

# Nieman Reports

SUMMER 2012  
VOL. 66 NO. 2

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

*To promote and elevate the standards of journalism*

# TRUTH IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA



**@NiemanReports** How journalists today  
expose manipulations and find reliable voices  
in the crowd **#NRtruth**

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 **CNN Breaking News**  
@cnnbrk

Supreme Court strikes down individual mandate portion of health care law.  
[on.cnn.com/LvVRcK](http://on.cnn.com/LvVRcK)

Reply Retweet Favorite

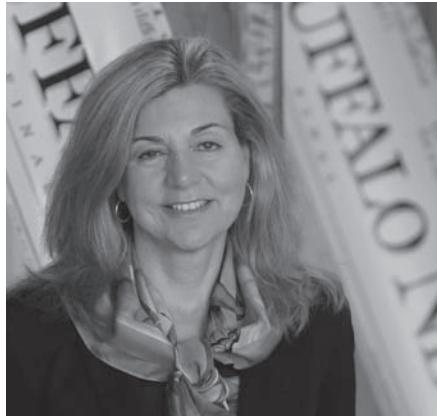
1,206 RETWEETS 155 FAVORITES

10:08 AM - 28 Jun 12 via web · Embed this Tweet

In an attempt to get the news out first, CNN got it wrong. Minutes after the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its decision on the health care law in June, CNN erroneously tweeted and reported on-air that the law's individual mandate had been struck down. Fox News also incorrectly reported on the ruling. Bloomberg News, The Associated Press, and others got it right within the same time frame.

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Megan O'Grady. Photo by Thorsten Trimpop.

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—LINDA GREENHOUSE, PAGE 21

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## Facts and Friction

A RECENT BLOG POST ON MASHABLE EXPLORED DESIGNER Oliver Reichenstein's suggestions for correcting errors on Twitter. It was illustrated with a quaint piece of art: a photograph of lined writing paper and a red pencil, eraser end down, retracting the word "Error."

"Twitter is celebrated for rapidly distributing breaking news, sometimes reaching vast audiences before that information is reported by the press," wrote Lauren Indvik. "But sometimes that information is inaccurate ... and it can be difficult to correct once it's saturated the Twittersphere. So how do you stop a bad tweet from spreading?"

The pairing of the post that posed a simple question and the illustration that offered a simple solution created its own quiet commentary. The journalism of verification and the immediacy enabled by social media can sometimes collide. The hidden hand of an editor methodically confirming or correcting is not a value hardwired into the mobile phone outfitted with Twitter. At the same time, Twitter is among the tools enabling fast and democratic correctives to falsehoods uttered in the public square and part of an arsenal deployed in the emerging field of information forensics. The healthy questions arising from these tensions are the focus of this Summer issue of Nieman Reports.

The evidence of fact inflation and manipulation is not a unique byproduct of social media, as we are reminded in these pages by the timeline documenting journalism's long history of errors and lies. Craig Silverman, who writes the Regret the Error blog, recalls a 19th-century handbook that advised aspiring journalists on the legitimacy of manufacturing non-essential facts in support of the central objective: "to make an

interesting story." The advice outlived the century. As a young reporter, I was disappointed to learn that a legendary journalist, while editing a newspaper story written by a friend of mine, had rearranged a source's quote, explaining, "Wouldn't it be better if he said it like this?"

But human obstacles to truth are now aided by increasingly sophisticated co-conspirators. One of the great challenges for reporters and editors is to harness technological tools and put them to work responsibly on behalf of news verification and dissemination. Some tools much older than Twitter—photography, for one—are posing both new possibilities and problems for guardians of verisimilitude. Santiago Lyon, director of photography at The Associated Press, writes about the latest versions of Photoshop having the "ability to make some manipulation virtually undetectable." The software to counteract that is still too slow to satisfy a news organization like Lyon's that transmits some 3,000 images each day.

Linda Greenhouse, a former New York Times reporter who now teaches at Yale Law School, recently spoke in Boston about fairness and the possibility that the symmetrical "he said, she said" journalism can actually undermine the truth. We reprise her remarks not because they directly address the social media challenges central to this issue of Nieman Reports but because she asks the question central to our time: "Why is it just so difficult to make the search for truth the highest journalistic value?"



# A New Age for Truth

‘Never has it been so easy to expose an error, check a fact, crowdsource and bring technology to bear in service of verification.’

BY CRAIG SILVERMAN

IN A HANDBOOK FOR ASPIRING JOURNALISTS PUBLISHED IN 1894, EDWIN L. Shuman shared what he called one of the “most valuable secrets of the profession at its present stage of development.”

He revealed that it was standard practice for reporters to invent a few details, provided the made-up facts were nonessential to the overall story.

“Truth in essentials, imagination in nonessentials, is considered a legitimate rule of action in every office,” he wrote. “The paramount object is to make an interesting story.”

It was easy for a reporter of the time to get away with a few, or even a bushel of, inventions. Information was scarce and could take days or weeks to make its way to the public sphere. The telephone was not yet widely in use, and the first transatlantic wireless transmission was years away. The early mass-market Kodak Brownie camera was close to a decade from release. The machinery of publishing and distribution was in the hands of a few.

If a reporter wanted to fudge a few details to make his story a little more colorful, well, chances are no one would

notice or call him on it.

Shuman’s advice is objectionable, but something about it—and the information and reporting environment in which it was offered—seems quaint and charming by today’s standards.

It also highlights how much things have changed when it comes to accuracy and verification. “Not too long ago, reporters were the guardians of scarce facts delivered at an appointed time to a passive audience,” writes Storyful founder Mark Little in his essay in this issue. “Today we are the managers of an overabundance of information

and content, discovered, verified and delivered in partnership with active communities.”

A reporter following Shuman’s advice today would likely find his fabrications swiftly exposed on social media. Bloggers would tally offenses and delve deeper. People with firsthand knowledge of the story in question might step forward with photos and videos to contradict the invented details. Media watchdogs, press critics, and others would call out the reporter and his employer.

In the same vein, a politician or public figure who publicly asserts a falsehood is likely to be called out by fact-checking organizations such as FactCheck.org and PolitiFact.

Never before in the history of journalism—or society—have more people and organizations been engaged in fact checking and verification. Never has it been so easy to expose an error, check a fact, crowdsource and bring technology to bear in service of verification.



This photo taken by a passenger after the London subway bombings in 2005 was one of the first images from the scene. It jump-started efforts at both the BBC and The Associated Press to solicit and verify user-generated content. Photo by Alexander Chadwick/AP.

Not surprisingly, the price for inaccuracy has never been higher. The new world of information abundance, of real-time dissemination, of smartphones and digital cameras and social networks has brought the discipline of verification back into fashion as the primary practice and value of journalists.

It has also necessitated an emerging area of expertise built around verifying photos, videos, tweets, status updates, blog posts, and other digital ephemera. I often call this the New Verification.

But that's not to say old values and skills aren't still at the core of the discipline.

"The business of verifying and debunking content from the public relies far more on journalistic hunches than snazzy technology," writes David Turner in his article about the BBC's User Generated Content Hub. "While some call this new specialization in journalism 'information forensics,' one does not need to be an IT expert or have special equipment to ask and answer the fundamental questions used to judge whether a scene is staged or not."

The Hub employs a dedicated team of journalists to verify (and debunk) content from social media. Al Jazeera's social media team practices verification as a core part of its work, as does a team of producers at CNN's iReport platform for citizen content. The Associated Press's photo desk also dedicates significant time and resources to sourcing and verifying photos and videos from social networks.

At Storyful, Little, a former television reporter, and a team of journalists around the world operate a news

organization that offers verification as one of its core services for customers such as Reuters and The New York Times.

Imagine: An outsourced verification operation, focused on vetting and curating social media content uploaded and shared by people the world over. It's a news organization and a business model that would have been inconceivable 10 years ago.

#### RUMORS AND LIES

The complexity of verifying content from myriad sources in various mediums and in real time is one of the great new challenges for the profession. This content can provide critical information during conflicts and natural disasters and provide clarity and color to a local event.

But it also takes the form of fraudulent messages and images engineered by hoaxers, manipulators and propagandists. Rumors and falsehoods spread just as quickly as, if not faster than, facts. In many cases they prove more compelling, more convincing, more clickable.

"People seem to find it easier to believe rumors that they wish were true or that seem to fulfill a desire to hear the worst," writes Tuscaloosa (Ala.) News city editor Katherine K. Lee in her essay about the News's Pulitzer Prize-winning tornado coverage.

Lee's experience speaks to a fundamental, if depressing, truth about humans and facts: just because something is true, it doesn't mean people are more likely to believe it. Facts alone are not enough to persuade, to change minds.

Liars and manipulators are often more persuasive than the press, even with our growing cadre of checkers

and verification specialists. Reporting and checking the facts isn't the same as convincing people of them.

This is one of the battles being fought in the shift from information scarcity and tight distribution to information abundance and media fragmentation. As I've previously written, "the forces of untruth have more money, more people, and ... much better expertise. They know how to birth and spread a lie better than we know how to debunk one. They are more creative about it, and, by the very nature of what they're doing, they aren't

responses to compensate for this unwelcome information. As a result, corrections are sometimes ineffective and can even backfire."

Humans resist correction and are disinclined to change closely held beliefs. We seek out sources of information that confirm our existing views. When confronted by contrary information, we find ways to avoid accepting it as true. We are governed by emotion, not by reason. (Read more about these factors in Nyhan and Reifler's "Misinformation and Fact-checking: Research

Humans ... are disinclined to change closely held beliefs. We seek out sources of information that confirm our existing views. When confronted by contrary information, we find ways to avoid accepting it as true.

constrained by ethics or professional standards. Advantage, liars."

Researchers Brendan Nyhan of Dartmouth College and Jason Reifler of Georgia State University have in recent years provided evidence that those working to spread lies large and small have a distinct advantage: the human brain.

"Unfortunately, available research in this area paints a pessimistic picture: the most salient misperceptions are typically difficult to correct," the pair wrote on the Columbia Journalism Review's website earlier this year. "This is because, in part, people's evaluations of new information are shaped by their beliefs. When we encounter news that challenges our views, our brains may produce a variety of

Findings From Social Science," a paper written for New America Foundation's Media Policy Initiative, at <http://newamerica.net>.)

These truths about human behavior help explain why political misinformation is so pervasive and effective and why myths and falsehoods take hold in society. The emergence of moneyed Super PACs promise an election year lousy with misleading ads, nasty e-mail campaigns, and manufactured lies.

Bad actors also make use of Twitter and other networks to create fake accounts that spread untruths or inject fraudulent chatter into the conversation. In dictatorships, they create fake videos and images and upload them to YouTube and other websites in



observatory in South Africa who had used a new telescope to observe plants, animals and flying man-bats on the moon.

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## GETTING IT WRONG

A sampling of mistakes, fabrications and manipulations.

BY JONATHAN SEITZ

1835

**Life on the Moon**  
New York Sun

The paper ran a six-part hoax, supposedly reprinted from the Edinburgh Journal of Science, about a preeminent astronomer at an

the hope that news organizations and the public will find them and take them for real.

There is no shortage of work for fact checkers and the emerging verification experts within news organizations. But along with checking and vetting, we must also make the product of this work more persuasive and shareable.

Spreading facts requires the use of narrative, powerful images and visualization, and appeals to emotion. We must engage readers in ways that help them get past their biases. It also requires that we dedicate ourselves to spreading the skills of verification and fact checking within journalism—and to the public as a whole.

A public with the ability to spot a hoax website, verify a tweet, detect a faked photo, and evaluate sources of information is a more informed public. A public more resistant to untruths and so-called rumor bombs. (Think “death panels.”) This is a public that can participate in fact checking, rather than merely be an audience for it.

Fact checking and verification are having a moment right now. But what matters is whether this is a flash or a turning point—whether all the effort being put into fact checking and verification can have a measurable effect on the persistence of misinformation and lies in our new information ecosystem.

I'd hate for a journalist to dig up this issue decades or a century in the future and marvel at our foolishness the way we did about Mr. Shuman and his great secret of 19th-century journalism.

**Craig Silverman** writes the *Regret the Error* blog about accuracy, errors and verification for the Poynter Institute, where he is an adjunct faculty member. He is the author of “*Regret the Error: How Media Mistakes Pollute the Press and Imperil Free Speech.*”



Soviet leader Leon Trotsky, circled at right, at a celebration of the 1917 Russian Revolution. After he fell out of favor, he was eliminated from the photo before it was republished in 1967. Photos from David King Collection, London.

# Detecting the Truth in Photos

As technologies to manipulate images grow ever more sophisticated, media organizations are using software to help determine authenticity.

BY SANTIAGO LYON

JOURNALISTS KNOW QUITE WELL THAT PICTURES CAN AND DO LIE AND THAT photographs have been manipulated for a long time. The Soviets under Stalin were masters of this, removing political figures from images as they fell out of favor. Leon Trotsky and others would disappear from photos, erased from the historical record as their political fortunes fell.

More recently, the Fox public relations department handed out a photo of the “American Idol” judges and host which it later admitted was a composite.



The Associated Press bars photographers from altering images so a freelancer was dismissed for eliminating his shadow from the photo at right.

Another image, sent to us by one of our photographers from a funeral in Northern Ireland some years ago, had a pixelated man in the background who had been rendered unrecognizable at the request of the activists controlling the funeral.

These are the kinds of manipulations that are fairly easy to spot. Naturally, we don't distribute them.

In recent years, however, things have gotten more complicated. News production is changing rapidly—from fewer resources in newsrooms to the use of user-generated content. Technologies to manipulate images are becoming ever more sophisticated. There are now cameras that can make the people in the pictures look skinnier, and in the latest versions of Adobe Photoshop there is the ability to make some manipulation virtually undetectable.

In this environment, the challenges for major news organizations are considerable. At The Associated Press

(AP), we transmit about 3,000 images every 24 hours to subscribers around the world. That's a little over one million images a year.

In this 24-hour news cycle, timely delivery is essential. Yet if even one of the images we distribute is found to be false or deliberately misleading, our credibility and reputation are on the line.

#### CREATING AN ETHICS CODE

One wake-up call came in 2004 when one of our regular photographers sold us an image of flooding in China. We didn't notice anything wrong with the dramatic picture.

Shortly after, we got a message from a reader in Finland suggesting that something was amiss with the photo. We contacted the photographer and, under questioning, he admitted that he had raised the water level from people's knees to their waists for effect. We immediately terminated our relationship with him.

Over the years we have unfortunately

had occasion to dismiss other photographers at the AP for manipulating imagery—and the same has happened at other news agencies and media organizations.

The question remains: what can we do about this phenomenon in photojournalism, and particularly what can we at the AP do about it?

One of the important steps to take in this new media ecology is to formulate a policy about what can and cannot be done to imagery. AP's ethics code is quite clear:

AP pictures must always tell the truth. We do not alter or digitally manipulate the content of a photograph in any way. ... No element should be digitally added or subtracted from any photograph. The faces or identities of individuals must not be obscured by Photoshop or any other editing tool. Minor adjustments in Photoshop are acceptable. These include cropping,

#### 1861

**Union Wins Battle of Bull Run**  
The Associated Press, others  
The first major Civil War battle looked like a Union victory so many reporters left to file stories. After the Confederates won, Union censors intercepted the AP's correction.

#### 1888

**Obituary for the Wrong Nobel**  
French newspapers, The New York Times, others  
When dynamite inventor Alfred Nobel's brother Ludvig died, many newspapers published obituaries for Alfred.

#### 1912

**Titanic Towed Safely to Halifax**  
The Baltimore Sun, others  
Early reports about the Titanic disaster had all passengers safe and the ship being towed to Nova Scotia before the extent of the casualties and the sinking were known.



dodging and burning, conversion into grayscale, and normal toning and color adjustments that should be limited to those minimally necessary for clear and accurate reproduction ...

Even these statements need to be supported by training and guidance, as words alone cannot address every possible nuance in tonality, shading and other variables.

We currently have more than 350 staff photographers and photo editors at the AP, and in the past few years we have invested substantially in a global training program designed to teach photographers and editors the best practices for using Photoshop. We have provided clear guidance on how to accurately handle images and what to do when in doubt.

The process changes somewhat when the material submitted comes from a member of the public or a citizen journalist. I first became aware of the potential of user-generated content after the London transit bombings in 2005. Explosions destroyed three subway cars and, later, a bus, killing 52 people and wounding over 700. Photographers and camera crews were limited to above-ground exit stations. The only visual entry point to the heart of the story deep underground came from cell phone photos taken by passengers evacuating through underground tunnels.

Seeing such an image on the BBC website, we contacted the person who'd taken the photo. A price was negotiated for the rights to that image and we distributed it. The next day it was widely used on front pages and across the Internet. At the time, some veteran editors, citing poor quality, dismissed the very notion out of hand. I argued that some image was better than none—and we started a sustained effort at the AP to obtain strong citizen content where and when it was needed.

#### MURKY ORIGINS

But the authenticity of a user-generated image isn't always as clear as it was in



An airplane passenger's photo of the space shuttle Endeavor after liftoff went viral, then was bought by The Associated Press. Photo by Stefanie Gordon/AP.

the London bombings, when we had access to the person who could verify ownership of the images, give us original data files, and sign an agreement.

Recently in the Middle East, for example, we've repeatedly seen events where access has been difficult or impossible for professional journalists. Local groups have been keen to share

portray what they claim to portray. We look for elements that can support authenticity: Does the weather report say that it was sunny at the location that day? Do the shadows fall the right way considering the source of light? Is clothing consistent with what people wear in that region?

If we cannot communicate with the videographer or photographer, we will add a disclaimer that says the AP "is unable to independently verify the authenticity, content, location or date of this handout photo/video."

We also frequently work with Hany Farid, a forensic computer scientist at Dartmouth College who has developed software that can often detect photo manipulation. But it takes time to check for a variety of possible alterations and the technology, still in its infancy, cannot yet detect every skillful manipulation, such as the one that raised the floodwaters in the picture from China.

Another limitation is that full analysis of a picture often requires a large original image file. The small, low-resolution photographs distributed across social media can make it nearly impossible to detect manipulation.

All that said, I think such manipulation-detection software will become

Local groups [in the Middle East] have been keen to share images but tracking down who actually produced a certain photo or video is extremely difficult.

images but tracking down who actually produced a certain photo or video is extremely difficult. These images often are posted on activist websites or Facebook pages where media organizations are invited to use the material at no charge. But how do we know these images have not been manipulated or that those purporting to have permission to distribute them really do?

Like other news organizations, we try to verify as best we can that the images

more sophisticated and useful in the future. This technology, along with robust training and clear guidelines about what is acceptable, will enable media organizations to hold the line against willful image manipulation, thus maintaining their credibility and reputation as purveyors of the truth.

*Santiago Lyon, a 2004 Nieman Fellow, is a vice president and director of photography at The Associated Press.*

# Inside the BBC's Verification Hub

'What everyone wanted to know, on Twitter and in the newsroom, was this: Was the video real or fake? That is the kind of question the [User-Generated Content] Hub is there to investigate.'

BY DAVID TURNER

A GROUP OF SOLDIERS SPEAKING ARABIC shovel sand into a pit while a disembodied voice wails. After a few seconds it becomes apparent that the desperate voice is coming from a man buried in the trench; the head alone is visible.

The soldiers—a number dressed, incongruously, in sneakers—appear to reply with gloating taunts. But they are mainly concentrating on the job at hand: covering the victim's head in earth. They do their grisly job well; in less than a minute his head is completely buried. The video then ends abruptly—the rest is silence.

One rain-swept morning in April, Trushar Barot, assistant editor at the BBC's User-Generated Content (UGC) Hub in London's rather bleakly monolithic BBC Television Centre, was studying the anonymously posted footage on YouTube. His Twitter feed was buzzing

with news of the clip. Jon Williams, the BBC's world news editor, had also raised it at the 9 o'clock news meeting. What everyone wanted to know, on Twitter and in the newsroom, was this: Was the video real or fake? That is the kind of question the Hub is there to investigate.

## A FATEFUL ERROR

Started in 2005 to sift through unsolicited contributions previously perused by many different teams, the Hub has grown to a complement of 20 staffers. Initially, the team focused heavily on images, footage and eyewitness accounts e-mailed to the BBC, but in the past few years people have become much more prone to distribute material themselves through Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. As a result, the number of contributions proffered to the BBC has declined to about 3,000 a day, and the Hub's task

has moved toward semi-conventional newsgathering with a Web 2.0 twist. Staffers now use search terms, see what's trending on Twitter, and look at the images and footage trusted contacts are discussing on their Twitter streams.

The golden rule, say Hub veterans, is to get on the phone whoever has posted the material. Even the process of setting up the conversation can speak volumes about the source's credibility: unless sources are activists living in a dictatorship who must remain anonymous to protect their lives, people who are genuine witnesses to events are usually eager to talk. Anyone who has taken photos or video needs to be contacted in any case to request their permission, as the copyright holder, to use it.

The risk of posting non-authenticated images is high, as the Hub was reminded on Sunday, May 27. As a breaking news

1918

End of World War I  
United Press International  
UPI president Roy Howard was visiting a French naval office on Nov. 7 when a U.S. commander told him that Germany had surrendered. Howard sent the false report to New



York, and UPI distributed it four days before the armistice was signed.

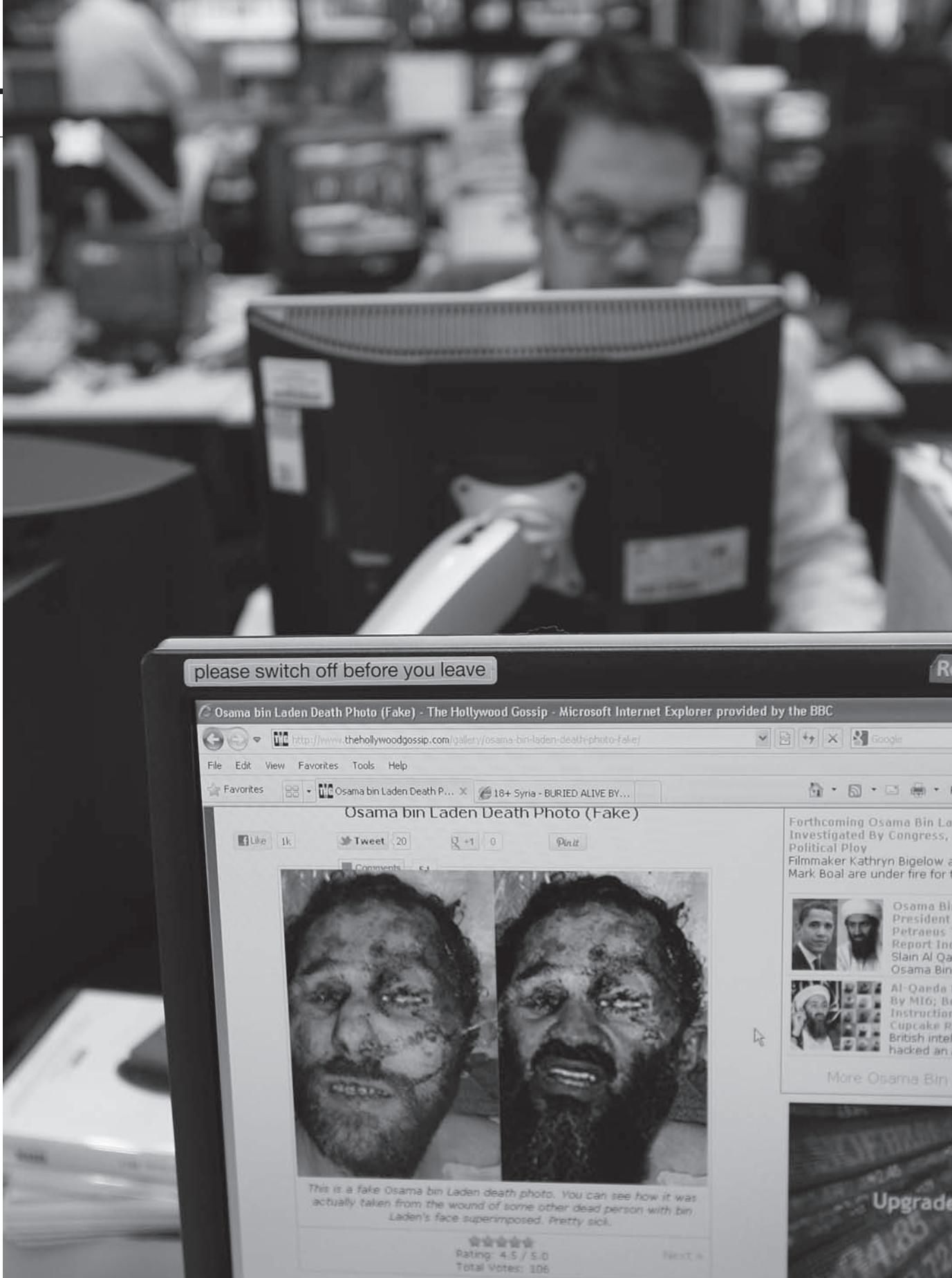
1927

Edna St. Vincent Millay Profile  
*The New Yorker*  
Details about the poet's parents were wrong. (Her father was a school teacher, not a stevedore, for example.) The errors led to the creation of the fact-checking department.

1948

"Dewey Defeats Truman"  
*Chicago Tribune*  
Editors relied on polls and the opinion of its Washington correspondent to incorrectly announce in early editions that Thomas Dewey had won the presidential election.

>>>



This fake photo of the dead Osama bin Laden was debunked by the BBC's User-Generated Content Hub. Using TinEye, the team revealed that bin Laden's features had been digitally superimposed on the head of a dead Afghan fighter. Photo by Philip Hollis.

## COVER STORY: TRUTH IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

story about a massacre in Houla, Syria, unfolded, staff members spotted a powerful photo circulated on Twitter, showing shrouded bodies in rows and apparently sourced from activists in Syria. “The original distributor of the photo on Twitter was tracked down, we spoke to them, and they gave us information about its sourcing,” says Chris Hamilton, the BBC’s social media editor since 2011. “So the picture was published on the BBC News website, with a disclaimer saying it could not be independently verified.”

Seeing the BBC News website, Getty photographer Marco Di Lauro almost fell off his chair, he later told The Daily Telegraph—the image supposedly showing the shocking aftermath of the Houla massacre was a photo he’d taken in Iraq in 2003. He posted on Facebook: “Somebody is using my images as a propaganda against the Syrian government to prove the massacre.” Meanwhile, alerted by users, the BBC took down the image—90 minutes after it had been posted. But the damage was done: The Daily Telegraph and other publications reported on the error, and the blogosphere went wild over accusations that the BBC was pushing the anti-Syria position of the British government. Interestingly, few readers or commentators accepted the disclaimer posted with the photo—a key element to how many news organizations today handle the challenge that there are few independent reporters in countries such as Syria and that activists’ accounts and footage often cannot be verified.



This photo, taken in Iraq in 2003, was posted on the BBC’s homepage on May 27, 2012 to accompany an article about a massacre in Houla, Syria. It had been distributed by Syrian activists on social media. Photo by Marco Di Lauro/Reportage by Getty Images.

“Posting this photo was a mistake, there is no question,” says Hamilton. “We should have made more checks, as is normal practice, and the decision to publish should have been delayed, something we are very happy to do in an environment where being right is more important than being first.” He adds: “But this was not a systematic error. We have a strong track record of stopping numerous examples of incorrect material making it to air or online.”

While frustrating, the intentional “redistribution” of the Iraq photo illustrates that “governments don’t have a monopoly on spinning the media,” says Hamilton. “There is a lot of potential for activists to be faking and spinning things in a way that puts their cause forward. It is

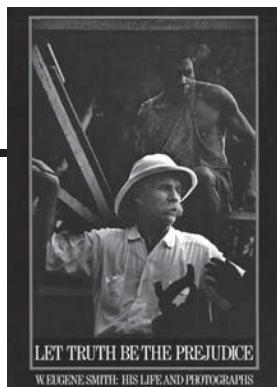
something we are all aware of. But it has to be navigated anew each and every time we look at footage. There are very few things that can give you 100 percent certainty.”

### RAISING DOUBTS

Authenticating photos and video, in other words, can be a tricky business, even for senior staff at the Hub. During my visit in May, assistant editor Barot recounted how on that rainy April morning he went about vetting the grisly video of the man being buried by people who appear to be Syrian soldiers: By 9:20 a.m. he had e-mailed the video to a colleague, an Arabic-speaking Syrian at BBC Monitoring, which uses language specialists to gather information from media outlets across the world. At 10:12 a.m. the colleague e-mailed back: The soldiers’

#### 1954

Dr. Albert Schweitzer in the Congo  
Life magazine, elsewhere  
Photographer W. Eugene Smith  
merged two images to create one of  
his most memorable pictures for Life  
magazine. It also appeared on the  
cover of “Let Truth Be the Prejudice.”



#### 1972

Thomas Eagleton’s Past  
The Washington Post  
Without evidence to back up the  
claim, Jack Anderson reported that  
Democratic vice presidential nomi-  
nee Thomas Eagleton had a history  
of drunken driving charges.

#### 1980

“Jimmy’s World”  
The Washington Post  
Reporter Janet Cooke fabricated an  
8-year-old heroin addict for a story.  
She won a Pulitzer Prize, which was  
later returned.

>>>

accents are Alawite, the ethnic group which rules Syria and provides many of its soldiers. And sneakers are commonly worn in some Syrian units. However, the colleague wondered how the voice of a man whose face is being covered in sand could be so consistently audible—unless he has been fitted with a microphone?

Barot had noticed this too, plus another cause for suspicion: Why does the video end only a few seconds after the victim's head has submerged completely? Could it be because it has to be short enough for him to hold his breath?

His hunch corroborated by this second source, Barot e-mailed colleagues around the BBC within 10 minutes to tell them the Hub had reservations about the clip. It had failed the test.

The dubious video illustrates a point made repeatedly by Barot and his boss Chris Hamilton: The business of verifying and debunking content from the public relies far more on journalistic hunches than snazzy technology. While some call this new specialization in journalism “information forensics,” one does not need to be an IT expert or have special equipment to ask and answer the fundamental questions used to judge whether a scene is staged or not.

“People are surprised to find we’re not a very high-tech, CSI-type of team,” says Barot. He and Hamilton, like the Hub’s other members, have conventional journalism backgrounds. Hamilton, for example, has done stints as reporter and editor during his 12 years at the BBC.

#### STREAMLINED FUTURE

It’s time for the Hub’s 10 a.m. news meeting, which has the feel of any morning confabulation of journalists at a media outlet, including a palpable sense of impatience to stop conferring and get on with the day’s work.

After setting priorities for the rest of the day, Hamilton finds a cramped office in which to discuss the future of verification.

Is the Hub here to stay? “We’re seeing correspondents and producers building

up their verification skills, and you’ve got to work out whether it’s something you need specialists for,” Hamilton says. But, he adds, “in some form you’ll always need them,” if only for the sake of efficiency.

Hamilton can, however, foresee a time when the size of the BBC’s Hub team might shrink as verification is “industrialized.” By that, he means that some procedures are likely to be carried out simultaneously at the click of an icon.

He also expects that technological improvements will make the automated checking of photos more effective. Useful online tools for this are Google’s advanced picture search or TinEye, which look for images similar to the photo copied into the search function. Barot used TinEye to disprove one of several gory fake images of Osama bin Laden’s head that circulated online soon after his death last year. He tracked down the original photo of another corpse’s face, onto which bin Laden’s features were grafted using Adobe Photoshop.

Responding to the tendency for social media to act as a rumor mill for outlandish theories, the Hub steers clear of tweets that ask the public whether something is true—in contrast to some journalists who use Twitter for crowdsourcing. Hamilton justifies this by pointing out that the mere fact the BBC is investigating a rumor “lends credence to the idea that it might be true.”

However, there is no question at the Hub about the role journalists should play in verifying online information with their trusted tools and techniques. “UGC and verification are no longer a side operation,” says Hamilton. “They have become part of the journalistic toolbox, alongside agency pictures, field reporters, background interviews. It’s critical for any big newsroom that wants credibility in storytelling.”

**David Turner** is a freelance journalist and author based in London. He was a correspondent at the Financial Times for 10 years.

## VETTING INFORMATION

*Members of the BBC’s User-Generated Content Hub offered tips for determining the veracity of videos and photographs:*

**Try to talk to the original source of the material.** You will quickly form an instinctive feeling about whether the person is telling the truth. One caveat: It may not be possible or even desirable to talk to an activist whose life will be in danger if they are identified.

**If material seems too good to be true, be skeptical—but keep an open mind.** The famous shot of a woman jumping out of a burning building during last summer’s London riots, neatly silhouetted against a raging inferno, initially aroused suspicions. However, the Hub verified it.

**Try to determine where the material first appeared online.** It could give clues about the identity and motives of the person who posted it.

**Consult specialists.** The BBC Monitoring Service can advise on accents. Use expert local knowledge of towns to advise whether images and videos depict the purported place.

**Use technology to help you.** Examples include Google Earth (to confirm that the features of the alleged location match the photo) and TinEye. But do not do so at the expense of journalistic instinct. Not all the faked photos of the Osama bin Laden corpse could be disproved by technical means, but BBC verifiers decided nonetheless that no possible explanation of how a real photo had leaked was credible.

**See what other verification experts are saying about an item on Twitter.** They may have useful information or ideas. —D.T.

# Finding the Wisdom In the Crowd

'Journalists need to get comfortable with risk, transparency and collaboration. We need to abandon the notion that we have a monopoly on truth.'

BY MARK LITTLE

WHEN I WAS A YOUNG TV JOURNALIST, the phrase "golden hour" meant the early evening light that bathed faces and landscapes in a warm forgiving glow. As a social journalist, I've started to use the term in a different way.

I now think of the golden hour as the time it takes social media to create either an empowering truth or an unstoppable lie, when a celebrity death trends on Twitter or an explosive video surfaces on YouTube. In other words, when journalism can matter most.

When I founded Storyful in 2010, I imagined a news agency built for the social media age. I wanted to create the products and protocols that would equip other journalists to meet the challenges of the golden hour.

At Storyful, we think a combination of automation and human skill provides

the broadest solution. We are a news agency but also a technology start-up. Our engineers work side by side with our journalists.

The Storyful development team is building products that will help our journalists and clients map influence and connections within social media conversations and get an early warning of changes in their speed or intensity.

We are also working to scale the techniques our editorial team has perfected in validating videos and images. At its core, this process is built around a checklist:

- Can we geo-locate this footage? Are there any landmarks that allow us to verify the location via Google Maps or Wikimapia?

- Are streetscapes similar to geo-located photos on Panoramio or Google Street View?
- Do weather conditions correspond with reports on that day?
- Are shadows consistent with the reported time of day?
- Do vehicle registration plates or traffic signs indicate the country or state?
- Do accents or dialects heard in a video tell us the location?
- Does it jibe with other imagery people are uploading from this location?
- Does the video reflect events as reported on Storyful's curated Twitter lists or by local news sources?

This form of inquiry is as old as journalism itself, even if the technology is not. Our approach to authenticating sources is also drawn

1982

Moving the Great Pyramid of Giza

National Geographic

A photograph of two pyramids was manipulated to better fit on the cover.

1983

Hitler's Forged Diaries

Stern (Germany), Newsweek,

The Times (London)

Stern staff reporter Gerd Heidemann procured what were purported to be the personal diaries of Adolf Hitler but no German experts on



World War II were asked to authenticate them.

1992

Truck Explosion

"Dateline NBC"

For a segment about automobile safety, "Dateline" producers tampered with a GM truck to ensure that it would explode during a test crash. GM sued.

>>>

# THE PROCESS OF VERIFICATION

In March, Storyful's sources in Syria tweeted that security forces were moving through Idlib province. In searching for visual evidence, the Storyful team found a 30-second YouTube clip which claimed to show troops in the Idlib town of Darkoush. News editor Malachy Browne explains a number of details that were checked to verify that the town shown was, in fact, Darkoush.

## CONSIDER YOUR SOURCES.

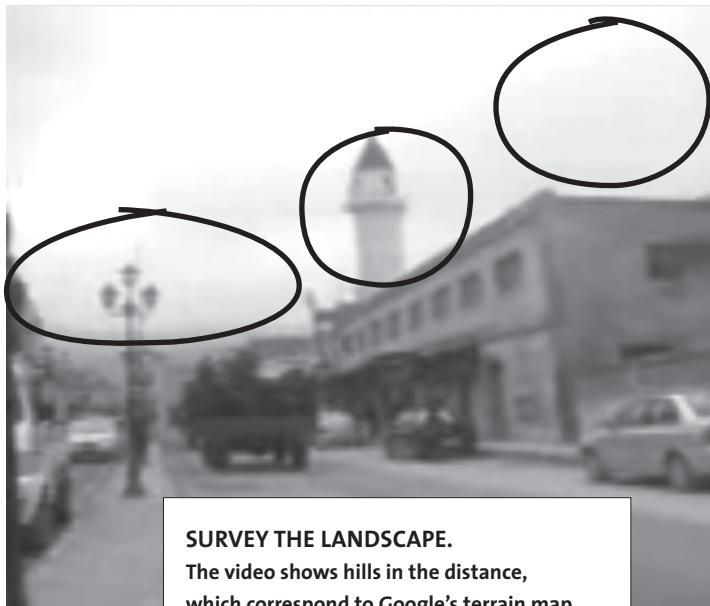
The user, Darkoush Revo ("Darkoush News"), uploads exclusively from this town and was active on the day in question. Affiliated Facebook and Twitter accounts are also Darkoush-centric.

7 آذار - جسر الشغور - دركوش: اقتحام الجيش دركوش

DarkoushRevo

Subscribe

236 videos



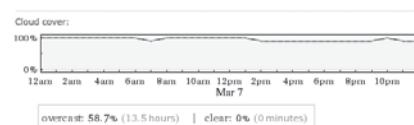
## SURVEY THE LANDSCAPE.

The video shows hills in the distance, which correspond to Google's terrain map of the town.



## CHECK THE WEATHER.

WolframAlpha search engine doesn't have details for the town of Darkoush, but it does note cloud cover in Idlib province on that date, which matches with the weather in the video.



## LOOK FOR LANDMARKS.

The key point is the mosque's distinctive minaret, which is visible in the satellite image from Google Maps because of the shadow it casts.



## COVER STORY: TRUTH IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

from the eternal values of storytelling. The Storyful team uses the phrase “human algorithm” to sum up its hybrid approach. Every news event in the age of social media creates a community. When news breaks, a network gathers to talk about the story. Some are witnesses, others are amplifiers, and in every group there are trusted filters.

The problem for journalists born into an age of elites is that these filters look nothing like our traditional sources, who are generally ranked on the basis of power and authority. Authority has been replaced by authenticity as the currency of social journalism. The key to engaging with a community is to seek out those closest to the story. They rarely have a title but are people of standing within a community. They are guides to the wisdom within their crowd and interpreters of nuance: if you are verifying video from Syria you don’t want a foreign policy wonk, you want someone who can distinguish between a Damascus and a Homs accent.

Our approach to rating sources and the video they upload revolves around another checklist:

- Where is this account registered and where is the uploader based, judging by his or her history?
- Are there other accounts—Twitter, Facebook, a blog, or website—affiliated with this uploader? How can they help us identify location, activity, reliability, bias and agenda?
- How long have these accounts been in existence? How active are they?
- Does the uploader write in slang or dialect that is identifiable in the video’s narration?

- Can we find WHOIS (domain registration) information for an affiliated website?
- Is the person listed in local directories? Does the person’s online social circles indicate a proximity to the story/location?
- Does the uploader “scrape” videos from news organizations and YouTube accounts?
- Are video descriptions dated? Does the title of the video have file extensions such as .AVI or .MP4?
- Are we familiar with this account? Has the content and reportage been reliable?

Reporters are taught never to expose their own ignorance but “I don’t know” is the starting point in any honest investigation of online communities and their

verify it and what context exists, if any. You are still a journalist.

Storyful has advantages in adjusting to the realities of social journalism. We don’t depend on ratings or traffic. Our mission is to help other journalists, particularly those who create the real value.

Storyful worked with ABC News to report the death of Osama bin Laden, discovering content and mapping key locations and images. But we were in no doubt that the person who really mattered on that day was Nick Schifrin, the correspondent in Pakistan.

When we work with clients like The New York Times, for example, our job is not to take the place of its reporters but to help turn user-generated content into something they can safely use. This may involve adding context to video for The Lede blog, building a Twitter list for a

**Every news event in the age of social media creates a community. When news breaks, a network gathers to talk about the story. Some are witnesses, others are amplifiers, and in every group there are trusted filters.**

content. Internally we consciously use the word “validation” instead of verification. Our role is to provide the essential context that will allow newsrooms to make informed judgments about content that may never be completely free of risk.

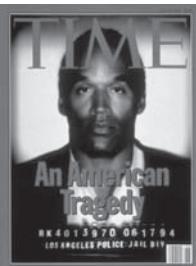
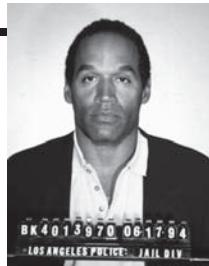
This does not mean that social journalists should not deliver judgments. It is not good enough to broadcast a user-generated video and then say it can’t be verified. You must tell us what you did to

beat reporter or helping the picture desk find a corroborating source.

Where social journalists like us can provide a unique benefit is in our embrace of collaboration. It does not come naturally to journalists to risk their reputation by engaging with online communities. But there is no alternative in the golden hour.

I would go further: all news organizations need to radically reconsider their approach to each other. There really

**1994**  
Face of O.J. Simpson  
*Time*  
The magazine darkened the mug shot of murder suspect O.J. Simpson that it put on the cover.



**1998**  
Stephen Glass Fabrications  
*The New Republic*  
The associate editor was found to have fabricated at least 27 articles that he’d written for *The New Republic*. In one case, he created a website for a fake company.

**1999**  
Wen Ho Lee  
*The New York Times*, various outlets  
The scientist was incorrectly identified as having leaked nuclear secrets to the Chinese. He received a settlement from the government and five media organizations.

>>>

is no value in going it alone in the golden hour. If you do, the chance you will be consistently first is non-existent. The chance that you will often be wrong is 100 percent.

Field reporters like me grew up with the reality of collaboration. In my days as a Washington correspondent, I relied on pool copy from the White House. In any war zone, my best friend was often my fiercest rival.

The very notion of the news agency stems from collaboration in a time of disruption. The Associated Press was the product of an historic partnership between New York's five daily newspapers during the Mexican-American War of the 1840s.

We're at that moment again. Faced with frightening disruption and stunning potential, journalists need to get comfortable with risk, transparency and collaboration. We need to abandon the notion that we have a monopoly on truth.

Not too long ago, reporters were the guardians of scarce facts delivered at an appointed time to a passive audience. Today we are the managers of an overabundance of information and content, discovered, verified and delivered in partnership with active communities.

What does that mean in practice? Technology will play its part but don't underestimate that human algorithm. We need new protocols to shape collaboration between journalists and communities. Perhaps just as important is collaboration among journalists, inside and outside the traditional structures of news.

I keep telling people we are entering a golden age of journalism. I truly believe that. But first we need to face up to the challenge of each golden hour.

**Mark Little** is founder and CEO of the social news agency Storyful.

# Vetting Citizen Journalism

'It's an emerging craft, one that combines an eye for a good story with a flair for connecting the dots and, above all, a human touch.'

BY LILA KING

THE CONVERSATION ON THE DESK usually goes like this: "Wow. Did you see this iReport? Incredible."

"Yeah, no kidding. But how are we going to vet it?"

The answer in broad strokes: It's an emerging craft, one that combines an eye for a good story with a flair for connecting the dots and, above all, a human touch.

Vetting is the heart of iReport, CNN's platform for citizen journalism. You won't see iReports on television or on CNN.com (outside the special iReport section, that is) before they've been fact checked and cleared.

The vetting process is rigorous and sometimes time-consuming. It usually starts with a phone call, most often from the iReport desk in Atlanta, where eight full-time producers tab through hundreds of incoming photos and videos every day, looking for the ones we think will make an impact.

About 8 percent of contributions are selected for vetting, a process that also alerts TV and digital producers there will likely be an element ready to go later in the day. Vetted iReports often turn into interview segments on air or quotes in stories you read online.



CNN's iReport invited viewers to submit questions for first lady Michelle Obama.

One morning in January, for example, iReport producer Christina Zdanowicz hit the desk to find scores of new photos and videos showing protests over increased fuel prices in Nigeria. Often when similar stories pile up on iReport, they're connected to a news event CNN is already on top of, like a natural disaster or a big political rally. The Nigerian iReports took us a bit by surprise—CNN was not yet reporting this so iReport was asked to sketch out the story.

#### VERIFYING REPORTS

One important contribution was a video showing a protest in the streets of Ibadan, Nigeria, earlier that morning. To investigate the authenticity of the clip, Zdanowicz reached out to the Ibadan iReporter, a 24-year-old pharmacist named Boma Tai. He described when and where and why the protest was happening and who was participating.

and similar news events is like the Ibadan clip: it comes from someone in the heart of the story, with a very subjective view of events. No surprise, of course, because iReport and most social media platforms are built for sharing the moments of your life.

At CNN we see it as our responsibility to add context and analysis to what we use from iReport and other social media platforms. That's why with the Nigeria protest, the iReport team continued to make calls all morning to iReport contributors who'd seen similar protests in Lagos and Abuja and Benin City.

Then we worked with a reporter at CNN International who connected the details we'd researched with comments from the local police, the office of President Goodluck Jonathan, and the economic and historic context of fuel price subsidies in Nigeria. Together, the citizen journalism, our research, and the

even though CNN didn't have a reporter on the ground to witness them.

The challenge was different when a teenage girl posted a video on iReport showing her being bullied. We verified it the old-fashioned way—by talking with her family and school officials and tracking down police reports.

And when a South Carolina woman started posting biting—and popular—webcam commentaries about the 2012 Republican presidential primary race, the vetting process wasn't so much about getting inside her head and verifying whether she really thinks the things she said. It was more about figuring out who she is and how she got to the point of posting videos of her commentary and saying that plainly and clearly to our audience.

At iReport we use a variety of tools: CNN-ers in the field, subject-matter experts, affiliate networks, and local media. We cross-check what we learn from citizen journalists with other social media reports.

We also use technology, which can't prove if a story is reliable but offers helpful clues. For example, we often check photo metadata to find timestamps and sometimes location data about the source photo or ask a photographer to share the previous or next 10 images from her camera. We also occasionally send an image through a service like TinEye to help determine whether it shows signs of alteration.

That's the journalism part—figuring out what you need to add to a video or photo that you find on the Internet to make sense of it and to help someone else understand why it matters.

At iReport we use a variety of tools: CNN-ers in the field, subject-matter experts, affiliate networks, and local media. We cross-check what we learn from citizen journalists with other social media reports.

All good and useful detail, but there was a catch: He wasn't just observing, he was participating, and he shared footage of the event because he wanted "the world to know in raw and unedited terms what is going on in Nigeria ... the poor are suffering!" So we decided to see what other context we could find to fill out the story.

Most of the video we see of protests

reporter's contributions formed a comprehensive story that provided images and video of the protests as well as news analysis explaining the context and why this was happening.

In a number of ways, the Nigerian protest story is a simple example. After talking to dozens of people about the same events, it wasn't a huge leap to say that we believed they had happened,

#### 2000 Presidential Election Results Various outlets

Many newspapers and media outlets declared a winner before the vote count in Florida was finalized. The election was eventually decided in court.



#### 2003 Jayson Blair The New York Times

In at least 36 national stories for the Times, Blair committed numerous fabrications, lied about where he reported from and what he witnessed, and made up quotes.

He also plagiarized from wire services and other newspapers. After Blair's deceptions were uncovered, two top editors stepped down, correction procedures were tightened, and a public editor was appointed to evaluate, criticize and comment on the paper's integrity.

>>>

#### BUILDING COMMUNITY

But there is also the community part: Vetted iReports are a giant Rolodex of stories and people to follow up on. This March when the world marked the first anniversary of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, CNN asked the iReporters who had shared footage of that event for updates on how they were faring. The result is as tender a portrait as you'll read in an anniversary piece.

More than offering immediate firsthand glimpses of breaking news, the community we are building may be the real secret behind iReport's success. Our platform provides an open door to participating in the news to almost anyone who cares to enter, and a growing number of people from all over the world are doing just that; as of May 2012, there were more than one million registered iReporters.

Outside of vetting, the iReport team in Atlanta spends the majority of its time dreaming up ways to invite that community—both existing and future members—to take part in what CNN is doing. For example, we've come up with new models, such as a recent community-driven interview with first lady Michelle Obama or a mash-up video of footage shot by people in various cities and countries on a single day in March.

We discovered early on that it wasn't enough to wait for news to break and hope people might think to contribute (and set off the vetting process). iReport today is a highly collaborative effort among professional journalists, eyewitnesses and passionate participants to tell the full breadth of news stories as they unfold and to reinvent the process together as we go.

**Lila King** is participation director for CNN Digital, where her work is focused on inviting CNN's global audiences to participate in the news.

# Doubting Amina

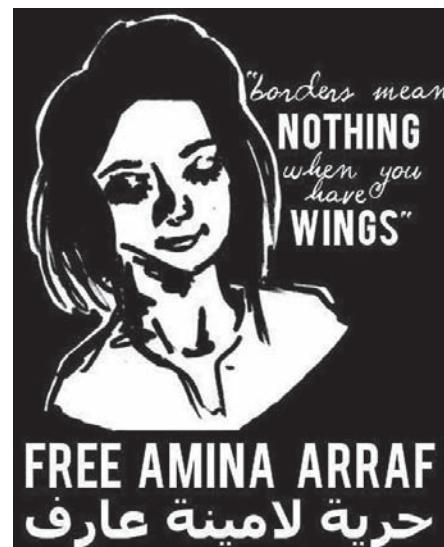
The biggest hoax of 2011 fooled activists and journalists alike. One writer and free speech advocate explains why so many wanted to believe in the 'Gay Girl in Damascus.'

BY JILLIAN YORK

IT ALL BEGAN WITH AN ARGUMENT. On someone else's Facebook wall is where I first encountered Amina. She was feisty, unapologetic and, though I can't remember what we argued about, I remember her apology afterward, written privately to me in a Facebook message. Soon afterward, we became Facebook "friends," though admittedly we rarely exchanged messages. It wasn't until months later when, after reading a piece in The Guardian about a Damascene "gay girl" whose brave blogging had earned her accolades, I put two and two together and realized that Amina was that girl.

Soon after, however, things took a turn for the worse: Amina, it was reported on her own blog on June 6, 2011, had been kidnapped by Syrian secret police forces. In a matter of just 24 hours, the international media was in a frenzy over Amina's disappearance. But as a few skeptics began to search for someone, anyone who knew Amina personally, her elaborate story began to quickly unravel and by June 12, six days after her supposed kidnapping, the truth became known: Amina was no gay girl in Damascus, but instead a white, American man in Scotland named Tom MacMaster.

Throughout the past year, and even before Amina's story, there has been an abundance of discussion on social media verification, as well as the need for



The supposed arrest of the "Gay Girl in Damascus" blogger provoked a campaign.

anonymity when reporting from places like Syria. So much of the debate has focused on *citizen journalism*, the practitioners of which are often deemed prone to errors, that we so easily forget that professional journalists make mistakes, too. Though it was indeed The Guardian that published the story that allowed us to believe that Amina was real, I don't place too much blame on the journalist—the pseudonymous Katherine Marsh—for her error. Though Marsh's editor should have doubted the veracity of the content upon learning that Marsh had conducted her interview over e-mail

## COVER STORY: TRUTH IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

A sampling of tweets from an effort by NPR's Andy Carvin to confirm Amina's existence.

**Sara @shoofs**  
@TheDaliFarmer @acarvin YES i do know Amina personally; I have conversed with her over chat and so have many of our common friends  
4:01 PM - 7 Jun 11 via TweetDeck - Embed this Tweet

**Andy Carvin @acarvin**  
@shoofs It's just odd that I can't find anyone who has actually met her in person. Some people have raised questions so I'm investigating.  
4:12 PM - 7 Jun 11 via TweetDeck - Embed this Tweet

**Sara @shoofs**  
@acarvin a little propaganda theory thinking don't you agree! friends have met her personally. no need to investigate  
4:33 PM - 7 Jun 11 via web - Embed this Tweet

**Oema Soso @oemasoso**  
@acarvin horrible if #Amina is really kidnapped but bad if exposed as hoax cause this endangers future REAL cases not being taken serious  
6:01 AM - 8 Jun 11 via Mobile Web - Embed this Tweet

A sampling of tweets from an effort by NPR's Andy Carvin to confirm Amina's existence.

and instant messenger, I understand all too well why Marsh believed "Amina," because I did, too.

During the six days of the search for Amina, I was directly in touch with those doing the digging and I admit: I at first resisted—and resented—their search. I was at a conference in New York at the time, as was NPR's Andy Carvin—among the first to express doubt about Amina—and I recall arguing with him about whether it was the right thing to do when a life could be at stake. I was upset, angry and wanting to believe.

The details about Damascus put forth by MacMaster were plausible, at least enough so that my Syrian friends failed to spot any errors. In fact, as my doubt crept in about Amina, I began writing to our many mutual Facebook

friends—mostly Arab women—to ask if any of them knew her in real life. At first, at least two implied "yes," a testament to how much we all wanted to believe that no one could be so callous.

And yet, callous is the first word that comes to mind when I think of what Tom MacMaster did. In an interview with The Guardian in June 2011, MacMaster attempted an apology, stating:

I regret that quite a number of people are seeing my hoax as distracting from real news, real stories about Syria, and real concerns of real, actual on the ground bloggers where people will doubt their veracity and the fact that I think it's only a matter of time before someone in the Syrian regime says 'See, all our opposition is fake, it's not real.'

imprisoned. We see the videos and the images and hear the desperate pleas on social media. And therefore, when doubt seeps in, we find it harder and harder to believe the next story. One need only look to the conversations taking place every day on Twitter—and even in the major media of some foreign countries—to see how pervasive the doubting of Syrian narratives has become.

And yet, the journalistic errors continue as well. Following the May 25 massacre in Houla in which 108 people, mostly women and children, were killed, the BBC used a photograph of shrouded bodies that had actually been taken in Iraq in May 2003. While the photograph had gone viral on social media, the BBC erroneously posting it led to more accusations of journalistic bias and more doubt.

During the six days of the search for Amina, I was directly in touch with those doing the digging and I admit: I at first resisted—and resented—their search.

Setting aside for a moment how shallow an apology it was, I am instead struck by MacMaster's foresight in recognizing the damage his hoax would cause. One year later, and the regime has maintained power by doing just that: Portraying the opposition as the real problem, as "terrorists."

And that is precisely why we want to believe each story. We know the horrors that the Syrian regime is capable of, and we know that thousands of Syrians have been killed while others have been

On a normal day, a journalist's mistake might cost him some respect, maybe even his job. But when reporting on conflict—especially a conflict like Syria, in which journalists are marginalized from the very beginning—a lack of scrutiny may, in fact, inadvertently further agendas of suppression.

**Jillian York** is the director of international freedom of expression at the Electronic Frontier Foundation and the cofounder of Talk Morocco.

### 2003

#### "She Was Fighting to the Death"

The Washington Post

A front-page story about the capture by Iraqi forces of Army Pfc. Jessica Lynch said she fired every bullet she had and suffered numerous wounds. In reality, she never fired a shot and

suffered only broken bones and bruises. Military and government officials inflated her story to spur support for the Iraq War.



### 2003

#### WMD in Iraq

The New York Times, others

Articles by Judith Miller published in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq cited reports that the country possessed weapons of mass destruction. That was proven not to be the case. >>>

# Challenging ‘He Said, She Said’ Journalism

Instead of striving for balance, a veteran Supreme Court reporter asks, ‘How about truth for a goal?’

BY LINDA GREENHOUSE

A 2009 STORY IN THE NEW YORK TIMES about a dispute involving Fox News described the cable network as “a channel with a reputation for having a conservative point of view in much of its programming.”

Really?

That phrase “with a reputation” put the reporter, and the newspaper, at arm’s length from the fact that the Fox News Channel *does have* a conservative point of view, and proudly so.

What was the purpose of that distancing phrase?

A 2011 New York Times article, typical of many others, referred to Jared Loughner as “the man accused of opening fire outside a Tucson supermarket.” Whether the Tucson shooter is guilty of murder is a legal question, but there is no question at all about his identity as the man who shot Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and killed six people. We don’t have to say “accused of”—he did the deed in front of dozens of witnesses.

I’m not picking on the Times—the newspaper I read most carefully as well as the place I worked for 40 years. And although it is attacked, most often from the right but not infrequently from the left, for various kinds of bias, it actually, in both its performance and its ideals, epitomizes the commitment of

mainstream journalism to the goals of fairness and objectivity.

This is nothing new. Adolph Ochs, the founding publisher of the modern New York Times, whose byword was “without fear or favor,” believed that a responsible newspaper should “report all sides of a controversial issue, and let the reader decide the truth,” according to a reminiscence written a couple of years ago for internal distribution to the Times staff.

In this article, I will raise some questions about the assumption behind that credo, as well as the utility, in this media-saturated and cynical age, of the siren call of “fairness and objectivity.”

Inside the profession of journalism, there has been a lively debate going on for years over whether the “he said, she said” format, designed to avoid taking sides on contentious issues, impedes rather than enhances the goal of informing the reader.

This debate comes up most often during political campaigns, and many press critics and commentators have pointed out how superficial and subject to manipulation that format can be in the context of a campaign. For that reason, many news organizations now publish or post “fact-check” boxes that vet the accuracy of political ads or of candidates’ assertions during debates.

## LOADED WORDS

It’s more challenging to question the “he said, she said” norm in other contexts. For instance, some people—many people—consider waterboarding to be torture, and they refer to it that way. But others cling to the notion that it is not torture. What is a news organization to do?

NPR has chosen to use “harsh interrogation tactics” or “enhanced interrogation techniques” instead of “torture” when reporting stories about waterboarding and other coercive practices used to interrogate terrorism suspects. When listeners pushed back, Alicia C. Shepard, NPR ombudsman at the time, responded that she agreed with the network. “The problem is that the word torture is loaded with political and social implications,” she wrote on her blog, adding: “NPR’s job is to give listeners all perspectives, and present the news as detailed as possible and put it in context.” Because using the word torture would amount to taking sides, reporters should instead “describe the techniques and skip the characterization” entirely, she said.

Again, that may be an easy example, because it’s binary—use the word torture, or avoid it. How about a complex event or situation that requires the reporter to make a series of judgments in

order to describe adequately and assign priorities to such factors as motivation, relationships among actors, or likely consequences.

Paul Taylor, a former political reporter for The Washington Post, had this to say in his trenchant book, "See How They Run: Electing the President in an Age of Mediaocracy":

Sometimes I worry that my squeamishness about making sharp judgments, pro or con, makes me unfit for the slam-bang world of daily journalism. Other times I conclude that it makes me ideally suited for newspapering—certainly for the rigors and conventions of modern 'objective' journalism. For I can dispose of my dilemmas by writing stories straight down the middle. I can search for the halfway point between the best and the worst thing that can be said about someone (or some policy or idea) and write my story in that fair-minded place. By aiming for the golden mean, I probably land near the best approximation of truth more often than if I were guided by any other set of compasses—partisan, ideological, psychological, whatever ... Yes, I'm seeking truth. But I'm also seeking refuge. I'm taking a pass on the toughest calls I face.

Jay Rosen, a press critic and journalism professor at New York University, calls the phenomenon that Taylor describes "regression toward a phony mean."

Joan Didion, way back in 1996, referred to "fairness" as a "familiar newsroom piety" and "benign ideal" that

operates as "the excuse in practice for a good deal of autopilot reporting and lazy thinking." What it often means, she wrote, "is a scrupulous passivity, an agreement to cover the story not as it is occurring but as it is presented, which is to say as it is manufactured."

In that same year, 1996, the Society of Professional Journalists dropped "objectivity" from its ethics code, a development understood to reflect the fact that there had ceased to be, if there ever was, a common understanding within the profession of what objective reporting consists of.

self-reflection, "nothing replaced objectivity as journalism's dominant professional norm." In fact, he notes, "a cottage industry of bias police has sprung up," leading to "hypersensitivity among the press to charges of bias," which in turn reinforces the problematic adherence to a standard of "objectivity" that "can trip us up on the way to 'truth.'"

Truth. How about truth for a goal? "We may not have a journalism of truth because we haven't demanded one," the cultural critic Neal Gabler wrote in response to the media's performance in covering the health care debate. He

**'We may not have a journalism of truth because we haven't demanded one,' the cultural critic Neal Gabler wrote in response to the media's performance in covering the health care debate.**

A leading commentary on the modern practice of journalism, "The Elements of Journalism," by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, omits "fairness" and "objectivity" from its list of the 10 basic elements of journalism, described as "clear principles that journalists agree on—and that citizens have a right to expect." Why the omissions? "Familiar and even useful" as the idea of fairness and balance may be, the authors say, the very concept "has been so mangled" as to have become part of journalism's problem, rather than a solution to perceived problems of bias and partiality.

But Brent Cunningham, deputy editor of the Columbia Journalism Review, has observed that despite this discontent and

noted that by simply reporting the latest guided missile from Sarah Palin or Rush Limbaugh, the media "marshal facts, but they don't seek truth. They behave as if every argument must be heard and has equal merit, when some are simply specious."

Why is it just so difficult to make the search for truth the highest journalistic value?

Well, for one thing, the notion that there exists one Truth exists in some tension with core First Amendment values. After all, "the First Amendment recognizes no such thing as a 'false' idea," the Supreme Court tells us. The familiar image of the marketplace of ideas suggests ideas competing freely for public

**2003****Doctored Photo  
Los Angeles Times**

A front-page photo, which also ran in the Chicago Tribune and Hartford Courant, showing a British soldier and Iraqi civilians, was a composite of two photos. When the doctoring was



revealed, the photographer was fired.

**2004****Dan Rather's Bush Papers****"60 Minutes II"**

A report about President Bush's service in the Texas Air National Guard was based on documents CBS later said it could not prove were authentic.

**2006****Sago Mine Disaster  
Associated Press, CNN, various newspapers**

The rescue of 13 men trapped underground in a West Virginia mine explosion was reported. Yet 12 had died; only one survived.

>>>

favor, unvetted, unranked and unregulated by some superintending power.

For another thing, the word “truth” lacks a single definition. To report, without elaboration, a politician’s charge concerning the “death panels” in the health care bill is—assuming the politician is quoted accurately—certainly to report the truth. Does such a report convey a more useful or meaningful truth, the contextual truth of the *situation*? Obviously not. But just as obviously, it would not require a correction.

In “The Elements of Journalism,” Kovach and Rosenstiel make a distinction between two kinds of truth: correspondence and coherence. “For journalism, these tests roughly translate into getting the facts straight and making sense of the facts.” They call for a “journalism of verification” to replace a “journalism of assertion”: “A more conscious discipline of verification is the best antidote to being overrun by a new journalism of assertion.”

Fairness and objectivity should be regarded as tools to that end, they maintain, rather than as ends in themselves.

#### THE ‘OTHER SIDE’

The following is a case study in what I regard as the perils of the journalism of assertion, as practiced by our finest newspaper.

Over the last few years, the name David B. Rivkin started showing up in the columns of The New York Times. For example, in August 2006, when a federal district judge in Detroit declared that the Bush administration’s warrantless wire-tapping program was unconstitutional, Rivkin had this to say in the Times: “It is an appallingly bad opinion, bad from both a philosophical and technical perspective, manifesting strong bias.” Rivkin was identified as “an official in the administrations of President Ronald Reagan and the first President Bush.”

There was no indication of what might have given him the “philosophical perspective” to criticize this court decision so forcefully, or of what evidence he

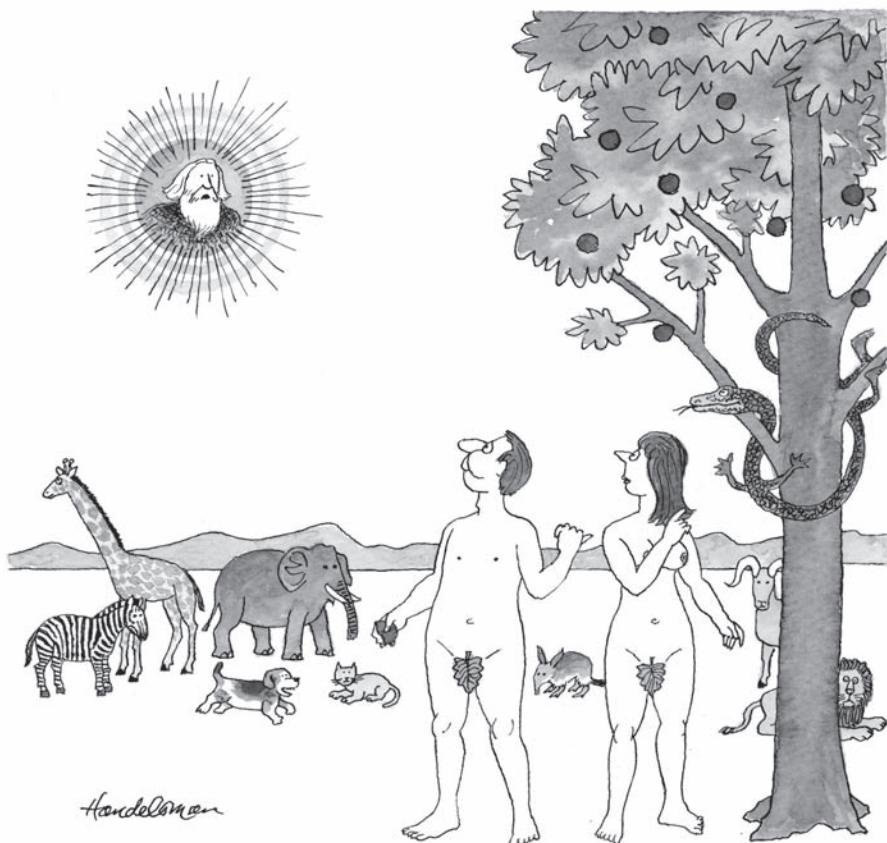
possessed of “strong bias” on the part of the judge, Anna Diggs Taylor.

When another judge ruled that some prisoners held by the United States at the Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan had the right to petition for habeas corpus, Rivkin “warned that the ruling ‘gravely undermined’ the country’s ‘ability to detain enemy combatants for the duration of hostilities worldwide.’” This time he was identified as “an associate White House counsel in the administration of the first President Bush.” Since that administration had ended 16 years earlier, I wondered what current expertise Rivkin possessed that led him to make such a harsh assessment of this new decision.

A check of the Times database reveals that since 2006, Rivkin has been quoted

at least 31 times in articles concerning the detainees at Guantanamo Bay (12 times), detainees at Bagram, executive privilege and presidential authority, targeted killing, Iraq, Abu Ghraib, the performance of Attorney General Michael Mukasey, and the Central Intelligence Agency and its interrogation policies. The descriptions of his role and his implied expertise varied from story to story, but the quote was always to the same effect: a strong defense of President Bush and his policies.

To the extent that Rivkin has any relevant expertise, the basis for it is not disclosed on his law firm’s website, which contains a lengthy biography. A partner in the international law firm of Baker Hostetler, he is identified as a “member of the firm’s litigation, inter-



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national and environmental groups.” The entry describes him as having “in-depth experience with various constitutional issues that are frequently implicated by federal regulatory statutes, including commerce clause-, appointments clause-, and due process-related issues, as well as First and Tenth amendment-related matters.”

His qualifications for practicing law in these areas are not evident: During his federal government service in the Reagan and first Bush administrations, he worked on domestic regulatory issues, with a specialty in oil and natural gas. He worked in the Office of Policy Development in the Justice Department and worked for Vice President Bush as legal adviser to the counsel to the vice president, later becoming special assistant for domestic policy to Vice President Dan Quayle and associate general counsel in the Department of Energy.

The more I read, the more mystified I became. An article on the prospect that President Obama might transfer some Guantanamo detainees to the United States included a warning from Rivkin that classified information might be made public during trials in civilian courts—“a danger that David B. Rivkin, an official in the Reagan Justice Department, calls ‘the conviction price.’”

I should note that Rivkin’s usefulness extends beyond the pages of the Times. A Washington Post analysis of the release of the so-called torture memos included this paragraph: “David B. Rivkin Jr., a lawyer at Baker Hostetler who supported the detainee policies, says the memos’ ‘careful and nuanced legal analysis’ ... produced ‘eminently reason-

able results.’” I give the Post writer credit for identifying Rivkin as a lawyer in private practice who simply supports one side of the issue.

Rivkin even showed up in a New York Times cultural feature about the documentary “Taxi to the Dark Side,” which took a highly critical stance toward the Bush administration’s interrogation policies. Rivkin, introduced to readers as “a lawyer in the administrations of President Ronald Reagan and the first President Bush,” becomes the voice of the “other side” in an account of the film and interview with the filmmaker. “It’s pretty clear that it’s not policy and it’s pretty clear that these things are prosecuted,” Rivkin is quoted as saying. The article goes on: “Mr. Rivkin said the military’s performance by historical standards has been quite good in the recent conflicts. ‘In all the good wars,’ he said, ‘we have had some pretty bad records.’”

How was it that Rivkin had emerged, Zelig-like, into daily journalism? I asked reporters who had quoted him whether they had called him for a quote or whether he had called them. (I omit the names of the reporters because they did not expect to be identified in an article.)

“He reached out,” one told me, noting that “I’ve known him a long time.”

Another said he had been referred to Rivkin by a conservative think tank.

“I called him,” another said. “I have quoted him a few times in the weird role of surrogate for the Bush administration. ... It was to the point that Bush administration officials would suggest him when they chose not to speak for themselves on Gitmo.”

From another reporter: “I called Rivkin, who has been defending the Bush policies for so long (especially interrogation) that he knows them as well as the human rights folks.” Noting that the article contained criticism of the policies, the reporter added: “I thought it would be unfair not to make the opposite point.”

I probably don’t have to tell you what I think of this kind of “reporting.” I find it particularly troubling to use Rivkin to criticize federal court decisions. When a federal district judge issues a decision, there is no “other side” to the story—the decision is the decision. The “other side” is contained in the briefs presenting the argument that the judge rejected. But digging up the briefs, reading them, and summarizing them takes more work than accepting an ad hominem sound bite from someone willing to answer any call.

I actually don’t mean to be critical of Rivkin, a man with whom I have a perfectly pleasant personal relationship. As a surrogate, a “go-to proxy,” he is simply filling a role assigned to him by reporters and—let’s assume—editors who accept unquestionably the notion that every story has another side that it is journalism’s duty to present. But there is another side to *that* story, too—one that calls on journalists to do their best to provide not just the facts, but also—always—the truth.

**Linda Greenhouse**, a former New York Times reporter who won a Pulitzer Prize for her coverage of the United States Supreme Court, is the Knight Distinguished Journalist in Residence and Joseph Goldstein Lecturer in Law at Yale Law School.

**2008**

**Iran's Missile Test**  
Various newspapers  
A photograph circulated by the Iranian government purported to show four missiles firing. After the photo ran on the front pages of several papers, including the

Los Angeles Times, and nytimes.com, it was revealed that the fourth missile had failed to fire but the photo had been doctored to make it look like it had.



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Melanie Sloan, who heads a government watchdog group, sees lobbyists using the Web to manipulate public opinion. Photo © Brooks Kraft/Corbis.

# Be Careful Who You Quote

Some nonprofits that claim to supply expert opinions are set up by spin doctors to further corporate agendas.

*A lawyer who once was a federal prosecutor and counsel to powerful Congressional committees, Melanie Sloan now chases legal and ethical wrongdoing in Congress. As executive director of the nonprofit government watchdog group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), she frequently follows up on in-depth reporting in the media. Her team's investigation of U.S. Representative Charles Rangel, a Democrat, for example, started with a story she read in The New York Times about the number of apartments he was renting in New York at below-market rates.*

*As her organization keeps an eye on abuses of power on both sides of the aisle, Sloan has also noticed that lobbyists have gotten more sophisticated in pushing their agendas. Nieman Reports's Stefanie Friedhoff spoke with Sloan about how journalists are being deceived, how experts with no expertise end up in news articles, and why "he said, she said" reporting isn't helping. Edited excerpts of the interview follow.*

**Stefanie Friedhoff:** CREW has documented how lobbyists, grassroots organizations, and other special interest groups

succeed in getting biased or false information—often presented as facts and expert advice—published in the media. **How does this work?**

Melanie Sloan: Yes, it happens all the time. Every special interest imaginable seems to be headquartered in D.C., and some speak louder than others, sometimes thanks to their greater financial backing. The proliferation of cyber advocacy has shown that while it may now be easier to educate the public about important issues, the potential for abuse is greater than ever.

**Can you give us a few examples?**

Richard Berman stands out as the unrivaled king of manipulation. You may not have heard of Berman, but you have undoubtedly—and possibly unknowingly—seen his work. He runs the for-profit public relations firm Berman and Company. His particular gimmick is to start up so-called nonprofit organizations—which receive favorable tax treatment by the IRS—financed by corporations with specific agendas, but which don't want their fingerprints on the message. Berman names himself executive director of each organization and then contracts with Berman and Company to handle the organization's activities.

By CREW's count, he has created

minions push their corporate sponsors' views in the media and are regularly cited in news articles as "experts" on subjects ranging from labor law to drunken driving to childhood obesity. Their real, well-financed agenda is hidden from unsuspecting readers.

Grover Norquist is another example. He is the head of Americans for Tax Reform, often paid for his opinion—and happy to give it. PR executives just know that PR folks aren't as helpful to their issues as having nonprofit organizations.

**Why aren't journalists catching such deceptions?**

On the surface, these people look like legitimate experts. And I think many

are both equivalent when usually one is lying or misstating as much as possible—or maybe they both are—but quite frequently it sounds as though they are just two equally valid opinions. Sometimes there isn't another side, like there actually is not another side to climate change. You can discuss degrees, but the concept that you can have an article that says "there is climate change, there is not climate change" is ridiculous.

**With respect to climate change, though, this is changing, isn't it? Over the past decade, it has become the most frequently cited example of the shortcomings of "he said, she said" reporting.**

Yes, but interestingly, we still have it. We are still having Senator Jim Inhofe tell you there is no climate change and the Heartland Institute is still funding all these people to say the same thing. And they are being quoted in the media. There is a new book out [“Private Empire: ExxonMobil and American Power” by Steve Coll] that details how ExxonMobil has funded huge numbers of think tanks who will then put out experts' reports saying there is no climate change. You can see the same techniques used with subjects like childhood obesity, where so-called experts funded by the soda industry and the junk food industry say there is no problem with childhood obesity in America. Again, you can differ on your solutions but the problem is pretty clear.

**Political fact checking has been on the rise in recent years, online and in print. Is that making a difference?**

I think that's helpful, but I don't know how many people read those little

I now educate new reporters all the time. The amount they don't know is stunning—and it's not their fault. They are smart, but there's no experience.

more than 25 such groups and websites, all of which are "staffed" by those who work for his PR firm, with each employee holding any number of different positions. One Berman and Company staffer, for example, at one point served as the chief administrative officer of Berman and Company, senior economic analyst and senior research analyst with the Employment Policies Institute, government affairs director at the Center for Consumer Freedom, and director of state affairs, spokesperson and lobbyist for the American Beverage Institute, among others. Through these alleged public interest groups, Berman and his

journalists don't necessarily look at the motivations of their sources. It's obvious when you're talking to a political campaign, but other than that I don't think reporters look closely enough. You have to check the background. What can you find that legitimates their expertise?

I think the culture of reporting two sides to every issue is also part of the problem.

**You mean the "he said, she said" style of reporting?**

Yes. Frequently, an article will report this person said X and this person said Y, as if, therefore, they



that the Arizona congresswoman had died. In fact, she survived the shooting in which six others died.

**2011****Gabrielle Giffords Shooting  
NPR, others**

Based on information from the offices of a sheriff and a congressman, NPR reported on air and online

SOURCES: “Getting It Wrong” by W. Joseph Campbell; “Covering America” by Christopher Daly; “Poisoning the Press” by Mark Feldstein; “Journalism’s Roving Eye” by John Maxwell Hamilton; “Deadline Every Minute” by Joe Alex Morris, Jr.; “Regret the Error” by Craig Silverman.

CREDITS: p. 6, Wikimedia Commons; p. 8, Baltimoresun.com; p. 10, Library of Congress; p. 14, Harvard College Library; p. 16, Los Angeles Police Department/AP; p. 18, Charles Bennett/AP; p. 20, Jacqueline Larma/AP; p. 24, Sepahnews.com/AP.



**CREW's Melanie Sloan in April at the signing of a bill to clamp down on insider stock trading by federal lawmakers.** Photo by Carolyn Kaster/The Associated Press.

sidebars, whereas a whole lot of people see the ads in the first place. And it is not like every news article includes that. Most of the new fact checking is really limited to what political campaigns say.

#### **Have you had conversations about this with journalists?**

That's tricky because then you are attacking reporters' abilities and methods. I also think a lot of journalists these days have so much pressure on them to produce quickly and to produce for the blog every day on top of the newspaper stories, and with fewer colleagues because papers are downsizing so much, they just don't have the time to check. They don't have the resources.

#### **You sound concerned about current changes in journalism.**

Yes. There is this concept of "win the day" in Washington; the news cycle is so short that it doesn't give journalists

the time to think through those stories. Reporters are often changing every year or two now and it is very easy to spin a reporter who doesn't know what they are talking about. You just can't dip your toe into something like taxes or campaign finance. I now educate new reporters all the time. The amount they don't know is stunning—and it's not their fault. They are smart, but there is no experience. So there is no long-term memory to understand that there's a context to what's happening.

One place where you actually see a difference is Supreme Court reporting. Those journalists do it for a really long time, they are careful, and they give you a perspective of what really happened.

#### **Are political bloggers filling some of the void?**

I don't know. I don't think the blogosphere is necessarily doing us great favors in news right now. It's like they're

all equal even though they don't check sources and they'll post almost everything. You really saw that at work in a terrible way in the 'Nikki Haley about to be indicted' case. How unfair to that poor woman. Pretty soon everybody reported it [a rumor that originated on a little-known blog and went viral on Twitter], even though there was no evidence whatsoever. This was not a one-time thing.

Also, so much of our Internet culture now is that drive for more content. If I went through The Daily Caller, The Daily Beast, Talking Points Memo, and all the other blogs, my day would be gone. Who can do that? So people are just picking the sources they really like. It's giving you only the content that you're likely to already agree with.

#### **Do nonprofit watchdogs have an impact?**

I think so, yes. More nonprofit groups like the Center for Public Integrity, ProPublica or the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism are picking up the role of investigative reporting. And you're seeing good reporting in that they don't have as much pressure to get out a story a day. Although another pressure they have is not insignificant either because they have donors who want to see that they're making a difference. As a donor-supported organization, [we know] they want to see that you've done something all the time, and so you're constantly proving your worth.

#### **You're an expert. How do you decide when to talk to a reporter and when to decline?**

I get asked questions all the time, and I will frequently say I'm not really the best person for that. But then I will sometimes read in the paper somebody else's quote on that subject, and I think, "Wow, that's really not who I would have thought of as an expert on that either." When you are in Washington, part of game is to be in the media a lot because you want to be the expert that people go to. But people should say "No" when they really don't know the subject matter.

What can we learn from traditional newsrooms that have transitioned well to covering breaking news on multiple platforms in real time? What happens to accuracy and verification in the process? Nieman Reports asked editors at two papers recognized by the Pulitzer Prize Board to share their experiences.

# Taking on the Rumor Mill

In the wake of a tornado, The Tuscaloosa (Ala.) News moved swiftly to sort fact from fiction.

BY KATHERINE K. LEE

**BODIES IN THE LAKE. BODIES ON TOP OF** the mall. Bodies hidden by city officials in a locker somewhere outside of town.

None of those rumors, which emerged in the wake of the April 27, 2011 tornado that hit Tuscaloosa, Alabama, killing 53 people, turned out to be true. But that didn't stop them from spreading and, in some cases, being picked up and perpetuated by other media outlets.

During times of crisis, news organizations often find themselves up against a wall, balancing the demands of speed with a commitment to truth. That balancing act has never been more important—or more difficult—than now, when the competition of 24-hour news channels and the instantaneous nature of social media tools like Twitter and Facebook make newsgathering harder to do thoroughly and accurately.

Before the tornado, The Tuscaloosa News had been like many other small-to medium-sized newspapers in its use of social media. We had held at least

one session, led by our own online staff, on the basics of using Twitter and Facebook to disseminate information. While our sports reporters were already proficient with Twitter, using it to update fans in real time on everything from game scores to player comments, only a handful of news reporters had Facebook pages or Twitter accounts. Several flat-out refused to use the new technologies, maintaining that the loss of privacy was not worth the effort.

But while most of us understood the usefulness of social media in the abstract, those methods were not seamlessly integrated into the newsroom's operations and were used only sporadically, usually during breaking news events or to find sources for stories.

## EMERGENCY DRILL

Two weeks after we held our first social media session, the tornado hit. It was a true test of how well we absorbed that recent information. With cell phones

unable to connect calls and electricity down all over the city, including in the newsroom, the public had few ways of getting accurate information except through smartphones.

We discovered that a disaster is ready-made for social media tools, which provide the immediacy needed for reporting breaking news. Our reporters and photographers were on the street within minutes of the storm, tweeting and posting photos of the devastation.

The simple eloquence of a photo or a two-sentence tweet cannot be discounted: One reporter whose apartment was destroyed tweeted that fact, as well as a photo of firefighters digging a girl out of the rubble of what used to be his home. That stark detail brought home to readers—and to others in the newsroom—just how much the disaster had affected us all.

It was obvious that we were one of the few available media outlets that was both on the ground and could accurately fill the information hole. Reporters' tweets

and photos were aggregated to the paper's website and Facebook page so people could see a continuous stream of information in the minutes immediately after the storm hit. Within the first 24 hours, we also created a Google Docs spreadsheet on the website to allow readers to post their own information, whether they were seeking missing loved ones or hoping to reassure their families that they were safe.

Such immediate information was also a service the public needed. People knew where the destruction was, what streets to avoid, and where to go for help. National Guard officials told editors afterward that they relied initially on the Twitter feed on The Tuscaloosa News website to show them where to deploy first responders.

#### THE DEBUNKING BLOG

But while reporting the basics of a disaster—the number of dead, the streets that were impassable, available emergency services—is an easy task for skilled reporters, one issue cropped up that we could not immediately get a handle on: rumors. People seem to find it easier to believe rumors that they wish were true or that seem to fulfill a desire to hear the worst. That might explain why people continued to insist, days after the storm, that the city was hiding hundreds of bodies in a secret cooler even though the list of missing grew smaller each day, and, as the police chief repeatedly said, the city had no reason to hide the dead.

To that end, News editors created a blog to probe some of the more persistent rumors, tracking where they might have originated and talking with officials to get the facts. The format fit the nature of the story well. Tracking the rumors, with their ever-changing details, in print would have been slow and awkward, and the blog allowed us to update quickly. We also had the freedom to adopt a more casual tone to dispel some of the more ridiculous rumors, which made for more entertaining reading.

The blog format also gave readers a space to weigh in with their own evidence, which proved very useful. One of the more

**tuscaloosanews** @tuscaloosanews.com  
The online source for West Alabama  
Tuscaloosa, AL <http://www.tuscaloosanews.com>

**tuscaloosanews** @tuscaloosanews.com  
Tornado emergency for cities of Tuscaloosa and Northport. Violent  
tornado on the ground heading for downtown.  
<http://bit.ly/lvs8se>  
5:06 PM April 27 2011 via Tweetdeck

**Wayne Grayson** @WayneGrayson  
This is from Forest Lake Avenue. And I am speechless. Literally looks like  
a bomb went off here.  
<http://yfrog.com/h4ci1ej>  
7:12 PM April 27 2011 via TweetDeck

**JB\_Morton** @Jason Morton  
DCH wants to dispel myth that it is a shelter for a future storm. It is not a  
shelter & there is no indication another one is coming.  
8 PM April 27 2011 via Twitterrific

**Jamon Smith** @jamonsmith  
I'm watching firemen try to dig a girl out of the rubble of my apartments  
right now.  
<http://plixi.com/p/96574021>  
8:17 PM April 27 2011 via Echofon

**JB\_Morton** @Jason Morton  
More than 83,000 are without power in #Tuscaloosa area, and the city's  
infrastructure has been "decimated," Maddox said.  
8:40 PM April 27 2011 via Twitterrific

**tuscaloosanews** @tuscaloosanews.com  
If you are a subscriber to the TNews but didn't receive your paper this  
morning come by the newsroom. We have plenty.

After a deadly tornado, The Tuscaloosa (Ala.) News found that Twitter and other social media provided the immediacy needed for reporting breaking news and dispelling rumors.

persistent rumors claimed that several children died while attending a party at a local Chuck E. Cheese's that was destroyed. A manager at that restaurant was able to debunk the rumor by posting on the blog that she herself had closed it hours before the storm.

In the year since the tornado, News staffers have learned how to more actively incorporate Twitter and Facebook into their jobs. Reporters now tweet from meetings at City Hall with periodic updates on council members' votes. They link to stories on Facebook to solicit feedback from readers.

Several times each day, we post advance versions of stories on the website, which allows us to take a more analytical, second-day approach with the versions of those stories for the print edition the next day. Our public safety reporter maintains a crime blog that she updates several times a day with reports of criminal activity. It has become one of the most widely read features on our website.

Incorporating social media and new technology continues to be a learning process for a news organization that still relies heavily on print to convey information. Like most other media outlets, we are still having conversations about how best to use these tools to enhance our newsgathering and how to handle the unique challenges that almost-instantaneous dispersal of news can pose.

But newsroom resistance to using these tools has largely died down, now that we have been confronted with stark evidence of how useful they can be to the newsgathering process and to readers who are increasingly ingesting news in untraditional ways.

**Katherine K. Lee** is city editor of *The Tuscaloosa (Ala.) News*. The paper won a 2012 Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News Reporting for its coverage of the tornado on April 27, 2011.



Demonstrators inside the Capitol in Madison, Wisconsin, cheer in February 2011 as the deadline drew near to vacate the premises or face arrest. Photo by Craig Schreiner/Wisconsin State Journal.

# The Story That Rocked the Clock

‘With so much news breaking, just posting updates to the paper’s website suddenly felt inadequate. We needed to meet readers where they were ...’

BY PHIL BRINKMAN

AFTER A STRING OF BREAKING NEWS that stretched over weeks, an uneasy calm had finally settled over Madison, Wisconsin, by early March 2011.

A month earlier Governor Scott Walker had dropped “the bomb,” as he would later call his controversial decision to effectively wipe out collective bargaining for public employees. Tens of thousands of protesters swamped the state Capitol, and the reporters, photographers and editors at the Madison-based

Wisconsin State Journal strained to cover every development that ensued: The Senate’s minority Democrats fled to Illinois to deny the Republicans a quorum. Schools closed when thousands of teachers joined the protests. Demonstrators occupied the state’s ornate Capitol building 24 hours a day, turning it into a protest village.

Each day brought a number of developments that taxed the newspaper’s two Statehouse reporters and forced us to abandon beat coverage elsewhere to

throw more bodies at the story. With so much news breaking, just posting updates to the paper's website suddenly felt inadequate. We needed to meet readers where they were experiencing the story: on their cell phones, on Facebook, and especially on Twitter. Several of us already had Twitter and Facebook accounts, but these were mostly ornaments. The events of February and March 2011 forced us to integrate social media into everything we do.

We acted in part out of self-preservation. If the Internet is the equivalent of giving every citizen a printing press, Twitter is like giving every person his or her own talk radio show: loud and highly charged interpretations of the news, broadcast to hundreds or thousands of followers. As Madison burned, the cacophony of voices was deafening. The paper risked being crowded out, the hard work of its independent and well-sourced reporters eclipsed by partisans.

We began by capturing an audience of our own. Equipped with smartphones, our Capitol reporters tweeted updates several times a day, often breaking news on Twitter even before informing their editors. When the protests started, reporter Mary Spicuzza had perhaps 500 followers on Twitter. Today, some 3,600 people hang on her every tweet.

Others needed to be brought up to speed in a hurry. We improvised, providing some reporters with iPod touches and mobile hotspots, and setting them up with Twitter accounts before sending them out the door. By the first weekend of protests, we had nine reporters in the field, all of them tweeting and contributing to a live blog, which drew 24,000 readers over two days. (By comparison, the State Journal's circulation is around 83,000 daily and 118,000 Sunday.)

As a source of tips, Twitter was indispensable, opening up listening posts across the state and across the political spectrum that could quickly influence coverage plans for the day. Of course, the downside of so much feedback is that it can quickly become overwhelming.

I began reacting to the merest development like a jumpy day trader, sending Spicuzza and fellow reporter Clay Barbour down endless rabbit holes to check out every rumor: No, police were not massing in riot gear on the edge of the city. No, the administration was not sealing the windows of the Capitol shut.

Over time, we got better at sifting out the chatter. We also knew we couldn't risk the newspaper's credibility by tweeting unverified information. What emerged was a common-sense policy akin to the paper's ban on writing off the police scanner: Don't forward tweets from unknown or unreliable sources. Don't retweet claims that haven't been independently verified. Stick to the facts.

Of course, those outside the paper weren't bound by any such constraints. With anger on both sides at a fever pitch, the media could not escape becoming part of the story. There were daily Twitter and Facebook campaigns taking issue with our coverage; knowing, conspiratorial treatises that only someone ignorant of the much more banal inner workings of a newspaper could conjure. Responding to those charges was tempting but often created more trouble than it was worth.

#### GOING VIRAL

By early March, everyone was exhausted, beat up, and badly nourished. The stalemate in the Senate at least allowed us to catch our breath. "Normalcy is returning," read one headline on March 8.

At 4 p.m. the next day, the Senate came back in a surprise session. Spicuzza learned that a conference committee had been hastily called for that day to approve the collective bargaining bill and send it back to both houses for a final up-or-down vote. She immediately tweeted that, but none of us knew what it meant. The bill hadn't passed the Senate due to the Democrats' boycott. How could it suddenly show up in a conference committee, which typically irons out differences between competing versions of legislation passed by both houses?

While Spicuzza and Barbour chased

down legislators and their attorneys, they continued tweeting and phoning in updates to a story developing online. The story went viral. Within an hour, Spicuzza could see people running toward the Capitol, and the rotunda once again began filling with singing, chanting protesters. After a brief and emotionally charged meeting, the committee chairman hammered the bill through. Half an hour later, the bill passed the Senate; in the morning it would pass the Assembly. The trick, it turned out, had been to remove fiscal elements from the bill so that the quorum required was smaller and it could be passed without the Democrats.

Another spasm of stories followed, and the events of that winter reverberated over the next year as recall campaigns were launched against the governor and other elected officials.

Not everything we tried worked. Sometimes we tweeted important developments but neglected to reprise those in print, forgetting that the two platforms served largely different audiences. I wish that some days we had held back more reporters to develop meatier enterprise stories (we carved out time for several of these, but not enough).

And we continue to struggle with the balance between immediacy and credibility. Like newsrooms across America, the State Journal has had to make considerable cutbacks in staff in recent years. At the same time, we've severely flattened the time reporters have to formulate questions, evaluate the answers, and present information in a comprehensible way. Our challenge is to keep these new tools from hijacking our main purpose, which remains the time-consuming work of cultivating sources, digging through records, analyzing data, and holding public officials accountable.

**Phil Brinkman** is the city editor of the Wisconsin State Journal, which was a 2012 Pulitzer finalist for its breaking news coverage of 27 days of around-the-clock protests at the state Capitol in Madison.

# AFTER THE SHOUTING, BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

‘... our newsroom has made a serious effort to forge a stronger connection between the paper and Buffalo’s black community. ... Not for a moment do I believe the healing is complete. But we’ve made a start.’

BY MARGARET SULLIVAN

As I WATCHED MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE racially charged shooting death of Trayvon Martin in Florida earlier this year, I found myself thinking about sensitivity and respect. Those issues were big ones for me and The Buffalo News in New York two summers ago.

As Geraldo Rivera of Fox News declared that black teens should avoid wearing hooded sweatshirts and some spectators gleefully welcomed revelations about Martin’s less-than-angelic past behavior, all of the questions came flooding back. How can we best avoid blaming the victim? Doesn’t the public have the right to know all the facts, not just the ones that support a particular point of view? How do placement and emphasis (in newspaper terms, a front-page headline versus three paragraphs at the end of a story) figure into media decision-making? How does the desire to be provocative (consider Rivera’s March 22 tweet: “His hoodie killed Trayvon Martin as surely as George Zimmerman”) weigh against responsible commentary and reporting?

As race-oriented stories continue to

emerge—and they surely will—those questions deserve to be thought about and talked about in newsrooms. And we can do that most effectively if we broaden the base of those in our conversations, recognizing that diversity is more than numbers; it’s the power of what happens when different voices are truly heard. This reality was brought home to me in the aftermath of the furor that erupted in Buffalo’s black community over a story the News published in August 2010.

## OUT OF CONTROL

The bloodiest crime in the city’s recent history began as a wedding party. Actually, it was a year-after-the-wedding party for a Buffalo couple who had moved to Texas and married there but had come back to celebrate with hometown friends. The setting was City Grill, an upscale restaurant downtown.

The party got rowdy. Then it got out of control, so much so that the proprietors decided to close it down. Bouncers shooed the crowd out onto Main Street. Gunfire blasted out.

By 3 a.m., eight people had been shot. Four of them ultimately died; the others were seriously injured. Among the dead was the 30-year-old bridegroom, Danyell Mackin. His wife, Tanisha, was unhurt.

In the days and weeks that followed the shooting on August 14, 2010, the community’s reaction included not only grief and shock but also anger—anger over deep-seated issues involving race and socioeconomic disparity in Buffalo, one of the poorest and most segregated cities in the nation.

All of the victims were black, as was 23-year-old Riccardo McCray, who was eventually convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison without parole.

One flashpoint for the anger was a story that ran on the front page of the Sunday Buffalo News, eight days after the shooting and on the same day we covered the funeral of one of the victims. Its headline: “7 of 8 shooting victims had criminal past.” It reported that five of the victims were convicted felons, with charges including weapons possession, reckless endangerment, drug possession, and armed robbery.



Buffalo News editor Margaret Sullivan drew national media attention for her handling of a controversial story. Photo by Derek Gee/The Buffalo News.

The story went to great lengths to make the point that no one intended to blame the victims. The first quote was from a local criminal justice professor who, after noting that a felony prosecution or conviction increases the statistical likelihood of becoming a crime victim, said, “It doesn’t mean that the people deserved it or in any way had it coming.”

But many members of the black community were enraged. A few days after the story ran, a former gang member turned community activist, Darnell Jackson, led a protest outside the News building, which is less than half a mile from City Grill. One by one, copies of the paper with

the controversial article were tossed onto a trash-can fire. He led a similar protest in an East Side backyard. The local TV media covered the criticism of their competition with a certain amount of glee: “Outraged community burns Buffalo News” read the headline on CBS-affiliate WIVB-TV’s website.

Soon, the national media was covering the controversy. I found myself on CNN, among other outlets, defending my decision to run the story. For it *was* my decision. I read it before it ran, and discussed with other editors how and where to display it. I thought the story was important because it helped make sense of what happened that night.

#### ANGRY CROWD

As the controversy raged, I made a few phone calls to black leaders in Buffalo to let them know that I was willing to explain my decision and to hear complaints from the black community. One of those leaders was a prominent minister, the Rev. Darius Pridgen. He took me up on my offer and invited me to a community meeting at True Bethel Baptist Church on Buffalo’s largely black East Side.

It was not the cozy chat around a table that I had envisioned. Seven hundred angry people filled the church, some holding signs criticizing the paper and me. The meeting had been well publicized and emotions were running

high. A lectern with a sound system ensured that everyone in the packed church could hear. Perhaps a dozen speakers preceded me: family members of the victims, ministers, public officials. They all had essentially the same message, and it was directed at me and the newspaper: You've treated us disrespectfully.

"I feel that we were victimized twice," said Cheryl Stevens, whose son-in-law was the bridegroom who died in the shooting. "What you did to us was you poured salt on the wounds that had not even healed."

When Pridgen spoke to the group, he attempted to provide perspective: "This meeting is not designed to be a combat session, but a night of progression. ... It is our hope that tonight will not be a one-stop meeting ... that this dialogue takes us to another level of understanding and unity in our community."

That evening was one of the most difficult times of my life. The sheer disconnect between a large segment of the community and its newspaper stunned me, as did the depth and intensity of the people's anger.

As I wrote in a News column a few weeks later: "I can say, without exaggeration, that I left that meeting both shaken and changed. I still believe The News was right to publish the story because it exposed an important piece of the puzzle about that tragic shooting. But its timing and placement should have been handled more sensitively and more respectfully."

#### REACHING OUT

Since the City Grill crisis, our newsroom has made a serious effort to forge a stronger connection between the paper and Buffalo's black community. Among other initiatives, we:

- Began a diversity advisory council, made up of community members, that meets with key editors four times a year. Now in its second round of members, the current incarnation includes Darnell Jackson, the leader of the

burn-the-News protest. Their perspectives have helped us better understand the community—and they've given us some good story ideas.

- Made a concerted effort to reach out to the black community. We distributed pamphlets explaining how to get stories into the paper and how to contact editors and reporters. We attended community events to speak or just meet people.
- Hired an outside firm to provide diversity awareness training for a large group of editors and reporters.
- Started a regular series of stories highlighting positive aspects of Buffalo's East Side.

Coincidentally, I named Lisa Wilson as executive sports editor; she is, we believe, the only woman of color heading a metropolitan newspaper's sports department. I was deeply grateful

Marie Bracey as the first black woman on the paper's editorial board and to have other black journalists in key roles. In this era of shrinking newsrooms and little hiring, the push for diversity has been sidetracked throughout the country, but for many reasons it remains crucial to our success.

Is everything all better now in Buffalo? Certainly not. Decades of resentment don't dissipate in a matter of months. But it's fair to say that we've made progress. And the efforts have been noticed. A black reporter on the News's staff, Deidre Williams, attends Darius Pridgen's True Bethel Baptist Church, the scene of my meeting with the black community.

She stopped in to see me a few weeks ago to report that, from the pulpit one Sunday morning, Pridgen explained his decision to sell The Buffalo News in the church vestibule. He held up that day's

Is everything all better now in Buffalo? Certainly not. Decades of resentment don't dissipate in a matter of months. But it's fair to say that we've made progress. And the efforts have been noticed.

throughout the City Grill episode to have the counsel and support of black journalists at the News, several of whom accompanied me to the church meeting. Among them was urban affairs editor and award-winning columnist Rod Watson, now the point person in our community outreach efforts.

There is no question that more diverse newsrooms make for better community coverage. I made a strong diversity-hiring push soon after becoming editor in 1999, increasing minority-group representation to about 14.5 percent of our newsroom's full-time employees, a significant jump from the 7 percent I inherited, but still less than the 20 percent minority population in our major circulation area.

I'm also happy to have named Dawn

edition, which included an extensive feature story on Eva Doyle, whose life's work has been teaching black history.

Williams related what Pridgen told his congregation that day: "The Buffalo News said they were going to make some changes, and they have. They kept their word."

Not for a moment do I believe the healing is complete. But we've made a start. I learned a great deal from what happened—that stories are one thing and that people's lives and their feelings are quite another. As journalists, it's hard to make peace between those two competing values, but we have to try.

**Margaret Sullivan** is the editor of *The Buffalo News*.

# FINDING STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Learning to use databases and mapping software has its rewards. **BY JOHN DIEDRICH**

I REMEMBER WHEN I FINALLY GOT serious about working with data. It was the third (or was it the fourth?) time I had taken a crash course in computer-assisted reporting. Reporters who have gone through this training know the drill: You learn how to use Excel in a day, ending with something called a “pivot table.” My moment of resolve came when I was learning yet again how to make one of those tables. I was even using the same data as before: baseball players’ salaries. I thought, “That’s it. I’m sick of learning and forgetting. It’s time for a change.”

I pitched my bosses at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on attending the week-long boot camp hosted by Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE). I hoped to finally push past this pivot table business and learn how to draw useful information out of databases. I didn’t want to be the database guy at our paper. We already had one. I just wanted to get past being a beginner.

By some accounts, at age 40, I was late to the data game. But I wasn’t deterred. I figured that if I can’t learn new skills, I probably am not long for this fast-changing business anyway. The IRE training in Missouri sealed the basics for me.

Now I was thinking in database speak, but I knew I had to use my skills or risk losing them. I didn’t want to troll the Web for data. That was backward to me. One of the keys to getting the training wheels off was to find a story that required data skills. For me, it was like knowing that to get from here to there I had to learn to ride a bike so I did.

My breakthrough story grew out of my reporting on a gun shop that was one of the nation’s top sellers of guns recovered

in criminal investigations. The dealer had surrendered his license rather than have it be revoked. The shop’s name changed and it was now being operated by a relative of the dealer. The switch wiped away all of the store’s federal violations. I wanted to find out if other stores around the country had done the same thing.

Database skills were just what I needed. I obtained two databases, one of gun dealers whose licenses had been revoked and one of current gun dealers—one from the Web, the other through a public records request. Through my analysis, I found about 150 stores whose licenses had been revoked though they looked to still be in business. Two colleagues and I contacted these dealers. More than 50 admitted that the person whose license had been revoked remained close to the operation.

I brought my findings to the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. The bureau had never done a similar analysis but officials were not surprised. They knew about the practice and even had a name for it—“phoenix rising from the ashes”—but were largely powerless to stop it.

“Wiped Clean,” the series about gun dealers, was recognized with a George Polk Award. I am convinced that it would not have been possible without the database work. But the lesson was that data alone was not enough. The numbers had to be backed up by old-fashioned reporting.

After the series was published, I knew I had to keep using the skills or lose them. One tip I always pass on is to use Excel for everyday work. I use it for my source lists and story ideas and to keep track of my requests for public records. I also use it to make timelines as I begin



**John Diedrich** uses Excel every day. Courtesy of Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

any investigation. I open it every day.

As I continued to use Microsoft’s database program, Access, I wanted to take another step and learn computer mapping. I got that opportunity in 2011 when my wife, Raquel Rutledge, was awarded a Nieman Fellowship. As an affiliate, I took a class at Harvard and learned to use mapping software to analyze data. For instance, I examined where homicides occurred and layered other data, including other crimes, home ownership, and income levels, on top of that. To round out my tool kit, I took a statistics class.

Back in the newsroom, I am putting my new tools to work. They complement the shoe-leather reporting that is still the best part of my job. While the data I come up with might account for only a couple paragraphs in a story, that information elevates my reporting beyond the merely anecdotal. That’s why I’m determined this time not to let my knowledge fade away.

**John Diedrich**, a 2012 Nieman affiliate, is the federal courts reporter at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.



# THIS LAND IS THEIR LAND

Bearing witness to the fallout from the  
exploitation of Latin America's natural resources

BY GUSTAVO JONONOVIĆ

LATIN AMERICA'S ABUNDANT NATURAL RESOURCES ARE A BLESSING AND A CURSE. Too often, foreign companies benefit while citizens lose their health and livelihoods. "Richland," my ongoing documentary project, is an attempt to show how the exploitation of the region's natural riches harms people and the environment.

Since the early 1990s Latin America has seen significant growth in foreign investment in mining and agriculture. Land has been opened up to multinational companies with few protections for the people who live on it.





I began this project four years ago with a visit to the Brazilian Amazon, where agribusiness companies bought wide swaths of land to expand their soybean farming operations. With the hope of starting a new life, many of the sellers migrated to the city of Santarém. Yet their money didn't go far. Many had no marketable job skills and found themselves living in slums.

The next year I traveled to La Oroya in the Peruvian Andes. This town is considered one of the most polluted places in the world. For 90 years the life and economy of La Oroya has revolved around a mammoth smelter, now owned by the U.S.-based Doe Run Company,

one of the world's largest lead producers. Thousands of children have been diagnosed with lead poisoning. It is difficult to prove that people get sick or die due to industrial pollution, but the connection between lead poisoning in children and irreversible brain injury is well established.

In 2010, I documented the destruction associated with illegal gold and diamond mining in Venezuela. Jungles are cleared, and diamond miners blast mountains with water under high pressure, wearing them down to nothing.

In Ecuador last year, my focus was oil pollution. During three decades of drilling in the Amazon, Texaco (now part of

Chevron) dumped more than 18 billion gallons of toxic wastewater into the rainforest, polluting rivers and streams that local people depend on for drinking, cooking, bathing and fishing. The population has suffered a wave of cancers, miscarriages and birth defects. Earlier this year an appellate court in Ecuador ordered Chevron to pay \$18 billion in damages for polluting the Amazon jungle. Whether the indigenous communities who are parties to the suit will ever receive any of that money remains to be seen.

*Gustavo Jononovich, a lifelong resident of Buenos Aires, Argentina, is a freelance photographer.*



Ecuador: Previous spread: The 300-mile-long Trans-Ecuadorian Oil Pipeline System carries crude oil from the Amazon to the Pacific Ocean.

Left: Natural gas is burned off next to an oil well.

Above: Eleven-year-old Anthony, who suffers from birth defects, walks on his knees, above. The polluted river is a place to play and bathe. Photos by Gustavo Jononovich.

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**PHOTO ESSAY: GUSTAVO JONONOVIICH**

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**Venezuela:** A diamond miner uses a high-pressure blast of water. Years of searching like this wears away the rock.

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**Brazil: Large areas of the Amazon have been deforested to make way for more soybean farms.**

Photos by Gustavo Jononovich.

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**PHOTO ESSAY: GUSTAVO JONONOVIICH**

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**Peru: A smokestack rises outside a window in La Oroya, a lead mining town that is one of the most polluted places in the world.**

Photo by Gustavo Jononovich.

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# chaos theory

An online pioneer challenges media companies to think differently.

*Over the past 30 years, Richard Gingras's work has spanned from broadcast teletext services, the earliest version of online news, to his current role as head of news products at Google. As he puts it, he's been online "since the day of steam-powered modems."*

*In a talk at the Nieman Foundation in May, Gingras spoke about the transformations media companies must undergo to thrive online. Edited excerpts appear below; a complete video is available at <http://nieman.harvard.edu/Gingras/>.*

Always reconsider your core assumptions.

I do feel these are extraordinary times. I do feel that we, in a sense, are in the beginnings of a renaissance with regard to journalism.

The reason why many entities don't successfully make the transference is that they're not capable of eating their own young, as it were.

The cycle of change is simply too rapid. Innovation is not a luxury; it can't be intermittent. ... I fear that many people think that we're in this transition period from a point of stasis to a point of stasis, and it's just not going to be the case.

If there's one thing we know about the link economy, it's that a persistent URL builds value over time and an ephemeral URL does not.

You've got at least one reporter and at least one editor who own every beat, every story. Why don't they own that topic page? Why would you have a rewrite person do that when, frankly, this should be the best real-time expression of the expertise of that reporter and the expertise of that editor? And if anything,

it's that page that should spawn whatever articles appear in your print edition, not the other way around.

Transparency regarding the source, right down to the reporter, is hugely important. More important than ever. I do believe that trust in this environment is not so much about the brand as it is about the individual.

Having the right to publish doesn't mean that everyone has the responsibility to listen to you.

If our objective is to communicate, if our objective is to convey information, then we have to think about what's the right form for the right medium at the right time.

When the iPad came out, I came out and said that I thought it was a fatal distraction for media companies. And I still think that's true. ... Too many publishers were looking at it, were looking at that tablet, and saying "Ahh, this is how I can get my magazine format back. This is how I can get back my glistening full-page ads that we force people to click through. This is how I can get back that subscription model." The very nature of the change of a singular device does not change the ecosystem under it.

We need to evolve our form to meet the evolution of the underlying audience. I will declare a very modest step of victory when I start seeing news articles maybe even with bullet points in them.

I'm not suggesting that everything must change, but that we owe it to ourselves and to the objectives of what we want to do in journalism to reconsider everything as we go forward.

The bottom line is, I've made more mistakes than anyone else.



Richard Gingras, the head of news products at Google, says, “Innovation is not a luxury.” Photo by Lisa Abitbol.

# Sounding



Vogue contributing editor Megan O'Grady, a 2012 Nieman Fellow. Photo by Thorsten Trimpop.

## Cover Stories

A book critic in praise of the counter-narrative

BY MEGAN O'GRADY

ONE LESSON WE LEARN YOUNG IS THAT there's a public life and a private narrative, and the two don't always correlate. Walking to school on dark winter mornings—I grew up in suburban Kansas City, in the kind of neighborhood where you don't know your neighbors—I was fascinated by how you could see inside people's windows, but that they couldn't see you: the dioramas of family life played out in slow succession,

stage-plays of robes and cereal bowls and crankiness, love and boredom and sometimes despair.

In my family, there was one great storyteller, and that was my grandfather. Grandpa O'Grady was always the hero of his own stories, and there was always a very clear narrative trajectory: how wisdom and perseverance—his own—led to triumph over adversity. His stories were set in Chicago during the Great

Depression, and as it turned out, they were largely apocryphal. He was his own fictional character.

I also spent a lot of time in church with my parents, listening to the moral of the story. The family skeptic, I would entertain myself by trying to imagine the thought bubbles over everyone's heads. Many children are alert to the things that aren't being said aloud, and this is pretty much the terrain that the novel occupies. In a novel, we can measure the distance between what the characters are thinking, and what they say and do. And if it's a good novel, there's a magical leap of faith that happens, and we empathize with them. We feel reassured when we recognize ourselves in their thoughts. And these are people we've never met, and who don't exist.

When I'm asked about what I'm looking for when I confront the pile-up of books at my door, fiction or nonfiction, it often comes back to this idea of the thing that's hiding in plain sight that the author is revealing to us. "Plot" is the book word for fate, and if a story feels too pat, as journalists know, it usually is. For this reason, I've always been drawn to counter-narratives. A good novel is, at some level, usually subverting something—often, the nature of storytelling itself. The result is that you feel the urgency in the writing: This is a story that must be told, and it must be told in this way. And however "small" or personal the story, it's a response to the big story—which is the world we all share at the moment it's written.

CHILDHOOD READING GIVES US A constellation of literary heroes. Brightly fixed in my own memory are Leo Lionni's "Frederick," a phlegmatic poet mouse with no useful labor skills who is ostracized from his mouse community but then redeemed; Roald Dahl's "Fantastic Mr. Fox," my first crush; Karana, the heroine of Scott O'Dell's "Island of the Blue Dolphins," a Native

American girl left behind on one of the Channel Islands for 18 years. She learns to spear fish, tames one of the wild dogs on the island for company, and has a great fashion moment when she makes a skirt out of iridescent cormorant feathers. And then there's the eponymous spider of E.B. White's "Charlotte's Web," who saves Wilbur the pig from slaughter by making him a tourist attraction. And so, as children, we learn just how powerful a web words weave; they create glamour and empathy. They can save lives.

I also read a lot of other things lying around the house that are not

of fairy tale. But at the same time, it gave me a sense that there was an aesthetic world out there that was, in fact, real.

BOOK CRITICS TEND TO AGREE THAT there are many paths to the well; the art is in the journey, the detours made, the choice of rest stops and landmarks noted, the lions and tigers and bears encountered en route. But sometimes, the parallels between literature and travel reach beyond the metaphoric to the very rudiments of how a perspective is formed. Sometimes, one simply has to get out of Kansas.

## A good novel is, at some level, usually subverting something—often, the nature of storytelling itself.

meant for children, as we do. Such as John Updike's "Couples": a terrifying substitute for sex ed. And my mother's magazines: She subscribed to Redbook and Good Housekeeping. Redbook was pretty trashy, and that was my favorite. It had articles with titles like "Would You Marry Him Again?" and diet tips, and then, a recipe for a high-calorie seasonal dessert. I remember my father once caught me reading one of these magazines, and he said, "Be careful. If you keep reading those, you'll get a soft spot in your head."

Of course, another important reason we read is to feel less alone. I think this was why, for decades, magazines like this flourished—to make housewives feel less alone.

It was sometime in here that I read my first Vogue. They sold it at the supermarket near my house, and it was like a passport to another planet. Even as a 10-year-old I understood that it demanded a different kind of relationship with the reader than my mother's magazines did, and that the images in it represented something idealized, a kind

In "Silas Marner," George Eliot writes of how "minds that have been unhinged from their old faith and love" can find happiness in a "new land, where the beings around them know nothing of their history, and share none of their ideas. ... the past becomes dreamy because its symbols have all vanished, and the present too is dreamy because it is linked with no memories."

Most of my travels have been about losing myself in Eliot's dreamy present—in Belfast during marching season, in an overcrowded Tijuana orphanage, in a Guatemalan village traumatized and starved by massacre and corruption, in Chile with a Pinochet hangover. But the best place I ever got lost in was Poland: nation as counter-narrative. Obsessed, in my early twenties, with the film director Krzysztof Kieslowski, I deferred graduate school in 1996 and got on a plane, casting myself in my own Polish movie. Teaching English in a grim, formerly German coal-mining town called Gliwice, I witnessed the town's physical transformation, in a series of renovations along the main street—ironically,

or perhaps delusionally, named "Victory Street"—from the '40s to the '90s. Of course, psychically, it takes a lot more than a coat of pastel paint.

The poet Wislawa Szymborska won the Nobel Prize that same year. Like Kieslowski, Szymborska loved fate and chance connections, the metaphysics of ordinary life, the "chairs and sorrows, scissors, tenderness, transistors, violins, teacups, dams and quips," as she wrote. One of Kieslowski's later films, "Red," a love story in which the lovers don't actually meet until the final frame, was inspired by one of her poems. In Szymborska's Nobel speech she spoke about how the work of the poet is to remind us that nothing about life is ordinary. And whether you grew up amid the strip shopping malls of the Midwest or the socialist housing blocks of post-Communist Europe, the banality of that statement only serves the point.

Poles love antihero stories as much as I do. When I was there, a beloved TV series from the '80s, "Jan Serce," about a lonely Warsaw sewer worker and his search for romance, was rebroadcast. Sometimes, finding beauty and meaning requires a flashlight.

VOGUE IS NOT ABOUT DEMOCRATIZING taste. The models are skinny; the clothes are expensive. Our mandate is to choose the best, to tell you what you should be wearing, watching, reading. I'm very lucky to have an editor in chief who is deeply invested in cultural coverage, and books in particular. Books find their way into the magazine as excerpts, reviews and profiles; I've interviewed a host of authors, from Jhumpa Lahiri to Jonathan Franzen, trying to get to the self in the story, to the thing that inspires the poetic impulse over other imperatives.

How we choose our cultural heroes is something I've given a lot of thought to during my time at the magazine—which voices have authority, what stories garner attention, how certain elements of our

fractured American identity catch the light. In a series I've developed with my editor, Valerie Steiker, called "Lives," I look at historical women—often a writer sidelined from literary history, like the modernist Djuna Barnes, or someone who isn't well known in the United States, such as the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova or Brazil's Kafka, Clarice Lispector—or more famous names—Cleopatra, Gypsy Rose Lee, Edith Wharton, Sarah Bernhardt, Coco Chanel—"icons" or "legends" whose complexity and historical importance has blurred. These articles tend to have similar themes: How complicit were these women in the making of their own mythology? And how distant was the reality of their lives?

It's a dystopic moment in American literature right now—bookstores are crowded with vampires and zombies and apocalyptic visions, and on the other hand, there's a lot of soft nostalgia, a hearkening back to simpler times. For the March issue, I chose a book that confronts the mood head-on without resorting to cynicism or naiveté: Lauren Groff's "Arcadia," a novel about the rise and fall of one utopian society. A defense of idealism, it's a nuanced response to the anger and disaffection that's behind the Tea Partiers and the Occupy movement. We don't have to choose between the novel of ideas and the novel of aesthetics, between social relevance and beautiful sentences. The challenge lies instead in the overwhelming clamor for our attention, and the limitations of empathy—not, as it turns out, a new concern. "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life," Eliot wrote in "Middlemarch" more than a century ago, "it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence."

**Megan O'Grady**, a 2012 Nieman Fellow, is a contributing editor at *Vogue*, where she writes the Books column. She's on the board of the National Book Critics Circle and lives in New York.

# Books



Accuracy was a hot topic when Ryszard Kapuscinski, right, taught journalists at the invitation of Gabriel García Márquez. Photo courtesy of the Ibero-American New Journalism Foundation.

## Secrets and Lies

Investigating a famed Polish journalist **BY PAUL SALOPEK**

### Ryszard Kapuscinski: A Life

BY ARTUR DOMOSLAWSKI

TRANSLATED BY ANTONIA LLOYD-JONES

Verso. 464 pages.

A CLUMSY MOMENT OF STONEWALLING—self-revealing in retrospect—jars an otherwise sleek 2004 documentary about the fabled Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski: When the film's interviewer asks Kapuscinski,

deferentially, about the multiple death sentences he allegedly survived while covering dictatorships and coups in the developing world, the famously mild, self-effacing writer grows defensive. He shakes his head in annoyance. In accented English, he cuts off the questioner. “I am not talking about these problems—never. Never answer these questions,” he mutters. Following an emphatic pause, he adds stiffly, “Next one please.”

Five years after dying from complications of cancer, Kapuscinski remains one of the most celebrated chroniclers of human suffering in our time: a solitary philosopher-reporter who was catapulted to fame by reporting from the world’s danger zones, usually on the shoestring budget of the Polish Press Agency, and who shaped his daily dispatches into books of luminous prose adored by millions, among them literary giants such as John Updike and Salman Rushdie.

But in “Ryszard Kapuscinski: A Life,” the journalist Artur Domoslawski strips away Kapuscinski’s mythic Lone Ranger mask. And what emerges beneath is a haunting portrait of a man who felt increasingly oppressed by his legacy—a storyteller compelled by ultimate truths and deep history, yet desperate to shield his readers from manufactured elements of his own past. He died, ill and steeped in dread, still trying. “I will sell you for nothing an idea for the title of your book,” a close friend of Kapuscinski sadly tells the biographer. “Kapuscinski—the price of greatness.”

#### TOUGH LOVE

Published two years ago in Polish, Domoslawski’s book ignited fierce debate in Kapuscinski’s homeland, where the author of “Imperium,” “The Soccer War,” “The Emperor,” “Another Day of Life” and other works of lyrical reportage has been elevated to the status of Journalist of the Century. Yet Domoslawski’s book is a mournful

exposure, and so his revelations are gently rendered. A former acolyte of the famed war correspondent, he describes Kapuscinski’s improbable trajectory from a childhood of genteel poverty in a backwater called Pinsk to the glittering banquet halls of Europe and the Americas with love—albeit a tough love. He locates, for example, evidence

“How dare you, you bastard!” the writer shouted, pinning the startled official to the wall by his lapels.

“I begin to think he was crushed by fear—and not merely of revelations of his cooperation with the intelligence service,” Domoslawski writes of the aging Kapuscinski’s final, anxiety-riddled years. “It was about far more than that.”

It appears that Kapuscinski transferred his ‘magical realism’ to the pages of his own life.

from government files that implicates the young Kapuscinski in intelligence gathering abroad.

Many Eastern Bloc foreign correspondents were forced to collaborate with communist regimes during the Cold War. But for Kapuscinski, whose oeuvre returns again and again to ordinary people’s struggles against power, the shame of cooperation was gutting. In Africa, foreign ministry officials assigned him to keep tabs on American companies and agencies. (The Polish embassies’ vaudevillian code for making contact with the journalist was, “Greetings from Zygmunt.” Kapuscinski’s countersign was “Has he sold the car?”) In Latin America the security service handlers knew Kapuscinski by his code name “Vera Cruz.” By then, however, Kapuscinski had grown famous enough to push back. He pulled the freelancer’s old trick of recycling articles—in this case, by presenting them as intelligence reports.

An anecdote from the early 1990s, when Poland’s right-wing press was gleefully outing intellectuals compromised by the ancien régime, reveals the terrible power of this kept secret. Kapuscinski—by all accounts a gnomish, affable personality—exploded after a cocktail party where a post-communist bureaucrat glibly named Polish diplomats he thought had been Soviet agents.

He is referring, of course, to Kapuscinski’s controversial habit of conflating journalism and literature.

Kapuscinski himself often described his reporting method as creative: He insisted he wrote to the “essence of the matter.” Domoslawski records him explaining to a colleague how tinkering with the sequence of real events is acceptable because it “sometimes helps to convey a deeper meaning. It all depends how it is done, and whether it sits within the particular realities, within the climate, or whether it is artificial, invented, deceptive.”

This type of literary reportage, Kapuscinski’s defenders have always noted, is rooted in an Eastern European tradition that used allegory to navigate around the culture of censorship prevalent behind the Iron Curtain. To be fair, Kapuscinski’s text does brim with dreamlike imagery that clearly signals the imagination at work. An old Indian inexplicably cranks an antique gramophone in the middle of a Mexican desert. Or the inhabitants of a Siberian town stagger about in a frozen fog, leaving discernible tunnels through it. His books never include disclaimers.

Meanwhile, during his three years of research, Domoslawski unearths more fictions that have little to do with art.

It appears that Kapuscinski transferred his “magical realism” to the pages

of his own life. Traveling in the great wanderer's footsteps, Domoslawski finds eyewitnesses who contradict several famous Kapuscinski-ian incidents of derring-do. It's unlikely, he concludes, that Kapuscinski faced death by firing squads in Africa or South America, as his book jacket blurbs assert. (Hence, perhaps, his evasiveness in the documentary.) Kapuscinski also appears to have grossly exaggerated his friendships with leftist liberation icons such as Che Guevara, Salvador Allende, or Patrice Lumumba. He may have never met them at all.

Domoslawski defers to a former New York Times correspondent who knew Kapuscinski to sum up such mythomania: "As the years went by, he became a member of the intelligentsia ... but he came from a poor background, from the provinces, from ignorance," said the late Michael T. Kaufman. "He had to make a super-human effort and do some incredible work on himself to get to the top, to reach the position he achieved at the end of his life."

Burdened by his self-made legend, Kapuscinski died planning one more improbable journey, to the islands of Oceania, a place he had never been.

Was it an escape? His last notebook entries, written after he was hooked up to a feeding tube, still hold the master's trademark beauty, and can be read, as the best Kapuscinski always will be, on multiple levels. "A terrible feeling of helplessness, I'm losing touch with the world, with the light, with my surroundings, with reality, it's all drifting away, disappearing."

**Paul Salopek** is a Pulitzer Prize-winning foreign correspondent. While on fellowship at the Nieman Foundation, he researched an around-the-world journey he'll make on foot to tell the story of human migration out of Africa 50,000 years ago.

# The Fight of His Life

Ed Kennedy paid a high price for spreading news of the war's end. **BY BILL SCHILLER**

**Ed Kennedy's War: V-E Day, Censorship & The Associated Press**  
EDITED BY JULIA KENNEDY COCHRAN  
*Louisiana State University Press.*  
201 pages.

IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE APEX OF his illustrious career. But in some ways, it was the beginning of the end for Edward Kennedy.

The "scoop of the century"—Kennedy's exclusive May 7, 1945 report on Germany's unconditional surrender and the end of World War II in Europe—commanded front pages and radio reports around the world. It triggered celebrations everywhere.

But Kennedy, then Paris bureau chief for The Associated Press (AP), was swiftly suspended and months later quietly let go.

He stood accused by the Allied military of breaking an agreed-upon embargo, thereby causing a security risk.

His colleagues who had agreed to the embargo accused him of the biggest double-cross in journalistic history.

Kennedy stood tall against the charges all of his life. He contended that he had never put any life at risk nor had he double-crossed anyone. Instead, he said, he had done his duty as a journalist: He had stood up against political censorship.

Now we have his posthumously published memoir explaining it all in cool detail, how he did it, why he did it and why, finally—after all these years—the AP was moved to issue an apology this past May. Instead of standing up for a reporter who had performed to the highest journalistic standards, his bosses at the AP not only abandoned him, they fired him.

"It was a terrible day for the AP. It was handled in the worst possible way," said Tom Curley, the agency's president and chief executive officer, in making the apology. Kennedy, he concluded, had done "everything just right."

The former foreign correspondent ended his days with his pride and journalistic principles intact, putting out a small, high-quality newspaper in Monterey, California.

Already suffering from cancer, he died in 1963 after being hit by a car. He went out doing what he loved to do.

"We can sell these pieces of dead trees only by creating the illusion that they are alive," he wrote in his final editorial. "This we attempt to do, with varying degrees of success, by headlines that grip the eye and written material that clutches the heart and soul of man."

Kennedy was attempting to do just that when, after six long years of war in Europe, the military was trying to muzzle the media—not for security reasons, but for politics.

News that would grip the very heart and soul of a world yearning for peace was being withheld.

## DEAL BREAKER

The powers in Washington and London wanted to delay the announcement of war's end for 36 hours to allow the Soviet Union to stage its own signing ceremony in Berlin and make people in its sphere of influence believe that it had delivered the death blow to Nazism, with contributions from other, lesser parties.

But Kennedy brought his signature alertness, sound judgment, and considerable spine to do what every good reporter should have done that day.

Kennedy had learned that while he and 16 other correspondents had agreed not to report the surrender they had witnessed at General Dwight D. Eisenhower's headquarters until given the green light, a German radio station in Allied-occupied territory had broadcast the news—with Allied approval.

The embargo broken, the news out, Kennedy approached the military, demanding an explanation. Getting none, he paused to consider, then moved swiftly.

He called a colleague in the AP's London office and told him the news: "Germany has surrendered unconditionally. That's surrendered unconditionally. That's official. Make the date Reims, France, and get it out."

He dictated about 300 words before the connection broke. Then he turned to his colleagues and said, "Well, now let's see what happens."

All hell broke loose. The AP was bullied by the military, its operations in the European Theater shut down, and it quickly backed down—even before it had obtained the facts from its own reporter.

Military leaders weren't the only ones to condemn Kennedy. The New York Times, which had used Kennedy's story on its front page with multi-stacked headlines announcing the end of the war, also attacked him, decrying Kennedy's report as a "grave disservice to the newspaper profession."

It was, of course, no such thing. It was one of the AP's and American journalism's finest moments and might well have saved lives.

"The war was over; there was no military security involved, and the people had a right to know," Kennedy told reporters when he landed in New York on June 4.

As his memoir recounts in telling detail, Kennedy knew the difference between censorship for political reasons and censorship for security concerns. As an AP correspondent for a decade, he had traveled across war zones in Spain, Italy, the Middle East, and Europe, and had operated regularly under the military censor's blue pen.

But after careful consideration, he knew that military security was not involved. He and his colleagues had been hoodwinked for political purposes.

Today, in an age when government manipulation of information appears to be growing, when the shameful spinning of tales like those about soldiers Pat Tillman and Jessica Lynch are wrought from whole cloth, we need inspirational

stories like Edward Kennedy's more than ever.

As Kennedy reminds us, truth need not be the first casualty in war, nor the last.

All journalists owe Edward Kennedy a debt for distinguished journalism under fire.

**Bill Schiller**, a 2006 Nieman Fellow, is a foreign affairs writer for the *Toronto Star*.



**Ed Kennedy, center, and an unidentified AP staffer react to the bombing at Anzio beachhead in 1944.** Photo courtesy of Louisiana State University Press.

# Mr. Difficult

The personal turmoil lurking beneath the tough exterior

BY STUART WATSON

## **Mike Wallace: A Life**

BY PETER RADER

*St. Martin's Press. 323 pages.*

IN HIS WANING YEARS, BROADCAST pioneer Mike Wallace declined screenwriter and filmmaker Peter Rader's request to be interviewed for his biography, "Mike Wallace: A Life." It's probably just as well. Rader meticulously researched Wallace's unique life in and out of broadcast journalism and he has crafted a narrative that is both engaging and revealing, though some readers may be put off by his admission that he wrote some "imagined dialogue." The book exposes many shortcomings and weaknesses that the great interrogator zeroed in on in others but never wanted to confront himself.

In the days and weeks immediately following Wallace's death, it was easy to watch the highlight reels of his career and feel a warm glow, but it's much harder to confront his character flaws off camera. He put his career ahead of family and friends. He could be cruel and sexist to women in the workplace. He was at times consumed with self-pity.

The retrospectives and obituaries are reminders of his unique contributions to broadcast journalism, but this biography takes Wallace away from the glowing screen and puts him on the couch. It was not easy to work with him. It was not easy to be married to him. It was not easy to be his child. It was not easy to be him.

Mike Wallace's resonant voice, his jet-black hair, his demeanor at once prickly and endearing, make him seem—in retrospect—born for broadcast. What is less well known is how

Wallace learned to use his voice as a skinny Jewish kid in Brookline, Massachusetts to compensate for profound insecurity about his pockmarked face and overbearing mother. Decades later, he famously reduced Barbra Streisand to tears on camera over the very same insecurities he instinctively recognized from his own experience.

He didn't gain admission to the University of Michigan without a good word from his friendly uncle, Leo Scharfman, who was on the faculty. Wallace later left a legacy there by donating Wallace House, home of the Knight-Wallace journalism fellows. He learned the real power of his voice at the campus radio station and later at WOOD/WASH radio (twin call letters because a furniture company owned half of the station and a laundry the other half). His early days in broadcasting were less than glamorous. He once shoveled elephant dung to clear the stage for the live broadcast of WGN's "Super Circus" in Chicago.

His first marriage was to his college sweetheart, Norma Kaphan. He wasn't ready. He went off to war in a noncombat role in the South Pacific and was absent when his oldest child developed tuberculosis. Norma enlisted a family physician to prevail on the U.S. Navy to send him home. But the military was a temporary absence. Wallace's career made for a more prolonged absence in the lives of his sons, Peter and Chris. The book details how Norma's second husband, CBS executive William Leonard,

encouraged Wallace to be a part of the boys' lives and welcomed his presence. It led to a renewed relationship.

Wallace's own life was profoundly altered when Peter died as a young man from a fall while hiking in Greece in 1962. The loss made him rethink his career choices. He focused more than ever on journalism. It's easy to see how his career could have continued as pitchman and game show host. But he was driven to produce more substantial and lasting work.

Wallace was married four times in all. He was not a philanderer, but this book chronicles in some detail how he seemed more comfortable with the enduring marriage to his vocation, his calling, his voice. He recognized it as a character flaw. He also did not give up on marriage, his final in 1986 was to Mary Yates, the widow of his former producer and good friend Ted Yates. Two years earlier she literally saved his life when she rescued him from an overdose of pills. Wallace later spoke frequently and freely about his own depression. He spoke less often of the failed suicide attempt. He left a note, which, Rader writes, "... befitting Mike, was rather impersonal—relating to financial matters rather than his feelings." What is glaringly apparent from the rest of this book is that had his suicide attempt been successful, Wallace would have missed the opportunity to make peace with himself and his loved ones and the world would have been cheated of more decades of tremendous reporting.

Wallace's prickly, challenging persona on "60 Minutes" meshed perfectly with public skepticism after Vietnam and Watergate and the exponential growth of television as a news medium. He spoke up for the voiceless. And that voice said, "Aw c'mon!" The phrase that Wallace chose to apply to himself may be applied to Peter Rader's fine book: "Tough, but fair."

**Stuart Watson**, a 2008 Nieman Fellow, is an investigative reporter at WCNC-TV in Charlotte, North Carolina.

# Nieman Notes

**1942**

**Thomas Sancton**, a Southern journalist who wrote articles in the 1940s advocating for racial justice, died at a nursing home in New Orleans on April 6th. He was 97.

A graduate of Tulane University, Sancton began his career reporting for The (New Orleans) Times-Picayune before joining The Associated Press and moving to New York. During his Nieman year he married **Seta**, who died in 2007, and left Cambridge early to become managing editor of The New Republic, a post that gave him a platform for his views on racial justice.

His essays and editorials denouncing segregation provoked outrage in some quarters, and a Mississippi congressman denounced him on the floor of the House of Representatives, an outburst that Sancton considered a badge of honor. His role as an early crusader for civil rights earned him a place in books such as The Library of America anthology "Reporting Civil Rights" and John Egerton's "Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South."



Thomas Sancton

Sancton was Washington editor for The Nation before returning to New Orleans. During nine years as a feature writer for The New Orleans Item, he wrote two novels set in Louisiana, "Count Roller Skates," later reissued as "The Magnificent Rascal," in 1956, and "By Starlight" in 1960. Neither was the financial success he had hoped for but his first novel was optioned this year for a movie.

While at the Item, he also taught feature writing at Tulane. Among his students was John Kennedy Toole, author of "A Confederacy of Dunces." Some of his students became so devoted to him that they held annual reunions at his house. One student told Sancton's son, Thomas A. Sancton, a former foreign correspondent for Time magazine, that the class was like "one big church service, something to worship and treasure for life."

In addition to his son, Sancton is survived by two daughters, five grandchildren, one great-grandchild, and one great-great-grandchild.

**1966**

**Robert A. Caro**'s fourth volume about President Lyndon Johnson, "The Passage of Power," was published on May 1 by Knopf.

Covering the years 1958 to 1964, the book examines Johnson's frustration about giving up the power he wielded as Senate majority leader to become vice president, his ascendency to the presidency after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and the burst of legislation that laid the groundwork for Johnson's Great Society.

Caro has twice won the

## ROBERT A. CARO *THE YEARS OF LYNDON JOHNSON* *THE PASSAGE OF POWER*

Pulitzer Prize for Biography: in 1975 for "The Power Broker," about New York City planner Robert Moses, and in 2003 for "Master of the Senate," the third volume in his "Years of Lyndon Johnson" series.

In a profile in The New York Times Magazine in April, Caro recalled a pivotal moment during his Nieman year. His class on land use and urban planning was discussing how traffic and population density determined where highways got built, and Caro thought to himself, "This is completely wrong. This isn't why highways get built. Highways get built because Robert Moses wants them built there. If you don't find out and explain to people where Robert Moses gets his power, then everything else you do is going to be dishonest."

**Bob Giles** has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The 220 members elected this year will be inducted at a ceremony in October at the academy's headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Joining Giles in the class of 2012 are Boston Globe editor Marty Baron and television journalist Judy Woodruff. The former cura-

tor of the Nieman Foundation, Giles is now commentary editor for GlobalPost.

**1969**

**Mike McGrady**, a longtime reporter and critic for Newsday best known as the mastermind of a ribald literary spoof, died of pneumonia on May 13th in Shelton, Washington. He was 78.

Published in the summer of 1969, "Naked Came the Stranger" was conceived by McGrady as a commentary on the declining tastes of American readers. The novel would offer little in the way of plot or style as it followed in graphic detail a suburban woman's sexual conquests in the wake of her husband's affair.

McGrady wrote the first chapter and drafted colleagues at Newsday to finish the book. "As one of Newsday's truly outstanding literary talents, you are hereby officially invited to become the co-author of a best-selling novel," McGrady wrote in his pitch to them. "There will be an unremitting emphasis on sex. Also, true excellence in writing will be quickly blue-penciled into oblivion."

The project was delayed by McGrady's reporting trip to



Mike McGrady

Vietnam and his Nieman year, during which he and his co-editor, Newsday colleague Harvey Aronson, mailed chapters back and forth. "We found out that it's very difficult to write badly," Aronson said.

The book credited Penelope Ashe, a "demure Long Island housewife," as its author, and McGrady had his sister-in-law play the role for public appearances. But after "Naked" sold 20,000 copies in the first few weeks after publication, the journalists revealed themselves as its creators. According to Aronson, the revelation created such a sensation that he and McGrady were picked up by helicopter for an interview on "CBS Evening News."

Before McGrady's journalism was overshadowed by "Naked," the New York City native covered the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War as a reporter and columnist for Newsday, where he worked until 1991. After John Steinbeck, writing in Newsday, called for other American writers to come to Vietnam and see the war for themselves, McGrady convinced the paper to send him in 1967. His columns from Vietnam were honored with an award from the Overseas Press Club for best interpretation of foreign affairs, and they were republished as a book called "A Dove in Vietnam." Later he was a film critic and restaurant reviewer.

McGrady wrote a number of novels and nonfiction books, including "Stranger Than Naked: Or, How to Write Dirty Books for Fun and Profit" and "The Kitchen Sink Papers: My Life as a House Husband." He also was the co-author of two memoirs by "Deep Throat" star Linda Lovelace.

He is survived by his wife, **Corinne**, two sons, a daughter, and five grandchildren.

#### 1971

**Daniel Rapoport**, a longtime Washington journalist, died at his home in East Chatham, New York on April 11th after a long battle with leukemia. He was 79.

Born in New York City, Rapoport moved to Washington, D.C. in 1959 after graduating from the University of Illinois and serving in the Navy. He joined United Press International and was covering the House of Representatives at the time of his fellowship appointment.

His longstanding interests ranged from prizefighting and the inaccuracy of lie detectors to the number of lions shipped to Rome to engage in Coliseum battles, according to Nieman classmate **John Pekkanen**, who called Rapoport "the kindest and most gregarious man I've ever known."

After leaving UPI, Rapoport wrote "Inside the House: An Irreverent Guided Tour Through the House of Representatives, From the Days of Adam Clayton Powell to Those of Peter Rodino," published by Follett in 1975. He also wrote for National Journal and Washingtonian magazine.

In 1983 he founded Farragut Publishing, which had early success with a series of cookbooks co-written by his wife, **Maxine**. "He was a natural innovator," said a Farragut colleague, Merideth Menken. "He offered profit-sharing agreements to Farragut authors and created partnerships with those who needed Farragut's experience to 'package' books under their own imprints, a forerunner of today's self-publishing movement."



**Daniel Rapoport**

From 1984 to 1996, Farragut put out 20 nonfiction titles. "As a publisher, Dan was willing and able to follow his own instincts and interests. Farragut was like nothing before or since," said Paul Dickson, co-author of "Baseball: The Presidents' Game," a Farragut book. Other titles included "On This Spot: Pinpointing the Past in Washington, D.C.," and "Grand Allusions: A Lively Guide to Those Terms, Expressions and References You Ought to Know But Might Not," which was reissued as "Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Allusions."

In addition to his wife, he is survived by three children and one grandchild.

#### 1974

**Patricia O'Brien**'s sixth novel, "The Dressmaker," was published by Doubleday in February under the pseudonym Kate Alcott.

It tells the story of Tess, a passenger on the Titanic who is an aspiring seamstress working for a famous designer. She survives the disaster only to be caught up in the media frenzy that followed.

Simon & Schuster rejected the manuscript due to poor sales for O'Brien's previous novel, "Harriet and Isabella," which

it had published. Twelve other publishers also turned it down. After her agent suggested using a pen name, it sold in three days. The critically acclaimed "Dressmaker" has spent several weeks on The New York Times extended bestseller list.

#### 1983

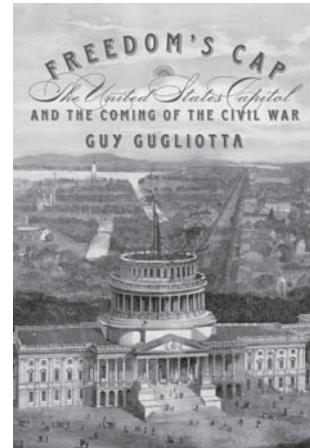
**Guy Gugliotta**'s book "Freedom's Cap: The United States Capitol and the Coming of the Civil War" was published in February by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

The book, his second, focuses on three men who influenced the design and construction of the building: Union Army Captain Montgomery C. Meigs, the lead engineer; architect Thomas U. Walter; and Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

Gugliotta, who covered Congress during a 16-year career at The Washington Post, is now a freelance science writer.

**William Marimow** returned as editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer at the beginning of May.

He ran the paper from 2006 to 2010 when he was reassigned to the investigative reporting team. He left the paper in 2011 to head the Carnegie-Knight News21 digital journalism





**William Marimow**

program at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

In a press release announcing the move, Marimow said, "It will be a privilege to work alongside newsroom colleagues who have continued to produce great journalism despite the toughest economic conditions I've ever experienced."

Marimow's return was announced just days after the sale of Philadelphia Media Network, which controls the Inquirer as well as the Philadelphia Daily News and their joint website Philly.com, to local investors.

#### **1984**

**Bert Lindler** was named a hero of conservation in the April issue of *Field & Stream* magazine.

For the past seven years Lindler has been a volunteer caretaker for a herd of 470 elk that winter on the outskirts of Missoula, Montana. He has worked with conservation groups, state agencies, local ranchers, and homeowners to control weeds and modify fences so the elk can find food and move across the land.

Lindler was a reporter for the European edition of Stars



**Roberto Eisenmann**

and Stripes and the Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune before becoming a technical editor for the United States Forest Service. He retired in 2010 and now describes himself as the "North Hills Elk, Bear and Weed Volunteer."

#### **1986**

**Roberto Eisenmann** received a lifetime achievement award from the Fundación Fórum de Periodistas por las Libertades de Expresión e Información (Journalist's Forum for Freedom of Expression and Information Foundation) in Panama.

Eisenmann, the retired founder of the daily newspaper La Prensa who was exiled from Panama during the Noriega regime, was honored for his long commitment to journalists' rights.

This is the 16th year that the foundation has given the awards. A panel of eight international journalists, including **Cecilia Alvear**, NF '89, an independent multimedia journalist, made the selections.

**Mark Ethridge** wrote the screenplay for the independent film "Deadline," which premiered in February and has been screened in a number of cities across the



**Mark Ethridge**

United States. It was released on DVD and other formats in July.

The film is based on his 2006 novel "Grievances," which was in turn based on a case that Ethridge covered while working at The Charlotte (N.C.) Observer in 1970. While the essence of the film—a rich white Northerner brings attention to the unsolved murder of a black man—is true to the facts, many details were changed. "The story's not factual," he said, "but it is true."

Ethridge's second novel, "Fallout," was published in February by NewSouth Books. It's what he calls an 'Old Man and the Sea' kind of story," about an editor at a weekly newspaper who stumbles onto a big story.

To promote "Deadline," the filmmakers teamed up with newspapers to host screenings in 45 cities, with all of the profits going to local nonprofits, such as the Reporters Committee for the Freedom of the Press in Washington, D.C. and VOX, a group that supports teen journalists in Atlanta.

"The movie has a very positive message about journalists and journalism," Ethridge said.

#### **1987**

**Valerie Hyman** conducted a three-week training program

this past fall at the National Broadcasting Corporation in Kyrgyzstan, at the request of the American Embassy. The longtime broadcast journalist said it "was an extraordinary opportunity to influence and train both journalists and executives at the center of the country's emerging democracy. I taught how to question authorities, find stories, and give voice to people who have been quieted for so long."

**Sabine Rollberg** was commissioning editor of the documentary "Sofia's Last Ambulance," which received the France 4 Visionary Award at the 51st La Semaine de la Critique ("Critic's Week") during the Cannes Film Festival in May. The film, directed by Ilian Metev, follows a team of paramedics in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia, where 13 ambulances serve a population of nearly 2 million. It was produced in part by German broadcaster WDR, where Rollberg is a commissioning editor.

#### **1989**

**Norman Robinson** will receive a 2012 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Press Club of New Orleans.

A longtime broadcast journalist who is a news anchor at WDSU-TV in New Orleans, Robinson will be recognized at the organization's 54th annual Excellence in Journalism Awards in July. In addition to New Orleans, he has worked for broadcast outlets in Southern California, New York, and Washington, D.C., where he was a member of the White House Press Corps as a correspondent for CBS News.

## NIEMAN NOTES: NEW FELLOWS



Laura Norton Amico



Borja Echevarría de la Gándara



David Abel



Chris Arnold



Alexandra Garcia



Jeneen Interlandi



Blair Kamin



Jennifer B. McDonald



Betsy O'Donovan



Mary Beth Sheridan



Jane Spencer



Laura Wides-Muñoz

## IN THE 75TH CLASS, A NEW FELLOWSHIP TAKES AIM AT INNOVATION

The 75th class of Nieman Fellows includes two members named to a new fellowship designed to generate ideas to advance quality journalism in the digital age.

The Nieman-Berkman Fellowship in Journalism Innovation is a collaboration between the Nieman Foundation for Journalism and Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet & Society. **Laura Norton Amico**, founder and editor of Homicide Watch in Washington, D.C., and **Borja Echevarría de la Gándara** (Spain), deputy managing editor of *El País* in Madrid, will be full participants in both the Nieman and Berkman fellowship communities.

Amico will study criminal justice journalism in the digital age, focusing on best practices and new models for reporting on crime and courts. Echevarría will study the structural evolution of newsrooms, look for patterns among successful newsrooms, and determine if the practices of digital start-ups can be applied effectively in established newsrooms.

### U.S. FELLOWS:

**David Abel**, staff writer at The Boston Globe, plans to study the evolution of new media, the impact of rising income inequality on the social fabric, and the science as well as the potential effects of climate change.

**Brett Anderson**, restaurant critic and features writer at The Times-Picayune in New Orleans, will study the forces and people

fueling the modern American food culture and their impact on the way Americans eat.

**Chris Arnold**, national correspondent at NPR, will study the reshaping of the government's role in housing after the collapse of the bubble and how the crash will shape the future of home ownership. He is the Donald W. Reynolds Nieman Fellow in Business Journalism.

**Alexandra Garcia**, video journalist at The Washington Post, will study interactive storytelling forms and how news organizations can create visual experiences that engage users.

**Jeneen Interlandi**, a science and health journalist based in New Jersey, will study the history of pharmaceuticals, the cultural forces that shaped people's relationships to medication, and the impact that has had on perceptions of illness and health.

**Blair Kamin**, architecture critic at the Chicago Tribune, will seek to re-examine and revitalize the field of architectural criticism in print and online. He is the Arts and Culture Nieman Fellow.

**Jennifer B. McDonald**, an editor at The New York Times Book Review, will study canonical works of literature and philosophy and the historical role of the critic in culture.

**Betsy O'Donovan**, a freelance writer and editor for The Herald-Sun in Durham, North Carolina, will study entrepreneurial mod-

els for community newsrooms. She is the Donald W. Reynolds Nieman Fellow in Community Journalism.

**Mary Beth Sheridan**, a news editor at The Washington Post, plans to study international politics and economics, with a focus on countries, particularly those in Latin America, moving from authoritarian to democratic systems.

**Jane Spencer**, international editor at large for Newsweek and The Daily Beast, will study digital tools for narrative storytelling, with an emphasis on how emerging technologies can be used to improve news coverage of global women's issues.

**Laura Wides-Muñoz**, Hispanic affairs writer for The Associated Press, will study the nexus between immigration and economics. She will examine how the global financial crisis affects the integration of immigrants into U.S. society and how the data can be presented in dynamic ways on multimedia



Karim Ben Khelifa



Katrin Bennhold



Ludovic Blecher



Lee Chong-ae



Jin Deng



Yaakov Katz



Souad Mekhennet



Paula Molina



Finbarr O'Reilly



Beauregard Tromp



San Truong

platforms. She is the Louis Stark Nieman Fellow.

#### INTERNATIONAL FELLOWS:

**Karim Ben Khelifa** (Tunisia/Belgium), photojournalist and founder of Emphas.is, will conduct research on journalist-audience engagement, analyze the behavioral economics linked to crowdfunding, and study new business models promoting the diversification of visual storytelling. He is the Carroll Binder Nieman Fellow.

**Katrin Bennhold** (Germany), London-based reporter for the International Herald Tribune, will study the economics of gender and motherhood and explore the barriers to and costs of gender equality in the early 21st century. She is the William Montalbano (NF '70) Nieman Fellow.

**Ludovic Blecher** (France), executive director and editor in chief of Liberation.fr, will study online media business models and explore ways to monetize high-value journalism. He is the Robert Waldo Ruhl Nieman Fellow.

**Lee Chong-ae** (Korea), senior

reporter, Seoul Broadcasting System, will study journalism related to complex trauma, focusing on people who have experienced the effects of periods of colonialism, war and military-influenced dictatorial administrations followed by rapid economic growth. Her fellowship is sponsored by The Asia Foundation.

**Jin Deng** (China), senior editor, Southern Weekly, will study how the democratization and fragmentation of information in the social media era will affect journalism, society and politics in China. Her fellowship is supported through Sovereign Bank and the Marco Polo Program of Banco Santander.

**Yaakov Katz** (Israel/United States), military reporter, The Jerusalem Post, will study the use of censorship in the digital age, especially in coverage of Israel and the Middle East.

**Souad Mekhennet** (Germany/Morocco), a reporter and columnist for The New York Times, Der Spiegel, and ZDF (German TV), will study how the Arab Spring influenced the long-term

strategies of terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda and how Islamic law deals with human rights, women and democracy. She is the Barry Bingham, Jr. Nieman Fellow.

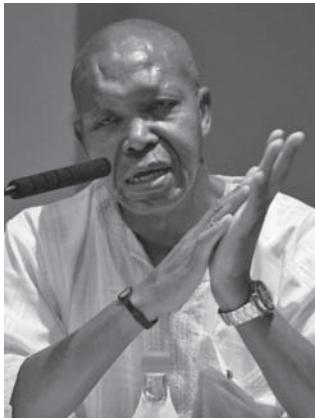
**Paula Molina** (Chile), anchor and editor at Radio Cooperativa, will explore opportunities the digital revolution has created for better development, sharing and distribution of broadcast news.

**Finbarr O'Reilly** (Canada), Africa-based photographer for Reuters, will focus on understanding how the human mind and behavior are affected by what happens in trauma and conflict zones. He is the Ruth Cowan Nash Nieman Fellow.

**Beauregard Tromp** (South Africa), senior field producer, eNews Africa, will study how the purchase of large tracts of land in Africa by countries and global corporations may affect trade agreements, governments and local communities concerned about possible exploitation under a “new colonialism.” His fellowship is supported by the Nieman Society of Southern Africa.

**San Truong** (a.k.a. Huy Duc) (Vietnam), a freelance journalist based in Ho Chi Minh City, will study public policy, American literature, and the history of Vietnam, to sharpen his work as a political analyst. He is the Atsuko Chiba (NF '68) Nieman Fellow.

In addition to Ann Marie Lipinski, NF '90, curator of the Nieman Foundation, the selection committees for the 2013 class included Steven Bloomfield, executive director of Harvard's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs; Colin Maclay, managing director of Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet & Society; Jack Megan, director of Harvard's Office for the Arts; George de Lama, NF '92, Nieman Advisory Board member and president of global development at Answers Media LLC; journalist Dave Denison, NF '90; Alicia Anstead, NF '08, editor in chief of Inside Arts magazine; Stefanie Friedhoff, NF '01, special projects manager for the Nieman Foundation; and Joshua Benton, NF '08, director of the Nieman Journalism Lab.



**Joseph Thloloe**

**Joseph Thloloe** received the Order of Ikhamanga silver medal from South Africa's President Jacob Zuma in April.

He was one of 31 people honored with national orders on Freedom Day, the anniversary of the country's first democratic elections.

The Order of Ikhamanga recognizes South Africans who have excelled in the fields of arts, culture, literature, music, journalism and sport. Thloloe, a veteran of South African journalism who is currently serving as the country's press ombudsman, was cited for his contributions to the struggle against apartheid and his role shaping the post-apartheid media.

The relationship between the government and the press has been strained of late, with Zuma's African National Congress party proposing a media appeals tribunal and a Protection of State Information Bill that many journalists view as a form of censorship.

Thloloe said it is "a measure of the maturity of our democracy that they overlooked our differences and gave this award. It bodes well for our democracy."

#### 1990

**Yossi Melman** has joined the Israeli news website Walla after 27 years with the daily newspaper Haaretz. He will continue writing about security and intelligence matters.

His self-published book "Spies Against Armageddon," co-written with CBS News reporter Dan Raviv, will be available in July on Amazon.com. It is an unofficial history of the Israeli intelligence community from 1948 to today.

He also recently published "Running: An Autobiography" in Hebrew. In the memoir he reflects on his life as a Polish boy who moved to Israel with his parents and how that history influenced him to start running marathons at age 43.

#### 1991

**Kevin Noblet** completed his term as president of the Society of American Business Editors and Writers (SABEW) at the end of 2011.

"Past presidents warned me it was a lot of work, and it was," he says. "But business news is now front-page news and SABEW's work has never been more important."

#### 1994

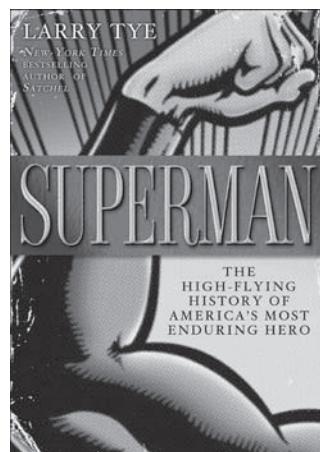
**Melanie Sill** has been named executive editor of Southern California Public Radio, a network of three stations. The former editor of The Sacramento Bee and The (Raleigh, N.C.) News & Observer, she is overseeing the newsgathering operation across online and broadcast platforms. She previously spent six months as executive-in-residence at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School of Journalism, where she

wrote the discussion paper "The Case for Open Journalism Now."

**Larry Tye** has written "Superman: The High-Flying History of America's Most Enduring Hero," published in June by Random House. The book looks not just at the Man of Steel character but at the creators, designers, owners and performers who made him a cultural icon. Tye, who has written biographies of baseball pitcher Leroy "Satchel" Paige and Edward L. Bernays, the father of public relations, grew up reading Superman comics and watching nearly all 104 episodes of "Adventures of Superman" on TV. He writes in the acknowledgements that the idea for the book "came from the place so many good things do for me, my wife, Lisa."

#### 1996

**Laura Eggerston** has been awarded the Michener-Deacon Fellowship for Investigative Journalism. A freelance journalist based in Ottawa, Eggerston plans to write about suicide among aboriginal communities in Canada. She plans to produce a series of articles in print and online and a radio documentary.



The fellowship, given annually by the Michener Awards Foundation, provides funding for a reporter pursuing an investigative project that serves the public interest.

#### 1998

**Julia Keller** will join the faculty at Ohio University this fall, teaching writing in the journalism department. She had been the cultural critic at the Chicago Tribune.

"It's been an extraordinary journey for me," Keller told Time Out Chicago about her tenure at the Tribune, where she had worked since 1998. "I was given the chance to write about anything and everything, from a long series on traumatic brain injury to a series on the aftermath of the Utica, Illinois, tornado.... Not too shabby for a kid from Huntington, West Virginia."

Keller has taught at a number of universities and written three books, including "A Killing in the Hills," which is being published by St. Martin's Press in August. It's a mystery set in her home state about a mother and daughter with a strained relationship who have to work together to solve a bizarre murder.

Keller won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing for her stories about the Utica tornado.

#### 2004

**Santiago Lyon** has been promoted at The Associated Press. He is now a vice president in addition to continuing as director of photography, a position he has held since December 2003. He says that he will continue "to be involved in working closely with AP Images,

Every year the Nieman Foundation awards a portfolio of prizes. The winners of three major awards were celebrated this spring.

## BINGHAM PRIZE FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

*A centerpiece clock tower that was lopsided. A rooftop track and field rendered unusable by design flaws. A feeding trough set too high for the pig to reach. From major to mundane, construction flaws plagued the \$5.7 billion program that Los Angeles voters authorized to rebuild the city's community colleges. But after reporters Gale Holland and Michael Finnegan spent 18 months investigating for their Los Angeles Times series "Billions to Spend," it became clear that the real story wasn't the flaws, but the corruption, greed and hubris that had created them.*

*In April the series received the Nieman Foundation's 2011 Worth Bingham Prize for Investigative Journalism. Prize judge Walter Robinson, formerly a long-time Boston Globe investigative reporter, called it "a stark reminder of the importance of the watchdog role the press plays when government spends scarce public funds. This was an important public works project whose biggest beneficiaries should have been working class community college students," Robinson said. "Instead, the funds were used to award lucrative contracts to politically connected companies, with lax oversight."*

*Edited excerpts of the reporters' discussion at the ceremony follow; a full version is available at <http://nieman.harvard.edu/2011Bingham/>.*

**Gale Holland:** I'm a higher education reporter, and I got a tip that the elected trustees of the college system had fired the chancellor because he opposed these outlandish renewable energy projects. Meanwhile Michael [Finnegan], who's a political reporter, got a tip that a newly renovated theater was going to be torn



Los Angeles Times reporters Gale Holland and Michael Finnegan constructed a narrative of the corruption they discovered by piecing together e-mails they obtained. Photos by Brooks Canaday.

down, and a new one built, just because they had enough money to do it. We met with our editors, and the conclusion was that the elected trustees were basically invisible in L.A., allowing them to spend \$5.7 billion in the dark of night, without any oversight. So they set us loose to take a comprehensive look at the program.

We went about trying to get the public records that would detail exactly what the construction problems were and exactly how much they cost. Our focus was to be very specific and to rely on public records, but for a year they gave us nothing. Finally, we had the bright idea of asking for the e-mail between the public officials and these contractors, architects and construction managers. When it arrived, in the attachments were all of the reports we had been seeking—all the engineering reports, and even a confidential legal settlement. So we put it all in a file and called it "Nirvana," because it was everything we needed.

E-mail was really a mother lode for our project. They delivered a lot of the e-mail in an Outlook format so it was word-searchable, which saved us tons of organizational work. It set up the chronology of when and how things happened. And more importantly, it created a narrative, because this e-mail was all architects, contractors and managers arguing over what went wrong, and whose fault was it, and accusations back and forth, so we had more of a story, with human beings talking, and we didn't have to rely just on the public records reports to document the problems.

We discovered that there were secretaries and PR people who were on the payrolls of shell companies that were owned and run by big campaign donors for the district. They were charging very fat markups, ostensibly to cover their business overhead and a small amount of profit. In one example, the district was paying about \$300,000 for somebody who was writing press releases, but that

employee himself only made about \$65,000. The rest of it went to these layers of private companies. That particular employee happened to be a nephew of one of the college trustees.

**Michael Finnegan:** My first job was reporting in New Jersey and New York, where I had done some investigative work and some political work. So my assumption when we couldn't get questions answered was that something must be wrong here, somebody must be on the take. Los Angeles is largely a Democratic Party town where environmentally friendly programs are kind of a given, and it wasn't unheard of for contracts to go to people as political favors in the green energy world.

It turned out, though, that it was not a standard story of public officials ripping off the public. It was a much more interesting story. It was about Larry Eisenberg, who was in charge of the program. It was about his ego, partly. He fashioned himself to be the Robert Moses of green construction in California.

Eisenberg spent two, three, four, five hours with us, trying to explain what they were doing, putting up these solar panels and windmills all over the campuses. Somehow they were going to generate so much electricity that they would no longer have to pay power bills, and the power costs would go down to nothing. Something didn't add up though, because renewable energy is more expensive than the traditional kind.

For us, it didn't matter how convoluted and detailed this was, anything—the construction of a rocket ship, say—could be explained if you just took enough time to listen to the people who were explaining how it was done. They couldn't do it—it was Alice in Wonderland. Finally, after he said, "Part of the plan is such-and-such," I just asked him: "What plan?"

Of course, there was no plan.

## TAYLOR AWARD FOR FAIRNESS



When J. Andrew Curliss investigated a district attorney, she attacked his work and his paper.  
Photo by Lisa Abitbol.

*To say that the subject of reporter J. Andrew Curliss's "Twisted Truth" series was difficult is putting it mildly. Tracey Cline, the district attorney of Durham, North Carolina, repeatedly battled Curliss and his paper, *The News & Observer* in Raleigh, over the investigation.*

*The three-part series is the 2011 winner of the Taylor Family Award for Fairness in Newspapers. Speaking about it, judge Tyler Bridges, NF '12, said "what especially stood out for me was how the newspaper handled Cline's attempts to discredit its work and that of its reporter ... The paper's editors demonstrated considerable fairness when Cline cast the paper in the difficult role of having to report on her attacks against it." She has since been removed from office.*

*Nieman Reports's Jonathan Seitz spoke with Curliss after the award ceremony. Edited excerpts of their conversation follow; a longer version is available online at <http://nieman.harvard.edu/Curliss/>.*

### Jonathan Seitz: What led you to the "Twisted Truth" investigation?

J. Andrew Curliss: It was me sitting in the courtroom, paying attention. There was a hearing where the D.A. ended up

on the stand and was asked a series of questions and clearly did not handle the questions well. My paper was the only one who covered that hearing, but on the same floor, basically across the hall, the news media for the entire region were covering a murder trial. If everybody else was sitting in the same courtroom, would they have seen what I did and decide to go look? Who knows. But part of doing good work, in my view, is seeing things happen. It's not just sources and records and all of that.

I was covering that hearing as part of my follow-up to another series my paper had done. I could have just wrote the story, "Oh, here's the case. It got dismissed." But as I was sitting there and seeing what I witnessed, my mindset was "God, there's more to this," you know? And the "more to it" was about the D.A.

### What are your go-to techniques for interviewing?

When I'm interviewing somebody, I'm thinking about two things. One is, whatever I'm asking them about, how might I describe it in the paper? Let's say that I'm going to describe some fund as a slush fund, right? Well, if I'm going to write the words "slush fund" in the newspaper, I want to make sure that I say that in the interview. I want to ask them, "Is this a slush fund?" The other is that I'm trying to listen. I think a lot of times we can just get so focused on, "I've got this list of questions I've got to get through, one to 10," and you don't really listen to the answers. Maybe you're on question three, and it could lead you in a whole new direction—if you were just listening.

The other thing I'm trying to do—I'll just be honest here: I'm trying to shut up. I tape a lot of my interviews and I go back and I'm listening to it and I'm just, like, "Would you just shut up?" You know? And so—that's one of the things that I'm really trying to do: ask short questions, and then be quiet.

**How do you go about recreating the particulars of a case?**

As a case goes up through the appeals process, things can get distilled, and in the distillation, there can be distortion. And so, as much as possible, I tried to rely on the actual trial transcripts.

What happens is that one side is arguing their point really hard, and the other side is arguing their point really hard, and sometimes the appeals court just adopts one side of it—when it's more nuanced than that. You might think in a court story like this that it's like, "Oh wow! This is all just sitting there in the court records." Well, I wish it were that easy. You can't just ask, "Oh, can I pull the file for the cases where the prosecutor's work was questioned?" I mean, that's the work, and there is no central file for that.

**You told the district attorney early on that she was the focus of your investigation and shared your findings with her. Is that how you always operate?**  
Yeah, on a story like that, I think it's helpful to try to get to the focus of the story as early as possible—"as possible" being the key words. I mean, you have to know what you want to ask them. But part of being fair is giving the person a chance to properly explain himself or herself. This notion of just showing up at the courthouse on Friday before a story's going to run on Sunday and catching them where they can't really explain their position—I just don't think that's the right way to do it. I don't want to catch them; I want their best.

And I want their best because that's what gets you to the truth. When you're balancing the value of "Ooh, I caught them in a moment and they couldn't explain this" or "I surprised them," the surprise factor, to me, doesn't outweigh the fairness factor. I guess that's the bottom line.



From left, prize winners Daniel J. Sharfstein, Jonathan M. Katz, and Sophia Rosenfeld. Jonathan Alter, right, is chairman of the J. Anthony Lukas Prize Project Committee. Photo by Lisa Abitbol.

## J. ANTHONY LUKAS BOOK PRIZES

J. ANTHONY LUKAS's "COMMON GROUND" was a model and inspiration to Daniel J. Sharfstein, winner of this year's J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize.

Sharfstein's "The Invisible Line: Three American Families and the Secret Journey From Black to White" tells the story of blacks who over the centuries have passed as whites. Largely by mining online databases, he found enough details to spin a narrative about three black families who passed as white.

A professor at Vanderbilt University, Sharfstein recalled that he became enamored with "Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families" in the late 1980s after his brother returned home from college, clutching it "as if it were a sacred text." He said Lukas's book has long influenced his thinking "about the complexities of race in the United States and the possibilities for telling stories about how we see ourselves and order our worlds."

The Lukas prize is one of three administered jointly by the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and the Nieman Foundation as the Lukas Prize Project Awards. In remarks at the awards ceremony in May, Nicholas Lemann, dean of the journalism school, said Lukas

had been a "close friend and hero" of his. Ann Marie Lipinski, NF '90, curator of the Nieman Foundation, said her Nieman class had had the pleasure of spending an afternoon with J. Anthony Lukas, NF '69.

"Common Sense: A Political History" by Sophia Rosenfeld, a professor at University of Virginia, is this year's winner of the Mark Lynton History Prize. The judges praised the book as an "extraordinary, wide-ranging and original work" that shows how central common sense is to the "evolution of our modern understanding of politics."

The Work-in-Progress Award went to Jonathan M. Katz for his book, "The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster" to be published by Palgrave Macmillan.

In January 2010, Katz, then a correspondent for The Associated Press, was on his computer upstairs at his home outside Port-au-Prince when he heard what he thought was the rumbling of a passing truck. "What we were hearing was the first shockwave coming from the epicenter [of the earthquake]," he said.

The awards were established to honor the late Lukas by recognizing excellence in narrative nonfiction books.

**Santiago Lyon**

AP's photo licensing arm, to grow AP's photo business, as well as ongoing cross-format leadership activities in AP's news department."

Lyon has been with the AP since 1991, when he joined as a photographer based in Cairo.

**2007**

**Eliza Griswold** has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship. The journalist and poet plans to spend her fellowship year working on three projects: a collection of poems to be published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 2013, a book based on a New York

**Eliza Griswold**

Times Magazine story she wrote about poetry in Afghanistan, and a book about the fall of manmade America and the nation's collective poverty. The fellowships, awarded by the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, provide funding to writers, scholars and scientists to work on projects of their choosing.

**Kondwani Munthali** was named Malawi's Blogger of the Year by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) during its World Press Freedom Day celebrations in May.

**Kondwani Munthali**

This is the first year that MISA has given the award, with financial support from the U.S. Embassy. The recipient was selected by a vote of journalists who are members of the organization. "I am proud that my peers, who form the majority of my critics, thought this was the best out of my Motherland Malawi," Munthali wrote in a blog post after the announcement.

When Munthali started blogging during his Nieman year, he mainly posted his opinions on issues ranging from global health to youth empowerment programs. Recently he has focused more on news, and he has occasionally faced harsh criticism and reprisals for his writing, especially during the political turmoil in Malawi over the past two years, he said in an interview posted on Global Voices Online.

**2009**

**Kael Alford**'s photographs from Louisiana are featured at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia. Her work is part of the "Picturing the South" exhibit on display until September. A companion book, "Bottom of da Boot," has been published by Fall Line Press. She has spent the last five years documenting the

**Kael Alford**

effects of erosion on Louisiana, especially in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and the Gulf oil spill, as part of a commission from the museum.

According to Alford, "Like the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans, what is being lost on the coast of Louisiana is more than a neighborhood or a storm buffer. It's a piece of our collective memory and a unique piece of heritage that defines us as a nation."

**Hannah Allam** joined McClatchy's Washington, D.C. bureau on July 1st, covering foreign affairs as part of the national security reporting team.

For the past nine years, Allam has worked for McClatchy in the Middle East, serving as bureau chief in Baghdad and Cairo. She gave birth to a son, Bilal, while covering the Iraq War. In a

**Hannah Allam**

**Anja Niedringhaus, NF '07, won first place in a spot news photography category of the National Headliner Awards. "Shot Down" shows a Libyan warplane moments before it crashed to the ground.**  
Niedringhaus works for The Associated Press.

Facebook posting announcing her new position, Allam said that her time abroad was “exhilarating,” but that she’s “excited about the new beat, the chance for Bilal to be closer to his grandmas and cousins, and the prospect of an occasional day off.”

**David Jackson** and colleague Gary Marx at the Chicago Tribune won the 2011 Medill Medal for Courage in Journalism for their series, “Across the Border, Beyond the Law,” about how flaws in the justice system allow fugitives to leave the United States and evade the law. Their series identified dozens of criminals from Chicago, including a priest charged with sexual assault, who had fled the country.

The Medill Medal is awarded annually by Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism to the individual or team of journalists “who best displayed moral, ethical or physical courage in the pursuit of a story or series of stories.”

“In their work, Marx and Jackson blend old-fashioned reporting shoe-leather, exhaustive public records searches and fierce courage in confronting international fugitives on their home turfs,” said Medill Professor Donna Leff, who led the judging. “The reporters wandered in areas known for harboring drug cartels that rule by assassination and kidnapping and through their fearless work, showed how the Justice Department, county prosecutors and local police could have found these fugitives from justice.”

On an 18-day trip to Mexico, the two reporters found eight of the nine fugitives they were seeking. Two agreed to interviews.



**David Jackson**

The series was a finalist for this year’s Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting.

**Tommy Tomlinson** has been hired to write for a joint venture of USA Today Sports Media Group and Major League Baseball Advanced Media. The partnership plans to launch a website this summer. He’ll be writing about all sports, with an emphasis on college football.

Tomlinson spent the last 23 years at The Charlotte (N.C.) Observer, where he has been a local columnist since 1997. In his final column, he wrote, “When I decided to leave the Observer, I had two main reasons: I’d never been part of something that was starting from the ground up, and I didn’t want to be an old man sitting on my porch wondering, ‘What if I had tried that?’”



**Tommy Tomlinson**



**Lisa Mullins**

#### **2010**

**Lisa Mullins** received a Gracie Award from the Alliance for Women in Media Foundation. Mullins was recognized as an outstanding anchor in the news/news magazine category for her work on Public Radio International’s “The World,” which she has anchored since 1998.

#### **2011**

**Hui Sui Fun**’s “Misjudged Cases” was one of two documentaries from Hong Kong-based TVB Jade Channel that received a 2011 Peabody Award. Her documentary focuses on unjust arrests and prosecutions.

The George Foster Peabody Awards are given annually by the University of Georgia’s Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication to honor excellence in television, radio and the Web.



**Hui Sui Fun**

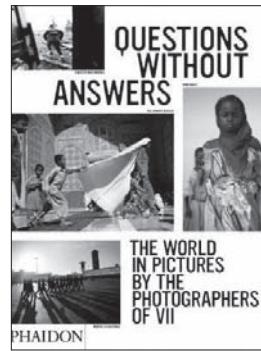
**Gary Knight**’s photographs are featured in the new book “Questions Without Answers: The World in Pictures by the Photographers of VII,” a retrospective of work by members of photo agency VII.

His photo essays are “Evidence: War Crimes in Kosovo,” in which he takes a forensic approach to photographing the former Yugoslavia after the indictment of Serbia’s President Slobodan Milosevic; “The Bridge,” about one of the first major assaults of the Iraq war; and “Amongst the Poor,” which grew out of Knight’s journeys through India over a two-year period.

Knight is director of the Program for Narrative and Documentary Practice at Tufts University’s Institute for Global Leadership.

#### **2012**

**Carlotta Gall** has been signed by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt to write a book about what the publisher calls “America’s long occupation of Afghanistan, from 9/11 to the present, a Vietnam-esque tragedy that leaves behind a country in turmoil.” Gall, a reporter for The New York Times, has been based in Afghanistan and Pakistan since 2001.



# Pulitzer Prizes for Two Niemans

SEATTLE TIMES INVESTIGATIVE reporter **Ken Armstrong**, NF '01, and Chicago Tribune columnist **Mary Schmich**, NF '96, have won journalism's most prestigious award.

Schmich won the Pulitzer Prize for Commentary for "her wide range of down-to-earth columns that reflect the

character and capture the culture of her famed city." Her subjects ranged from the personal to the political, from crime to the installation of a cringe-worthy statue of Marilyn Monroe.

After the announcement, Schmich, who had been a Pulitzer finalist in 2006 for feature writing as well as last year

for commentary, wrote about how she got started as a columnist 20 years ago and what she has learned since:

"On a chilly afternoon in the April I arrived, I sat in a Coffee Chicago with a yellow pad . . . I wrote down things like: Go out. Get to know people. Introduce Chicago people to each other. Make

**Kristen Lombardi** was part of the Center for Public Integrity/NPR investigation, "Poisoned Places: Toxic Air, Neglected Communities," that won the Society of Professional Journalists' (SPJ) 2011 Sigma Delta Chi Award for Public Service in Online Journalism.

The series looked at hundreds of cities across the US where efforts to clean up air pollution have fallen far short of expectations. More than 20 years after clean air legislation was passed, many communities are still exposed to chemicals that can cause cancer and other health problems.

SPJ judges said the series "fully utilizes the tenets of online journalism to uncover an important issue. The in-depth stories, photography and video give readers an immersive experience on what it feels like to live near a company that is on the EPA's watch list. . . Upon its publication, the EPA posted data on its website. One state cracked down on a polluter. Other media caught on to the story and published their own pieces and reaction to the work."

Lombardi has been on staff at the Center for Public Integrity



**Kristen Lombardi**

since 2007. She won the 2009 Sigma Delta Chi award in the same category for "Sexual Assault on Campus: A Frustrating Search for Justice."

**Raquel Rutledge** and her affiliate **John Diedrich** were part of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel team that won a Sigma Delta Chi Award for Investigative Reporting for "A Case of Shattered Trust." The series also won first place in the investigative category of the Association of Health Care Journalists' (AHCJ) Awards for Excellence in Health Care Journalism and a 2012 Gerald Loeb Award for excellence in business reporting.

In the paper's investigation, contaminated alcohol wipes emerged as the suspected cul-



**Raquel Rutledge**

prit behind illnesses and deaths in hospitals, including that of 2-year-old Harrison Kothari. The reporters discovered that for a decade a Wisconsin firm had frequently violated federal rules for making sterile products, but the U.S. Food and Drug Administration had taken little action.

"While the FOI effort alone could constitute a first-place award, the reporting was humanized and made intensely relevant when the writers introduced us to the Kothari family's loss," the AHCJ judges said. "Overall, this effort exemplifies best practices in multimedia storytelling, with graphics, compelling photos, and riveting video. This will become a hallmark for how to accomplish public service reporting."



**Pir Zubair Shah**

**Pir Zubair Shah** has been named the 2012-2013 Edward R. Murrow Press Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. The fellowship provides an opportunity for a foreign correspondent or editor to focus on sustained analysis of events abroad. Shah, who has reported for The New York Times in Pakistan, intends to work on what he calls a "politically relevant memoir of growing up in Pakistan." The book will examine the nation's past and present in an effort to predict its future.

*To submit a note about a new job, project or award, please reach us at [nreditor@harvard.edu](mailto:nreditor@harvard.edu) or Nieman Reports, One Francis Ave., Cambridge, MA 02138.*

the city visible. Make it feel like a small town. Stories! ... After that, one story at a time, I began to make sense of this amazing, chaotic place. It was like putting together a giant jigsaw puzzle, one you can never get entirely assembled because pieces keep vanishing and new pieces keep turning up."

Armstrong and fellow reporter Michael J. Berens's series "Methadone and the Politics of Pain" was one of two winners in the investigative reporting category. The prize was given "for their investigation of how a little known governmental body in Washington State moved vulnerable patients from safer pain-control medication to methadone, a cheaper but more dangerous drug, coverage that prompted statewide health warnings."

A week after the series was published in December 2011, the state announced that it would issue an emergency public-health advisory to more than 1,000 pharmacists and about 17,000 licensed health care professionals, warning of the risks associated with taking methadone. In January the state went further, instructing physicians to treat methadone as a drug of last resort.

The series also won the Selden Ring Award and an Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) award.

The reporters announced that they would donate their \$10,000 Pulitzer Prize to provide IRE training to their colleagues at The Seattle Times. "We just wanted to find a way to do something for the paper and something for IRE," Armstrong said. "IRE, more than any other organization you can think of, is the group that people turn to when they want to learn this craft and they want to be inspired. And to me, those two things are equally important."

—JONATHAN SEITZ



Seattle Times reporter Ken Armstrong is congratulated in the newsroom on the day the 2012 Pulitzers were announced. Photo by Bettina Hansen/The Seattle Times.

## 'METHADONE AND THE POLITICS OF PAIN'

*The Seattle Times series by Michael J. Berens and Ken Armstrong, NF '01, that won a 2012 Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting began under the headline: "State Pushes Drug That Saves Money, Costs Lives." Among the chilling facts in the three-part series was that California has more than five times the population of Washington, but fewer methadone deaths. The excerpt below lays out the problem:*

Map the deaths and you see the story. Assign a dot to each person who has died in Washington by accidentally overdosing on methadone, a commonly prescribed drug used to treat chronic pain. Since 2003, there are 2,173 of these dots. That alone is striking, a graphic illustration of an ongoing epidemic.

But it's the clusters that pop out—the concentration of dots in places with lower incomes. Everett, whose residents earn less than the state average, has 99 dots. Bellevue, with more people and more money, has eight. Working-class Port Angeles has 40 dots. Mercer Island, upscale and more populous, has none. For the past eight years Washington has steered people with state-subsidized health care—Medicaid patients, injured work-

ers, and state employees—to methadone, a narcotic with two notable characteristics. The drug is cheap. The drug is unpredictable.

The state highlights the former and downplays the latter, cutting its costs while refusing to own up to the consequences, according to a Seattle Times investigation that includes computerized analysis of death certificates, hospitalization records, and poverty data.

Methadone belongs to a class of narcotic painkillers, called opioids, that includes OxyContin, fentanyl and morphine. Within that group, methadone accounts for less than 10 percent of the drugs prescribed—but more than half of the deaths, The Times found.

Methadone works wonders for some patients, relieving chronic pain from throbbing backs to inflamed joints. But the drug's unique properties make it unforgiving and sometimes lethal.

Most painkillers, such as OxyContin, dissipate from the body within hours. Methadone can linger for days, pooling to a toxic reservoir that depresses the respiratory system. With little warning, patients fall asleep and don't wake up. Doctors call it the silent death.

# WRITING HER HEART OUT

BY MARY SCHMICH

*This column by Mary Schmich, NF '96, who won the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for Commentary, appeared in the Chicago Tribune on August 7, 2011 under the headline "Troubled daughter grows up."*

My sister Gina received her first cellphone as a birthday gift a few days ago.

Until recently, Gina had insisted that a cellphone was too complicated for her, a plausible statement given how many things she finds hard.

For years, she found bathing complicated, so she rarely stepped into a tub or shower. Brushing her teeth felt complicated, so her teeth went bad. Cleaning her room felt like climbing a mountain, so her room devolved into a jungle of junk with a skinny path to the unmade bed. In the final weeks of her old cat's life, she found it too complicated to pick up the cat feces on the carpet, so she neatly laid a paper towel over each set of droppings.

When Gina was little, doctors said she had an IQ of 34, and though they were far wrong, the right diagnosis has never been clear. Mild autism. Borderline personality disorder. The verdict seems to have changed almost as often as her medications.

What is clear is that Gina is different, so she always lived with our mother and our mother lived with the question: What will happen to Gina when I die?

Gina worried too. As Mama grew frail, Gina often climbed in her bed in the middle of the night to weep.

"Honey," my mother would soothe her, "you'll be OK," and my siblings and I, unconvinced, told our mother we'd make sure she was.

In the months leading up to my mother's death, Gina began to change. She calmed down, some. She took pride in making Mother's morning coffee. When one of my brothers or I bathed our mother, Gina held the towels. When we'd lift Mother off the portable commode next to the sofa where she slept, Gina was quick to say, "I'll empty it."



**Chicago Tribune columnist Mary Schmich on the day it was announced that she had won the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for Commentary.** Photo by Nancy Stone/Chicago Tribune/via The Associated Press.

But after Mama died, we braced for Gina's familiar rages. We talked about how to handle her when she burst into shrieks at the memorial.

On the morning of the service, she found me while I washed my face.

"Do you think," she began. "Do you think it would be OK if I don't go? I just. I just think the best way for me to honor Mom today is to take a shower and brush my teeth and go out on the bus."

And that's what she did.

With clean hair, in new brown capris and shin-high socks from Target, she rode the bus from store to store that day, along a route she rides for hours almost every day just for fun. She visited with clerks and pharmacists she considers her best friends, telling them her mom was gone.

"Mom would be proud of me for being independent," she said when she got back.

In the year since, Gina has lived alone, next to one of our brothers. She has given

up soft drinks, after years of a dozen a day. She has gone to the dentist, and her teeth, minus several that had to be pulled, are white again.

She showers.

And now, thanks to two brothers, she is a modern woman with a cellphone. I called her on it last week.

"I'm doing a lot of things I never thought I'd be doing," she said with a big laugh. "Living alone! And a cellphone!"

I try to understand my sister's transformation, to trust that it will last. It's one of the most mysterious and beautiful things I've ever witnessed, though maybe it's no more complex than this:

When your greatest fear comes to pass and you survive, you discover who you really are.

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# And You Thought Your Newsroom Was Innovative

Across the globe, journalists are finding new ways to deliver diverse content to an increasingly mobile audience. **BY ADRIENNE LAFRANCE**

**DOES YOUR DAILY NEWSPAPER OFFER ROMANCE NOVELS ON THE side? How about an interactive evening edition for the iPad?**

As media innovation increasingly targets an on-demand culture, these were among the projects that attracted interest at the 13th International Symposium on Online Journalism (ISOJ), where hundreds of journalists, media executives, and academics gathered in April to exchange research and ideas about disruptions in journalism and global reactions to them.

The conference, hosted by the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas at the University of Texas at Austin, reliably draws a mix of professional news producers and high-level researchers. In addition to the continuing need for innovation and entrepreneurship, many of this year's speakers emphasized the importance of addressing the challenges presented by the rise of mobile devices.

## E-BOOKS

When it comes to finding opportunities for revenue, the attitude increasingly is "why not?" That's the case at the Inquirer Group, one of the largest media companies in the Philippines, where JV Rufino heads the mobile and books group.

His group has tried a number of approaches in its foray into e-books, including publishing collections of what had already appeared in the print newspaper—like a three-part investigative series that examined the failed promises of a fund established to help coconut farmers.

But some of the other genres that the newspaper company went with for its e-books may surprise you. At Easter, it released a collection of prayers that had been published over time on the front page of the community newspaper Inquirer Libre. It also offered a Tagalog romance novel that had been serialized in another Inquirer newspaper.

The Inquirer Group also published books—this time in physical as well as electronic formats—about the Supreme Court's decision-making process.

## EVENING EDITION

Pedro Doria, digital platforms editor of O Globo, a national newspaper based in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, wowed ISOJ with a demonstration of his newspaper's evening-edition iPad app. One feature layered 300-year-old paintings of Brazil on top

of contemporary photographs of the same settings. With the swipe of a finger, users could reveal the modern photo that corresponded to an old painting.

Doria said the paper saw engagement with its tablet app skyrocket after it introduced the edition earlier this year. O Globo found that the amount of time people spent using the app jumped from an average of 26 minutes a day to 77 minutes a day.

One key factor, Doria said, is that the company assembled a team dedicated to building something "not for the Web, not for the newspaper—for the tablet." The mentality at O Globo, he said, is that great journalism should be distributed wherever it fits best, and that no single channel—print, television, tablets, smartphones—should inherently trump another.

## MOBILE NETWORKS

In some cases, people connecting to the Internet for the first time are doing so through mobile devices. That's true in parts of Africa where those who missed the shift to desktop Internet access are now getting connected via phones. This development holds great promise for expanding access to news, but it also carries a risk.

Harry Dugmore, a mobile communication expert who teaches at Rhodes University's School of Journalism and Media Studies in South Africa, is behind a project called Iindaba Ziyafika, which promotes the use of mobile phones for "interactive journalism." It encourages citizens to send information to media outlets via text message and is working to develop methods of distributing news directly to cell phones.

At ISOJ, Dugmore talked about the enormous importance of mobile networks in delivering news to consumers in Africa. Yet these networks have a down side. They tend to be centralized and they're often under government control.

In nations that lack press protections, the architecture of mobile networks raises security risks for those who rely on them. As the global population shifts toward phones and tablets, innovation in the arena of mobile security will be critical to promoting freedom of speech and of the press.

*Adrienne LaFrance is a staff writer for the Nieman Journalism Lab.*

# Out of His Comfort Zone

Buzz Bissinger on ambition, fear of failure, and the genesis of 'Friday Night Lights'

*The 2012 fellowship year ended on a bittersweet note this spring when narrative nonfiction legend **Buzz Bissinger**, NF '86, came home to Lippmann House to talk about his new book, "Father's Day: A Journey Into the Mind and Heart of My Extraordinary Son."*

"The Nieman year was probably the most special year of my life," he told fellows, who moments later would have their closing barbecue. "The intimacy, the stimulation ... people say, 'Why'd you begin to write books?' The reason I really began to write books is that after my Nieman year I felt I owed it to myself to go and do something out of the box, and really, really do

*something different, not simply go back to my paper with the sort of glow of a great year. So that's what I did."*

*Bissinger of course went on to write the iconic "Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream," a narrative about high school football in Texas, and other acclaimed books. "Father's Day," published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, is about a cross-country road trip with one of his twin sons, Zach, a 24-year-old savant.*

*In conversation with curator **Ann Marie Lipinski**, NF '90, who was his editor at the Chicago Tribune, Bissinger talked about books, newspapers and the best possible attitude for an outgoing Nieman. What follows is an edited excerpt:*

I get excited about a lot of ideas and I just let them sit. I get a sort of pulsating feeling in my heart, my chest—this excitement. And if the excitement lingered that meant I was onto something.

I had a passion and a feeling in my heart that ["Friday Night Lights"] was the right book for me to do. And then I got lucky.

As my father says, "You have to be close to be lucky."

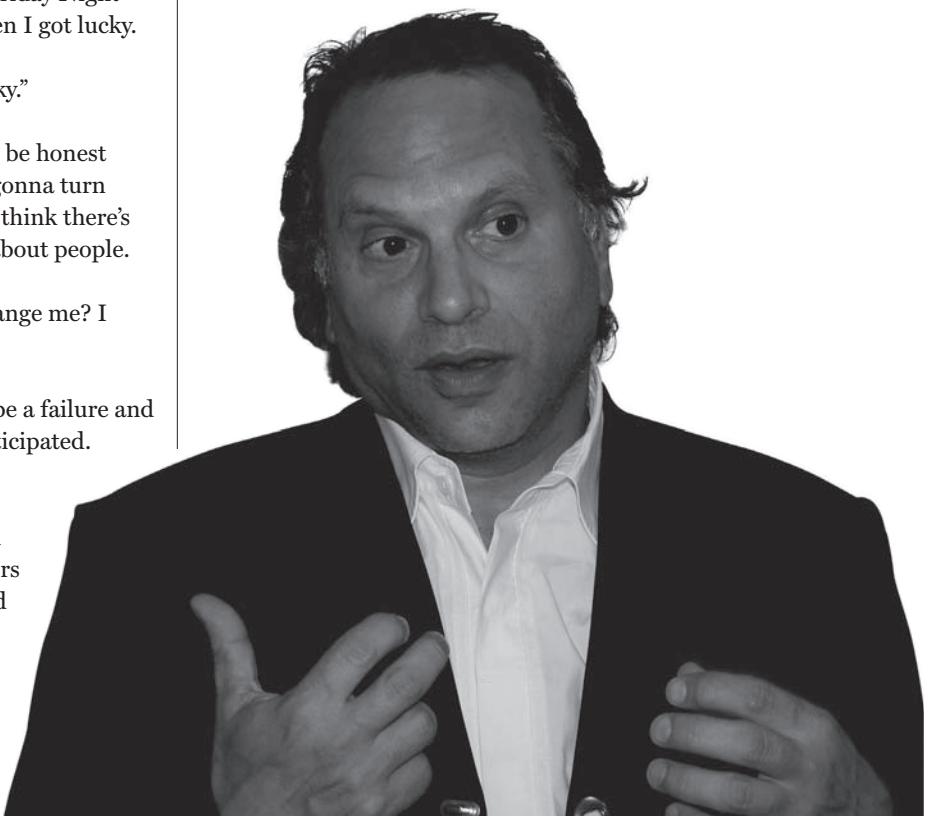
As a journalist, all I ever do is try to get people to be honest about themselves and open up. I felt, well if I'm gonna turn the light on myself I have to be honest, because I think there's purity in honesty. I think that's where you learn about people.

Did ["Father's Day"] change me? Did the trip change me? I don't think it did.

I'm still ambitious. I'm still frantic the book will be a failure and if it's a success it won't be as big a success as I anticipated. But it did make me feel closer to Zach.

What was great about journalism when I entered it, which was right after Watergate, in 1976, papers were hot, papers were making money, but beyond that they all wanted investigative reporting, they all wanted long-form reporting.

After your Nieman year you owe it to yourself to do something different. Even if you're going back to your own paper, do something different. Do a different beat. Write a book. Whatever. Just do something different.



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“The key to reporting is to zig while everyone else zags.”

—BUZZ BISSINGER

Read the transcript of Buzz's visit at [www.niemanstoryboard.org](http://www.niemanstoryboard.org),  
along with an excerpt from “Father’s Day.”

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