysteries of decoding the English language: blending letters to make words, putting words together to make sentences, mastering the horrors of short vowels. Who thought of short vowels, by the way? Why is the sound of the letter 'a' different in 'map' and 'Carl'? I know, I know, the controlling 'r.' Try explaining that to a four year old. But that's just what we're doing.

Before we thought of characters, animation or music, we spent several months with the country's leading reading specialists constructing a curriculum that continues to inform everything we produce. This was five years ago, when the battle between believers in whole language and phonics was at full pitch. Those of faint heart should not wander into academic reading wars. Our advisors concluded, and we agreed, that "Lions" should include both whole language and phonics. We arrived there before it was fashionable: Some months later, leading educators decided that whole language (the love of reading, reading in the world around you) and phonics (mastery of fundamental reading skills) were *both* important. So "Lions" is a combination of whole language and phonics.

Kids love to be read to, so we featured a read-aloud story in every program. Phonics was trickier. How would we nestle lessons about short vowels, silent "e" and word blending into segments that children would enjoy? In short, how would we make phonics fun, not a lesson? My friend and colleague Christopher Cerf said, "Every good idea begins with a bad pun." Boy, do we have them. (Beginning with the title: Our program takes place in a mythical library and one must pass between lion statues guarding the entrance). Here is a sample of recurring segments:

- Martha Reader and the Vowelles, a 60's Motown group that only sings vowel sounds (if they want to make a word, they must sing with Hoboken great Johnny Consonati who only sings consonants).
- Gawain's Word, in which two brave knights, each yelling part of a word, charge together to create a whole word.
- Tiger Words, a golfing phenom, who approaches a tee and must figure out which vowel will make a word.
- Chicken Jane, a hapless chicken who scratches out word clues to two children who might remind parents of Dick and Jane.
- Dr. Ruth Wordheimer (yes, it's *the* Dr. Ruth, for which we've received some heat) who counsels early readers suffering from Long Word Freakout. (Just take it one syllable at a time.)

And so on.

"Between the Lions," now seen daily on PBS, debuted in April. Since then we have been encouraged by two events. First, the American Television Critics Association recognized "Be-

tween the Lions” for Outstanding Achievement in Children’s Television. Essentially, they called it the best children’s program of the year. In a crowded and competitive children’s programming field, this award has proved enormously helpful in terms of validating our work. Second, and more important, independent research from the University of Kansas shows that children who watch “Between the Lions” demonstrate a startling improvement in reading skills by virtually all measures.

- Kindergartners who watched only

four weeks of “Between the Lions” showed a 50 percent increase in specific reading skills. The control group improved by 13 percent.

- Scores on standardized tests rose 26 percent among children who viewed “Lions” versus five percent for children who did not.

Other results were just as dramatic.

Now deep into producing season two, we are trying to get the word out to parents and teachers that this program actually helps children learn to read. We’re trying to be inventive about how to put the series into the hands of

the families that most need it. This, as we try to figure out how to teach the “-ed” concept (a song called, “It’s All in the Past”), how to explain that some words are the same forwards and back (watch for the “Palindrome Polka”) and the vagaries of spelling (“I Couldn’t Be Q Without U”). As we say at PBS, check your local listings. ■

Judith Stoia, a 1980 Nieman Fellow, has produced documentaries, news magazines, drama and comedy for PBS and commercial television. She is the executive producer of “Between the Lions.”

—1942—

Neil O. Davis died on June 7, 2000. He was 85 years old. The obituary in the Montgomery Advertiser described Davis, the longtime publisher of the Auburn Bulletin, as follows:

“In a time of great moral cowardice, Neil O. Davis stood as a consistent voice of reason and intelligence in Alabama.... When Alabamians in droves were running away from racial issues or shamelessly exploiting them for political benefit, Davis addressed them unflinchingly, in print and in person. He saw, and wrote about in piercing prose, the necessity of coming to grips with these issues for the greater good of all. For years, Davis told his readers that their state could and should be better, that it could and should do more for its poor, that it could and should offer greater educational opportunities for all its people.”

—1947—

Francis Philbrick (Phil) Locke died unexpectedly on July 28 in Arlington, Massachusetts. He was 88.

Locke began his journalism career as a reporter with the Miami Daily News. After two years, he began writing editorials, which he continued to do for the rest of his career. He retired in 1972 at age 60.

A 1933 graduate of Harvard University, Locke spent more than 30 years as a volunteer for Harvard, working to

recruit high school students. He received the prestigious Harvard Medal for his work in 1983.

His wife, **Carroll Day Locke**, to whom he was married for nearly 62 years, died in 1999. Locke leaves two daughters, a son, and three grandchildren. Contributions in his honor may be made to the Francis P. Locke 1933 Scholarship Fund, c/o The Harvard College Fund, 124 Mount Auburn Street, Cambridge, Mass., 02138, and/or to the Mission Inn Foundation, 3696 Main Street, Riverside, Calif., 92501.

—1953—

John Strohmeier has created an endowment for the establishment of the Robert B. Atwood Alaska History Reading Room at the University of Alaska-Anchorage, where Strohmeier is writer in residence. Atwood spent a half-century as Publisher of the Alaska Times and frequently lamented the scant attention paid to Alaskan history in the state’s educational system. Strohmeier made an initial gift of \$2,400 shortly after Atwood’s death in 1997 and contributed \$7,600 more in November 1999. He is also working on a book about the demise of fisheries in the United States.

—1966—

Bob Giles, former senior vice president of The Freedom Forum, was named Curator of the Nieman Founda-

tion by Harvard University President Neil Rudenstine in August. Giles follows **Bill Kovach**, who retired this year after 11 years as head of the Nieman program. While at The Freedom Forum, Giles was editor in chief of their Media Studies Journal and directed an in-depth study of fairness in the news media. [See book review on page 71.] Before joining The Freedom Forum, he spent 11 years as executive editor and, later, editor and publisher, of The Detroit News. Two newspapers won Pulitzers under Giles’s leadership. While he was managing editor, The Akron Beacon Journal was honored in 1971 for its coverage of the shootings at Kent State University. While he was editor, The Detroit News won in 1994 for the disclosures of a scandal in the Michigan House Fiscal Agency.

—1967—

Hiranmay Karlekar writes that he was the editor of “Independent India: The First Fifty Years,” which was published by Oxford University Press in 1998. The book includes two essays by Karlekar: one on historical developments prior to Independence and one on the Indian media. Since his Nieman year, Karlekar has been editor of The Hindustan Times, deputy editor of the Indian Express, and assistant editor of the Statesman. He has also helped lead a number of press-related organizations and written two novels in Bengali and, in English, a socio-political book,

“In *The Mirror of Mandal: Social Justice, Caste, Class and the Individual*.”

Joseph Mohbat writes: “What a splendid performance by all of you in arranging the reunion weekend. The mood was so right that even a 45-minute wait for a bus Saturday night was most pleasant. Thank you very much. Please note that I am no longer with ‘Inform’ but am now an assistant corporation counsel (i.e. lawyer) for New York City; office address is 198 E. 161st Street, Bronx, New York 10451; my office telephone number is 718-590-6168, and office e-mail address is jmohbat@LAWLAN.ci.nyc.ny.us”

—1974—

Shirley Christian, who has worked as a reporter in New York, Latin America, and Washington and won the 1981 Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting, is at work on a new book that, she says, “excites me more than anything I have done for many years.” The book is currently titled “Before Lewis and Clark: The Chouteau Dynasty of French America,” and is slated for publication by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in 2004, the 200th anniversary of the beginning of Lewis and Clark’s expedition. The Chouteaus, who were French fur traders, helped open the Midwest to settlement by founding St. Louis and the outpost that became Kansas City, beginning steamboat service on the upper Missouri river, and outfitting Lewis and Clark for their expedition.

Ellen Goodman is this year’s recipient of the Lyndhurst Prize, sponsored by the Chattanooga, Tennessee-based Lyndhurst Foundation. The prize is awarded annually to individuals who have made a significant contribution to the arts. Goodman is a syndicated columnist for *The Boston Globe*.

—1983—

Daniel Brewster was selected by the German media giant Bertelsmann AG to be president and chief executive officer of Gruner + Jahr USA, which

publishes *Family Circle*, *McCall’s*, *YM* and several other magazines. Bertelsmann AG, the largest privately held media company in the world, owns 75 percent of Gruner + Jahr. Brewster had been president and CEO of American Express Publishing since 1993.

—1984—

Jane Daugherty, former projects editor of *The Detroit News* and Children First editor of the *Detroit Free Press*, is now a policy analyst and writer on children’s issues based in Albany, New York. After directing media relations for the Children’s Defense Fund’s 1999 national conference in Houston

and the dedication of CDF’s Langston Hughes Library in Clinton, Tenn., she completed a statewide research project funded by the Mott Foundation on New York’s pre-kindergarten program. More recently, she has written on foster care for the Benton Foundation, early interventions with high-risk children and teens for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and educational innovations for the Danforth Foundation. Earlier this year, she also helped design and edit the Web site for the California-based corporate investigative firm the W Group, and is currently collaborating with the National Safe Workplace Institute on a pre-K-12 anti-violence curriculum. Daugherty can be

Kovach Library at Lippmann House

Nieman Fellows from around the world have donated nearly \$12,000 for the newly named Kovach Library at Lippmann House. The contributions honoring outgoing Curator Bill Kovach will be used to improve and expand the collection of books and other materials devoted to journalism.

A plaque, describing Kovach as “the conscience of journalism,” now hangs in the library area. “The outpouring of donations far exceeded our expectations,” said Jerry Zremski (NF ’00) and Washington, D.C., correspondent for *The Buffalo News*, who organized the fundraising after the ’00 Fellows decided on this tribute. Most of the donations came from the classes of 1989-2000, when Kovach served as Curator.

Kovach notified Harvard University officials last summer that he would step down in June 2000. He and his wife, Lynne, returned to the Washington, D.C., area, where he is focusing on his work with the Committee of Concerned Journalists and writing projects. “Nothing the Nieman Fellows could have done for me could have had more meaning, and both Lynne and I were very moved by this act,” Kovach said.

Naming the library in Kovach’s honor grew out of a spring brainstorming session. “From everything we heard, he had a great interest in the library and wanted it to be a resource, espe-

cially for the international fellows,” Zremski said.

The fundraising drive was conducted through e-mails and telephone calls, without Kovach’s knowledge. Donations ranged from \$25 to \$1,000, and the total stood at \$11,745 in mid-July. Much of the initial funding will be used to catalog the existing library holdings and put the information on the Internet. Organizers also plan to expand the collection as part of an ongoing project.

Harvard University has granted permission to name the library in Kovach’s honor. Longtime National Public Radio China correspondent Mary Kay Magistad, (NF ’00), oversaw the design and crafting of the plaque, which fellows presented to Kovach at the final dinner during the 2000 Nieman Reunion.

The plaque hangs over the back door of the library in Lippmann House, surrounded by bookcases. Bill Kovach installed it on June 30, his last official day as curator. ■

—Deborah Schoch (NF ’00)

Donations can be made by check payable to the Nieman Foundation, with “Kovach Library Fund” written in the lower left-hand corner, sent to: The Nieman Foundation, c/o Elizabeth Tibbitts, One Francis Avenue, Cambridge, Mass., 02138.

reached at Stoney Associates, 308 Thais Road, Averill Park, New York 12018. Phone (518) 674-5635. Fax (518) 674-2799. Email: JaneDaughe@aol.com.

Jane also reports that then-four-year-old Nieman kid Ryan Daugherty Robinson graduated from Bloomfield Hills (Mich.) Andover High School June 11 and is headed to Denison University in Ohio this fall. "My classmates will not be surprised that his intention seems to be to major in golf and minor in music." His post-Nieman sister, Meghan, 13, visited Lippmann House July 14 and plans to attend Harvard as an undergraduate to make up for being Nieman-year deprived.

Paul Knox brings us up to date: "Perhaps remarkably, I'm still at The Globe and Mail—now in my 23rd year. As you know, after our Nieman year I was posted to Mexico City (1985-88) and Rio de Janeiro (1988-91). When

we returned to Toronto, I was given the job of editing major front-page features and then became national editor for beat reporting. After two years of that I asked to return to writing. For the last five years I've been back on the international side, although based in Toronto. I write about global issues and travel several times a year—mostly to New York and Latin America, although I was thrilled to be able to spend three weeks reporting from South Africa in May 1999. I also do a weekly commentary for the Spanish-language service of Radio Canada International—our answer to VOA. In July, I was named one of four winners of the annual Maria Moors Cabot prize for reporting on the Americas. The awards are to be presented in September by Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism.

"**Lesley** [Paul's wife, Lesley Krueger] has published three books of fiction

since our Nieman year, and her travel book, 'Foreign Correspondences,' will be published this fall. She also has done magazine freelancing and teaches writing in the continuing education program at Ryerson Polytechnic University in Toronto.

"Gabe, who was just seven weeks old when we began the Nieman year, is now 17 and an accomplished musician, dividing his time among voice, electric guitar, bass and theory."

—1985—

Lucinda Fleeson has moved to Washington, D.C., where she is working as an independent writer and consultant after five years of traveling and working in Hawaii and Eastern Europe. In 1998, she was a Knight International Press Fellow in Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and the Czech Republic, teaching young journalists and

Nieman Foundation Announces Fellows For 2000-01

Twelve journalists from the United States and 12 international journalists have been named Nieman Fellows for the 2000-01 academic year at Harvard University to make up the 63rd class of Nieman Fellows.

The journalists in the new Nieman class and their areas of interest are:

Sulaiman Al-Kahtani, columnist and correspondent based in Washington, D.C., Al-Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; globalization, the implications of new technology, and American politics.

Ken Armstrong, legal affairs writer, Chicago Tribune; the historical roots of American legal principles and the intersection of law, history and ethics.

Don Aucoin, television critic, The Boston Globe; effects of the cultural fragmentation of the television viewing audience; interaction between television and the Internet; how the broadcast media will contend with these issues in the future.

Ana Lourdes Cardenas, reporter, CNI Channel 40, Mexico City; television's coverage of social conflicts in various countries and government

regulation of the media. Knight Latin American Fellow; funding provided by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Sayuri Daimon, reporter and editor, The Japan Times, Tokyo; changes in the Japanese and U.S. political systems after the Cold War, U.S. foreign policy towards Asia, and women in politics.

Sunday Dare, general/online editor, The News, Tempo and P.M. News, Lagos, Nigeria; media ethics, and ethnic diversity and identity issues.

Anne Fitzgerald, agribusiness writer, The Des Moines Register; concentration of ownership in agriculture; genetic engineering issues; farm policy and how it relates to domestic and foreign markets.

Paula Fray, editor, Saturday Star, Johannesburg, South Africa; the impact of international economics on South Africa, business and management, issues of gender, and globalization. Funding provided by The United States-South Africa Leadership Development Program.

Stefanie Friedhoff, freelance journalist from Germany based in Cambridge, Mass.; the history of society's reactions to technological developments; the effects of the new media on society, and the ethical issues surrounding new technologies.

Kirstin Downey Grimsley, staff writer, The Washington Post; history of economics; labor laws; immigration; class, culture, race, religious and gender issues. Funding is provided by the Stark Fellowship Fund in honor of Louis Stark, a pioneer in the field of labor reporting.

Kelli S. Hewett, city hall/special projects writer, The Dothan (Ala.) Eagle; the civil rights movement, political history, sociology, religion, poverty and the emerging Latin population.

Hu Jingcao, director, China Central Television, Beijing; the political, economic and technological effects of information technology on the media and on society. Chiba-Nieman Fellow; funding provided by The Atsuko Chiba Foundation.

consulting at newspapers. The International Center for Journalists published in May 2000 her two teaching manuals developed during that fellowship: a training model for teaching investigative reporting in developing democracies and a guide for workshop participants.

Fleeson is working on a non-fiction book about Hawaii and writing a chapter for the American Journalism Review's State of the American Newspaper Project.

—1986—

Geneva Overholser has been appointed to the newly created Curtis B. Hurley chair in public affairs reporting at the University of Missouri's School of Journalism in Washington. Overholser will continue to write her semiweekly syndicated column for the Washington Post Writers Group.

Stanley Tiner is now executive editor at The Sun Herald in Gulfport, Mississippi. Tiner was previously executive editor of the Daily Oklahoman. Casino gambling has generated sharp economic growth in Gulfport, and Tiner says he wants the Sun Herald to provide aggressive coverage of the gambling industry.

—1989—

Rodney Nordland received two awards for his overseas coverage in Newsweek. For his article about Kosovo Albanians massacred by Serbs, "Daddy, They're Killing Us," Nordland received the Overseas Press Club's Ed Cunningham award for best magazine reporting from abroad. "The Next Chernobyl," Nordland's story about aging nuclear power plants in the former Soviet bloc and the West, won a

Sigma Delta Chi Award from the Society of Professional Journalists.

—1991—

Rui Araujo writes: "Almost 15 years after writing a nonfiction book on the war in East Timor, I wrote my first thriller. It was a real challenge, because as a writer I had everything to prove. I also realize now that a thriller is more difficult to write than nonfiction. But it is much more fun.

"A Queima-Roupa' (Close-Range Shot), published by Terramar, Lisbon, was presented to the press in July 2000 at the Portuguese Press Club in Lisbon. It is a 200-page novel based on true stories—I wrote it after spending 14 long months with the Homicide Brigade in Lisbon. I am now writing a second book—the adventures of the same Portuguese cop and his brigade dealing with crimes in Portugal."

2000-01 Fellows continued

Dong-Kwan Lee, assistant editor, political news desk, Dong-A Ilbo, Seoul; North Korea's economic and political situation and its emerging policies towards other countries. Funding provided by The Asia Foundation and The Sungkok Journalism Foundation.

J.R. Moehringer, Atlanta bureau chief, Los Angeles Times; American civilization, with emphasis on the post-World War II period; sociology of organizational behavior; cultures faced with revolutionary change.

Anil Padmanabhan, economic affairs editor, Business Standard, New Delhi, India; the ways electronic governance can empower people in developing countries, cyberspace laws, economics and political science. Ruth Cowan Nash Fellow; funding provided by the Nash Fund.

Senad Pecanin, editor, Dani, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; Islam and politics in an emerging democratic, multi-ethnic society.

Mark Pothier, executive editor, MPG Newspapers, Plymouth, Mass.; community newspapers as mirrors and

conduits of the community and what can be done to solidify their positions as local institutions.

Linda Robinson, Latin America bureau chief, US News & World Report; U.S. foreign policy, the evolving practice of journalism, Latin American culture, and the Latinization of the United States.

Consuelo Saavedra, reporter, anchor and editor, National Television of Chile, Santiago; democracy and politics in Latin America; market economy; globalization, and the international network relating to the environment, human rights, and labor laws.

Helena Smith, southern Balkans correspondent based in Athens, Greece, The Guardian and The Observer, London; peace processes and negotiation, the influence of non-governmental organizations on diplomacy and public policy, and nationalism and national identity.

Ron Stodghill II, Midwest bureau chief based in Chicago, Time; forces that have inspired individuals into political activism and leadership and their

impact on society; government and politics.

Andrew Sussman, senior program producer, "The World," a co-production of the BBC World Service, Public Radio International and WGBH Boston; Europe in the 21st century; changing national identities; economic and legal aspects of the European Union's development.

Peter Turnley, photojournalist based in Paris, Newsweek; interactive media; computer science; public service and social and political science; business management and leadership.

Nuri Vallbona, photojournalist, Miami Herald; the society and history of Cuba, Haiti and other Caribbean countries, and writing.

The selection committee included K. Anthony Appiah, Professor of Afro-American Studies and of Philosophy, Harvard University; Bill Kovach, committee chair and 1989 Nieman Fellow; and Melanie Sill, Managing Editor, The News & Observer, Raleigh, and 1994 Nieman Fellow. ■

Katherine M. Skiba became a Washington, D.C. correspondent for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel in May. Skiba is the first woman to be appointed to the two-person bureau in its 50-year history. She writes: "I was told that in Washington, the circus always is in town. Only after arriving did I realize it's a nine-ring spectacle. I'm thrilled (and busy). My husband, **Tom Vanden Brook**, and I are living in Arlington, Virginia. All the D.C. Niemans have been wonderful friends to us. We invite outside-the-beltway friends to visit and are accepting reservations via e-mail: kskiba@onwis.com."

—1994—

Larry Tye, staff writer for The Boston Globe, was honored for "Patients At Risk," his 1999 series about medical errors. The series won the top prize for general circulation publications in an annual health care journalism competition sponsored by the National Institute for Health Care Management Research and Educational Foundation.

—1995—

Lisa Getter reports that she married **Jonathan Peterson**, a reporter in the Los Angeles Times Washington bureau, in May. She is sorry she missed the Nieman reunion last April.

Anne Hull left the St. Petersburg Times in August to join The Washington Post as a national reporter.

—1999—

Gonzalo Quijandria is the Press Director at Apoyo Comunicaciones, a Peruvian mass media conglomerate that publishes three magazines on economics and politics. He's also writing about South American politics for EsMas.com, an Internet portal based in Mexico City and edited by **Martin Holguin**, (NF '99).

Yu Sun writes: "I was with China Central Television Station for several months in an environmental program, called 'Economy of Thirty Minutes.' It

is a very famous program in China. It covers every topic in the environmental field, from policy and legislation to the current environmental situation. I was both reporter and editor then. I interviewed many top environmental officers....

"About two moths ago, I started to work for the People's Daily, a leading newspaper in China. I work for the Internet department, and I am responsible for international news. Every day, I write some articles and put them in the Website: www.peopledaily.com.cn. I like environmental news and always give priority to it, so I can say I am still doing some international environmental news.

"Recently I went to Washington, D.C., for the International Women's Media Foundation conference. Actually, it is **Bill Kovach** who recommended me to the IWMF for this conference. It is a high-profile conference...about women's leadership in the media...."

—2000—

Thrity Umrigar's first novel, "Bombay Time," will be published by Picador in July 2001. The book is set in a Bombay apartment building and begins as a group of middle-aged residents gather for the wedding reception of a younger man who grew up among them. All of the action takes place in one evening. The novel recounts the life stories of the characters, most of whom are Zoroastrian or Parsi, and also examines their experiences as affluent members of a religious minority in a city whose residents are primarily poor and Hindu. Umrigar, who says that she wrote most of the book during her Nieman year, has also accepted an invitation from Harvard's English Department to read from "Bombay Time" next spring.

—2001—

Peter Turnley's new book of photographs, "Parisians," will be released by Abbeville Press in September. Turnley is a contract photographer for Newsweek and has been based in Paris

for the past 23 years. He has covered most international news stories of significance in the past two decades. "Parisians" will be accompanied by exhibits in September at the Leica Gallery in New York and at the Galerie Agathe Gaillard in Paris.

Because of Turnley's long-standing and intimate knowledge of Paris, "Parisians" catches Paris from an insider's point of view. It is a city that, Turnley says, "offers me not only beauty but also a cherished haven from the horrors of war and upheaval that I have documented in the course of my career as a photojournalist." ■

International Journalist Added to Nieman Class of 2001

Ignacio Gomez, a Colombian journalist who fled to the United States in July after receiving death threats in his own country, will be a 2001 Nieman Fellow. As an investigative reporter for the Bogota newspaper El Espectador, Gomez has reported on the relationship between the Colombian government and Colombia's major economic groups, and on the U.S. military's growing role in the Colombian civil war and links with organizations accused of violating human rights. Gomez disclosed that the 1997 massacre in the village of Mapiripan, in which 49 people were killed, was carried out by right-wing paramilitaries with the help of Colombian military forces.

The Nieman Foundation occasionally awards a fellowship after the class has been selected to a journalist who is faced with a dangerous or career-threatening situation.

Funding for Gomez's fellowship is provided by The Freedom Forum. ■

Howard Simons' Legacy Lives On

Scholarships for minority journalism students bear his name.

By Marcia Slacum Greene

They never met. Megan Kay Scott was entering grade school when Howard Simons ended his legendary career as managing editor of The Washington Post and became Curator of the Nieman Foundation. Yet, like the many journalists whose careers Simons influenced before his death in 1989, Scott will benefit also from the editor's reputation for nurturing young talent.

This fall, Scott, a recent graduate of Clark Atlanta University, will pursue a master's degree in journalism as a recipient of the newly created Howard Simons Graduate Fellowship to the University of Maryland. The Washington Post initiated the Howard Simons Scholarship and Fellowship program last year as part of an education partnership with the university's College of Journalism. Each year, two outstanding minority students will be awarded a graduate fellowship and an undergraduate scholarship.

Scott, who has dreamed of a writing career since childhood, already understands that the business of journalism requires commitment. Her credentials include internships at The Boston Globe and The Detroit News, reporting and editing experience, and an award for editorial writing. "I've always believed in doing the maximum, not the minimum," Scott said. "The fellowship involves a lot of hands-on experience. In journalism, that is one of the best ways to learn, and I'm really looking forward to it."

Like Scott, Simons was passionate about journalism. His enthusiasm was matched only by his endless efforts to develop, encourage and challenge good journalists. In fact, the program named in his honor is part of the newspaper's

three-year-old Young Journalists Development Project, which was designed to support students interested in newspaper careers and to encourage more minorities to enter journalism.

In the Simons tradition, the development project has guided young journalists with help from an extensive network of volunteers from The Washington Post's news staff. In addition, it has allowed the newspaper to assist students in the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia through writing seminars, equipment donations, and technical assistance. The program helped revive a number of the District's high school newspapers.

As the Young Journalists Development Project expanded to include college level education partnerships, it became clear that financial assistance could play a key role in attracting talented journalists, said Dorothy Butler Gilliam, the project's director. "Lack of funding for higher education often had been cited as a barrier to minority enrollment," she said. Financial assistance for University of Maryland students became one way of addressing that barrier.

Lolly Bowean—the first Simons' graduate scholar—concentrated on public affairs reporting and spent a semester of reporting work at the Capital News Service. She took classes taught by Gene Roberts, former Philadelphia Inquirer editor and New York Times managing editor, and Haynes Johnson, a former Washington Post columnist.

Bowean praised the program's professors for giving her a new appreciation for the power inherent in great journalism. "Before the University of Maryland, I thought of journalism as a job—a good one that I loved, but a

job," Bowean said. "They showed me how journalism has the power to change things, to make things better...."

Simons certainly understood the power of the press. He received the first telephone call about a break-in at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee and later managed the coverage of what became widely known as Watergate, the biggest story in the newspaper's history.

But even as he pushed reporters to pursue the big stories, Simons also emphasized that the reporting had to meet the high standards he valued—fairness, completeness and evenhandedness.

When the newspaper celebrated the new Simons awards during a gala reception last year, a program note explained the designation: "The scholarship and fellowship are named for Howard Simons because he embodied the attributes The Washington Post values most: a relentless drive for the truth, a nurturing and inclusive presence, a reverence for the language and—above all—a sense of fun."

When Katharine Graham, chair of the executive committee of The Washington Post, addressed the gathering, she referred to Simons as a "brilliant writer and editor" who had "stood for the best in our profession." She continued, "Thanks to this program, I feel sure his influence and his standards will endure in journalism—and in journalists—for many generations to come." ■

Marcia Slacum Greene is a special projects reporter at The Washington Post and a 1991 Nieman Fellow.

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

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

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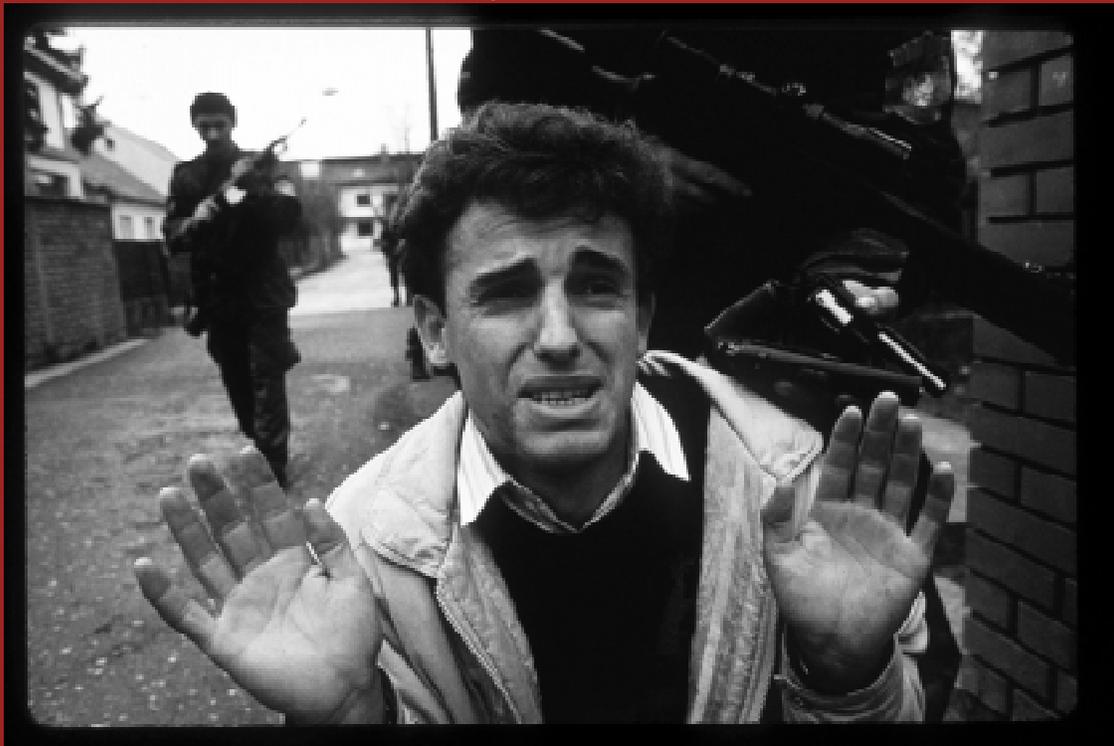
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— *Thomas French, St. PetersburgTimes*