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The Newsletter of The National Association of

ScienceWriters

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"ENCHANTING, ORIGINAL, REMARKABLE" DESCRIBE SCIENCE IN SOCIETY WINNERS

by Jon Franklin

Science writers, like other journalists, have had mixed results in figuring how to best use the World Wide Web. Last year, NASW's Science in Society panel chose not to even make an award. But what a difference 12 months make! This year the judges unanimously singled out Fantastic Forests: The Balance Between Nature and People of Madagascar (**www.wbur.org**) as a site that shows how it should be done.

The top award for Web science journalism went to **Daniel Grossman**, correspondent; **Ken George**, project manager; and **Gavin MacCarthy**, Web designer and multimedia editor. Together they lay out their argument that the island of Madagascar may be the place where the struggle to preserve the Earth's diversity of life will be won or lost.

Web magic happens at www.wbur.org/special/madagascar/

Daniel Grossman

The judges called the site a tour-de-force of Web magic. It was "enchanting and original," and "a remarkable example of how effectively the Web can and should be used in conveying information and interpretation."

These and other top science writers in newspaper, magazine, and book journalism will receive their awards during the 2006 NASW meeting, in Baltimore.

The Science in Society awards are often considered the highest honor in science journalism, in part, because winners are chosen by panels of their accomplished peers and, in part, because the awards are not sponsored by any interest group. The only interest involved is NASW's traditional interest in top-notch science journalism.

Expenses and prize money come from the dues of NASW's roughly

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SUBMISSION DEADLINES

Winter *Next Issue* . . **December 1, 2006**
Spring . . . . . **March 1, 2007**
Summer . . . . . **June 1, 2007**
Fall . . . . . **September 1, 2007**

IMAGE COURTESY OF JOE MCCONNELL, DESERT RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Andrew Revkin videotaping Jospeh McConnell, Ph.D., a glaciologist, at the edge of the Greenland ice sheet.

2,500 members. Winners receive $1,000 and a certificate, which will be awarded October 29, 2006 at NASW's annual Science in Society meeting.

First place in the broadcast category went to **Craig Duff** with **Andrew C. Revkin** for *Arctic Rush*, a collaboration of the *New York Times*, the Discovery Times Channel, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Craig Duff

The documentary, based in part on reporting done for a three-part *New York Times* print series "The Big Melt," showed that there is gold up thar, under that melting ice. No, not *gold* gold but the black kind…the melting ice is apparently unsealing what experts predict is a quarter of the world's undiscovered oil.

That was just the tip of the melting iceberg. The ice was not going to stop melting, the documentary showed, no matter how the world responded (or didn't) to global warming. As a result a whole new, navigable sea was appearing at the top of the world. Environmentalists might be alarmed, but for businesses and nations alike this wrinkle on global warming spells opportunity.

PHOTO BY ALEXANDRA WITZE

Andrew C. Revkin

Revkin with the crew's treaded vehicle on Alaska's North Slope.

The documentary team traveled across the land of the midnight sun, from the eroding shores of Russia's far north to the frigid emptiness patrolled by Canada's arctic rangers, and the windblown Scandinavian tundra where Sami reindeer herders live. Everywhere they went nations, oil companies, and entrepreneurs were jostling for a piece of the action.

The Science in Society judges commended the piece's solid on-site reporting and its very thorough

SIS Judging Process

The winners were chosen by a lengthy, three-step winnowing process that included prescreening, semifinal elimination, and the final judging.

This year's final judges were K.C. Cole, University of Southern California; David Perlman, *San Francisco Chronicle*; and Edward O. Wilson, Harvard University.

The members of the initial prescreening committee were Robert Finn (awards co-chair), International Medical News Group; Jon Franklin, University of Maryland, College Park; Mary K. Miller, The Exploratorium; and Carol Ezzell Webb, freelance. The surviving entries were sent forward to the screening committees, who narrowed the search to three entries in each categories.

Members of the newspaper screening committee were Lew Cope, *Minneapolis Star Tribune* (retired); Jon Franklin, University of Maryland, College Park; and Charles Petit, freelance. Members of the magazine screening committee were Toni Feder, *Physics Today*; Sally Maran, *Smithsonian* magazine; and Ben Patrusky, Council for the Advancement of Science Writing. Members of the book screening committee were Deborah Blum, University of Wisconsin, Madison; Victor K. McElheny, freelance; and Joel Shurkin, freelance. The members of the broadcast screening committee were Blaine Baggett, Jet Propulsion Laboratory; Ira Flatow, Samanna Productions; and Ray Villard, Space Telescope Science Institute. The members of the Web screening committee were David Ansley, *British Medical Journal*; Dennis Meredith, freelance; and Mary K. Miller, The Exploratorium.

As always, the Science in Society awards are administered by Diane McGurgan, executive director of NASW.

analysis of multiple sources of information.

The judges also awarded an honorable mention to **Daniel Grossman** for "Preserving the Magic of Madagascar," Living on Earth and Radio Netherlands. This, of course, was the radio version of the first-place Web site winner.

Winner in the book category was **Robin Marantz Henig**, author of *Pandora's Baby: How the First Test-Tube Babies Sparked the Reproductive Revolution* (Houghton Mifflin). Her careful history of in vitro fertilization draws parallels between the controversy over the technique in the 1970s and the current controversies over human cloning and stem-cell research.

The judges cited Henig's book for being a "very absorbing and well-written account of progress in a scientific field that has direct impact on human life."

In the newspaper category, the winner was **Jim Erickson** of the *Rocky Mountain News*. His story, "A Change in the Air," published Dec. 13, 2005, is a vivid account of the affect of climate change on the Colorado Rockies.

The judges were especially impressed with Erickson's nuanced approach to scientific uncertainty, and how global environmental change is likely to have impact on everything from the ski industry to the ecosystem of the Rocky Mountains.

The judges were especially impressed with Erickson's nuanced approach to scientific uncertainty…

The judges also awarded an honorable mention to **Anthony R. Wood, Jr.** of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* for "A Mighty Stream," an account of how the Gulf Stream is being remade.

The magazine award went to **Laurie Garrett**, who specializes in epidemiology, for a piece in *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2005) entitled "The Next Pandemic?" The story analyzes the danger of an avian influenza pandemic, drawing on the lessons of the devastating 1918 flu epidemic and many other sources. The judges described the article as "an excellent primer for an influential audience." ■

Robin Marantz Henig

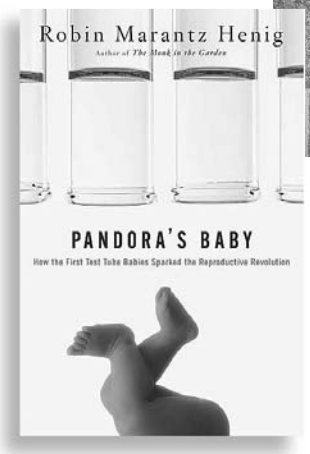
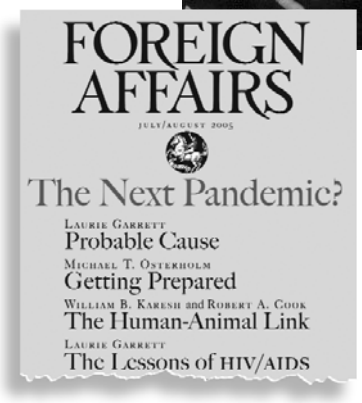


PHOTO COURTESY OF ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

Jim Erickson

Laurie Garrett

PHOTO BY MARK GREENBERG



JEROME GROOPMAN WINS 2006 VICTOR COHN PRIZE

by Cristine Russell and Paul Raeburn

Jerome Groopman, M.D., a staff writer at *The New Yorker* and a professor of medicine at Harvard, has been awarded the 2006 Victor Cohn Prize for Excellence in Medical Reporting for stories that combine sensitivity to patients' concerns with a thoughtful analysis of issues and controversies in medicine.

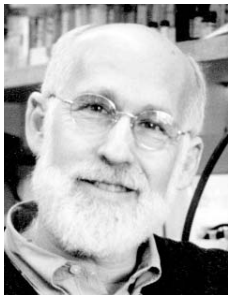


PHOTO BY MICHAL RONNEN SAFDIE

Jerome Groopman, M.D.

The prize, for a body of work published or broadcast within the last five years, was created by the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing (CASW), an organization of journalists and scientists committed to improving the quality of science news reaching the public.

In recent articles, Groopman has critiqued the war on cancer, questioned the rationale behind common spinal surgery, argued for government funding of stem-cell research, and looked at the ethical concerns involved in studying complications in pregnant women.

The $3,000 award will be presented on Oct. 29, 2006, in Baltimore, Md., at an awards dinner held during the council's 44th annual New Horizons in Science briefing for reporters.

Groopman was recognized by the judges for the quiet authority, meticulous reporting, and unconventional thinking that he brought to coverage of a broad range of medical stories. In his nominating letter, *New Yorker* editor David Remnick said, "Groopman's pieces frequently challenge conventional medical wisdom and common perceptions about illness." He noted that Groopman "brings an expert's understanding and a journalist's skepticism to complex and timely medical issues."

Groopman holds the Dina and Raphael Recanati Chair of Medicine at the Harvard Medical School. His research focuses on the basic mechanisms of cancer and AIDS. He has been a staff writer at *The New Yorker* in medicine and biology since 1998 and is the author of three books, including *The Anatomy of Hope*, published in 2003.

This year's entries were judged by Ben Patrusky, CASW's executive director; CASW president Cristine Russell, a freelance writer and fellow at the Harvard's Kennedy School of Government; Robert Lee Hotz, a science writer for the *Los Angeles Times*; and Paul Raeburn, a New York City-based journalist and the New Horizons program director.

This is the seventh presentation of the Cohn Prize for Excellence in Medical Science Reporting. The inaugural award went to Laurie Garrett of *Newsday* and Lawrence K. Altman of the *New York Times*. Subsequent recipients were Jon Palfreman, who has made more than 30 documentaries for public television; Daniel Q. Haney, former medical editor of *The Associated Press*; Shannon Brownlee, a widely published magazine and newspaper journalist; Michelle Trudeau, a reporter for National Public Radio; and Rick Weiss, science writer for the *Washington Post*.

The award honors the late veteran *Washington Post* medical writer Victor Cohn, who distinguished himself for the clarity, honesty, and effectiveness of his reporting during a 50-year career. He was also a co-founder of the CASW. ■

Cristine Russell, a freelance writer and fellow at the Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, is president of CASW.

Paul Raeburn, a New York City-based journalist, is the CASW New Horizons program director.

SURVEY SHOWS ONE-THIRD OF AMERICANS DISMISS EVOLUTION

Surveys by NASW member Jon D. Miller, a Michigan State University researcher, find that about one-third of the American population does not believe in evolution, a figure much higher than those found in similar surveys in European nations and Japan.

For example, in Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, and France, 80 percent or more of adults accepted the concept of evolution, as did 78 percent of Japanese adults.

Only adults in Turkey, a predominantly Muslim nation, were less likely to accept the concept of evolution than American adults.

The findings appeared in the Aug. 11 issue of *Science*.

The data for the 32 European countries were collected by the European Commission using primarily personal interviews. The Japan data were collected in 2001 by personal interview. The U.S. data were collected by Miller using Knowledge Networks, an online national sample of households selected on a probability basis. All of the interview and online data were weighted to reflect actual population distributions and are comparable across countries.

There were several reasons for these inflated U.S. numbers. The most significant factor: The influence of fundamentalist religions.

"The total effect of fundamentalist religious beliefs on attitude toward evolution was nearly twice as

continued on page 7

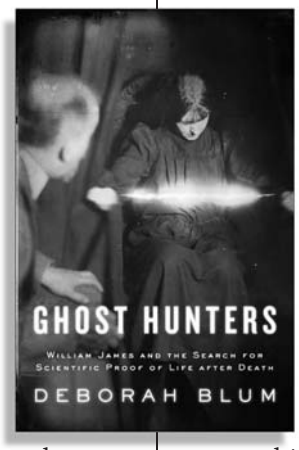
WHEN A SCIENCE WRITER WRITES ABOUT THE SUPERNATURAL

by Deborah Blum

So, let me tell you a ghost story:

A software engineer takes a west coast vacation. One day he decides to explore a wildlife refuge near his hotel. He finds a promising rocky area. He gets down on his hands and knees to inspect for fossils and for the fun of it, because he "loves digging in the dirt." He never finds a fossil but he does find a small treasure of worked stones and a few almost finished arrowheads. He deduces, excitedly, that he's uncovered some part of an old camp, the remnants of an arrowhead making operation.

He decides to take a handful of the stones back home with him as a souvenir of a really good day. About a week later, on a lazy Saturday, he takes a midmorning shower and wanders into his living room still dripping. "And standing not 20 feet from me in my living room was an American Indian." The engineer just freezes in place. He doesn't believe in life after death or ghosts or anything remotely supernatural. And yet, somehow, there's this Indian, standing before him.



While the watcher still hesitates, the Indian raises a hand in farewell and then just dissolves into "how do they say it, into thin air." Hallucination, walking dream, moment of insanity, real ghost? He's been wondering for almost a decade. Friends have proposed, half-jokingly, that he try some ceremony with his stones; see if he can summon the Indian back. It was weird enough once, he tells them. But he still remembers the breath-catching reality of it. He still even occasionally, not very hopefully, asks for new opinions on what happened.

Which is why, when he reads a review of my book *Ghost Hunters*, he writes to ask my view of that long-ago vision. My book is subtitled *William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life After Death*. It occurs in Victorian times, but it is also a story of the best scientific ghost hunt in history, the one time when some of the world's leading scientists—including James, Charles Richet (who won the Nobel for his discovery of anaphylaxis), John Strutt, Lord Rayleigh (who won the Nobel Prize for his work with atmospheric chemistry), Alfred Russel Wallace, co-founder of the theory of evolution, among others—attempted to solve some of the mysteries of the supernatural.

It's because of that scientific framework that the software engineer wonders if I can offer any explanation for his story. I study his e-mail with a now familiar jolt of mixed feelings. Three or so years ago, before I started working on this project, the engineer wouldn't have asked me and, if he had, I wouldn't have answered. The e-mail would have caused me to roll my eyes and dump the correspondence into my computer trash basket. But that was several hundred conversations ago.

Almost since the day that I started this project, people have been telling me their supernatural stories. It turned out that the down-to-earth secretary in my journalism school office had lived in a haunted house. That the Stanford psychologist at a luncheon table was adept at telepathy. That a physicist at a Florida university had fled a ghost-inhabited laboratory. That the wife of a history professor, while driving down the street, sees her recently dead brother several days in a row—staring at her through the window of the car in the next lane or walking down the sidewalk toward her until he, just, vanished into thin air.

When I decided to write about science and the occult, I worried that the subject might be a little tricky for an established, mainstream science writer like myself. I'd spent some 20 years writing across a range of research disciplines without reporting on ghosts or psychics. The supernatural didn't crop up at the science meetings I attended; studies of the supernatural didn't appear in research journals. Every working science writer I knew thought of parapsychology—or psychical research as it was called in the Victorian times of my book—as fringe science at best and pseudoscience at worst and ghost stories as a murky soup of mind tricks, coincidence, and what William James himself called "the will to believe."

My worries were entirely self-focused. I had a reputation as a sane science writer to protect, after all. I had no desire to become known as "Madame Deborah." On the other hand, what's the point to building up credibility if you can't squander some of it on a fascinating project? And I did think that there was a great story to be told. If some of the best scientists in the world, from the late 1800s into the early 20th century, investigated the occult, what did they find?

As we all know, even the most peculiar subject requires a good amount of plodding research. I expected —which turned out to be right—to spend a lot of time in archives and libraries, time reading old books, old newspapers, old journals, 19th century correspondence, hunting down the details of the story I wanted to tell. The letters and diaries reinforced my idea that this was an

Deborah Blum is a freelance writer and professor of journalism at the University of Wisconsin. She is the author of Ghost Hunters: William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life After Death *(The Penguin Press, 2006).*

unusually bright group of researchers and, although I found some of their studies wonderfully comical, I found others completely inexplicable. I was especially intrigued by "the every-day supernatural," the puzzling phenomena reported by working citizens. I became fascinated by crisis apparitions—sensations of another person, by touch, vision, sound—at the time of that person's death. Crisis apparitions are the most common of all supernatural experiences. My Victorian ghost hunters coordinated a survey of tens of thousands of people—and found that they occur about 400 times above chance.

I had no desire to become known as "Madame Deborah."

Once I started listening, crisis apparitions seemed to arise like startled birds around me. As an example, my father-in-law suddenly related to me an event from about 20 years ago, when he woke up at 3 a.m. and heard his cousin calling him. In the course of trying to find his cousin, stumbling out into the dark yard to look for him, he thoroughly startled his own wife. But they were both shocked when later that day, his nephew called to tell him that the cousin had committed suicide at about 3 a.m., almost exactly when my father-in-law had been searching his yard. By itself, it's kind of a creepy story. Line it up with the hundreds of other similar ones that I've heard and read, and it's impossible not to wonder about the consistency of that experience.

Writing a book on the supernatural has not convinced me that the ghosts of long-dead Indians naturally arise from ancient arrowheads or that dead cousins routinely come calling in the night. It has convinced me that such experiences can't always be dismissed out of hand; that what they tell us is more interesting—and less goofy—that I earlier thought. If you're wondering—and a number of book critics have asked—I have not abandoned my faith in natural laws or scientific methodology. But I have gained new appreciation for the questions that traditional science as yet cannot answer—or perhaps, that it refuses to consider. "Science means, first of all, a certain dispassionate method," wrote William James in 1890. "To suppose that it means a certain set of results that one should pin one's faith upon and hug forever is to sadly mistake its genius, and degrades the scientific body to the status of a sect."

Somewhat to my surprise, I've come to wish that science would try once again to address the question in some kind of meaningful way. Instead of worrying quite so much about my reputation, I worry that James was right, when he wrote in that same essay for Scribner's, that there's a risk in outright dismissal. People are "indifferent to science because science is so callously indifferent to their experiences." I've learned myself how much people care about their encounters with the inexplicable, how little they expect from science in telling them whether it's a dream or a demon, whether reality is only what we can measure today or something more.

I find myself harboring a hope that we may someday be able to better define the scope of reality. And I find myself hoping that science, instead of reacting with consistent scorn, will contribute to the answers. Because there might just be natural laws that will explain this, some trick of quantum mechanics, some form of "dark energy," as one physicist proposed to me, that we have yet to explain.

So, of course, I do write back to the software engineer about his phantom Indian. I say that I like his story because it fits so neatly among the others I've heard, the thousands of similar tales that my Victorian ghost hunters gathered, a chain of human experience. I write: "They add up to a convincing pattern, at least so the researchers in my book thought, and I agree. The question is, of course, a pattern representing what?"

He responds that that is, the BIG question: a pattern representing what? He's wondered if we're not smart enough to figure out that answer. I've wondered if we've been too unwilling, or arrogant, to really push for the answer. But both of us agree on one point: the whole subject is so fascinating that we're glad we got a chance to take a look at it. ■

EVOLUTION *continued from page 5*

much in the United States," Miller said, "which indicates that individuals who hold a strong belief in a personal God—and who pray frequently—were significantly less likely to view evolution as probably or definitely true than adults with less conservative religious views."

In addition, the issue of evolution has become highly politicized in the United States, with the Republican Party in particular often using it as a litmus test for possible candidates for office.

"There is no major political party in Europe and Japan that uses opposition to evolution as a part of its political platform," Miller said.

Not surprisingly, Miller and colleagues also found that persons with strong pro-life beliefs were significantly more likely to reject evolution than those with pro-choice views.

Miller said a lack of genetic literacy on the part of many American adults also plays a role. For example, only a third of American adults agree that more than half of human genes are identical to those of mice, and only 38 percent of adult recognize that humans have more than half of their genes in common with chimpanzees. ■

(Source: university news release)

GIVING VOICE TO GRIFFITH OBSERVATORY'S NEW EXHIBITS

by Carolyn Collins Petersen

Late this fall the venerable Griffith Observatory, in Los Angeles, (**www.griffithobservatory.org**) reopens its doors to the public after a nearly five-year, $93 million renovation and expansion project. Along with a transformed planetarium theater (one of the largest in the U.S.) and several public telescopes, the building's public space has more than doubled. A significant part of the project has been the creation of more than 60 new astronomy exhibits, a process with which I have been intimately involved as senior science writer since spring 2005.

For most southern Californians, Griffith Observatory is the shining white building in the Hollywood Hills, a place once referred to by longtime director Edwin C. Krupp as "the hood ornament of Los Angeles." It is familiar to moviegoers as a backdrop in numerous films, most notably the famous James Dean flick *Rebel Without a Cause*. Funding to build the observatory was given to the city by philanthropist Griffith J. Griffith (1850-1919), who wanted to create a "people's observatory," and the institution has been sharing the skies for free since 1935 with anyone who wants to see them.

For me, Griffith Observatory is one of the great iconic institutions that dot the planetarium and science center landscape. I have written dozens of documentary scripts for planetarium and science centers around the world, and my background includes a stint as an astronomy researcher, a master's degree in science journalism, and an extensive science writing experience in books and magazines. In fact, it was a referral from my former boss at *Sky & Telescope* magazine that led to an interview with Friends Of The Observatory (FOTO), the nonprofit group partnered with the City of Los Angeles to manage the observatory's renovation.

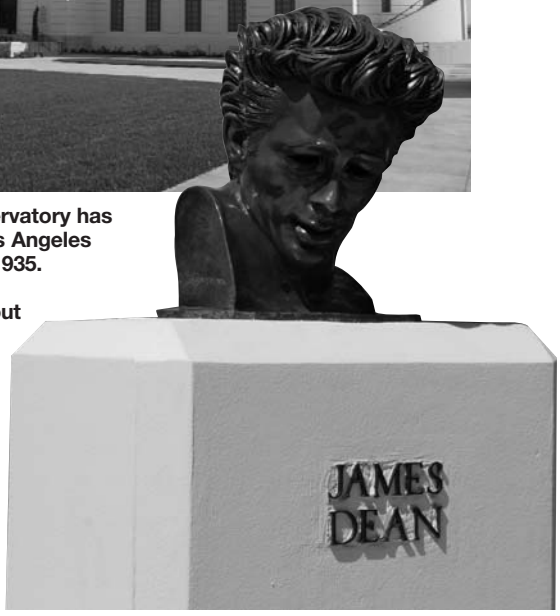
My charge was to create readable and engaging text for the astronomical exhibits and the more than 150 interpretive panels accompanying them. It came with several challenges. First, the material had to be written to fit very precisely designed spaces on each panel. Second, I had to aim the words at a seventh-grade reading level, and they had to fulfill the core precept of Griffith Observatory's mission: turning visitors into observers. Third, the captions on most exhibits are likely to stand in place for a decade or more and appeal to an astonishingly diverse audience. These requirements meant finding creative, clear, and concise ways to explain complex science concepts—a tall order for a writer!

When I joined the project in April 2005, the first order of business, after reading through an extensive print guide to the proposed exhibits, was to come up with a "voice" for the exhibit language. The idea was to use words that could just as easily be spoken to the reader by a friendly, knowledgeable guide to the sky.

How to create a written voice to do that? Just as an actor prepares for a role, I explored what the observatory itself would tell people about the astronomical objects it has shown over the years. By coincidence, I had taken some voice-acting classes, and the preparation techniques learned were invaluable in working with the curatorial team (a diverse group of astronomers and educators) and the FOTO program management to find the right note for what we eventually came to call "the observatory voice."

It took several tries before I nailed the voice to the satisfaction of the curatorial team and my own inner critic. Then, beginning in June 2005, I started cranking out exhibit text. I also supervised and edited the efforts

The Griffith Observatory has been a major Los Angeles landmark since 1935.



The "Rebel Without a Cause" monument sits on the lawn as a tribute to the iconic movie—filmed on location.

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of three colleagues who wrote a subset of a dozen panels for which they had expert knowledge. As of this writing, I'm writing some of the last exhibit panels and working on captioning for several related audio-visual elements.

All of my work has been with the FOTO exhibit program manager and a team of designers at New York City-based C&G Partners, LLC, the firm charged with the observatory's exhibit design. Since I live near Boston, I commuted to temporary digs in New York for two to three days each week. While there, I delivered copy, okayed preliminary layouts, and chiseled words to fit design holes (which often meant shaving words to make a rag look better, for example). I also acted as a science advisor to the designers, backing up our exhibit project scientist (who divide his time between New York, Los Angeles, and Tucson). The rest of the time I worked from my home office, where I wrote material to deliver for the next week's layout process.

The new Zeiss Mark IX Universarium Planetarium Projector in the new Samuel Oschin Planetarium theater.

I also traveled several times to Los Angeles for meetings with the curatorial team and observatory director. The heavy travel phase ended in late 2005, and since then I've worked from home, swapping exhibit files in Microsoft Word and PDF documents with the New York and California team members as we finish the exhibits.

In Retrospect

I've been asked what I know now that I didn't know before I started working on the Griffith exhibits. The answer lies in the nature of the project. The Griffith Observatory exhibition is the type of unique assignment that comes along once or twice in a writer's career, and rarely to writers outside of museums and science centers. I found out that most institutions have exhibit writing done in-house. However, the

Staying Current

One of the questions that any writer has to grapple with is the timeliness of content. I've faced this issue as a documentary script writer, living in fear that the minute I had a documentary narrated something would change to make it out of date.

While I worried about events overtaking exhibit writing, it really didn't happen. Even with changing news, such as the big "Pluto demotion" story, updating its exhibit wasn't an issue. From the beginning, the planet panels were designed to give the visitor a sense of what it would be like to visit a particular world and explore its landscapes. The words flowed from that expectation, rather than making each panel a catalog entry about a solar system object.

The visual design for the Pluto panel was always planned to reflect its uncertain status as a planet. This allowed us to introduce visitors to current ideas about the outer solar system. Indeed, the Pluto panel was named "Pluto and Beyond" with this idea firmly in mind.

I knew that the issue of Pluto's status as a planet was under heavy discussion by groups of astronomers and planetary scientists. I was also aware of the somewhat false controversy generated by adherents on both sides of the "Pluto is/is not a planet" dichotomy and I was determined to avoid that issue since the panels would have to stand for longer than any controversy might last. So, from the beginning I worked to make the Pluto exhibit copy reflective of the exhibit design as well as current trends in planetary astronomy thinking about it and other distant worlds.

Pluto has long been heralded as among the largest worlds in a population of bodies in the outer solar system called the "Kuiper Belt." It stretches out beyond the orbit of Neptune and is really at the frontier of the solar system. The Kuiper Belt is also where a lot of planetary science research is focusing on materials left over from the birth of the solar system. As such, that story was a perfect fit for the exhibit. It put the focus on how much this region is extending our understanding of the outer solar system and the many new worlds we are finding out there.

With Pluto in its proper context then, what I had written was already in the spirit of the discussion about the outer solar system when the International Astronomical Union came out, in August, with its controversial statement that Pluto is not a planet. Griffith's exhibit still focuses on Pluto as a world and what it can tell us about its region of the solar system. Visitors to Griffith's exhibits will always see Pluto as a special place with an interesting history all its own, regardless of what word we ultimately use to describe its planetary status. *CCP*

Griffith exhibit planners felt it was important to bring an outside-the-institution viewpoint to their exhibits. That emphasis on independent design and writing, plus the challenges of writing accessible copy, doing it in constant travel mode, and maintaining the voice for well more than a year, made this not-just-another-writing project. It actually became a very absorbing way of life. The work ultimately called on every skill I have (in writing, acting, research, layout supervision, and science, not to mention a few wheedling tools helpful when dealing with overworked airline employees), and taught me a few new ones. With the reopening of the building I'm confident and proud that my contributions are helping Griffith Observatory extend its voice and fulfill its aim of turning visitors into astronomy observers. ■

SALE OF HOME PARTLY USED AS BUSINESS OFFICE

by Julian Block

Q. Within the next few years, I plan to sell my home. I use one of its rooms only as a home office for my business as a freelance writer. I have been claiming office-at-home deductions for a proportional share of depreciation and other expenses associated with the room's business use, just as I have been writing off all the equipment and furniture stuffed into the office. How do the tax rules work when I sell my home?

A. Prior to 2002, the rules were tougher if you used part of your residence for business purposes and then sold your home. Yes, the law allows an exclusion—an escape from taxes—of profit from sale of a principal residence. The exclusion amount is as much as $250,000 for single persons and married couples who file separate returns and $500,000 for married couples who file joint returns. But those rules authorized an exclusion only for the portion of the profit attributable to the residence part, prohibiting any exclusion for profit on the office part.

In effect, the IRS previously treated this kind of sale as if you had sold *two* pieces of property: one a residence and the other business real estate. Consequently, you had to make separate calculations for the residence and business profits, dividing the selling price, selling expenses, and basis between the residence and business parts.

Prior to 2002, the rules were tougher if you used part of your residence for business purposes and then sold your home.

The IRS scrapped the old rules and replaced them in 2002 with new ones that do away with an allocation between residence and business. The sale is a *single* transaction as long as the home office and the residential part are both within a single dwelling (a "dwelling unit," as agency regulations put it). Accordingly, someone like you can exclude the *entire* profit, despite using part of the home for business.

This break is subject to a "recapture" restriction designed to prevent a double benefit. You forfeit any exclusion for the part of the profit equal to any depreciation deductions allowed or allowable on the home office after May 6, 1997. Instead, you pay taxes on that part. (Allowed or allowable means what you claimed previously or, if you claimed less than you could have claimed, the amount that you could have claimed.) In this regard, the new rules do not differ from what the old rules obliged you to do.

What the IRS accomplishes is to recapture depreciation write-offs that enabled you to lower taxes in presale years. The agency still applies the recapture rules even if you cease to use that room for business reasons and the *entire* home is a principal residence for at least two years out of the five-year period that ends on the sale date.

To qualify for relief from recapture, you have to show by "adequate records or other evidence" (usually, past returns should be sufficient) "that the depreciation deduction allowed was less than the amount allowable." Then the amount that "you cannot exclude is the amount allowed."

To illustrate, assume that your home office qualified you to claim depreciation, but you can show that you never claimed any. Then there is no reduction of the exclusion amount and no recapture.

Recaptured depreciation is taxed at a maximum rate of 25 percent instead of the top rate of 15 percent for long-term capital gains under the rules that apply to a sale in 2006. Report this recaptured amount on Schedule D (Capital Gains and Losses), not Form 4797 (Sale of Business Property). On the plus side, you suffer no recapture of other expenses, such as real estate taxes and mortgage interest. ■

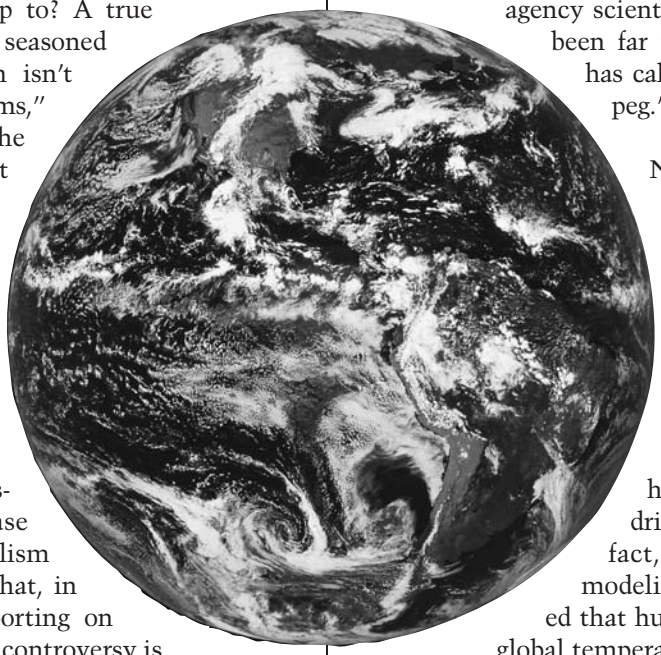
*Julian Block, an attorney in Larchmont, N.Y., has been cited as "a leading tax professional" (*New York Times*) and and "an accomplished writer on taxes" (*Wall Street Journal*). This article is excerpted from his* The Home Seller's Guide To Tax Savings: Simple Ways For Any Seller To Lower Taxes To The Legal Minimum. *For information about his books and to read more articles, go to his Web site,* ***www.julianblocktaxexpert.com****.*

THE NEXT BIG STORM: THE HURRICANE-GLOBAL WARMING CONTROVERSY

by Matthew C. Nisbet and Chris Mooney

The debate over whether and to what extent global warming may be influencing the behavior of the world's hurricanes is scientifically complex, rife with data issues, and superimposed atop a politically charged debate over what, if anything, needs to be done about it. Global warming can never be determined to "cause" a specific storm. However, global warming may affect a great many environmental factors that could, in turn, strengthen hurricanes on average and increase their destructive potential.

What does it all add up to? A true headache even for the most seasoned science reporter. "Journalism isn't used to these kinds of problems," remarks Andrew Revkin of the *New York Times*. "The great strength of the global warming argument lies in the balance of the evidence. The closer you bore into specific impacts like hurricanes, however, the more equivocal the science gets."



In the face of such complexity, it may seem tempting to pronounce that an utter mismatch exists in this case between the culture of journalism and the culture of science—that, in other words, meaningful reporting on the hurricane-global warming controversy is doomed from the start. In fact, that would be going too far.

Our examination of hurricane-global warming coverage across the national trendsetting newspapers and major regional papers found several noteworthy articles accurately detailing the complexity of the science. At the same time, however, we found some reporters—sometimes in the context of the same stellar writing—building their stories around emotional conflict between scientists, a tendency that drives the researchers themselves to become quite angry at the media.

In truth, however, scientists' complaints about journalists stirring up or even exacerbating personal controversies capture only one problem with media coverage of the hurricane-global warming link. A more overarching issue is this: Although journalists have framed the story from three main angles—an emphasis on breaking scientific news (defined by the release of a study at *Science* or *Nature*), an emphasis on conflict between scientists (by playing up personal tensions at conferences), and an emphasis on government accountability (the control of media statements made by agency scientists)—in each case they have been far too trapped by what Revkin has called the "tyranny of the news peg."

Dramatically active North Atlantic hurricane seasons like 2004 and 2005 inevitably trigger speculation about a possible role for global warming. Although many factors affect hurricane strength and the regions in which they occur, scientists have understood since at least the 1950s that hurricanes are fundamentally driven by warm ocean water. In fact, theoretical and computer modeling studies have long suggested that hurricanes would strengthen as global temperatures rose, and that their levels of precipitation would increase.

But the stakes increased considerably in 2005, with the publication of two prominent scientific papers—by MIT's Kerry Emanuel (in *Nature*) and by Peter Webster, of the Georgia Institute of Technology, and his colleagues (in *Science*)—suggesting that this problem wasn't merely one to be considered with an eye to the future; instead, it had already happened. The studies triggered strong critical responses from the hurricane forecasting community, many of whom questioned the reliability of the historical data used to identify trends.

Into this miasma wandered journalists, who had far more than complicated technical issues to grapple with. Within days of Katrina's landfall, a framing contest began to spin the still uncertain science in politically advantageous ways. The Emanuel study came out three weeks before Katrina made landfall; the Webster study eight days before Rita hit. On the one hand, a

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who's who of Democratic leaders including Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and Jimmy Carter cited the recent scientific findings to warn that global warming had contributed to the hurricane problem, and to push for action on greenhouse-gas emissions.

Amidst the political rhetoric and opinion-page debate, many of the science reporters we spoke with for this article believed that in the weeks after Katrina their job was to cover the nature of the science rather than the dramatic framing of policy implications. "It's all kind of predictable," said Mike Toner, of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. "You know which side someone is on, so the only new element in all of this is data, is scientific research."

Most of the coverage by science writers clustered around the September 16 release of the Webster study in *Science*, though some reports about the Emanuel study in *Nature* appeared pre-Katrina. The format for spot news was familiar: Describe the main findings of the study as the lead and middle portion of the article; and then connect the work to any previously published findings. In many cases, articles ended with dissenting comments from scientists, but in shorter articles no counter arguments were included. At least partly addressing this weakness, science writers also wrote technical backgrounders. In these articles, they tried to draw readers away from the immediacy of the events and to interpret the debate over the emerging science.

…[journalists] have been far too trapped by what Revkin has called the "tyranny of the news peg."

During September and October, other news beats also picked up on the global warming and hurricane angle. At the *Washington Post*, for example, stories ran in the local sections about community meetings focused on the potential threat to the Chesapeake Bay area. Across several papers, foreign correspondents covered statements from European officials about the need for immediate U.S. action on global warming, and business writers reported on calls from the insurance industry for a rethinking of coastal development as well as for limits on greenhouse gas emissions.

But by November 2005, as no new studies emerged from the major journals and the political clamor subsided, science reporters and their colleagues at other news beats found themselves without a convenient news peg. As a consequence, with the exception of a handful of articles, the hurricane-climate issue disappeared from the pages of the agenda-setting newspapers, despite its potential significance.

After the destruction of New Orleans by a hurricane and the publication of two major studies suggesting that human activities might have made the average hurricane more intense, news organizations needed to integrate the scientific debate with a serious discussion of the possible policy options, even in the face of ongoing scientific uncertainty. The obvious question should have been: Is cutting down on greenhouse gases a good way of addressing potentially growing hurricane risks? Or, given that a dramatic concentration of human greenhouse gas emissions are already in the atmosphere, committing us to a significant degree of warming already, do we have no choice but to simply adapt to hurricane risks through measures such as stronger levee and seawall construction, better evacuation routes and building codes, restoration of natural barriers, or perhaps restricting insurance for some coastal areas? These themes were scattered across the bulk of articles filed at the different news beats, but because they remained disconnected and fragmented, readers had little hope of connecting the dots and understanding the relevance of the information. Fragmentation also likely dampened a sense of urgency about the problem.

The only place where all of these separate factors came together was on opinion pages. If columnists could put these angles together last fall, why couldn't science writers? In combination with tight deadlines and space, science writers' need to appear objective and cautious in news reporting led to the heavy reliance on the release of a new study to justify filing a story. The perceived scientific uncertainty concerning the relationship between hurricanes and global warming also made science writers cautious about how to judge the newsworthiness of the issue. "The science is not absolutely settled on this question, and that's what keeps this from being a bigger story," said Juliet Eilperin, of the *Washington Post*. She continued: "There should be a concern that if you get too far out ahead of the science, if you hype up the story and the science, then you misled readers." But shouldn't it be possible for journalists to fully describe scientific uncertainty and yet also introduce readers to the kinds of policy considerations that emerge if one takes a precautionary orientation towards the latest research?

With objectivity and caution the guiding norms, in early 2006 some science writers turned to coverage of scientific conferences as their next news peg. In these contexts, outside of the normal vetting process and controlled discourse of the scientific journal article, uncertainty as well as personal conflicts can mushroom.

Valerie Bauerlein's front page, February 2 *Wall Street Journal* article represents both the perceived good and bad of this type of coverage. Reporting on the American Meteorological Association meetings in Atlanta, Bauerlein's article opens with a heavy accent on interpersonal conflict between scientists, a tone

amplified by the Page One headline: "Cold Front: Hurricane Debate Shatters Civility of Weather Science." At the conference, wrote Bauerlein, the reasons for the deadly 2005 hurricane season "were almost too hot to handle." She then turned to criticisms of the Webster study in *Science*, quoting longtime Colorado State University hurricane specialist William Gray as saying that "Judith Curry [one of Webster's co-authors] just doesn't know what she's talking about," and then quoting Curry with the reaction that Gray suffered from "brain fossilization."

Despite the dramatic headline and opening paragraphs, as a backgrounder, the 2,059-word article by Bauerlein went on to provide some of the best insight into the technical dispute. Yet, according to the scientists we talked to, the *Wall Street Journal*'s decision to highlight personal conflict in the opening and headline to Bauerlein's article helped to feed a culture of distrust between experts and journalists. (We contacted Bauerlein to talk to her about the story, but as per *Wall Street Journal* policy, were referred to her editor for comments.)

In addition to personal conflict, journalists found another hook for the hurricane-global warming story, once again tying their coverage to controversy, although this time of an institutional rather than interpersonal nature. They began to cover charges that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) had taken a stance of unjustifiable denial of any hurricane-global warming link, and perhaps even had suppressed scientists within the agency who dissented from this perspective. The "government accountability" angle certainly merited coverage, but once again, it created a formula in which journalists could not pay adequate attention to policy options.

…as no new studies emerged from the major journals and the political clamor subsided…

The origins of how government accountability became newsworthy traces back to official agency reaction immediately following Katrina. In Senate testimony on September 20, National Hurricane Center director Max Mayfield stated that the current period of intense Atlantic hurricane activity was "not enhanced substantially" by global warming. Then, as the 2005 hurricane season drew to a close, NOAA (of which the hurricane center is part) held a press conference where an agency scientist told reporters that warmer ocean temperatures could be attributed solely to natural climate fluctuations and were "not related to greenhouse warming." In fact, however, no such consensus existed.

Still, the simmering controversy at NOAA did not appear in news coverage until after parallel revelations at NASA emerged in early 2006. As first reported by Revkin, in a January 29 article that ran as the lead story in the Sunday edition of the *Times*, NASA's James Hansen claimed that public affairs officials at the agency had tried to block his ability to make public statements about the urgency of addressing climate change. The prominence of the *Times* article generated a flurry of follow-up reports at other major media outlets, while setting in motion a series of events that continued to give the story legs.

…the hurricane-climate issues disappeared from the pages of the agenda-setting newspapers…

Hansen continued to stir the pot in statements made at a conference in New York, where he claimed he knew NOAA scientists who were afraid to speak out about efforts at information control—comments reported by Juliet Eilperin, in a February 11 *Washington Post* article. With pressure building on NOAA, the stage was set for a February 16 article, in the *Wall Street Journal*, by Antonio Regalado and Jim Carlton. The clincher was a Web posting by NOAA administrators in which the agency backed away from the previous year's statements about the existence of a consensus view on hurricanes and global warming. An e-mail followed the same day from the chief administrator to NOAA scientists encouraging them to "speak freely and openly." Regalado and Carlton included in their story the first on-the-record allegations from NOAA scientists regarding agency efforts to control their statements to the media.

In these articles, what had started as a controversy over the emerging science of hurricanes had morphed into a political story about whistle-blowers, with an emphasis on the accountability and transparency of government agencies. The accountably frame brings to light important information while allowing journalists to ply their investigative instincts. Nevertheless, reports on the NOAA allegations once again remained disconnected from the context of the science or any discussion of the policy options, only perpetuating a fragmented narrative about the link between hurricanes and global warming and what to do about it.

In the future, explaining the possible strategies for coping with intense hurricanes even in the face of uncertainty about the ways and extent to which hurricanes might be changing will pose a major challenge for news organizations. Reporters must strive to show the public not only the science in all of its complexity, but

also to open a window on why addressing the problem matters and the choices the nation faces over how to do that. This will require balancing the desire to appear objective against the need for precautionary and forward-looking coverage—coverage that helps set the agenda for how we think about the possible effects of global warming. It will also require getting beyond the tyranny of relying on major new studies, personality conflicts, or overt political conflict as the primary means of defining what counts as newsworthy.

Responsibility for effectively covering the emerging policy questions should not rest solely with journalists. A recent report by the British Royal Society recommends that science journals, when releasing an important new study, also simultaneously publish a separate, peer-reviewed article that outlines the policy relevance of the work. When covering the release of future scientific studies, if journalists could simultaneously turn to authoritative, peer-reviewed assertions about what might be done in the policy realm, it might make it easier for them to move beyond a "just the science" approach.

Responsibility for effectively covering the emerging policy questions should not rest solely with journalists.

Indeed, in late July a group of 10 climate scientists and hurricane experts issued a joint statement calling attention to the immediate policy implications of the hurricane problem. The group observed that although they currently disagree over whether hurricanes have measurably intensified due to global warming, that ongoing scientific debate should not distract from addressing the immediate problem of population growth and development in coastal regions. The statement was covered by Revkin, on July 25, as part of his paper's weekly *Science Times* section, but was not picked up by other major media outlets.

In sum, science writers continue to worry about how the issue of hurricanes and global warming is being used politically, and many also assert that caution demands the publication of more research before they can move ahead on the story. These are all legitimate concerns, and the pressure exerted by both editors and media watchdogs to not "take sides" is real. Yet given their specialization and experience, science writers are perhaps uniquely qualified to shield themselves from allegations of bias, and to interpret the policy implications of the subjects they're covering for readers. As long as they ground their stories in thorough, fair-minded reporting and do not stray into unsupported speculation or unnecessary argumentation, these journalists could provide a true public service. Such changes in how journalists and scientists negotiate what counts as news could mean that, when the next big storm hits, we have a chance to bring the policy questions into sharper focus. Otherwise, the public will be left with an all-too-familiar repeating narrative of conflict and doubt. ■

The full version of this article is available at ***www.csicop.org/scienceandmedia/hurricanes****.*

WHY EDITORS MUST DARE TO BE DUMB

by K.C. Cole

Like many beat reporters, science journalists spend a great deal of time educating their editors about the peculiarities of their fields, and by and large those exchanges are not only illuminating but ultimately lead to better stories. But there's one place we hit a wall.

No, it's not that editors aren't smart enough to understand science. Actually, it's the opposite: they're too accustomed to being smart, and thus can't deal with the fact that they don't understand it. And because they're uncomfortable feeling confused, readers are left in the dark about a universe of research that eludes easy explanation.

I was discussing this problem recently with a colleague who had been beating his head against the wall for months trying to get a story about a mysterious "dark force" in cosmology past editors at *The New Yorker*: "They kept saying they didn't understand it!" he complained. Well, of course they didn't understand it. Nobody understands it. That's precisely what makes it so interesting.

In science, feeling confused is essential to progress. An unwillingness to feel lost, in fact, can stop creativity dead in its tracks. A mathematician once told me he thought this was the reason young mathematicians make the big discoveries. Math can be hard, he said, even for the biggest brains around. Mathematicians may spend hours just trying to figure out a line of equations. All the while, they feel dumb and inadequate. Then one day, these young mathematicians become established, become professors, acquire secretaries and offices. They don't want to feel stupid anymore. And they stop doing great work.

A former science writer for the Los Angeles Times*, K.C. Cole teaches science journalism at the University of Southern California. Her latest book is* Mind Over Matter: Conversations with the Cosmos.

In a way, you can't really blame either scientists or editors for backing off. Stumbling around in the dark can be dangerous. "By its very nature, the edge of knowledge is at the same time the edge of ignorance," is how one cosmologist put it. "Many who have visited it have been cut and bloodied by the experience."

All the more reason it's so refreshing that readers of science stories don't seem to mind a bit of confusion—even when the subject matter is difficult or counterintuitive: ten-dimensional space, for example, or fossils for foot-long "bugs" that crawled out of the sea 480 million years ago. Every science writer I know has had the experience of readers coming up to them and saying: "Gee, that was fascinating. I didn't understand it, but I've been thinking about it all day." Readers often inquire about books where they can read further on a subject, or even primary sources.

Editors, however, seem to absorb difficulty differently. If they don't understand something, they often think it can't be right—or that it's not worth writing about. Either the writers aren't being clear (which, of course, may be the case), or the scientists don't know what they're talking about (in some cases, a given).

Why the difference? My theory is that editors of newspapers and other major periodicals are not just ordinary folk. They tend to be very accomplished people. They're used to being the smartest guys in the room. So science makes them squirm. And because they can't bear to feel dumb, science coverage suffers.

So what is it about science that makes them uneasy? Surely it is more than the obvious fact that it's hard to understand things that aren't (yet) understood. In science it can be just as hard to understand what is understood. Relativity and quantum mechanics have been around for nearly a century, yet they remain confusing in some sense even to those who understand these theories well. We know they're correct because they've been tested so thoroughly in so many ways. But they still don't make *sense*.

In science, feeling confused is essential to progress.

On the other hand, why should they? Humans evolved to procreate, eat, and avoid getting eaten. The fact that we have learned to understand what atoms are all about or what the universe was back to a nanosecond after its birth is literally unbelievable. But the universe doesn't care what we can or cannot believe. It doesn't speak our language, so there's no reason it should "make sense."

That's why science depends on evidence.

In fact, this is one place in which the intelligent-design people have a point. It is unfathomable that complex life forms evolved in tiny increments over time through random mutation and natural selection—that our ancestors are bacteria and our siblings are fish.

We know it happened nonetheless because we have multiple lines of evidence: the fossil record, DNA, morphology, embryology, and so on. (We even see evolution in action right in front of our noses. If we couldn't, we wouldn't be worrying about bird flu.) But to pretend evolution "makes sense" in some ordinary way does our readers a disservice (and too often leads journalists to neglect to mention the evidence at all).

Editors, however, seem to absorb difficulty differently. If they don't understand something, they often think it can't be right…

Science muddles our minds in many other ways as well. For example, much of it deals with essentially invisible things. I once had a hard time convincing an editor of the reality of curved space-time (Einstein's extremely well-tested explanation of gravity) because, she said, "You can't see it." Actually, you can see it—among other ways, through gravitational "lenses" that bend light just the way the lens in a camera does.

Science is also innately uncertain. What makes science strong is that these uncertainties are out there in the open, spelled out and quantified.

It's essential to know not only what scientists know, but also what they know they don't know. This is an unfamiliar concept to editors used to dealing with politics or sports.

And then there's the fact that data are always to a certain extent ambiguous. Translating the behavior of retroviruses or superconductors into words takes a lot of interpreting—even for scientists. There may be more than one correct answer. Or no description in lay language may be able to do justice to the subject at hand.

For all these reasons and more, good science journalists know that if they're not dealing with subject matter that makes them dizzy, they're probably not doing their jobs.

The best editors understand all this. As for the rest, perhaps Weird Al said it best: sometimes you just need to "dare to be stupid." ■

"Weird Science: Why editors must dare to be dumb," Columbia Journalism Review, *July/August 2006.*

TALL STORIES AND THE TWISTED HISTORY OF SCIENCE

by Henry Nicholls

I was saddened to hear of the death last month of Harriet, the giant tortoise that Charles Darwin reputedly collected from the Galapagos Islands in 1835. She died in the Australia Zoo, in Beerwah, Queensland, where she spent the last two decades of her allegedly very long life. Don't get me wrong, I wasn't mourning the tortoise. What distressed me was that the news of her death would give the world's media another opportunity to meddle with the history of science.

I have just published a book about another famous Galapagos giant tortoise called Lonesome George, and I was intrigued by the tale of his compatriot. It was pretty clear to me that the story encouraged by Harriet's custodians, that she was the oldest known living animal and one of four giant tortoises that lived alongside Darwin on HMS Beagle, was bogus. Yet this legend has clung to her since the mid-1990s like a stubborn moss to her shell. Surely, I thought, the truth must be exposed. But then it got me thinking: perhaps there's another way of looking at these things.

How did the Harriet story arise? The historical record is rather like the fossil record: open to interpretation and often with vast gaps, such as lost letters and missing manuscripts, that leave plenty of room for fiction. A flood in 1893 is said to have washed away records at the Brisbane Botanic Gardens that could have shed light on how the tortoise came to be in the institution's small zoo, where she lived until 1952. In the absence of this crucial information, her relationship with the world's most celebrated naturalist flourished.

There have been plenty of opportunities to debunk it. In the late 1990s, tests on Harriet's DNA revealed that she came from Santa Cruz, a Galapagos island that was not on the Beagle's itinerary, casting considerable doubt on the idea that she shared a cabin with Darwin. A couple of years later micro-palaeontologist and science writer Paul Chambers questioned the popular suggestion that, after the Beagle had returned to England, Harriet hitched a ride to Australia with John Wickham, a shipmate of Darwin (*New Scientist*, 11 September 2004).

Harriet's owners were unperturbed by all this. Last year, they celebrated the reptile's "175th" birthday. The world's media lapped it up. Yes, she probably was old, even by the standards of giant tortoises, but settling on 175 was little more than an ill-informed guess, based mainly on the far-fetched assumption that she was on the Beagle. Some have argued that 175 years is a fair estimate of her age because her DNA suggests she predates a large cull of Santa Cruz tortoises that took place in the mid-19th century, but geneticists say it would take extensive sampling to verify this. Such doubts over Harriet's age and provenance are not what the hundreds of thousands of people that have flocked to see her will want to hear, but I fear they have been misled.

This saga made me think of other stories in the history of science that are but shadows of the truth. There are plenty: Newton getting intellectual inspiration from a falling apple, Galileo toying with cannonballs in Pisa, Archimedes leaping from his bath. Once established they are hard to dislodge, even when real evidence comes to light that exposes them for the fables they are.

For example, more than 20 years ago, research by Frank Sulloway, a historian of science now at the University of California, Berkeley, should have shattered the popular belief that Darwin experienced some kind of eureka moment in the Galapagos—that he entered the archipelago a God-fearing creationist and left it praising the power of natural selection. Sulloway showed that it was not until the Beagle was well on its way to Tahiti, some eight months after leaving the Galapagos, that Darwin made his first explicit reference to the theory that would make his name. Yet no one but historians of science acknowledge this.

There's more. The widely held belief that Darwin's inspiration for natural selection came from studying the Galapagos finches—an idea perpetuated by their nickname "Darwin's finches"—is way short of the mark. The great man made almost no mention of these iconic birds in his voluminous writings. Indeed, University of Cambridge historian of science John van Wyhe has shown that the first time the words "Darwin" and "finches" appeared alongside each other in print was in 1935, exactly a century after the Beagle steered its course through the Galapagos. Will the myth ever be written out of the textbooks? Unlikely.

Inaccurate histories of science are all around us. This leaves me with what may sound like a surprising question: does it matter? They persist because people are so keen to believe them, and because they fill a need for narrative. I doubt whether Harriet and Darwin will ever be separated, since the alternative version is not half as exciting and would have no chance of living on in the popular consciousness. Indeed, such myths might actually be something to encourage. Communicating a version of history is better than communicating no history at all. ■

Henry Nicholls is editor of the history of science magazine Endeavour *and author of* Lonesome George *(Macmillan, 2006).*

"Tall stories and the twisted history of science," New Scientist*, 15 July 2006.*

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

by Robert Lee Hotz

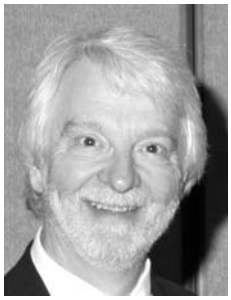


PHOTO COURTESY OF SIGMA XI

What good is sitting alone in your room?

Come hear the music play …Come to the science cabaret.

Yes, you heard that right.

One highlight of this year's annual NASW Science in Society meeting in Baltimore is an evening cabaret of comedy and song drawn from the improbable annals of science, organized by NASW board member Robin Marantz Henig.

I know what you're thinking. Science is hardly a laughing matter. What could be the humor in Poincare's Conjecture, protein folding, or dark matter?

This year, we can evaluate the empirical evidence at the Tremont Grand, in Baltimore, where Robin, who clearly missed her calling as a nightclub impresario, has organized for those attending the annual workshops a cabaret to lighten our more earnest considerations of craft and the future of science writing. Not since Harvard mathematician Tom Lehrer first put the periodic table of the elements to music has so much laboratory talent been devoted to chortles.

Joining us at Robin's invitation will be Jonathan Coulton, the contributing troubadour for *Popular Science* magazine; singing Darwinian Richard Milner, from the American Museum of Natural History; and stand-up science comic Brian Malow, who has developed his own theories about the conservation of mass. Malow may be the only person that the National Academy of Sciences has in common with The Punchline. He has performed for both.

As I understand it, NASW's cabaret was inspired by the provocative evenings of science and art staged regularly, since 2001, at the Cornelia Street Café, in Greenwich Village, by Nobel laureate Roald Hoffmann. Hoffmann, a Cornell University researcher, who won the 1981 Nobel Prize for his work on applied theoretical chemistry, likes to say he became a scientist because he never had the courage to be an artist. Nonetheless, Hoffmann is an accomplished poet and playwright.

That first session in Greenwich Village—organized in collaboration with science writer K.C. Cole—comprised an evening of readings and talks about "the concept of nothing, the void, the Buddhist idea of emptiness, in art, science, physics." In the years since, scientific luminaries ranging from Oliver Sacks to Benoit Mandelbrot have taken the cafe's basement stage to hold forth with musicians, sculptors and other artists on themes such as "Blind Will and Selfish DNA," "Coltrane, Einstein, and Cosmology," "The Two-Fisted Singing Universe," and "Heavy Metal." During a recent evening devoted to "Good Vibrations," Iowa State University chemical engineering professor Kenneth Jolls demonstrated the physics of the vibraphone.

If nothing else, Hoffmann and his friends have more than proved that science is a performance art. More importantly, they also remind us as writers and broadcasters in just how many different ways that the story of science can be told.

Should anyone doubt it, they need only hum along as Rob Morsberger at Nova's ScienceNow celebrates in song a recent advance in solving Euclid's 2,300-year-old Twin Prime Conjecture, concerning how prime numbers may or may not pair into infinity. That performance is preserved on Nova's Web site.

Our 2006 Science in Society meeting is devoted to the story of science. The energetic volunteers of the workshop committee have organized seminars that range from the basics—sessions on how to cover a scientific meeting, how best to become an effective public information officer, and how to navigate new media—to the most advanced—sessions on evolving ideas of intellectual property, and the secrets of clinical trials. As an added attraction, those attending the NASW meeting can, at no cost, also take advantage of the New Horizons in Science briefings, organized by the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing, with Johns Hopkins University. Researchers are expected to present new findings in particle physics, epigenomics, climate change, archeology, neuroscience, environmental health, and the sociology of political advertising.

All told, hundreds of NASW members are expected to attend the 2006 Science in Society meeting—a very healthy crowd—yet I know that represents only a fraction of our more than 2,500 dues-paying members. Not everyone can spare the time; not everyone can afford the expense. To help, we have long offered travel grants to defray travel expenses. For the second year, we are also offering mentor grants to students at six university science writing programs around the country, in the hope that through NASW they may gain a professional foothold in our craft.

In our era, science so often wears the Greek mask of tragedy, grimacing perhaps at the prospect of nuclear terrorism or biowarfare. By organizing this year's science cabaret, Robin thankfully reminds us how science can also reveal the upturned grin of comedy.

Science can happily play the fool, tongue fixed firmly in cheek. ■

Robert Lee Hotz is a science writer for the Los Angeles Times. *He can be reached at leehotz@earthlink.net.*

CYBERBEAT

by Russell Clemings

Perhaps you've heard about a new plan from the U.S. Postal Service for dealing with the plague of junk mail. From now on, instead of delivering everything to your mailbox and letting you sort through it, your letter carrier will do the sorting for you and throw away the junk mail. Mail from addresses that the post office suspects of sending junk mail will go straight to the trash can. You'll never see it. You won't be told what's been thrown out. You won't be able to retrieve it. And if you want to opt out and go back to sorting your own mail—well, sorry, it just can't be done.

If you think that sounds like a terrible idea, don't panic. I made it all up. As far as I know, the post office isn't even considering anything as stupid as that. Not so for some of the biggest Internet service providers. NASW members who use AOL or Verizon for their e-mail have recently experienced something quite similar to that fictional post office scenario. Both providers, at various times, have placed nasw.org on a "blacklist" of sites suspected of sending junk e-mail, or spam. Neither notified us. We found out only when members complained to us about undelivered mail. Both providers eventually took nasw.org off their blacklists, but it didn't happen right away. In the meantime, members missed messages—including mail from NASW listservs and mail sent to nasw.org forwarding addresses.

When companies like AOL or Verizon charge money to accept mail, only to throw some of it away without telling you, customers have every right to complain. We can only hope that enough will do so to force changes in those policies. In the meantime, if you're stuck with an Internet provider who throws away your mail, you might consider using a different e-mail service. Free Web-based services like Gmail and Yahoo will screen out your junk mail too, but instead of throwing it away, they place it in a special folder, where you can retrieve it later if needed. Have your nasw.org mail forwarded to one of those accounts and you should never miss messages again.

NASW-talk:

Indianapolis freelancer Dan Ferber rolled out a grenade Aug. 11, asking what's the difference between public information officers and public relations representatives: "OK, maybe I'm a little slow, but I've never really understood this distinction," he wrote. "PIOs for universities and government agencies, like PR people for companies, represent an organization. They try to make that organization look good by working with reporters to get good press coverage."

Two leading PIOs—A'ndrea Elyse Messer from Penn State and Earle Holland of Ohio State—quickly rose to the challenge. Messer took issue with Ferber's characterization of her role, saying that "the majority of the time I don't represent the university. I am simply writing about research that is published or presented by someone at the university … And I choose my stories because they are news, not because someone tells me to."

Holland said that PR people and PIOs get their work in different ways. With PR people, he said, "clients come to an agency and ask them to do specific tasks or solve specific problems, but in the end, the client controls what the results are through their approval or disapproval. In my shop, there is no client in that sense. We decide what needs covering and simply do it."

What followed was a debate on two points. First, are PIOs from those two institutions typical of the breed? Second, what motivates their employers? West Virginia freelancer John Gever suggested that self-interest may answer the second question: "My point is merely that your bosses allow and encourage this because they believe it will redound to the benefit of the institution. They may also believe it's the institution's responsibility, in some cases even a legal mandate. But I submit that the image factor is by far the most important."

University of North Carolina science writer James Hathaway, though, credited many leading PIOs with being effective advocates of openness in their institutions. "Earle is actually being too modest here," he wrote. "What OSU and Penn State and a number of other large public universities in the country (and some of the big privates too, though there are different dynamics there, I guess) have done is to adopt a culture of public responsibility and transparency."

Last word went to Daryl McGrath of the National Cancer Institute, who rose to the defense of the PR side: "I maintain that, in general, the jobs of PIO and PR are substantively similar, that is, sharing information about the organization/institution you represent with the news media in hopes that the media will share that information with their audiences. Both jobs require good news judgment, journalistic writing skills, and good relationships with the journalists you work with."

NASW-freelance:

A nuts-and-bolts question—how to find archives of published scientific papers—drew multiple responses in a thread that began Aug. 2. "Is there a Web site where

Russell Clemings is NASW's cybrarian and a reporter for the Fresno Bee. *Drop him a note at cybrarian@nasw.org or rclemings@gmail.com.*

I can search on keywords, perhaps authors, and find listings of at least titles, authors, and abstracts of relevant scientific papers from a wide range of journals? A Google for scientific literature?" wrote San Francisco writer/editor Henry Bortman.

Arizona science writer/consultant Paul Muhlrad quickly offered an intuitive choice:
- Google Scholar (**scholar.google.com**).

Other suggestions followed:
- Biology: PubMed (**www.pubmed.gov**).
- Physical sciences: The University of Michigan's Shapiro Science Library (**www.lib.umich.edu/science/astro/**)
- Astronomy, physics, geology and related topics: The Smithsonian/NASA Astrophysics Data System Abstract Service (**adsabs.harvard.edu/ads_abstracts.html**)
- Preprints in various fields: Cornell University's e-Print archive (**www.arxiv.org**)
- Older papers: The Science Citation Index, available at any good university science library. ■

THE FREE LANCE

by Emma Hitt

How to survive— or even enjoy— a medical conference


EMMA HITT © 2006

Medical conferences—large ones—take place at least weekly in the United States and around the world. For medical writers, conferences are an excellent way to meet other writers, to learn more about a particular field, and to satiate a desire to travel. If you're willing to foot the bill for your travel and expenses or the conference is local, offering to cover a conference can also be an excellent way to get new clients.

The downside of conferences is that they often require 12-hour or longer days, and they can be physically exhausting. The emotional experience can range from exhilarating to mind numbing. Occasionally, "disasters" can happen—your equipment may stop working midstream—your travel plans may go wrong in fantastic and unimaginable ways. The possibilities are endless. I don't mean to sound negative—just be forewarned!

Emma Hitt is a freelance writer located near Atlanta, Ga. Emma specializes in writing about oncology and other medical topics. Contact her at emma@emmasciencewriter.com.

All that said, attending a conference, perhaps in a foreign city halfway across the globe, mingling with other writers and scientists, and learning about cutting-edge research is an amazing experience—one of the privileges of being a freelance medical writer.

Here are some pointers about how to select and cover a medical conference.

Selecting a Conference

An extensive and searchable list of conferences is available at **www.docguide.com/crc.nsf/web-bySpec?OpenForm**. You can also sign up to newswise.com and access medical conference info at **newswise.com/resources/calendars/med/**. It is best to select a conference that is large and is likely to generate a number of news stories. It should be taking place in about three to six months from the date you approach a given editor about covering it.

Estimating the size, and hence newsworthiness, of a conference is sometimes difficult, but general clues can be found in the conference's subject, venue, and location. A one-day laparoscopy training course at a small hotel resort in Hawaii in July is a doctor's subsidized vacation opportunity, not a conference. By contrast, the annual meeting of XXX Medical Society, held in one of the big convention centers in Atlanta, Chicago, or Los Angeles in the spring or fall is likely to be a conference of interest to a variety of editors.

Once you have selected a conference, you can approach various editors at publications that might be interested in coverage from it. Whom you contact will depend on the topic. For example the American Diabetes Association annual meeting would be of interest to several diabetes- and obesity-related publications, as well as CME companies (producers of continuing education materials for physicians) dealing in that therapeutic area. You just have to be creative in finding conferences and potential publications. Types of conference coverage may include news pieces, symposium reports, monographs, feature articles. It will vary depending on what publication you approach.

Your chances of getting a positive response will increase if you offer to cover your own travel and expenses. The first conferences might not be money-making ventures, but they are an effective way to get your foot in the door of medical writing. If you do a good job, the editor will likely ask you the next time round rather than you having to ask them.

Making Travel Plans

When making travel plans, I first go to the conference Web site to see when the scientific content of the conference starts. The first day typically consists of educational courses, and you don't need to be there for that. Here is the order in which I make travel arrangements

and some useful travel Web sites.

1. **Book flight** (Orbitz.com, Mobissimo.com, Sidestep.com). Try to get a direct flight that arrives about 24 hours before your first presentation and leaves on the evening of your last presentation.
2. **Book room** (Hotwire.com, Orbitz.com). I try to find a hotel on Hotwire that has 4.5 to 5 stars (4 stars on Hotwire is about 3 stars by realistic standards). The location of the hotel with respect to the conference venue is not that important to me (see next point), although some people prefer to stay very close to the conference center.
3. **Rent car** (Orbitz.com). Renting a car may seem like an unnecessary expense, but at least for conferences in the United States, I find that having a car is essential for comfort and safety. Renting a car often works out economically as well when you take into account the money on taxis and wasted time. Having wheels also enhances your choice of hotel location. A car probably isn't necessary or desirable in foreign cities, however.

Registering as Press

You will next need to register as press. Note: Press registration is always free, but it is sometimes not easy. Also, a strange dichotomy exists in which as a member of the press, you are treated either as a dignitary or as a bottom-feeder who can attend the conference only under the most stringent of criteria. You never know which it's going to be.

Instructions to register should be under the "media" or "press" tab on the conference Web site. You usually need to fill out a one-page form and fax it or e-mail it. Sometimes you need an assignment letter from the outlet you're working for and/or credentials such as your NASW or AMWA (American Medical Writers Association) membership card.

Preparing to Travel

When it comes to packing, keep comfort and emotional well being foremost in your mind (don't forget your toddler's picture, for example). In terms of equipment, you will need a reliable tape or digital recorder, a digital camera, a laptop, headphones, spare batteries, and a briefcase with wheels in which to roll it all on the ground.

Picking Presentations

When faced with a book containing 20,000 abstracts, it's a bit of a daunting task. Here are some approaches:

- Talk to the media relations people in the press office and ask them what they think the big deal presentations are. This may or may not be a productive approach depending on the knowledge level of the person you are dealing with.
- Browse the press releases, which may be available on the conference Web site (although not all press releases will cover presentations that are important to your publication).
- Look at the press conference schedule. The presentations being covered in the press conferences are generally important to the larger news outlets.
- Look through the titles of the big oral sessions (oral presentations are generally more important and contain more mature data than poster presentations) and scour them for words such as "randomized" and "phase III." Any trial that contains hundreds of patients is often newsworthy, especially if it has the word "final results" in the abstract. By contrast, animal studies, and phase I trials are generally not newsworthy.

Covering the Conference

OK, so your editor has told you which of your pitches they want you to cover—or perhaps they have told you from the outset what they want covered. Now the real fun begins. I start by making myself a master table of all the presentations I am to attend, including title, time, location, lead researcher's name, and three or four questions that I plan on asking the researcher to get a quote (derived from scanning the abstract briefly). I then print the table out so I can refer to it constantly—the press room should have a printer.

For an individual news piece, before the presentation even takes place, you can rewrite the abstract (taking excessive care not to copy, i.e., plagiarize, any one sentence directly and to change the flow of information) and do any necessary background research on the topic. That way, all you will have to do is add a couple of quotes, recheck the piece, and you'll be done. An important caveat is that often the numbers in the abstract represent older data that are updated during the actual presentation. It is extremely important to check for this disparity and replace the older data with the newer data in your piece. Also, watch out for newsworthy info makes its way into the presentation that isn't in the abstract.

Try to get into the conference hall about 10 minutes before the scheduled presentation. On rare occasions, speakers go out of turn and will give their presentation before you show up. This practice should be made illegal. Basically, there's nothing you can do in this situation except try to get all the information you need when you find the speaker later on—*if* you find the speaker later on—or tell your editor that you've found a much more interesting presentation to cover (importantly, one that has yet to take place).

Right before the actual presentation I try to get a seat in the front few rows. Using a camera is important for the sake of accuracy, but photography is often expressly "banned." If you plan to use a camera, do so discreetly and without the flash. This point cannot be overemphasized. But, don't sweat it—a journalist's use of a camera in a conference does not carry a prison sen-

tence in most countries.

Immediately when the presenter is finished with his presentation, you need to watch him like a hawk to see where he sits down. Your best chance of catching him for a quote is now—he may leave before the end of the symposium. Discreetly crouch down by the presenter's side as soon as they sit down and ask him if he has a moment to talk with you (they will usually agree to this —to which your corresponding emotion is *Thank God*).

When you have the researcher outside, first thank them, and then ask them a couple of questions designed to generate a quote for your article. Some open-ended, generic questions—designed to get them talking—include:

- Were you surprised at all by your findings—why, why not?
- What are the next steps with regard to this research?
- What are the clinical implications of your findings?
- How do these findings add to what is already known about this research area?

As the researcher responds to your questions, stick your recorder close to their mouth and glance at it often to make sure it is working. Try not to ask anything that you could easily look up or that you should already know. If you are new to interviewing, try not to seem too nervous. Often, researchers are equally shy of the press, so focus on putting them at ease. Nod your head a lot and look them in the eye. Be friendly, courteous, and appreciative.

With the right lineup of clients, conferences can be highly profitable. They can also take you to some exotic places. Frequently, though, I find myself dispelling friends' and family members' notions that I am taking a vacation when I'm off covering a conference. In reality, you may not have much time to see the outside of the conference center or your hotel room. And knowing that Paris or some equally appealing locale is right outside the walls when you have to work—well, it's torture. Do plan to go out at least one evening though. A trip to the top of the Eiffel tower and dinner in a picturesque sidewalk café can really take the edge off…no need to mention it to anyone back home though. ■

NOTE: For a full-length version of this article, go to ***www.emmasciencewriter.com****. Also see Ed Susman's highly informative "Rules of the Road for Conference Road Warriors,"* ***www.nasw.org/mem-maint/sciwrtr/fall01tex/rules.htm****.*

At a surprise retirement/60th birthday party, Dennis Meredith admires a collage of some of his many stories.

PIO FORUM

by David Jarmul

In the realm of science communications—and in particular, research communications at American universities—it would be difficult to single out a person who has done more, or who has been more instrumental in the maturing of this field, than Duke University's own Dennis Meredith.

Those aren't my words. They're from Ohio State's Earle Holland, who says that "along with a few of his colleagues, Dennis guided this profession through its childhood, its adolescence, and now its coming of age. The fact that, where there were once a mere handful of science communicators and there are now hundreds spread across academe, is directly related to the model that Dennis represents to his peers."

Earle was among several NASW members and others who wrote letters to mark Dennis's recent retirement from Duke. Their words did more than offer a personal tribute; they also offered guidelines for other science PIOs who might aspire to be as successful and consequential as Dennis has been over the years.

For instance, Sandy Blakeslee of the *New York Times* highlighted one key attribute of a successful PIO in her letter to Dennis: namely an awareness of reporters' interests and limited time.

"Science writers are bombarded by information, most of which can be deleted or tossed in the waste basket," she wrote. "The detritus is staggering. Despite all efforts to convince them otherwise, many public information officers still send 'news' of promotions, campus 'news,' badly written press releases or story ideas on subjects completely uninteresting to you. Some are pests. They send regular reminders that they sent you something months ago and wonder if you are 'still interested.' Some are vaguely shmoozey, just 'checking in' to see what kinds of stories you might be looking for.

David Jarmul is associate vice president for news and communications at Duke University.

"Then there is Dennis Meredith. Every science writer I know will *always* take a phone call from Dennis or answer an e-mail immediately. Why? You know he has a good story or, more likely, a great story that is right up your alley. You know he won't waste your time. You know he's done his homework. You know he's prepared his sources to talk to you."

Earle made a similar point, saying what "set Dennis apart from others, to my mind, was the obvious respect he received from almost all of the key science reporters at the national level. While he clearly was a 'PR person' for his institution, reporters didn't see that as an albatross…as they sometimes do. No, the respect Dennis—and his institutions—received was a direct reflection of reporters' view of his professionalism. Not only did they know that he had the kind of 'nose-for-news' that they often found lacking in some of the PR folks they might meet, they also knew that he had an understanding of the science, the research involved, and how it fit into a larger context."

The letters made clear that an ability to "smell a good story" is only a starting point. Successful science PIOs also must be able to write clearly about the information they're promoting to reporters or the public.

"Dennis is in part responsible for the impact our work has had in the scientific and lay public," wrote Erich Jarvis, a Duke neurobiologist whose work has been profiled by NOVA, *New York Times*, and others. "He has a great knack for presenting complicated scientific findings and ideas in simple terms, and doing so without losing accuracy or meaning. He also had a fascination with the brain, which made it a pleasure to speak with him about the science we do."

Jim Keeley of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute made a similar point in his letter to Dennis. "One thing I've learned in this business of science writing is you don't trust your homeobox genes, transcription factors, or zinc fingers to just anyone," he wrote. "It takes a special kind of person to understand incredibly complex journal articles, negotiate the minefield of egos in big-time science, ask the incisive questions, and nail the story."

The very best science PIOs write not only with clarity, but with grace. Cathy Clabby, science reporter for *The News and Observer*, in Raleigh, N.C., describes Dennis's work as "poetry among the flood of self-promotion," citing a *Duke Magazine* article in which he describes a biologist's underwater explorations "surrounded by 'ghosts,' swirls of ethereal entities whose glimmerings tell him he is not alone in the see-forever cerulean waters. He is enveloped in a clear-as-glass menagerie of creatures that make the open ocean their home. They survive because they have evolved to be nearly invisible."

Another attribute of Dennis's success has been his consistent ability to look beyond his own pitches and stories—indeed, beyond his own institution—to the needs of scientists and journalists more broadly.

As Jeff Nesbit, head of NSF's Office of Legislative and Public Affairs, wrote to Dennis, "Some people watch. Some people wait. Some people offer opinions, but don't do much. And some people know when to watch, when to wait, when to opine—and when to 'just do it.' You belong to that last rarified group. The folks who create buzzwords call that 'situational awareness.' I call it leadership.

"No matter how busy, you made time to see the big picture and then help to modify it. As NSF sought to create a sustained collaboration with its PIOs, you were a key adviser and supporter—always thinking about what's best for not only your own institution, but for hundreds of others, too. Over years of collaboration, you worked closely with NSF's public affairs office, led discussion groups, helped build consensus, gave your own thoughtful suggestions, and sometimes gave us 'hardcopy' too."

Ginger Pinholster, director of the AAAS Office of Public Programs, described Dennis as "a great friend to EurekAlert!, and thus to science communications more broadly. His ideas, advice, and overall support have been an important part of EurekAlert!'s success." In her letter to Dennis, Ginger recounted the "legend" by which he and Ginger's predecessor, Nan Broadbent, "were in a pub or some similar establishment when they conceived of EurekAlert! The rest, as they say, is history."

Dennis has contributed to the science journalism community in these and many other ways, such as by recently helping develop outreach systems for new electronic journals. Less visible has been his mentoring of young science writers from Duke and elsewhere.

"Writing about science for Dennis Meredith was the best work-study job on the planet," wrote one of those students, Margaret Harris, who is now pursuing a doctorate in physics, in England. "Under his guidance, I interviewed a kaleidoscope of talented researchers in a wide variety of fields, from violin-playing lobsters (yes, really), and carbon nanotubes, to devices for people with disabilities.

"The articles, however, were only half the fun. The other half was working with Dennis. Dennis is a top-notch editor, with a keen ear for a catchy phrase or well-worded explanation and a sharp sense of the 'wow factor.' He is also kind, generous, and patient—particularly when that same keen ear alerts him to a particularly clunky piece of prose. … He is welcome to spill red ink over my writing anytime."

I feel the same way. Five years ago, when I was considering leaving the Washington, D.C., area to move to Duke, one of the main attractions was to work alongside Dennis, with whom I'd interacted on various

science writing projects over the years. He proved to be even more talented (and yes, quirkier and funnier) than I'd imagined.

Dennis and his wife, Joni, recently left Durham for their mountain home in western North Carolina, where he will freelance—and undoubtedly continue serving science writers everywhere. To quote Jim Keeley, "In the backwoods of Purlear, North Carolina, they might refer to such a person as a 'woodchipper of science writing.' We're relieved to hear that although he will officially retire from Duke, the old woodchipper will still roar to life on occasion to shred grand science ideas into sound-bite sized pieces understandable to the masses."

When you next see Dennis at an NASW meeting, humor him as he shows off his latest goofy toy or slide show of his granddaughter. He's earned your attention. As Jeff Nesbit wrote him, "Some people fade into retirement without leaving much of a wake. Not you. You leave behind a large wake: a better environment that will forever bear your personal imprint." ■

NEWS FROM AFAR

by Jim Cornell

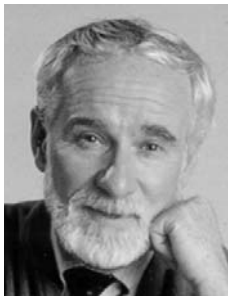


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

The second trial of the ambitious experiment to create a European version of an AAAS-style science meeting was conducted in Munich, Germany, July 15-19; and by almost any standard, the test was successful.

Despite sweltering heat and some post-World Cup burnout, Euroscience Open Forum 2006 attracted more than 2,100 participants from 58 countries who enthusiastically signed up for seminars, lectures, and panel discussions on topics such as aging, ethics in brain research, the state of science journalism, the marketing of pharmaceuticals, and, appropriately enough, terrorism and security—all with a decidedly Euro slant. In addition, a host of public outreach activities, held in conjunction with the 2006 Wissenschaftssommer (Summer Science Week), were staged in the Marienhof (City Center) and the historic Altes Rathaus (Old City Hall).

For those who attended the first ESOF meeting in Stockholm in 2004, the improvements in Munich were striking. Among them was the venue itself—the Forum of the Deutsches Museum—with its logical layout, large lecture halls, spacious (and lively) exhibit area, and, best of all, in-house beer garden!

But most important were the changes in the basic program, with a markedly higher percentage of sessions devoted to science than to those allotted to eye-glazing science policy. And, if Stockholm sometimes seemed dominated by gray-bearded guys in dark suits, Munich was much more lively—and certainly more diverse—with noticeable increases in the number of younger scientists and attendees, both male and female.

Like the general meeting itself, improvements in media relations at Munich represented a quantum leap over the fledgling (and sometimes fumbling) efforts in Stockholm. Specifically, the layout of the rooms for press registration, papers, briefings, computers, and interviews was excellent. And the Reporters' Lounge was almost sinfully over-stocked with an ever-changing array of refreshments throughout the day. (A personal favorite: butter-filled pretzels!)

The availability of papers—and their orderly accessibility in the Papers Room—was a welcome change. Computers seemed to operate almost glitch-free—a rare occurrence at meetings these days. And, the press briefings, moderated by Germany-born/Arizona-based NASW member Daniel Stolte, offered a good mix of topics and speakers. Stolte kept both speakers and press on target and on time. This was a highly professional operation, clearly based on the model of the AAAS, which, not entirely coincidentally, ran the meeting's "virtual newsroom" through EurekAlert!

Indeed, with 485 of the 2,100 attendees, or nearly 25 percent, registered as "press," and with a half-dozen program sessions devoted to journalism-related topics, it was easy to feel ESOF2006 had been staged solely for the benefit of journalists.

Among those 485 very well served scribblers were several associated with NASW. As it had done in Stockholm, the Robert Bosch Foundation (one of ESOF2006's sponsors, incidentally) brought a dozen North American journalists to Munich to attend the meeting as Bosch Fellows, in cooperation with the International Science Writers Association (ISWA). They included NASW members Gretchen Cuda, Christine Dell'Amore, Todd Neff, Andreas von Bubnoff, and Sarah Webb.

As noted in an earlier newsletter, ISWA co-sponsored a session called "Quality Science Journalism: Is a New Style Needed?" featuring presentations by NASW members Rick Borchelt, Wilson da Silva, and myself. You can see the papers and power-point presentations at ESOF2006's Web site at **www.esof2006.org/downloads.php4?ID=25**.

The next Euroscience Open Forum will be held July, 18-22, 2008, in Barcelona, Spain. NASW member Ingrid Wuenning of Germany, who is also responsible

Jim Cornell is president of the International Science Writers Association. Send items of interest—international programs, conferences, events, etc.—to cornelljc@earthlink.net.

for the Bosch Fellows program, will serve as co-chair. More information can be found at: **www.esof2008.org**.

The World Federation of Science Journalists, which launched its flagship "Project Peer-to-Peer Development and Support of Science Journalism in the Developing World " (P2P) at the AAAS meeting in St. Louis, used the occasion of ESOF2006 to hold a training session for those experienced journalists who will be serving as mentors for aspiring sci-tech specialists from the Third World.

The P2P mentoring program aims to improve the quality and the quantity of science reporting in the developing world, and to improve recognition in the newsroom that science is a critically important part of the news mix. For two years, the mentors will partner 60 writers already covering science and technology in Africa and the Middle East whether as freelancers, full-time journalists, or, in some cases, scientists who write regularly for the media.

The P2P's three regional coordinators (for Anglophone and Francophone Africa and the Middle East) and 16 mentors (the majority from Africa and the Middle East themselves, with others from Canada, France, Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States) met in Munich July 10-14, for training led by Kathryn O'Hara, chair in science journalism at Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada), in collaboration with Technisch-Literarische Gesellschaft (TELI) and the Wissenschafts-Pressekonferenz (WPK), the two German science journalist associations.

The WFSJ mentoring scheme is funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DfID), and that has helped the WFSJ change from what was once only a "virtual" organization into a brick-and-mortar institution with its own real office and staff. For more information visit **www.wfsj.org**.

Among the more visible manifestations of the WFSJ—even during its previously vague and virtual state—have been its periodic international conferences. It is now less than a year until the next one: "Science in Melbourne 2007," the fifth World Conference of Science Journalists.

The organizers are nearing their original goals: To bring 300-400 people to WCSJ2007 and to raise $1.1 million (Australian), part of which would help support the participation of 50 science journalists from the developing world.

The meeting is scheduled for April 16-20, 2007, in Melbourne, of course, and there is still time not only to register but to make suggestions for program topics and plenary speakers. The program committee hopes to start each day with a "blockbuster" plenary session that can set a broad theme for the sessions, workshops, and panel discussions to follow.

For more information on the developing program, or to submit your own ideas for topics and sessions, visit **www.ScienceInMelbourne2007.org**. ■

Upcoming international meetings

Nov. 4-6, 2006. ***The Fifth Asia-Pacific Symposium on Press and Scientific and Social Progress (APSP-5)***, Beijing, China. The theme for this year's session is "Scientific Culture and Innovative Development." For more information visit **www.csstj.org.cn** or e-mail the organizing committee at kJ@csstj.org.cn.

Nov. 15-17, 2006. ***The Second International Media & Environment Summit***, Kuching, Malaysian Borneo. For more information and press registration visit **www.newsworldnature.com**.

Nov. 26-28, 2006. ***Challenges and Vision in Science Communication***, New Delhi, India. Sponsored by the Indian National Centre for Science Communicators (NCSC), the conference is open to professionals (and students) in education, research, and science communication and will focus on, among other topics, challenges in science education, science and society interaction, and S&T policies. For more information, contact Suhas B. Naik-Satam, NCSC general secretary, at mavipa @vsnl.com.

Dec, 4-7, 2006. (The first) ***African Science Communication Conference***, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, hosted by the South African Agency for Science & Technology Advancement (SAASTA). Information, including abstracts and registration details, available at **www.saasta.ac.za/ascc/**.

April 16-20, 2007. ***The 5th World Conference of Science Journalists*** (WCSJ2007), Melbourne, Australia. For more information visit **www.ScienceInMelbourne2007.org**.

Nov. 8-10, 2007. ***The 3rd World Science Forum***, Budapest, Hungary. Hosted by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the theme will be "Investing in Knowledge: Investing in the Future." Information is available at **www.sciforum.hu**.

OUR GANG

by Jeff Grabmeier

PHOTO BY JO McNULTY, OHIO STATE

Making Her Debut. D.C.-based **Kate Arnold Travis** left her post as news editor of the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* to be the associate editor at *Science News* magazine. The *Science News* gig is a half-time position, so she'll be taking on freelance editing and writing projects in the other half of her time. You can find Kate at ktravis@nasw.org.

Following a New Script. Replacing Kate at *JNCI* is **Andrea Widener**, who comes to the job after spending a year and a half as a Peace Corps health volunteer in The Gambia. Before that, Andrea was the science reporter at the *Contra Costa Times* for five years, and also served on the board of the Northern California Science Writers Association for a few years. Talk to Andrea at andrealwidener@yahoo.com.

A Leading Lady. **Beryl Lieff Benderly** of Washington, D.C. has been one busy freelancer. In the award department, an article she wrote for *Science* called "Not Your Father's Postdoc" was a finalist for the 2006 "Iris Molotsky Award for Coverage in Higher Education," given by the American Association of University Professors. And in other news, she is starting an ongoing part-time gig with ReligionLink.org, a Web site run by the nonpartisan and nondenominational Religion Newswriters Foundation. She will be ReligionLink's new science correspondent and will be covering issues at the intersection of science and religion. Beryl notes that she found out about this job through the always-helpful NASW jobs list. Beryl is at Blbink@aol.com.

Bravo! Another award-winning freelancer is Buffalo-based **Jennifer Wettlaufer**. *Buffalo Spree* magazine, where Jennifer is a regular contributor, won the Silver medal in one the most important categories of the 2006 City and Regional Magazine Awards: General Excellence. In the issues entered, she wrote on fossil hunting at the Penn Dixie site in Hamburg, N.Y., disc golf, and the International Spy Museum (from intelligence she gathered in Washington, D.C. at NASW's spring 2005 meeting!) Send your congratulations to buffalolink@earthlink.net.

Rave Review. **Richard Hill**, science writer for *The Oregonian*, in Portland, recently won first place in the general reporting category in the 13-state "Best of the West" journalism competition. He won for a package of five stories that ran in a special science section about the 25th anniversary of the eruption of Mount St. Helens. The competition judge said "All five stories by Richard Hill were just full of 'Hey Martha' wowers." Great praise, indeed! Congratulate Richard at richardhill@news.oregonian.com.

Costume Change. A newcomer to Washington, D.C. this year is **Shawna Williams**, who has taken a job as science writer/managing editor at the Genetics and Public Policy Center, which is part of Johns Hopkins University. She comes to the center from the Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research, in Ithaca, N.Y., where she had been a public affairs officer for almost two years. Shawna's new e-mail address is swill114@jhuadig.admin.jhu.edu.

Won't Be Typecast. Some science writers just can't stick to the facts—and that's not always a bad thing! Take freelancer **Jim Kling**, of Bellingham, Wash., who is a new member of the Science Fiction Writers of America. Jim joined SFWA after publishing three short stories in *Nature*'s Futures section, including one in the July 6 issue in which Jim's "semiautonomous" appliances rise up against him! (You just can't trust those toasters….) Jim is at jkling@nasw.org.

Changing Roles. After 11 years at the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, **Maryn McKenna** is moving on. At the *AJC*, Maryn primarily worked as the CDC/public health reporter, where she wrote the only book on the CDC's rapid-reaction disease-detective force, *Beating Back the Devil: On The Front Lines with the Disease Detectives of the Epidemic Intelligence Service* (Free Press). In the fall, she will be an East-West Center Health Journalism Fellow. From September 2006 to August 2007, she will be a Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation Media Fellow, studying emergency departments in crisis. Catch up with Maryn at mmckenna@mindspring.com.

Entering A New Stage Door. **Becky Oskin**, formerly a writer and senior PR specialist in the Duke University Medical Center News Office, has moved a few miles down the road to Chapel Hill. Her new position is Health and Science Editor in the University of North Carolina News Services office. Becky will edit press releases and serve as a roving editor, digging up stories and trends from the university's many health and science schools. You can reach Becky at boskin@nasw.org.

Education Encore. NASWers seem to always be looking to educate themselves, and **Jennifer Huergo** is no exception. Jennifer, a science writer for the Office of Naval Research, in Arlington, Va. recently received a Master of Arts in Writing (with a science/medical specialization) from Johns Hopkins University, through the Advanced Academic Programs in D.C. Congratulate Jennifer at Jhuergo@nasw.org.

Jeff Grabmeier is assistant director of research communications at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. Send news about your life to Jeff at Grabmeier@nasw.org.

Held Over for Another Degree. Another highly educated NASW member is **A.R. Hogan**, who earned a master's degree in journalism at the University of Maryland-College Park, in May 2005, researching and writing an 80,000-word thesis called *Televising the Space Age: A Descriptive Chronology of CBS News Special Coverage of Space Exploration From 1957-2003*. He immediately segued into the journalism Ph.D. program, also at UMCP, where he is now researching and writing a dissertation that will provide a narrative history of U.S. network television and radio coverage of space exploration since the 1950s. He welcomes any suggestions or materials at arhogan1610@yahoo.com.

Curtain Call. After 28 years at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, **Ann Mauzy** is taking a much-deserved retirement. Ann spent 14 years in film and video and 14 years in technical writing and editing at the laboratory. Her retirement date is Sept. 28.

Break A Leg, Kim! If you've been paying close attention so far, you've noticed that there's a lot going on with NASW members in the D.C. area. Another example is **Kim Krieger**, who is no longer a full-time freelancer. Kim has accepted a job as an energy reporter for Argus Media, covering emissions markets and policy from Capitol Hill. Her stories on (nonenergy related) physics and technology will keep appearing in other venues from time to time. Kim can be found at Kim.Krieger@nasw.org.

In the Spotlight. **Barbara Ross**, lead writer for the South Florida Water Management District, won first place in the "Writer's Portfolio" category of the National Association of Government Communicators (NAGC) 2005 annual awards. Barbara's winning portfolio included articles on Everglades research, hurricane-related flood control, and impacts of a river restoration project. Congratulate Barbara at bwross@sfwmd.gov.

Appearing on Two Stages. **Andrew Porterfield** of San Juan Capistrano, Calif. reports that is he setting aside part of his freelance business to take a position as a copywriter and editor at Invitrogen Corp. in Carlsbad. You can chat with Andrew at amporterfield@cox.net.

Box Office Smash. Gilbert, Ariz.-based **Mignon Fogarty** continues to be a star in the podcast world. Her "Absolute Science" podcast was nominated for "Best Science & Technology Podcast" in the Podcast Awards, and for "Best Science Podcast" in the Podcast Peer Awards, and was ranked #5 out of all podcasts in the Mega Cast Wars at the Podcast Pickle (a big podcasting directory). It is also regularly in the top 25 of all Science & Medicine podcasts at iTunes. Also, she has just launched another podcast, called "Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing," that has rocketed to the iTunes top 40 after just six episodes. Learn more at Mignon's Web site **www.welltopia.com** or by e-mailing her at mignon@welltopia.com.

A Radio Drama. British freelancer **David Bradley** answered the call from Caltech posted on the NASW job list earlier this year asking for news ideas for "The Loh Down on Science," a program on 89.3 KPCC FM. He has now had about a half-dozen items scripted and broadcast, covering subjects such as corrosion prevention. Each item gets podcast as well as radio broadcast, and he blogs them as they appear on his site **www.sciencebase.com**. He is at david.bradley@sciencebase.com. ■

EVERT CLARK/ SETH PAYNE AWARD ANNOUNCED

Nicholas Zamiska, a staff writer at the *Wall Street Journal*, is winner of the 2005-06 Evert Clark/Seth Payne Award, an annual prize for young science journalists. Zamiska received the award and its $1,000 prize for four stories: "Inside U.N. Agency, Flu Data Sparked a Tense Debate," "How Academic Flap Hurt World Effort on Chinese Bird Flu." "Scientist Rebels Against WHO Over Bird Flu" and "After Fighting a Cattle Disease, Vet Turns to Birds."

The panel of judges cited Zamiska for "sustained in-depth reporting, compelling storytelling, and a rare look at the often uneasy relationship between scientific facts and policy decisions."

The judges also awarded an honorable mention to NASW member Erika Check for four stories in *Nature*: "Patchwork People," "Screen Test," "Roots of Recovery," and "The Tiger's Retreat." Check's articles showed "enterprising reporting" and an impressive command of the molecular biology beat, the judges said.

Both will be honored at the NASW/CASW awards ceremony on Sunday, Oct. 29, 2006 in Baltimore, Md.

The Clark/Payne Award encourages young science writers by recognizing outstanding reporting in all fields of science. It is given each year in memory of Ev Clark a veteran journalist at *BusinessWeek*, *New York Times*, and *Newsweek*; and Seth Payne, his long-time friend and colleague at *BusinessWeek*, and a founder of the award. It is designed to carry on the work of both men, who offered friendship and advice to generations of young journalists. This marks the 16th year of the award.

The award will be presented by the Evert Clark Fund and NASW, in conjunction with the National Press Foundation. All entrants must be age 30 or younger. For more information visit **www.mindspring.com/~us009848/**. ■

2006 RENNIE TAYLOR/ ALTON BLAKESLEE FELLOWS ANNOUNCED

The Council for the Advancement of Science Writing (CASW) has announced the recipients of this year's Rennie Taylor/Alton Blakeslee Graduate Studies Fellowships. The fellowships provide up to $2,000 for the academic year to both professional journalists and students of outstanding ability who have been accepted into graduate-level programs in science writing. The recipients are:

Gretchen L. Cuda entering the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, following graduate studies in pharmacology at Boston University.

Alla Katsnelson, a graduate of Cornell University who earned a Ph.D. from Oxford University (UK) in Physiology/Neuroscience. Enrolled in the science communications program at UC Santa Cruz.

Benjamin J. Leach, a journalism graduate of The College of New Jersey in Journalism, who will continue his studies at Columbia University.

Julia C. Mead, a graduate of Columbia University and now a working journalist, she'll enter the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism.

Support for the fellowships derives largely from a special bequest made to CASW by the American Tentative Society (ATS), which for three decades played an important role in promoting public understanding of science and the scientific process. The fellowships honor the memory of Rennie Taylor, a science writer for *The Associated Press*, whose estate provided funds for the establishment of ATS, and Alton Blakeslee, AP science editor, who served as long-time president of ATS. Fellowship application and eligibility requirements can be found at **www.casw.org**. ■

SIGMA XI CREATES AFFILIATES PROGRAM FOR THE SOCIETY

Sigma Xi, the international honor society of research scientists and engineers, has created a new category of participation in an effort to promote greater public involvement in issues at the intersection of science and society.

The Sigma Xi Affiliate Program is open to all those who support the society's mission, but who are not otherwise qualified for membership through election based on noteworthy research achievements. Affiliates include science and math teachers, technicians, clinicians, science writers, students and science enthusiasts.

"One of our primary goals is to increase public engagement in science and technology, and the new Sigma Xi Affiliate classification is designed to help achieve this," said Sigma Xi Executive Director Patrick D. Sculley. "It also allows us to recognize those who make important contributions to research, both inside and outside the laboratory."

Founded in 1886, Sigma Xi is a nonprofit society with about 65,000 members in 100 countries. The society awards grants to hundreds of student researchers each year and also promotes hands-on science and engineering education, ethical research practices, and networking among scientists and engineers around the globe.

For more information about the Sigma Xi Affiliate Program, including dues, benefits, and an online application, visit **www.sigmaxi.org**. ■

(Source: news release)

NASW GRADUATE FELLOWSHIPS

NASW is pleased to announce the recipients of this year's fellowships for graduate journalism students:

Pat Barry, Boston University
Curtis Brainard, Columbia University
Ciara Curtin, NYU
Adam Hinterthuer, University of Wisconsin
Christine Hoekenga, MIT
Julie Ann Liebach, NYU

Each fellowship is in the amount of $800. Support of this education initiative comes from Author Coalition funding. ■

CASW TRAVEL FELLOWSHIPS

Ten CASW Traveling Fellowships, of up to $1,000 each, were awarded to help science writers defray the costs of attending the 2006 New Horizons in Science briefing, in Baltimore, October 28-31. The fellowships assist journalists from publications and broadcast outlets that do not routinely cover major science meetings or employ a full-time science writer. CASW also assigns a veteran science writer to each fellow to serve as a mentor during the program.

The 2006 CASW Traveling Fellows are: **Catherine Clabby**, *News & Observer*, Durham, NC; **Boonsri Dickinson**, *Daily Camera*, Boulder, Colo.; **Alison Drain**, freelance, St. Louis, Mo.; **Jennifer Evans**, U of Wisconsin; **E-Ching Lee**, North Carolina Sea Grant; **Kirsten Sanford**, This Week in Science; **Nicole Strickera**, *Post Register*, Idaho Falls; **Mweia Uqoezwa**, of Raleigh NC; and **Laura M. Reckford**, *Falmouth Enterprise*.

The New Horizons Traveling Fellowship Program is underwritten by a grant from the Burroughs Wellcome Fund. ■

NASW TRAVEL FELLOWSHIPS

Nine science writers have been chosen to receive NASW Traveling Fellowships to the NASW Workshop, Oct. 27-28 in Baltimore.

Maury Breecher, freelance, Corpus Christi, Tex.
Elizabeth Dougherty, freelance, Northboro, Mass.
Jennie Dusheck, freelance, Santa Cruz, Calif.
Kevin Fitzgerald, freelance, South Windsor, Conn.
Sally James, freelance editor/writer, Seattle, Wash.
Melissa Phillips, freelance, Seattle, Wash.
Leslie Sabbagh, contributing editor, *Popular Mechanics*
Mark Schrope, freelance, Melbourne, Fla.
Graeme Stemp-Morlock, freelance, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

The fellowships, totaling $7,200, were made possible through Authors Coalition funds received by NASW. ■

NOTICES FROM DIANE

by Diane McGurgan

Election


PHOTO BY ANDREW SKOLNICK

The ballots for the NASW board election are in the mail. Candidate statements can be found in the summer issue of the newsletter. **Deadline for ballot return is Dec. 1**. Only those ballots received by the deadline will be counted. No exceptions. Exercise your right to vote and elect the board you wish to represent you.

Dues renewal

Watch the mail for the end-of-the-year mailing containing your dues renewal. **Renewal deadline is March 15, 2007**. This is a generous amount of time to get your payment in. Be aware that payments received after the deadline create an administrative headache, bog down the system, and impact Diane's ability to respond in a timely manner to member requests for other services. So be considerate, be professional, and renew your membership ahead of the March 15 deadline.

Authors Coalition annual survey

Yeah, it seems like only yesterday that you filled out this survey, but it's that time again. Moreover, it's important that members return a completed survey EVERY YEAR. We need 60 percent compliance in order to qualify for Authors Coalition funds. Failure to turn in your survey could drastically reduce future payouts. To make it easy the survey form is printed on the reverse side of the membership renewal letter. How convenient can you get? Thanks for your help.

If you need more convincing, consider that NASW has received $273,400 to date in coalition disbursements. The only way to keep this influx of money coming (and supporting programs that benefit NASW members) is to return your annual survey. Please help NASW help you. Thank you. ■

REGIONAL GROUPS

by Suzanne Clancy

Chicago


PHOTO BY MARC LIEBERMAN

The intersection between news reporting and archaeology is a subplot in the story of the 1922 discovery of the tomb of King Tutankhamun; a drama made clear in a photo exhibition viewed by Chicago science writers on June 8 during a visit to the Oriental Institute Museum at the University of Chicago.

Clearance of Tut's tomb took ten years, and in that time, photographer Harry Burton (1879–1940) took more than 1,400 large-format, black-and-white images. Some of those photos, on display, document the initial discovery of the tomb, the dramatic moment when the excavators first glimpsed the dazzling array of artifacts, the entry to the burial chamber, the series of shrines and coffins that protected the king, and the king's mummy, wreathed in floral collars and bedecked with gold jewelry.

As workers excavated the tomb, the Valley of the Kings was quickly overrun with reporters. In order to control access to information, archaeologists granted the *Times of London* exclusive use of photos and the announcement of the findings, putting local journalists in a bind as they had to wait for details to be published abroad before they could report their own stories.

Burton's photos set the standard of how archaeological photography should be done, explained Emily Teeter, show curator. Before Burton, photography was a somewhat haphazard affair; scientists didn't recognize the value of using it as a tool of documentation. Burton

Suzanne Clancy manages corporate communications for Nanogen, Inc., in San Diego, Calif. Send information about regional meetings and events to sclancyphd@yahoo.com.

showed the way, by affixing numbers to artifacts and carefully using electrical light to illuminate them for photography before they were removed from the tomb.

Science writers also visited other portions of the museum which contained items related to events in the Middle East that were contemporary with Tut. Afterward they gathered in the splendid office of America's first Egyptologist James Henry Breasted (1865-1935); founder of the Oriental Institute and himself a famous figure connecting archaeology with journalism.

New England

Despite August being the month for vacations, several dozen members of the New England Science Writers were lured by food and drink to NESW's annual summer social, at a restaurant in Cambridge. The party brought together new as well as some decade-long NESW members. Networking was in high gear. The event was also an opportunity to test NESW's new online membership services and event registration system, which enables members to join and renew online, update contact information, and have access to a members-only directory.

Washington, D.C.

At about 350 members and counting, the D.C. Science Writers Association (DCSWA) is thriving. The group has been busy making improvements to its Web site (**www.dcswa.org**) and has recently signed up with a Web-based service company so that individual members will be able to post profiles describing themselves including photos. Kind of a "face book" for science writers. The service should also improve management of the group's membership database and event invitations.

In June, DCSWA put together a panel discussion held on Capitol Hill on scientific openness at federal science agencies. The event attracted about 60 DCSWA members and generated a lively discussion led by Andrew Revkin, environment reporter for the *New York Times*, David Goldston, majority chief of staff for the House Science Committee, and Alan Leshner, chief executive officer, American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). Revkin described how articles he had written about restrictions placed on scientists in talking with journalists ultimately led to the "uncorking" of NASA.

Following tradition, DCSWAns spent the rest of the summer with substantially lighter program fare. A joint happy hour with the AAAS Mass Media Fellows gave the group a chance to meet budding science-writing talent from across the country. In July, members absorbed some culture at a local theater's production "An Experiment with an Air Pump," an unusual combination of drama, science, mystery, and romance. In August, members escaped D.C.'s oppressive heat and humidity with another happy hour and a weekend soiree to Frostburg, Md., and the Appalachian Mountains. In Frostburg about 20 hardy DCSWAns were treated to early morning bird/nature walks with NASW's "Ranger" Rick Borchelt and a full day of ecological delights compliments of the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science and Frostburg State University's Compton Science Center. A lecture on the behavior of prairie dogs was particularly enlightening. Who knew that those cute little prairie dogs spent their days engaged not only in group kissing and grooming, but also promiscuity, adultery, homosexuality, murder, incest, kidnapping, and rape!

The group is hoping to host some café scientifique events in the coming months. If you know of science and technology researchers who are stellar speakers and who will be traveling to D.C. in Sept. through Dec., please send an e-mail describing the speaker and a proposed topic to Gail Porter at gail.porter@nist.gov. ■

IN MEMORIAM

Louis L. Lerner

Editor/scientist created service awards for staff/volunteers

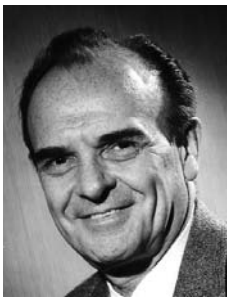


PHOTO COURTESY OF CHICAGO SECTION, ACS

Louis L. Lerner, an NASW member since 1974, died on Aug. 19, 2006 at the age of 91. Lou served as the editor of the *Chemical Bulletin*, published by the Chicago Section of the American Chemical Society, from 1966 through 1980, and again in 1991. This in addition to his full-time employment as a senior scientist for the Gillette Personal Care Division, where he worked for many years until 1974, and later as a physical scientist with the Federal Trade Commission until his retirement in 1995.

Lerner always appreciated the efforts of unsung volunteers and staff members who carry out the usually thankless job of running an organization and felt keenly that some tangible form of appreciation was warranted. In 1974, for example, Lerner established a Distinguished Service Award to be given annually by a vote of the board of directors to selected members of the Chicago Section American Chemical Society in recognition of their volunteer services. The award is still given today, yet, ironically, Lerner never personally received it. Lerner funded a similar award for NASW (see page 30).

Ever unselfish in his generosity, Lerner sought only to have justice done for, and bring joy to, others.

The Diane McGurgan Service Award

In 2001, NASW member Louis Lerner felt the need to show appreciation of the efforts of NASW Executive Director Diane McGurgan (in particular) and other unsung members whose efforts on behalf of NASW go above and beyond the call of duty. He did this by sending $2,500 to NASW and left it up to the organization to decide how best to dole out the money. At Diane's suggestion, it became an ongoing service award in the amount of $500.

"I never knew the man," she said. "Except he always paid his dues on time, even in his later years, and thought enough of NASW to provide the funding for this award."

Award recipients

(2002) Diane McGurgan—Inaugural recipient of the award that bears her name, given in recognition of her many years working on behalf of NASW and in acknowledgement of Diane as the glue that holds the association together.

(2003) Beryl Benderley—Honored for months of tireless work that culminated with NASW's membership in the Authors Coalition, a group that disburses royalty fees collected in Europe to writers' organizations in the United States. To date, this has brought more $273,400 into the NASW treasury for projects that directly benefit science writers.

(2004) Mariette DiChristina and Kelli Whitlock—For coordinating the annual mentoring program at the AAAS meeting, helping launch the annual internship fair, and two Web sites targeted at new science writers and science writing teachers

(2005) Nancy Shute and Corinna Wu—In recognition for their outstanding work in creating a presence for NASW at the Unity Conference, the world's largest gathering of journalists of color, in an effort to bring diversity to NASW membership ranks.

The 2006 recipient will be announced at the NASW meeting in Baltimore. Further, the NASW board has voted to continue funding the Diane McGurgan Service Award in order to honor members for exemplary service to NASW and ensure Louis Lerner's legacy to the science-writing community.

Until the very end, Lerner retained an active interest in both the arts and sciences.

(Source: Dolores T. Kenney)

Eric Burgess

His life's work helped give birth to the Space Age

Eric Burgess yearned as a youth to learn about the stars and his life's work helped give birth to the Space Age. Burgess, 84, died March 15, 2005. He had been an NASW member for 36 years.

A native of Manchester, England, Burgess' love of rockets and space started early. He enjoyed launching solid-fuel rockets as a teenager, which earned him the nickname "Rocket Man." A member of the Royal Air Force during World War II, Burgess helped analyze Germany's V-2 rocket program and later, in the United States, met its architect, Wernher von Braun, who headed postwar development of U.S. rockets and satellites.

In 1946, Burgess planted the seed of modern global telecommunications when he proposed sending satellites into orbit for radio and TV broadcasting, weather monitoring, and other purposes.

One of the first people to write on rocket propulsion, Burgess was the author of 25 books on exploring the planets of the solar system and edited 25 more. He worked on several NASA projects and for seven Southern California high-tech firms. His specialized knowledge also landed him a job for a year as a technical consultant to the James Bond movie "Moonraker." A plaque honoring Burgess' efforts toward space exploration is displayed in the Smithsonian Institution.

In 1952, five years before Sputnik ignited the U.S.-Soviet space race, he published The Martian Probe, which coined the term "interplanetary probe" and explained how to calculate the trajectory of a missile traveling 34 million miles to Mars.

"It was considered a nutty idea; I was one of the lunatic fringe," he said in a newspaper interview a year before his death. "You realize all this was done with slide rules. There were no computers then."

His vindication came when the first American probe, Mariner IV, flew by Mars in 1965.

People need to go to Mars, he said, despite the dangers and technological challenges, noting little would be known of the world had early explorers not taken their ships across dangerous oceans to new lands. Years ago, Burgess observed that the first probes to reach Mars in the 1960s did so more easily than he had envisioned, due in part to solar-cell power generation.

"When an idea comes along," he wrote, "people at the moment try to make executing it sound impossibly

complex. But the doers eventually do it pretty simply."

(Source: Santa Rosa Press Democrat*)*

Nathan Horwitz

ScienceWriters has learned belatedly of the May 2005 death of award-winning medical writer Nathan Horwitz, at the age of 92. An NASW member since 1973, Horwitz spent nearly 30 years writing for the *Medical Tribune*. He had been an NASW member since 1973. ■

LETTERS

Thank you for the *ScienceWriters* tribute to Laura van Dam (*SW*, Summer 2006). I'm sure she would have been honored by what you and the others had to say. Mass. General Hospital has let me know that NASW and CASW had made contributions in Laura's memory. It's comforting to think that someday people will not have to go through what she did.

As I've sifted through Laura's stuff over the last months, I've been struck by the many waylaid and confused notes she left for herself over the past year. Much of her heart and energy over that time went into trying to carry on as president of NASW. It meant so much to her, both for the honor that it was and as the final connection with a career that she had loved. I can't imagine that anyone could have cared more, or tried harder to keep going.

I'll always be grateful for the outpouring of support and sympathy that came from NASW members. It will become part of Laura's legacy to our son, David. Thank you.

Howie Saxner
Cambridge, Mass.

ScienceWriters *welcomes letters to the editor*

A letter must include a daytime telephone number and e-mail address. Letters may be edited. Letters submitted may be used in print or digital form by NASW.

Send to Editor, *ScienceWriters*, P.O. Box 1725 Solana Beach, CA 92075, fax 858-793-1144, or e-mail lfriedmann@nasw.org.

BOOKS BY AND FOR MEMBERS

By Ruth Winter

***The Sun* by Steele Hill and Michael Carlowicz (NASW), published by Harry N. Abrams Books.**

Michael Carlowicz, a science writer/editor affiliated with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, has a photo-essay book focused on the only star we can study up close and the only one that has a real impact on our lives on Earth. He says: "Our voyage to *The Sun* began nine years ago when Steele (Hill) and I shared an office at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. Day after day, we traded ideas and images that could engage and educate the public about our nearest star. We watched the Sun and the aurora alongside the scientists and investigators of SOHO and the International Solar-Terrestrial Physics program, learning as they learned. It was a rare privilege for a couple of liberal arts majors to be part of the greatest solar-terrestrial observing campaign in history. We collaborated with scientists on posters, Web sites, press conferences, and educational products, but none of them did justice to the amazing new (and archival) views of the Sun we found. Hence this book, which attempts to bring together the full breadth of solar imagery from ancient cultural sites to satellite-era close-ups." Carlowicz can be reached at 508-477-1450 or mikewicz@nasw.org. The book's publicist is Lisa Sherman-Cohen at 212 519-1202 or lsherman@hnabooks.com.

***Right Answers: Short Takes On Big Issues Separating Fact From Fantasy* by Alan Caruba (NASW), published by Merril Press.**

Alan Caruba's book is on topics ranging from Islam to immigration and environmentalism to education. He maintains the text is "documented, attributed, and opinionated!" The book emanates from The National Anxiety Center (NAC), which he founded in 1990. The NAC is, he says, a "clearing house for information about 'scare campaigns' designed to influence public opinion and policy." In the book he takes on "food cops," advocates of technophobia, environmental corruption, global warming, and the green agenda. "Whether you agree with him or not, you will find his opinions thought provoking and fun and often quoted in the media. He says he didn't start out to become a pundit or a conservative but became disillusioned with the United Nation's peace efforts, the United States' educational system, government funding of social security and Medicare as well as the supreme court's ability to protect the inherent rights of citizens and property

rights. Caruba can be reached at acaruba@aol.com or 973-763-6392. More information on NAC at **www.anxietycenter.com**.

***Embargoed Science* by Vincent Kiernan (NASW), published by University of Illinois Press**

Those of us who have suffered embargos on hot stories will find Kiernan's book of great interest. A senior writer at *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, he writes that the popular notion of a lone scientist privately toiling long hours in a laboratory, striking upon a great discovery, and announcing to the world is romanticized fiction. Kiernan offers insight into how embargo's impact on public knowledge of science and medical issues. He points out that members of the general public aren't the only readers of newspapers and watchers of TV. Scientists, he says, often learn about new research through the mass media, long before the journal article describing the research arrives in the mail. "Thus," he writes, "the distorted picture of science that can be blamed on the embargo may also skew the understanding of scientific developments by scientists and physicians." Kiernan can be be reached at 202-466-1061 or kiernan@nasw.org. The press representative is Michael Roux at 217-244-4689 or mroux@uillinois.edu.

***Regaining Bladder Control: What Every Woman Needs To Know* by Rebecca G. Rogers, Janet Yagoda Shagam, Ph.D. (NASW) and Shelley Kleinschmidt, published by Prometheus Books.**

Shagam is an Albuquerque, N.M. freelance writer; Rogers is director of the Division of Urogynecology, at the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center; and Kleinschmidt, also of Albuquerque, is a proposal manager for Tier Technologies. There are more than 15 million women in America who experience chronic bladder-control problems. The authors say that the good news is that eight out of 10 women can improve their continence with simple exercises and dietary changes detailed in the book. *Regaining Bladder Control* includes work sheets, self-assessment questionnaires, a glossary, and frequently asked questions to help readers evaluate and discuss their condition with their doctors. Shagam can be reached at 505-298-2163 or janetyagooda@nasw.org. The press representative is Lynn Pasquale at 800-853-7545 and lpasquale@prometheusbooks.com.

***FED UP! Winning the War Against Childhood Obesity* by Susan Okie M.D. (NASW), published by Joseph Henry Press.**

Harvard-trained family physician Okie writes, "Carefully limiting your child's 'screen time' is one of the most effective things you can do as a parent to reduce your children's obesity risk. This isn't just speculation. A double-blind, randomized trial by Stanford University researchers found that reducing the amount of time that kids spent weekly watching TV was associated with lower obesity rates." The problem, Okie points out, is serious. "Today's kids may be the first generation of children to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents. The cause for that startling fact is obesity." She points out, according to the TV Turnoff Network, on average, children in the U.S. will spend more time in front of the television (1,023 hours) than in school (900 hours) this year. In her new book, *FED UP!*, Okie goes into detail about how reducing your child's screen time—which includes their time in front of a computer—can help fight the obesity epidemic. "Turning off the TV probably works in multiple ways to protect kids from unhealthy weight gain," Okie explains. "It makes them more likely to be physically active. It may help to limit the kind of unconscious snacking that many kids do while watching TV. And it reduces their exposure to commercials for high-calorie food and drink products." She calls on more parents to employ television monitors, devices that can be hooked up to your television or computer and set to allow the device to be on only for a certain number of hours per week. Once the time runs out, the child is prevented from watching additional television. Another important strategy for parents looking to limit their child's TV time? According to Okie, "Never put a television set in a child's bedroom!" In the end, *FED UP!* advocates a combination of healthy eating and healthy living and presents the obesity epidemic in terms that parents can understand and do something about. Okie can be reached at 202-223-3032 or susan.okie@verizon.net. The publicity representative is Robin Pinnel at 202 334-1902 and rpinnel@nas.edu.

***Inside Out Down Under: Stories from a Spiritual Sabbatical* by Diana Somerville (NASW), published by Beechworth Press.**

Somerville lived for a year in rural Australia and writes that ancient rocks and warbling birds taught her to listen in new ways. Seeking her own "songlines," she found powerful teachings in the spiritual links between Australian Aborigines and Earth's oldest continent and traditional ways that echo Native American cultures while contrasting vividly with the rugged individualism of the American West. She writes, "Approaching 50, that midlife milestone, I overflowed with questions. Undertaking a physical journey can be not only a metaphor for the spiritual journey but embody it." A freelance from Washington State, she says the book began as an assignment for the late *Earth* magazine but it became mainly her "own spiritual seeking to go 'inside out' spiritually by going 'down under geographically.'" The book is a mixture of her perceptions, surprises, wanderings, and encounters with the culture, the

personalities, the landscape of Oz, and herself. She writes being a science writer gave her lots of practice delving into a completely unfamiliar topic, following her nose, trying to figure out whether or not it was interesting enough to write about. You can share her journey and take note of "new ways to some of the world's ancient truths." Somerville can be contacted at 360-452-1212 or writer@olypen.com. The press representative is Elizabeth West at 360-670-5491.

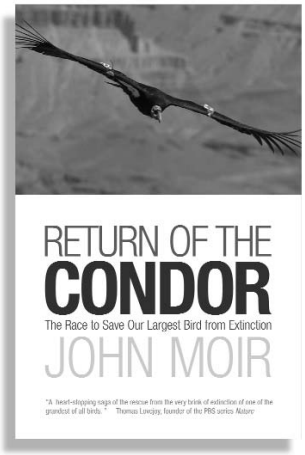
A Scientist's Guide To Talking With The Media: Practical Advice from the Union of Concerned Scientists **by Richard Hayes and Daniel Grossman, published by Rutgers University Press.**

This book may help us as much as it helps the scientists. Hayes is the media director of the Union of Concerned Scientists and Grossman is a science journalist, radio, and Web producer. They advise, for example, "*Preparing for a Press Conference*. In advance of the event, create your compass of main messages and talking points. If more than one person will be speaking, each person should choose one or two of the messages as their main focus of discussion. Brain storm all the possible questions reporters may ask you, and have your answers ready, always aiming to bridge back to your talking points. If possible, try to schedule your press conference at 10 a.m. or 11 a.m. That will give newspapers and television reporters plenty of time to put their stories together for the evening news or the next day's paper." Among the other subjects are "Hope for the Best, Prepare for the Worst" and "Do You Hear What You Are Saying?" NASW's Deborah Blum has a quote on the back of the book: " …now more than ever we need an improved public understanding of science and the way it affects our lives." The press representative is Aaron Huertas at 202-331-5458 and ahertas@ucsusa.org.

The Rock From Mars: A Detective Story on Two Planets **by Kathy Sawyer (NASW), published by Random House.**

Sawyer, a former science writer for the *Washington Post*, tells the story of the passionate scientific dispute that engulfed a rock from Mars that landed in Antarctica 13 millennia ago. At the core of the drama is one team's 1996 claim that the rock might harbor the first known signs of extraterrestrial life, but the narrative encompasses broader themes: How scientists think and work and feel, how journalists and politicians—all the way to the White House—interact with science, and how the controversy ultimately changed scientists' approach to such mysteries as how life begins on any planet, including Earth. Sawyer can be reached at kathy@kathysawyer.com. Publicist is Jennifer Jones is at jmjones@randomhouse.com.

Return of the Condor **by John Moir (NASW), published by The Lyons Press.**



The book tells the story of the race to save our largest bird from extinction. The storyline transports readers deep into the world of the California condor and describes how the condor symbolizes the extinction crisis facing our planet. Moir says he had been writing articles about the condor recovery program for newspapers and magazines for several years. "In 2004, I was asked to do a feature story on the recovery effort for *Birding* magazine. Researching this article took me deeper into the world of the condor and the biologists who are trying to save it, and I realized that the story of this iconic bird would make a great book. I've spent the past year and half researching, traveling, and writing the book." Moir can be reached at John@Jmoir.com. The press representative is Theresa Eldredge at 203-458-4539 and theresa.eldredge@globepequot.com.

References

The Seventh Edition of Scientific Style and Format **by The Council of Science Editors published by Rockefeller University Press.**

The Web site: **www.csemanual.org**. Council of Science Editors Web site: **www.councilscienceeditors.org/services/societylinks.cfm**. The marketing representative for Rockefeller University Press is Suzanne Runyan, runyans@mail.rockefeller.edu.

Science Book News **is a blog published by NASW member Phillip Manning,** a Chapel Hill, N.C. freelance.

It comes on the Net each Monday and lists new books of science with brief excerpts from press releases and often includes links to reviews of science books. The URL is **Scienceblog.html**. ■

Send material about new books to Ruth Winter, 44 Holly Drive, Short Hills, N.J. 07078, or e-mail ruthwrite@aol.com. Include the name of the publicist and appropriate contact information, as well as how you prefer members get in touch with you.

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Notice to all journalists: Does the new commercial space sector whet your whistle? Do you have an interest in NASA, astronomy, remote sensing, international space achievements or just about anything that goes sub-orbital and above? If you want to write, or have written, about everyone from the "Burt Rutan"s to the "Michael Griffin"s of the space sector or all the space-related products, the new and old businesses or almost anything relevant or somewhere in between, you want to enter this contest.

The contest has two categories. One is for published work, in which a piece of space journalism that has been written for a noteworthy publication can be submitted for entry. The second category is one in which the submission will be an original, factual, human-interest, 2,700 word maximum feature story on the space sector.

To compete, fill out the application at the following website (www.newforks.net), cut and paste your work for either category or both. Then, submit the application and your story to this contest. The winner of each category will win $3,000. Rules for the contest can also be found at http://www.newforks.net/contest/rules.html.

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**Student member*

Correction

New member Joe Kullman's affiliation is Arizona State University, Tempe/Phoenix (not University of Arizona as previously reported).

ScienceWriters regrets the error and subsequent teasing Kullman was subjected to as a result.

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