

The Newsletter of The National Association of

ScienceWriters

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REPORTING WITHERS WHILE INFORMATION EXPLODES

by Stuart F. Brown

[Stuart Brown is recipient of the 2007 Grady-Stack Award. The following is the text of his acceptance speech.]

It is a particular honor and pleasure for me to receive a prestigious journalism award from the American Chemical Society. Put yourself in my shoes for a moment and contemplate how this feels. I never studied chemistry; I majored in English literature. And as a student I felt tortured and defeated by algebra, which seemed to be utterly incompatible with the way my brain was organized. But by nature I am a gearhead, and want to know how everything works. I have a huge admiration for invention and discovery. With a lot of encouragement from editors and colleagues, I forged a niche for myself writing about what I like to call the man-made world. I like to think that I can use the tools of analogy and metaphor—but not algebra—to convey the excitement of highly technical developments.

I believe that some of the most intricate processes in a field like chemistry can be made gripping to readers when presented in vivid and lively language, with maybe a beer-making reference or two thrown in. This stuff is utterly fascinating, so come along with me to find out how it's done. That's the mission.

I have written about many topics over the years, and one of the most durable categories for me has been manufacturing technology. How are things made? How do they fit together? It's a field of endless new wonders, as scientists and engineers figure out how to harness the properties of materials and organisms to make things that people will pay money for. This pursuit eventually led me to look at biotech drugs—which were proving to be perilously difficult to make—as a manufacturing-technology topic that I could get my boss to sign off on. The learning curve was steep as I enlisted a biochemist friend to march me through some 101 on DNA, and fermentation, and how drugs are actually “grown” these days through the magic of recombinant technology.

So was born the series of *Fortune* magazine articles recognized by the 2007 Grady-Stack Award. Those stories were reported at a time when my magazine was making good money, and there was funding for traveling around the country. I clambered up on catwalks to admire gleaming bioreactors in the factories of the drugmakers, and I came away deeply impressed

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SUBMISSION DEADLINES

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with the delicacy of the whole process. The tiniest bit of contamination, or a slight recipe error, can reduce a really expensive batch of medicine-in-the-making to garbage.

One of my favorite biotechnology adventures got underway several years ago when some executives from Bayer AG's headquarters in Germany made a presentation at my magazine's New York offices. A smart editor listened with interest as the execs described a production disaster at their plant in Berkeley, Calif., that makes Factor 8, the clotting agent hemophiliacs lack in their bodies. During an unannounced inspection, FDA officials had found the plant's worker training, record-keeping, and quality control wanting. The government shut down the plant until it could pass a follow-up inspection, and Bayer's name was mud with the world's organized hemophiliacs, who were understandably up in arms about the Factor 8 shortage the company caused.

Will you let one of our writers tell the story of how you fixed the plant? the editor asked the German executives. Yes, they said. They were willing to let me into the scene of their foul-up in the hope of salvaging the company's reputation. The PR people in Germany told the PR people in the U.S. to give Brown a tour of the plant. But as I sought a precise date to visit the Berkeley complex, it seemed to be taking a long time to get an answer. So, with my editor's backing, I followed a strategy that can sometimes work: just show up. I told the Bayer Berkeley people that I was headed for the airport and would see them soon.

Camped out in a hotel a few miles away, I called up the plant every morning. I'm good to go, I told them, can't wait to see how you do it. And finally, on the fourth morning, the Bayer PR lady invited me over for a tour. The story that resulted was a frank account of how Bayer lost control of a delicate industrial operation, and then regained it. It was an article full of parables for readers involved in running factories, and the company's openness said they were chastened and serious about winning back their good name.

The reason I devote so much description to the Factor 8 episode is that it was expensive to report. My magazine rolled the dice and paid for me to hang around Berkeley for several days in the hope of getting a great manufacturing story. And it worked out. But my sad message today is that this kind of high-quality, inquiring journalism appears to be an endangered species in the U.S.

Why should chemists, in particular, care about this development? Because the science and engineering professions benefit from having technologically literate reporters working

in the media. Here's what is actually going on right now: Original reporting, the lifeblood of real news, is on the wane. And this will affect the way all of the sciences are communicated to the public. Many sectors of the U.S. economy are doing pretty well these days, so it might come as a surprise that there's one important business that's falling apart: news publishing. Almost 18,000 "media workers" got laid off last year, according to the New York outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, which tracks layoffs.

***...many news outlets
these days are
just aggregators of
information, not actual
gatherers of it.***

Let's follow the money for a minute. Newspapers and magazines earn their profits mostly from advertising sales; subscription income just helps keep the lights burning. As the number of readers who turn to the Internet for their news has boomed, the business equation in publishing has pretty much collapsed. Selling a page of 4-color advertising in a magazine used to be a profitable activity. But now, with print readership declining, publishers have to cut their rates to reflect the shrinking audience of print readers they can deliver to an advertiser.

And web advertising commands only a fraction of the revenue that print ads earn. This has landed publishers in the crazy position of giving away a substantial slice of their product for free. Staff cuts soon follow as the publishers try to meet their profitability targets. Fact-checking gets scarce, and pretty soon quality starts to erode. Investigative journalist Lowell Bergman has reported in detail on the ruinous effect the Internet has had on the newspaper business in his PBS Frontline documentary series called "News War."

There are plenty of places to lay the blame. Publishing executives have made misguided promises to Wall Street about how profitable their companies can be over time. And with all the unpaid bloggers typing away in their basements in their boxer shorts, I think some media execs may have started to actually believe the computer-hippie adage that "information wants to be free." But you only get what you pay for.

What we used to call journalism is increasingly being referred to by the news-business people as "content." We are now providing "content" for "mul-



Stuart Brown

PHOTO BY NILES A. JAEGER

multiple platforms." It sounds like some sort of fluid that you pour into jars. And many news outlets these days are just aggregators of information, not actual gatherers of it. How can bloggers in their basements with no budget do much actual reporting? They can't, so they recycle and rehash the shrinking amount of original reporting that gets done by the cost-cutting media companies.

So we find ourselves in the curious situation of living in a society that increasingly runs on technology and information—while witnessing the withering of the original reporting that tells us what's going on. Market theory says that if quality information is in demand, a business can be made of providing it. Let's hope somebody figures out the new business model pretty quick that will once again pay for reporters to hit the road, to clamber up catwalks, and camp out in hotels in the places where the man-made world is being invented.

Against this increasingly parched reporting landscape, the Grady-Stack Award becomes even more valuable. It is an oasis of encouragement. In the years ahead, I hope the American Chemical Society has a strong roster of award candidates to choose from. The publishing environment right now seems to increasingly revolve around celebrity "news." But what's going to matter in the long run is not Britney Spears' hormones or chemical recreation du jour, but the innovations of the people who master molecules and methods that help us to live better and in harmony with our environment. That's a really great story. ■

THE SCIENCE BEAT: UH OH, ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST

by Charles Petit

Journalism has been my working life for about 35 years, almost all on the science beat. I was first at a small newspaper in Livermore, Calif., then the *San Francisco Chronicle* for about 26 years, and another six at *U.S. News & World Report*. It has been a good time reporting science news on deadline, competing with the crime, corruption, catastrophe, combat, and celebrity sexcapades that fill so much of the papers, news weeklies, and evening newscasts.

Lately, the good times for many people like me—covering breaking science news—are not so good.

The changing state of the media—particularly of science writing—ambushed me in late 2004. I took a more or less compulsive buyout from *U.S. News*. It was

Charlie Petit, who freelances and tracks from Berkeley, is a former NASW president.

scrapping its science unit—with the exception of health and medicine. I didn't know it then, but it was a sign of the times. I now get to see further signs of it from my desk each morning.

To augment freelance income, a year ago I took a part-time job. I scour the U.S. media and much of the English-language press elsewhere for daily science, medical, and environmental news. I look for things that haven't been heavily reported, or that advance the ball, or that have attracted a mob of reporters, or that I just like. Selection is highly subjective. Armed with newsfeeds and search engines, I scan not just the websites of newspapers, but broadcast outfits, wire services, and those online outlets that try to follow journalistic standards of objectivity, fairness, and accuracy.

The site was set up by Boyce Rensberger, director of MIT's Science Journalism Program. It is online at ksjtracker.mit.edu. Many of *ScienceWriter's* readers are also my readers on the site. I usually identify myself with just a twinge of self-consciousness as The Tracker. I never had a cool nickname as a kid. This one is even better than Skip or Tank.

I link to and comment on what catches my eye. You want to know if something's been reported today, and by whom, about bird flu, another species in trouble, a Big Pharma company in trouble for bent data on its medicines, the groans of the precarious Greenland ice cap, the hunt for the Higgs boson, or the struggles at NASA to build a new generation of space telescopes, I'm your man. In the first year of operation, ending with April 2007, the site had nearly 2,900 separate postings. Some are about just one story, some aggregate a dozen or more. The items average three or four stories each. So, roughly 10,000 newspaper, magazine, and broadcast science stories have been cited by me or, when I can't do it, Boyce or our backup tracker, John Cox. It would be a flat lie to say I read everything I cite word for word, but many stories I do.

***Lately the good times for
many people like me—
covering breaking science
news—are not so good.***

Seems like a lot, but the fact that one person can even attempt to get a representative sampling of each weekday's big stories hides another truth: There are not all that many of them.

Full-time, traditional-media science reporters covering breaking news are growing scarcer. Not only has the absolute number of newspaper science writers in the U.S. fallen, from about 90 twenty years ago to 80 or so now as judged by membership rolls of the National

Association of Science Writers, but the percentage of membership in that category has more than halved to about three percent. Just a few outlets—the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, AP, and Reuters chief among them—account for about one-third of the stories. Plus, we link to press releases when we can, finding one or more for perhaps one fourth of the posts.

***So far, the fabric of
mainstream reporting of
breaking science news is
frayed, not shredded.***

In February, at the AAAS meeting in San Francisco, the reality of the science-writing slump hit me in the eye. I noticed the number of former newspaper writers, veterans not ready for retirement, sort of hanging around without much to do—there mostly by habit. I heard from several additional colleagues in the midst of taking buyouts or who, discouraged, were leaving. Since then I have received a continuous stream of tips on who most recently left the daily news biz for university public relations, freelancing, book writing, or fishing.

The biggest response I've ever gotten to an item on the Knight blog was when I commented on that and other evidence of our trade's slow evaporation. It came after longtime science writer Mike Lafferty of the *Columbus Dispatch* told me he was taking a buyout. So I wrote a post on Lafferty's departure and the scene at AAAS saying, in part:

I was dismayed to learn that Bryn Nelson at *Newsday*...is taking a buyout, and that *Time* magazine's Mike Lemonick has gone solo, too (although he, like co-former-*Time* sci writer Madeleine Nash, will continue writing for the pub as an outside contributor). I, bought out under duress by *U.S. News* a short few years back, was hanging around in the AAAS press room without much to do. So was former *Dallas Morning News* science editor Tom Siegfried. Earl Lane, former *Newsday* science writer, was at work: staffing the place.

To the list of science-reporting veterans leaving the mainline media, usually a tad before they were ready to retire, one may recently add Ron Kotulak at the *Chicago Tribune*, Glendna Chui of the *San Jose Mercury News*, Christine Gorman at *Time* magazine, and Mike Toner at the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

Here's one reason newspapers and similar outlets are in a bad fix. Want to see what the *Boston Globe* or *New York Times* science sections have? It's free, a few clicks away—along with all the paper's contents. Most

traditional news outlets feel compelled to give their product away on the web. That is not a winning business model.

Science sections in this leaner media world are becoming rare. In 1989 there were at least 95 newspaper science sections; today there are about 30 and a rising share of them focus on health and medicine.

The reason the daily press contingent is shrinking is not that managing editors don't want science news. But their publishers are squeezing them hard to keep profits up in an era of steadily, steeply declining circulation and loss of traditional advertising. Somebody has to go. As newspapers and their like sag, surveys show that the public gets 40 percent of its science information from TV, 20 percent from the Internet, and just 14 percent from newspapers. Some 92 million Americans say if they want some sort of science info, they go online. The blogosphere is skyrocketing, with 50 million weblogs counted as of July last year, a number that was doubling every six months.

Most of the science Internet surfing, incidentally, goes not to blogs but, more typically, to sites maintained by such outlets as the Discovery channel, NASA, and National Geographic. The goofballs have not taken over yet.

The science beat's troubles are just part of a larger shift underway in society's access to information. Not just reporters say it matters. Sean Carroll is a theoretical physicist at Caltech. He also is a blogger (www.CosmicVariance.com). He comments regularly on things outside his specialty of string theory and extra-dimensional speculations. Not long ago, he mused on the state of science news. He scolded many of the more exuberant, self-referential residents of the fast-growing blogosphere:

Bloggy triumphalism can be tiresome, and the MainStream Media aren't going to be replaced in the foreseeable future, if only because they actually put a great deal of effort and resources into real reportage. You know, calling people on the telephone, traveling to places where interesting things are happening, stuff like that. Annoying as they may be at times, the MSM are still the primary source for information about what is going on in the world.

So far, the fabric of mainstream reporting of breaking science news is frayed, not shredded. The Associated Press has several full-time science writers in the U.S. and a few overseas, and big outfits with large corporate owners including the *San Francisco Chronicle* (Hearst), *Los Angeles Times* (Tribune Corp, for the moment), *New York Times*, and *San Jose Mercury News* (MediaNews), syndicate their stuff widely. But fewer local papers are maintaining their own science writers. We're all waiting for big media to find an online busi-

ness model with fat enough profits to pay real reporters to dig out the news.

Any way one cuts it, science is an essential source of, for me, the purest sort of news. It is not just new names and places on familiar plots of crime, corruption, and catastrophe. It produces things new to human experience. It is also a variety of good news. Science stories bring to the public a world of rather smart people who usually have done something right and well. Given the usual run of news, that's a tonic. Presumably, some way will arise for people in our business to keep delivering it, daily, and for pay. Right? ■

BEN PATRUSKY INDUCTED IN HALL OF FAME

by Cristine Russell

The City College of New York has produced more than its share of journalism luminaries, including *New York Times* editor A.M. Rosenthal, the broadcasting brothers Bernard and Marvin Kalb, NPR commentator Daniel Schorr, and journalism dean Stephen B. Shepard. Now award-winning science writer Ben Patrusky, a 1958 electrical engineering graduate, joins the illustrious ranks of those inducted into the CCNY Communications Hall of Fame.

Patrusky was honored at the group's annual dinner, on May 30, for his distinguished career in journalism, as both an award-winning science writer and a leader in efforts to improve science news coverage. He has been executive director of the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing (CASW) since 1988. He served for 30 years as program director of CASW's New Horizons in Science, an annual meeting that offers journalists a look at cutting-edge science.

Patrusky's roots in journalism began at *The Campus*, City College's 100-year-old undergraduate newspaper. As Ben recalled at the ceremony, he came to college determined to become an electrical engineer, as his immigrant parents wished. But a chance encounter led him to work as a *Campus* reporter, where he was "smitten" with "the frenetic energy, the clamor, the easy

camaraderie, the exquisite shabbiness" of the newspaper's office. When he graduated, he gave up a well-paying opportunity as an electrical engineer in southern California for an editorial internship at an electronics magazine in New York City.

In 1961, Ben attended Columbia University's School of Journalism as a Sloan-Rockefeller Advanced Science Writing Fellow. "I could not have joined the science-writing community at a more propitious or more magical time for we were then on the threshold of what many would call the most explosive, most productive epoch in the history of science," he said.

...smitten by "the frenetic
energy, the clamor,
the easy camaraderie,
the exquisite shabbiness"
of the newspaper's office.

The next year Ben went to work at the American Heart Association, writing and organizing science-writer seminars, and became a full-time freelancer in 1975. He wrote 35 articles for the National Science Foundation's research magazine *Mosaic*, contributed to publications from *Look to American Health*, authored three books (on lasers, gravity, and heart disease), and directed science-writing seminars for organizations such as the Ford Foundation and the Scientists' Institute for Public Information. He has received science-writing awards from numerous groups, including the American Institute of Physics, the American Chemical Society, and Sigma Xi, the scientific research society. He also served as a trustee of Science Service, publisher of *Science News*.

Patrusky was the second science writer inducted into the CCNY Hall of Fame, following Earl Ubell, a class of '48 broadcasting pioneer and CASW co-founder, who received the honor in 2000. Earl died after a long illness on May 29, the day before the 2007 award ceremony, and was remembered with a moment of silence at the dinner. Ben and his wife, Judy, were joined at the CCNY awards banquet by a contingent of CASW colleagues, including Jerry Bishop, Diane McGurgan, Paul Raeburn, Joann Rodgers, and Cris Russell, as well as retired science writers Ed Edelson and Matt Clark. ■



PHOTO BY CONRAD WALDINGER

Ben Patrusky's distinguished career in journalism has earned him a place in the City College of New York Communications Hall of Fame.

Cristine Russell is president of the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing.

TWO NASW MEMBERS AMONG THIS YEAR'S PULITZER WINNERS

NASW members **Usha Lee McFarling** and **Kenneth Weiss** share this year's Pulitzer Prize Explanatory Journalism award with a colleague at the *Los Angeles Times* for their five-part series called "Altered Oceans." The official citation says the award is "for their richly portrayed reports on the world's distressed oceans, telling the story in print and online, and stirring reaction among readers and officials."



Kenneth Weiss

The "Altered Oceans" project, headed by Weiss, revealed how man has choked the oceans with trash and basic nutrients—killing advanced sea life, making people sick, and effectively reversing the course of evolution back toward "the primeval seas of hundreds of millions of years ago."

Reporter McFarling and photographer Rick Loomis teamed with Weiss to create the stories, photo galleries, animated graphics, and videos (posted at www.latimes.com/oceans) that evoked a broad and emotional response from citizens and political leaders.

"We cling to this notion that the oceans are too big to change. But it turns out they are not. The oceans are suffering from an accumulation of assaults," said Weiss, a long-time surfer and scuba diver. "We need to be much more careful what we are pulling out of the ocean and what we are dumping into the ocean."

The Pulitzer is only the latest of an extraordinary collection of prizes garnered by McFarling, Weiss, and photographer Rick Loomis. Their work was previously honored by awards from the American Geophysical Union, the American Society for Microbiology, the American Institute for Biological Sciences, the John B. Oakes award from the Columbia School of Journalism, and the George Polk Award. The web version of their series is, indeed, impressive. McFarling is an alum of the Knight Science Journalism Fellowship, having spent the 1992-1993 academic year at MIT. Ironically, she is no longer at the *Times*, having left daily journalism last year. ■

(Source: Los Angeles Times and MIT Knight Tracker)



Usha Lee McFarling

AN OFF-LINE EVENT ABOUT ONLINE SCIENCE LITERACY

by Anton Zuiker

As a Peace Corps volunteer on an Internet-free South Pacific island in the late 1990s, I spent countless hours swinging in a hammock reading the fine print of the *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*. With every mosquito I slapped away, I pondered the possibilities for getting sick and whether I'd ever get back to my job as a magazine editor in Cleveland.

By the time I left Vanuatu, I had contracted dengue fever and nursed my wife through malaria. But I had also been bitten by the health-reporting bug, and so when we found our way to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I was delighted to discover Dr. Tom Linden's graduate program in medical journalism through which I earned a master's degree.

In between Peace Corps and grad school, though, I started blogging. And that's how I met Bora Zivkovic.

Zivkovic was a doctoral student at N.C. State University, where he studied circadian rhythms in Japanese quail. But his dissertation was lagging because he spent seemingly every waking moment writing his various blogs about politics, science, and education. When I started reading his science blog (A Blog Around the Clock), he was beginning to earn international attention for the connections he made among the current research in chronobiology.

Two of Zivkovic's blog entries caught my attention. The first was a long but fascinating post about malaria and jet lag. From my Peace Corps experience, I knew that mosquitoes came at me in the mornings and at night. But from Zivkovic I was about to learn that the malaria parasite, too, had its timing, and that *Plasmodium*'s cycle could be thrown off by jet lag.

"[J]et-lagged individuals may be warmer than the surrounding locals at midnight and thus more attractive to mosquitoes at that time," he wrote, summarizing recent journal articles. He went on to list his hypotheses about why this might be. His entry included pictures and diagrams and even footnotes. This was not the blogging I was used to.

This was science blogging.

Through Zivkovic, I discovered other scientists using blogs to explore science, discuss their research into the full spectrum of topics, and refute public misconceptions about evolution and other hot-button topics. These science bloggers, through their linking and com-

Anton Zuiker is a writer and editor in Durham, N.C. He blogs at www.mistersugar.com.

menting, have created a vibrant online community.

That second post of Zivkovic's was a call for someone to organize a conference for those science bloggers: "[I]t would be so cool to meet each other face-to-face and share a beer and stories."

We met for coffee one day. "Let's just do it here in Chapel Hill," I suggested. Six months later, in January 2007, we hosted the inaugural North Carolina Science Blogging Conference at UNC, welcoming more than 140 scientists, journalists, teachers, bloggers, and others.

The invitation was simple and straightforward: Join us for a day of discussions about the use of blogs to promote public understanding of science.

To start that conversation, Hunt Willard, director of Duke University's Institute for Genome Sciences and Policy, discussed how the 1960s race to the moon riveted the nation. "The science of the space race was on the television all the time," he said, and yet most listeners and viewers didn't understand the science. "I still can't explain how a rocket works," admitted Willard.

But in an age of multimedia overload, how to engage the public about complex areas of science such as Willard's exploration into genomics?

The science bloggers in the audience felt strongly that the academic publish-or-perish tenure model needs to be shaken up to encourage younger scientists to share their research findings and observations online before formal publication of results. (In conjunction with the conference, Zivkovic edited a peer-reviewed anthology of the best science blogging from 2006.)

In a breakout session on open-source science, Drexel University chemistry professor Jean-Claude Bradley facilitated a discussion about how primary scientific information can be disseminated via blogs, wikis, and other non-traditional vehicles. Bradley does that with the collaborative Useful Chemistry blog at www.usefulchem.blogspot.com. Another session, led by *American Scientist* editor Rosalind Reid, explored ways to illustrate blog posts so that visual learners could understand the science.

Meanwhile, the high school teachers who'd driven in from rural parts of North Carolina were eager to learn how blogs could help them engage their students in out-of-classroom science learning, and an editor from a major New York media company pondered how to incorporate blogs into a new medical news section of the newspaper's site.

The science-blogging conference didn't cause a sea change—a blog about celebrity gossip is the most popular blog in 2007, after all. But every day there are more and more blogs about global climate change, advances in medicine, marine science and other science topics, written by expert scientists or even well-versed nonscientists.

And that's why another NC Science Blogging Conference is planned for Saturday, Jan. 19, 2008. Sigma Xi, the scientific research society, will host this time

around, and a generous grant from the Burroughs Wellcome Fund is helping to improve the conference program. Conference details and registration information are online at www.scienceblogging.com.

This Spring, his dissertation still not finished, Bora Zivkovic landed a job with Public Library of Science as their new online community manager, proof that blogging about science—or any topic—cogently and consistently, can pay. ■

AAAS NEWS BRIEFING DVD AVAILABLE AS CLASSROOM AID

by Ann Gibbons

When I resumed teaching science writing at Carnegie Mellon University this year after a decade-long hiatus, I soon realized that some of my teaching materials were dated—some of my favorite readings were written when my students were in elementary school, which would seem like reporting from the Jurassic. So, I posted a query on nasw-teach to seek new materials, including a DVD, video, or link to a website with a recent press conference where scientists announced new research results. I got lots of great ideas for my class, but I was surprised that none of us could find a great example of a press conference about scientific research results online at the time. (We found NASA updates on the space shuttle, drug updates, new technology announcements, Nobel laureate interviews, etc.) My posting did spark a lively discussion about what we would want in a "dream press conference," as *San Jose Mercury News* science writer Glennda Chui wrote, but I had to abandon that engaging subject to meet my class deadline (and to get a life, as Glennda put it).

That's when *Science's* John Travis suggested I contact the grand impresario of scientific press conferences—Ginger Pinholster, director of the office of public programs at AAAS. She and her staff were busy lining up scientists to talk about their work at this year's AAAS Annual Meeting, in San Francisco. She had no press conferences on DVD but had hired a crew to film one session and was willing to split the cost with NASW to film several press conferences on one day of the meeting. NASW President Robert Lee Hotz gave it the nod (and authorized the funds), and Ginger set up the filming.

Two days after the meetings, several DVDs arrived on my doorstep. I selected one—a press conference on

Ann Gibbons is a contributing correspondent for Science and author of The First Human: The Race to Discover our Earliest Ancestors (Doubleday, 2006). She teaches science writing at Carnegie Mellon University.

the endangered languages and efforts to restore them—and showed it to my class the next day with instructions for them to take notes and to write a story based on what they heard. I gave them copies of the same press materials passed out to reporters at the AAAS, and told them they could search the Internet, contact the scientists, or use other sources for background, as I would on deadline.

When they turned in their stories the next week, we all were impressed with the wide range of topics they selected—and compared them with reports in several newspapers. The students liked the assignment and got a kick out of reporting on a “real” press conference that had taken place only a few days earlier. The only glitch was that the sound quality was poor, but they still could hear their favorite part—a wonderful performance by an unidentified reporter demonstrating the fine art of presenting his own ideas, with lots of hand-waving and no hint of a question. It was in stark contrast to a succinct question from David Perlman of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and both examples were worth an entire lecture on interviewing techniques. I couldn’t have staged a better press conference if I’d tried.

Other science-writing teachers can obtain copies of the DVD by contacting Tiffany Lohwater, AAAS public engagement manager, at tlohwater@aaas.org. ■

LONDON BOOKMAKERS LAY ODDS ON ROUGH GUIDE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

by Lynne Friedmann

“There’s obviously more than a little irony in flying across the Atlantic to be recognized for a book that describes how fossil-fuel emissions are warping our climate,” says Robert Henson, author of *The Rough Guide to Climate Change* (Rough Guides).

In May, Henson found himself in London for the announcement of this year’s Royal Society Prize for Science Books (www.royalsoc.ac.uk), often referred to as the “Booker prize for science writing.” His book was one of six shortlisted titles in consideration.

“This year’s shortlist reflects the great range of styles that science books can encompass,” said Professor Colin Pillinger, a space scientist from the Open University, in Milton Keynes, who chaired the judging panel. “We believe that they are the best six science books of the last year.”

There are two prize categories: the junior prize, which is given to the best book written for children under 14, and the general prize, for the best book written

for a more general readership. First place in each category takes home £10,000; the author of each shortlisted book receives £1,000.

So prestigious is the Royal Society Prize that each year U.K. bookie William Hill (www.willhill.com) assigns odds on each book in the weeks leading up to the announcement. [Henson’s odds were a respectable 3/1.] This year’s award ceremony took place on May 15.

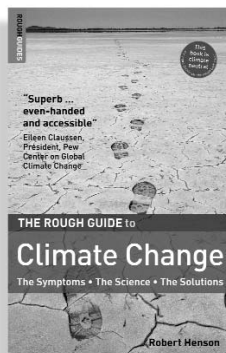
“It’s certainly a pulse-quickenning experience to walk into the halls of the Royal Society and reflect on the titans who considered the society an intellectual home: Robert Boyle, Isaac Newton, and many others,” Henson said.

In the end, Harvard University psychologist Daniel Gilbert took the general prize for *Stumbling on Happiness* (Harper Press). But for Henson, the slight sting of losing was eased by a happy coincidence.

“It was also the night of Rough Guides’ 25th anniversary party, which I’d otherwise have never been able to attend,” he said. “And that party was just a few blocks away from the Royal Society.”

In fact, Henson’s editor, Duncan Clark, as well as his colleagues Andrew Lockett, Peter Buckley, and Vivienne Watton, gallantly skipped the early part of the Rough Guides party to accompany him to the Royal Society ceremonies.

“The five of us soon adjourned to a basement club in London for our second bash of the night, where we toasted the evening’s events with Mark Ellingham, the founder and publisher of Rough Guides and a huge supporter of education and action on climate change.” Henson is grateful that Rough Guides recognizes the



Book award history

Now in its 19th year, this science book award was known as the Rhone-Poulenc prize from 1990 to 1999, then became the Aventis Prize. The award now bears the name of the Royal Society. A complete listing of past nominees and winners can be found at www.royalsoc.ac.uk/bookspage.asp?id=6372.

Robert Henson is among a handful of NASW members whose work has been recognized by this competition. Robert Kunzig was the 2001 general prize winner for *Mapping the Deep: The Extraordinary Story of Ocean Science*; Jerry Bishop and Michael Waldholz made the shortlist, in 1991, for their book *Genome*.

importance of climate change and saw fit to commission a book about it. Not only as an author, but as an individual, Henson has been working to reduce his own carbon footprint in many other ways—compact fluorescent bulbs and wind power at home, a car that gets great gas mileage, frequent bicycle commuting, and so forth, but admits that air travel remains his “Achilles’ heel for now.”

Henson did, however, make it a point to book both Atlantic crossings during daylight hours. Flying in darkness is estimated to produce at least twice the greenhouse impact of daytime flying, because at night the aircraft contrails can’t reflect sunlight—a process that helps compensate for the overall warming effect of aviation.

“This is one example of how small and simple changes in our lifestyle can make a difference in our greenhouse impact,” he said. “Tackling (the climate change) problem will involve almost every aspect of our lives, but I’m optimistic that we can make a dent in the planet’s greenhouse emissions and improve our way of life at the same time.” ■

VAN DAM FELLOWS SHARE TRAVELS AND TRAVAILS DOWN UNDER

[Editor’s note: The first Laura van Dam Travel Fellowships were awarded earlier this year to fund attendance at to the 5th World Congress of Science Journalists, in Melbourne, Australia. The following are reflections of these writers on the experience.]

Letter from Melbourne

by David Wolman

The 5th World Conference of Science Journalists was at turns more amusing and sorrowful than I anticipated. Instead of the typical bad-then-good news delivery, though, permit me to ping-pong a little.

One of my interests in going to Melbourne was to learn about drought and related agricultural sciences, especially in Australia. It took almost no time in country to discover that Australia’s water woes are far more severe than I had perceived, and as front-and-center in the minds of Australians as Iraq and Paris Hilton are in the minds of Americans. During the same April week as the conference, a federal water-management plan was being hotly debated in Canberra and reported on the front pages of the major newspapers. Corresponding WCSJ sessions covering drought-tolerant plants and weather prediction, as well as a reading by a prominent Australian writer who covers rural issues, were informative and timely.

Later that night at the Melbourne Aquarium, as the manta ray seemed to float up and out of the head of



Recipients of the inaugural Laura van Dam Travel Fellowships: (L to R) David Wolman, Betsy Mason, and Emily Sohn

the *Science* magazine correspondent, it dawned on me—after a few drinks—that the advent of these within-the-tank tunnels has got to be one of the most underreported aquarium-technology advances of the last half century. I also learned that loudspeaker announcements about shark feedings are an effective way to herd journalists toward a particular section of a building, but it does not always follow that there will be an actual feeding.

The next day I attended a talk entitled, “Coral Reefs—Going, Going, Gone?” (The short answer: Yes.) Listening to one of the world’s preeminent reef scientists describe the global-scale collapse that is now well underway, I couldn’t help but feel moved by his despair. Do the plight and politics of coral reefs warrant more media coverage? Of course, and the speakers did their best to outline what lies ahead. Still, their action-based optimism didn’t diminish the aching sense of inevitability.

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In fact, the fifth WCSJ was filled with climate-change gloom and doom, in large part because science today is all about that ungodly complicated predicament. There were other interesting sessions, sure, about mining technology, podcasting basics, and neuroscience breakthroughs. Yet I couldn’t help but notice how much of the week was dedicated to global warming and corresponding research. The scientific realities of climate change added an undercurrent of sadness to many of the sessions, even when the presenters dutifully focused on data and methodology.

The best chance for a bit of levity about global warming came the morning of the first day, when attendees awoke to find that uber-right-wing climate-change naysayers had slid under the door of every hotel guest a

riveting piece of propaganda describing the “global warming hoax” and labeling Al Gore’s “An Inconvenient Truth” genocidal. A bizarre and, when you get right down to it, rather silly episode. Unfortunately, the stiff apology from the hotel manager for the “security breach” somehow neutered everyone’s ability to laugh at the patently laughable.

Two final parting snapshots: There was the absolutely priceless story of the sassy Australian TV journalist who confessed to adultery while reporting a story about brain imaging and lying. And I will never forget the following peculiar encounter by the sink in the hotel men’s room. I was washing my hands at the same time as another conference attendee. Knowing from his presentation that he hadn’t been feeling well, I asked: “How’re you feeling?”

“So-so during the day. Not good at night,” he replied.

“That’s a drag.”

“Well I’m not going to be changing my behavior because of it,” he said, as if I’d accused him of kowtowing to the interests of Big Pharma. Then he forcefully disposed of his used paper towel and left.

A non sequitur for the purposes of this letter, you might think, but let me explain. As a “journor,” as they say in Australia, and especially as a freelancer, I have a bit of a hang-up about socializing at conference-sized events; my home office (read: cave) is just more comfortable. But it’s important to put yourself out there. That’s why the oddball encounter in the Melbourne Grand Hyatt men’s room was so valuable. It reminded me that I need not be insecure about cocktail-hour aptitude because there will always be people out there, more socially awkward than me.

Even without the chance to make new friends and learn about cool new science, this reminder alone was worth the trip to Melbourne.

David Wolman is a freelance science writer and author based in Portland, Ore.

The koala in the tree seemed like a good omen.

by Emily Sohn

It was our first morning on southern Australia’s Great Ocean Road, and after nearly 10 hours of post-conference sleep in the back of a red, rainbow-striped campervan, Canadian freelancer Hannah Hoag and I woke up under a eucalyptus tree—with a leaf-munching koala on one of the top branches. We cooed at the furry ball cuteness for a while, before taking off in our rented home on wheels. Throughout our weeklong journey, koalas would show up again and again to teach us about Australia’s charms and its troubles.

When I learned in January that I would be attending the 5th World Congress of Science Journalists in Melbourne in April, I first thought about all the great stories I could write for my young, animal-loving audience at *Science News for Kids*. Then, I thought about fun. I decided to stay an extra week to pursue stories and revel in my lifelong dream of visiting Australia.

Hannah, whom I met at the AAAS meeting in San Francisco in February, e-mailed me a month later with news that she would be in Melbourne, too. What was I doing after the conference? Within days, she had booked her flight to coincide with mine. I didn’t hesitate to sign up for a week on the road with a virtual stranger, and I didn’t need to worry. Hannah and I are both in our early 30s, recently married outdoor fanatics, and equally enthralled by odd products in foreign grocery stores, such as squeezable coffee in a tube. We got along great.

When I learned...I would be attending the 5th World Congress of Science Journalists...I reacted like any typical lottery winner would.

Already, I’ve written conference-inspired stories for *Science News for Kids* about the Earth’s poles, Indonesia’s prehistoric “Hobbit” people, and more. But what I will remember most is one of our first post-conference stops, at the Cape Otway Centre for Conservation Ecology. On 165 acres of land overlooking the ocean, Shayne Neal and Lizzie Corke—both in their late 20s—rehabilitate wild animals that have been stranded or wounded, usually by cars. The Centre, which borders the stunning Great Otway National Park, also serves as a luxury eco-lodge and research center. Lizzie and Shayne bought the land on a whim after their college graduation, and built the lodge with their own hands. They were married there last September.

After a tour, the red-headed duo took us outside to feed koalas and wallabies that had been rescued from a devastating wildfire three months earlier. After a decade of relentless drought, bushfires are increasingly common in Australia. In January, a blaze wiped out 95 percent of koala habitat in a nearby area called Framlingham, Shayne says. Thousands of animals died. Hundred more were burnt or orphaned.

As part of a network of volunteers, Shayne and Lizzie took in 10 animals from the fires, including five koalas. One died right away, but the others are thriving, thanks to around-the-clock care. At first, Shayne and Lizzie were up every few hours all night long to change bandages and bottle-feed goat’s milk to the animals. Lizzie proudly showed us the healing hand of Bea, an adult female, who lost two claws on a singed paw. We

also met a big male named Hunter whose fur was so badly burned that, for weeks, he had to be hand-dried after rainstorms to avert hypothermia. Ruby, who Lizzie called “the little, pretty one,” The sweet creature was not injured, but she was too young to take care of herself.

Like young parents, Shayne and Lizzie haven’t slept through the night in years, and they can’t take vacations because the animals and the lodge need them. But their energy is contagious, their dedication to the environment inspiring, and we felt as cared for as the koalas were. After the animal feeding, we joined Lizzie and Shayne for a feeding of our own. Over hearty vegetable quiche, fresh salad, local wine, and an apple-berry crumble made with local ingredients, we talked late into the evening about the land, the animals, the drought, the future.

For the rest of our journey, Hannah and I concentrated on surfing, hiking, and exploring. We drove cautiously, and not just because we were driving on the left. Every time we saw a koala by the side of the road, we wondered things like: Do Australians think they’re as cute as we do? Does koala-watching ever get old? How many stories can we write about these adorable animals?

It’s comforting to know that self-sacrificing volunteers like Lizzie and Shayne are protecting injured koalas and wallabies in Australia, but who’s watching out for all of the other troubled creatures around the world? Who is going to nurse them back to health?

Emily Sohn is a freelance science writer based in Minneapolis, Minn.

Post conference with penguins

by Betsy Mason

“Will I get to see a kangaroo? A koala?” That was the first thing I thought when I learned I was heading down under on an NASW travel fellowship. What immediately followed, of course, were thoughts about professional development, international networking, and cultural enrichment. But then my mind went straight back to the exotic animals. Don’t tell me you wouldn’t have done the same thing. I mean, a platypus? Come on!

Anyroad (that’s Australian for “anyway”), I got busy registering for the World Conference of Science Journalists and making decisions about hotels, meals, and workshops. My progress was abruptly stopped, however, by the six all-day tours I had to choose from for the final day of the conference, each with several stops such as the brand new Australian synchrotron, a brain-research institute or a dairy research center where scientists milk wallabies.

All tempting, but I quickly homed in on a tour to

a sanctuary where endangered native animals are bred for conservation, and sick or injured animals recover at a wildlife health center. There would be kangaroos...and koalas...and platypi...and more crazy-sounding animals like bandicoots, echidnas, and Tasmanian devils. A no-brainer, right? That’s the tour for me.

But wait, what’s this? A tour to an island to see the world’s smallest penguins? Everyone knows the best way to make a cute animal even cuter is to make it smaller, so logically, these have to be the cutest penguins on the planet. After several days of waffling, I opted for the Little Penguins.

Our first stop was Australia’s newest botanical garden in Cranbourne, which was unlike any other botanical garden I’ve seen. It was a work of art, intended to evoke images of the landscape’s fragile relationship with water and instruct gardeners on how to conserve the precious resource. In Australia you can’t escape the water issue. Most areas of the country are under some level of water restrictions, and while I was there, climate change was front page news virtually every day.

The week had been filled with fodder for stories, maybe even a book and lots of invaluable perspective...

Next we headed for the coast. After what seemed an eternity, we crossed a bridge to Philip Island and finally reached the Little Penguins. Or so I thought. It turns out that in my excitement about the mini birds, I completely missed the fact that we were also going to see...koalas! We were at a sanctuary that protects the ten or so koalas that remain on the island. While at least one neighboring island is virtually overrun with the iconic animals, many of Australia’s koala populations have been stunted by Chlamydia, which sterilizes the females. We were able to get within a few feet of some of the sleepy, fuzzy marsupials which were so enchanting that our tour guide had to literally herd us back to the bus. We had a tight schedule to keep: the penguin parade occurs at sunset.

After rushing through dinner at the visitor’s center, we raced out to the beach. We were halfway there when we saw the first bunch—an unbearably cute procession of waddling blue and white penguins, barely a foot tall, heading inland to their burrows. They were a bit tubby after gorging at sea for weeks on end and preparing for several days on land without food. The fattest ones would flop down on their stomachs every few feet for a quick rest.

From the viewing platform at the top of the beach, we watched droves of the little birds come out of the water and zip across the beach as quickly as their awkward little bodies could go to keep from becoming a

meal for a fox. Once each group made it to the relative safety of the first dune, they stopped to catch their breath and rearrange their feathers until the next gang arrived and nudged them on their way. Soon the island was echoing with penguins making the most of precious time for socializing—the sea can be a bit lonely it seems.

I watched and listened and marveled at how lucky I was. The week had been filled with fodder for stories, maybe even a book, and lots of invaluable perspective. Being in the minority as an American science writer was refreshing. Colleagues from third world countries shared their struggles to get science into the news, and in some cases just to be paid for their work. I had met dozens of really smart, talented, dedicated people from all over the world including Madagascar's only science journalist as well as some new friends from my own country. And of course, the Little Penguins. I never would have experienced any of it without the NASW fellowship.

After about an hour, the cold night breeze sent us contentedly back to the bus. It was the perfect way to cap off what truly was an amazing week of professional development, international networking, and cultural enrichment. ■

Betsy Mason is a staff science writer at the Contra Costa (Calif.,) Times.

AVOID PITFALLS WHEN REPORTING ON GENDER AND SEX

by Clifford R. Cannon

A researcher reversed the usual roles of science and journalism to show science writers how to avoid slanted, even false, reporting in stories on sex and gender.

What is meant by a question like, "are boys better at math than girls?" asked Abbe H. Herzig, an assistant professor of mathematics education at the University at Albany, State University of New York.

Herzig, speaking at this year's AAAS annual meeting on the topic of gender, science, and the press,* dissected the seemingly innocent question to point out the pitfalls it contains.

*"Miscommunications, Misunderstandings, and Mistakes: Gender, Science, and the Press," presented Feb. 18, 2007, during the AAAS annual meeting, in San Francisco.

Clifford R. Cannon is a freelance writer who lives in Encinitas, Calif.

- What population of boys—what are their ages, education, and nationality?
- Which population of girls are the boys being compared to?
- Which aspect of math is being studied?
- What is meant by "better"—reasoning, understanding, or test scores?

According to Herzig, such an indefinite question is unanswerable—although it is a question many people do think about, and certainly a subject that receives frequent attention in the media.

In earlier ages, it was believed that women could not pursue mathematics and the sciences because their heads were too small, their nervous systems too delicate, or their reasoning capacities insufficient. Recent comments from sources as diverse as the president of Harvard University and the *Financial Times* indicate at least some of these antiquated notions still exist.

So, what questions can sex and gender research answer?

Herzig prefaced her remarks by reminding the audience that research is not a search for "the truth," but rather a systematic search for evidence, to help infer understanding. As evidence accumulates, stronger inferences can be made—or past mistakes discovered. Journalists play an important role in the public's understanding of this process of science.

"Males and females are different in some ways and not in others," Herzig said. "And there's a lot of ways in which we are not different, and some of those differences just don't matter."

She pointed out that "any attempt to make sweeping conclusions that we know anything about how gender works...is bound to be wrong."

Herzig, a professional statistician for more than a decade for the parent company of *Consumer Reports*, cautions writers when evaluating statistical data that "significant" does not mean the same as "important" or "meaningful."

Statistical significance means that, "based on the sample that we have in front of us, we feel pretty confident inferring that there's a real difference in the population at large," she said. However, that difference may not matter in practical terms, and it's important for journalists to understand and to convey to their audience the magnitude of the difference and not merely the statistical confidence.

Herzig offered a checklist of questions for both journalists and researchers to ask—and answer—when reporting on sex and gender research:

- What research question was the study designed to address? The question asked limits what conclusions can actually be supported by the data.
- How was the sample formed, and what population does it represent? The sample chosen limits what popu-

lation any conclusions can be applied to.

- What was actually measured? Are those measures valid and reliable? For example, measuring standardized test scores is not the same as measuring intelligence.
- If significant differences are reported, are those differences meaningful and important?
- Do the conclusions presented clearly follow from a chain of evidence?
- If the research was published some time ago, is it still valid? More recent research may have drawn different conclusions or revealed flaws in earlier work.
- Finally, what are the limitations of the measures applied? In consequence, what can *not* be inferred from the research? Knowing the limitations can be a safeguard against over generalizing the results of a particular study.

Another panelist, Annalee Newitz, a freelance writer and a contributing editor at *Wired* magazine, discussed how journalistic conventions—characters, conflict, and human interest—can unintentionally distort a story. For example, casually asserting that sex-linked behavior in animals explains a gender difference among human beings is a common reporting mistake.

Another slippery slope is injecting male-female conflict as a way to add interest to a story. “But is it true in the matter you are reporting?” Newitz asked.

Work with editors to tell new types of stories with real characters instead of clichés, proposed Newitz. Create interest by posing a problem and showing how the answer is being sought. Describe real conflicts that exist among researchers. Profile the scientists’ dramatic professional lives and leave out irrelevant personal details.

As professionals, there is little difference between female scientists and their male counterparts. Newitz encouraged journalists to use women scientists as sources the same as you would men. If you wouldn’t describe a male scientist by mentioning his marriage, children, and fashion sense—don’t describe females that way either.

As writers, keep in mind that your audience already has beliefs about sex and gender, and the beliefs are interwoven, advised sociologist Kathryn B. Campbell-Kibler, a lecturer in the department of linguistics at the University of Michigan. For example, for many people “good at math” implies that a person is socially awkward or somewhat unattractive. However, people can embrace completely contradictory beliefs—they don’t need to get rid of an old belief to adopt a new one.

Use the power of association, recommended Campbell-Kibler to change preconceptions about sex and gender. For example, you can assert “there are girls and boys who are cute, socially adept, *and* good at math,” to instill a new belief by connecting it to other desirable qualities. ■

DID YOU HEAR THE ONE ABOUT THE WITTY SCIENCE WRITER?

by Steve Nadis

It took more than two decades, but it finally happened. I finally got my own humor column. To the outside world, it’s no big deal, just a hard-to-find little 800-word tract called “Cambridge on My Mind” that I’ve carved out in the local paper, the *Cambridge Chronicle*. The column hasn’t caused much stir yet, though some people seem to like it. A few, however, yearn for the good old days when I was just another man on the street without a soapbox to climb onto.

It all came about last year as a result of something I wrote about *Parade*—a magazine I often praise “because it’s real.” In this piece, I compared myself to former Miss America, Vanessa Williams, who claimed on the cover: “I always knew I’d bounce back.” That’s my story too, though there are many other words I can imagine emblazoning on the magazine’s cover:

- “I was so low, my head hit the floor on the way up.”
- “Deep down, I always knew there was a road back. If not a through road, at least a cul-de-sac.”
- “After the 10th cheeseburger, I realized I had to look within.”
- “Years later, in the middle of the weather forecast, I finally got the wake-up call needed.”

The piece was rejected by the *Chronicle*, in part because it lacked the “local angle.” But the editor surprised me by saying: “We get so much political stuff, the paper could really use more humor. Any interest in having a column?”

And so it began. Of course, it didn’t exactly begin there, as my first humor columns started appearing in the *Chronicle* in the mid-1980s, and I figure several dozen have been published, off and on, since then. But it’s different now that I’ve got my own space and am a regular columnist, right up there besides other celebrity writers like the “Dog Lady” and the “Travel Guy” and the senior citizen whose name momentarily escapes me, but I can assure you he’s handling the indignities of old age with a mixture of resignation and grace.

It’s been a long haul for me, a so-called “veteran” science journalist who’s always harbored the dream of having a humor column. And now I’ve got one—a place where I can rattle off *non sequiturs* at will without having to check quotes with sources or provide interview notes or secondary material to a crew of overly-zealous fact-checkers. In other words, I get to run my mouth off with

Steve Nadis is a freelance writer based in Cambridge, Mass.

few restrictions so long as I keep it clean, keep it local, and maintain a reasonable humor quotient. So here I am, getting less than 10 cents a word and telling myself: "Kid, you finally made it."

The way I see it, I'm like a poor man's Dave Barry, which is accurate—the poor part of it at least. Of course, nitpickers might point out that Dave Barry is actually funny. To that I offer my standard disclaimer: You can't have everything. Besides, I may not be Dave Barry, but I can still do some of the things he does. Take his book, *Dave Barry Turns 50*. Well, big deal, I turned 50 too. I just didn't feel the need to write a bestseller about it. Sure, there's an income gap between us, but deep down I have to believe that if Dave keeps plugging away, he's eventually going to make it. Just like I did.

Though I make it sound easy, it actually took perseverance and fortitude, because I've had many close calls, plus my share of heartbreak, in the decade or two it took to get where I am today. Back in the 1980s, for instance, the then *Chronicle* editor asked me if I wanted a column. "Sure," I said. "Why not?" He then asked me to send some sample columns. But I balked at doing that since he'd already published a dozen of my essays and an equal number of features in the last year alone. "What more do you need?" I asked.

He was thin-skinned, as most editors are, and didn't like being challenged. He was also still mad at me for writing my last feature in cowboy vernacular. "You may need a dating service," he fumed. "Or a shrink. But you don't need a column." And he was probably right on all three scores.

In the 1990s, I found another *Chronicle* editor who seemed like he'd be receptive to my plans, as he printed every humor piece I submitted without question. I was about to ask him about setting up a regular gig, when he broke his leg, took a medical leave, and never returned. Next, I published some humor in *OMNI*, also in the 1990s, but they decided to go out of business rather than put me on the masthead. I then sold a humor piece to their "sister" publication, *Penthouse*, which was kind of a stretch for me. You see, I'm used to taking a story and "cleaning it up" before sending it off for publication. But in this case, I had to "dirty it up," and that didn't come naturally. Though I'm sure it would have with practice.

A year or two later, to my surprise, *Technology Review* offered me a humor column, which we decided to call "Strange Matter." I'd given them a number of ideas, as well as some clips, and was ready to go. But our timing couldn't have been worse. In less than two months, the magazine got a new editor, a new publisher, and a new look. My column, evidently, was not part of that "look."

Somehow I got to talking with the publisher of a glossy, bimonthly rag called *The Improper Bostonian*, and we made arrangements for a column, "Call Me

Snake," which is a name I've since appropriated for my blog (cambridgeguy.blog.com). I remember meeting him in their glitzy office space across from the Boston Common, with a lot of young, fashionably dressed, and superficial-looking people milling about. It dawned on me during our conversation that I didn't fit in there and that maybe *Penthouse* wasn't such a stretch after all. But the publisher had big plans for me: He wanted to plaster my picture on the side of city buses, and this was well before Carrie Bradshaw of "Sex and the City" did the same. "How good are you at self-promotion?" he asked.

I thought of saying: "Well, if I was really good at self-promotion, I wouldn't be sitting here, now would I?" But instead I replied: "I've been promoting myself since I was in my mother's womb and haven't stopped yet." That was the answer he was hoping for.

But it didn't last, as this publisher was sacked for financial reasons within a matter of weeks, and I got nowhere with his successor.

So I had to wait nearly a decade until my big break came last year. The pay, as I've mentioned, is not great. In fact, it's so low I have to restrict my humor attempts to the late-night hours—as if it were a bad habit like pornography—so that it doesn't cut too much into my income-generating work. On the other hand, sometimes you've said all you can about neutrino oscillations, supersymmetry partners, or quantum chromodynamics, and a little item about rabbits running amok in the neighborhood serves as a welcome distraction.

There is a price to be paid for celebrity. When I walk into the local Y these days, the guy at the front desk always has a wisecrack to dispense. "I saw your latest column," he remarked last week. "You didn't make too many mistakes this time." Or "Your columns seem to be getting longer and longer. Kind of like verbal diarrhea."

Then there are the irascible types who write to the paper online just to take potshots at me—people like Roy B., who related a joke that had I been "a good comedian" I would certainly have known. "You can pretend to be sincere, but you cannot pretend to be funny," he quipped.

I didn't bother to respond though it's obvious that if "Cambridge On My Mind" were a "comedy" rather than a newspaper column, I would be sure to have a built-in laugh track so I wouldn't have to deal with muckraking killjoys like him.

Besides, some people have uplifting things to say, like Tim R. from California, who saw my "Bug-Kill Philosophy" piece online and told me to "keep at it" (although I'm not sure whether he meant for me to keep writing or to keep spraying).

Still, I can't let all this praise go to my head, nor should I get complacent. The *Chronicle* editor is now waging war with the city's mayor about the latter's

spending habits—his penchant for treating others to expensive lunches and for handing out pricey watches as if they were business cards. Who knows how this contest will play out? Maybe the editor will be toast before the year is done, and maybe my column will go that way as well. In which case we can all go back to the good old days when I was just another man on the street, without a soapbox to climb onto. ■

TAX TIPS ON TRAVEL BAD DEBT, AND A LARGE BOOK ADVANCE

by Julian Block

What kinds of tax write-offs are available to NASW members and others who attend the 2007 meeting in Spokane? You get to deduct 100 percent of what you spend for the attendance fee, tapes of sessions and the like, plus travel between your home and Spokane and expenditures for hotels. For use of your own car, deduct actual expenses or a standard mileage rate that is 48.5 cents per mile for 2007, whichever is greater. Whether you claim actual expenses or the standard rate or the cost of a rental car, also deduct parking fees, as well as bridge, tunnel and turnpike tolls. There is a cap for meals not covered by the attendance fee, including both what you eat en route and food consumed while in Spokane. Deduct only 50 percent of those expenditures. Some often overlooked tax relief is available for lodging costs even when your spouse, significant squeeze or someone else tags along only for fun. You are entitled to a deduction for lodging based on the single-rate cost of similar accommodations for you — *not* half the double rate you actually paid for the two of you.

Question: Last year, a magazine agreed to pay \$2,000 for an article, plus reimburse my expenses. Usually, I ask and receive more for this kind of article, but I wanted the exposure this publication could provide. This year, I made sure to deliver the article well in advance of its due date, along with my bill for \$2,700, comprised of the \$2,000 fee and \$700 for travel, telephone and other expenses incurred in the course of

research. The assignment turned out to be a fiasco. I will collect zilch because the magazine went kaput; last I heard of its publishers, they had gone into the witness protection program. When tax time rolls around, I know where the various out-of-pocket expenses aggregating \$700 go on which lines of Form 1040's Schedule C (Profit or Loss From Business). It seems only fair that I should be entitled to a further reduction in my income taxes with a bad-debt deduction on Schedule C for that unpaid \$2,000 fee. As I fall into a 30 percent federal and state bracket, the additional write-off works out to a savings of \$600—not monumental moola, but likely enough to cover several sumptuous spreads of my favorite paella at a Zagat-recommended restaurant. Some extra consolation is that a decrease in Schedule C's net profit will lower what I owe for self-employment taxes. But where do I enter the \$2,000 deduction in the expenses part of Schedule C? Or am I supposed to amend the previous year's return in order to claim it?

Answer: Downsize your dining desires and be content to gorge with the other gringos at La Casa Internacional de Pancakes. You cannot take any deduction for the \$2,000. The snag: You are what is known as a "cash-basis taxpayer." That is the Internal Revenue Service's designation of individuals (including most of us) who generally do not have to report payments for articles, books, and other income items until the year that they actually receive them and do not get to deduct their expenses until the year that they pay them. As the tax code does not require you to count the \$2,000 as reportable income, it does not allow you to deduct an equivalent amount. Only if you were an "accrual basis taxpayer," and had previously counted the \$2,000 as reportable income at the time it became due to you, could you deduct it now, as it has not actually arrived and is a lost cause.

Question: For the past few years, my writing income has been meager. But this year's income will soar because of a six-figure book advance. According to a fellow writer, income averaging will lower my tax tab by many thousands of dollars. When I file next spring, do I need to complete some form for averaging that has to accompany the 1040 form?

Answer: Your friend's advice might have been helpful when the Oval Office was occupied by Ronald Reagan. But the rules now on the books provide no break for someone whose income jumps. A top-to-bottom overhaul of the Internal Revenue Code, known officially as the Tax Reform Act of 1986, included a provision that abolished averaging for nearly everybody, though there continues to be a limited exception for farmers. My advice is to focus instead on easy and perfectly legal ways for writers to trim taxes. A standard tactic is to stash some of that advance money into one of those retirement plans for self-employed persons. ■

Julian Block is an attorney in Larchmont, N.Y., who has been cited by the New York Times as "a leading tax professional" and by the Wall Street Journal as an "accomplished writer on taxes." He is the author of Tax Tips For Small Businesses: Savvy Ways For Writers, Photographers, Artists, And Other Freelancers to Trim Taxes To The Legal Minimum. Contact him at julianblock@yahoo.com. Copyright 2006 Julian Block. All rights reserved.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

by Robert Lee Hotz

As I look to the second half of the year, I see so many things afoot for NASW here and abroad.

Mariette DiChristina and her workshop committee have done a tremendous job creating an exciting roster of workshops for our Science in Society meeting this October in Spokane. We will, as in years past, be funding many travel fellowships for freelance members as well as awarding mentor grants for gifted science writing students to attend this annual meeting.

The international Laura van Dam fellowships, which gave three of our members the chance to pursue stories in Australia, last spring, appear to be a success—one well worth repeating in years to come. (See page 10)

Thanks to the freelance committee, we have launched Words' Worth. Don't you love the name? Chosen from among 175 entries, this pun was the inspiration of Carol Milano, who received the prize of a year's free membership in NASW. Please consult Words' Worth whenever you need accurate, confidential information about the fees, contracts, and treatment that your fellow members have received from a wide variety of markets and clients. Do us all a favor by contributing your own experiences, anonymously, of course. (See page 24)

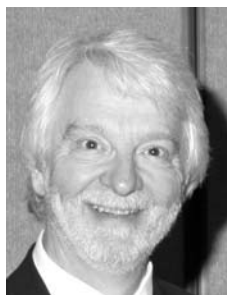


PHOTO COURTESY OF SIGMA XI

As I look to the second half of the year, I see so many things afoot for NASW here and abroad.

It is worth noting that *ScienceWriters* editor Lynne Friedmann once again has filled our venerable periodical with the lively news of our craft with her unfailing professional aplomb. (If you knew how late this column was submitted, you'd admire her work even more.) Cybrarian Russ Clemings is keeping the website humming. Our listservs are active and amicable. And, as Peggy Girshman recently reported in her secretary's missive, we have intervened actively this spring to defend our members' professional interests.

As many of you may recall, NASW embarked recently on a mentoring project with the new Arab

Science Writers Association. On our behalf, former president Deborah Blum and board member Robin Marantz Henig met with the president and vice president of the new group during the recent World Federation of Science Journalists meeting in Australia. We are taking the next step in our support of this mentoring partnership by helping to bring several board members of the Arab Science Journalists Association to our meeting in Spokane, where they will have the opportunity to meet with the board and members at large to learn how to organize an annual science-writing conference. To this end we are contributing \$5,000 in travel fellowships to match \$5,000 in travel stipends voted by the Council for the Advancement in Science Writing.

Barely a year old, the Arab Science Journalists Association has 150 members and has already demonstrated considerable energy and commitment. It conducted a two-hour session at a biannual scientific conference in Damascus, Syria, on Arab science journalism. It has started a series of science cafés in Cairo, Egypt, at one of the city's most popular cultural hubs. It will start conducting monthly seminars for science journalists living in Egypt. It has developed its own website and continues to work on it to turn it into a resource center for Arab science journalists, at www.arabsciencejournalists.net. It also started a monthly newsletter. They soon hope to produce a guide on Arab science journalism and create an award program for Arab science journalism.

This mentoring project is a new direction for NASW, but it grows directly out of our long-standing organizational aim to improve the quality and accuracy of the science information that reaches the public—a public that is increasingly a global audience. As a practical matter, it also clearly and directly benefits our members to build closer international ties as a function of professional networking. And it is a special opportunity for NASW to demonstrate its leadership role in raising the level of professionalism of our craft. NASW's efforts follow the model of other association mentoring projects. For instance, the French science-writing association is partnered with Cameroon and has brought African journalists to Paris for discussions and for a joint workshop on HIV.

Deborah Blum, reporting to the board, said it best: "I believe this is an important effort for us U.S. science writers on all kinds of levels—the importance of science journalism in a global sense, the importance of being good citizens in that sense, the symbolic nature, I suppose, of this particular association, and the real possibility that we will learn from these journalists as well and gain in our ability to do science writing well."

Others agree. Announcement at the Melbourne meeting of the NASW-Arab Science Journalists Association partnership received a standing ovation. ■

Robert Lee Hotz can be reached at leehotz@earthlink.net.

2007 NASW BUDGET REPORT

Income	2006 Proposed	2006 Actual	2007 Proposed
Dues	\$ 175,000	\$ 178,812	\$ 177,000
Labels	16,000	16,847	16,000
Ads/Online & Newsletter	12,000	22,501	20,000
Unrealized Gain	1,900	1,407	1,200
Misc. Income	2,000	3,366	2,500
Bank Interest	700	(see below)	0
Subtotal	\$ 210,600	\$ 222,933	\$ 216,700

Special Sources

Dividends /Investments	\$ 1,800	\$ 11,062	\$ 11,000
CD Interest	2,300	(see above)	(see above)
CASW Grant	1,500	1,500	1,500
NASW Banquet	14,000	9,600	9,500
SW Field Guide	5,500	2,263	1,200
Workshops	55,000	52,265	45,000
Authors Coalition	55,000	73,400	60,000
Subtotal	\$ 135,100	\$ 150,090	\$ 128,200

TOTAL INCOME	\$ 345,700	\$ 373,023	\$ 344,900
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Expenses

Exec. Dir. Payroll	\$ 42,000	\$ 43,000	\$ 48,000
Assoc. Exec. Dir. Payroll	0	0	45,000
Exec. Dir. T&E	1,500	1,500	1,350
Taxes & Benefits	13,000	21,578	22,000
Newsletter Production	47,000	41,548	45,000
Editor	22,000	22,000	22,000
Awards	16,000	12,190	16,000
Roster	13,100	12,117	13,500
Office Expenses Misc.	1,000	2,457	2,300
Accountant Fee	5,500	5,500	6,000
Postage	5,000	4,472	4,400
Supplies	2,000	678	1,000
Telephone	3,000	2,400	2,600
Printing	5,000	4,590	3,000
Corporate Taxes	250	250	250
Authors Coalition	45,000	17,002	40,000
Bank Charges	2,300	2,876	2,900
Check and Payroll services	780	782	900
Computer Support	500	947	500
Subtotal	\$ 227,950	\$ 195,887	\$ 281,700

Special Projects

Local Groups	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,575	\$ 1,000
Cybrarian	25,000	20,600	20,000
Web Hosting	1,500	1,500	1,500
Website Redesign	5,000	0	0
Bd. Travel	10,000	10,349	10,000
SW Field Guide	1,000	2,274	500
Workshop	50,000	92	60,000
Banquet Outlays	8,000	8,959	2,000
Diane McGurgan Award	825	830	845
Ins. (Bd. Liability /Work. Comp.)	3,100	3,167	3,185
Dues / WFSJ	300	300	300
Subtotal	\$ 105,725	\$ 137,700	\$ 99,330

TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 333,655	\$ 333,587	\$ 381,030
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CYBERBEAT

by Russell Clemings

At long last, the final phase of the NASW website upgrade is taking place this summer. By the time you read this, much of it should be in place, including some much-requested features—such as giving members the ability to update their membership directory information and recover their passwords without waiting for assistance.



To recap: Last year, after an extensive member survey and many discussions within NASW's Internet committee, we unveiled a colorful new design for our organization's home page. Our existing content was reorganized and updated and new features added, such as a revolving display of the latest science news headlines.

Earlier this year, we added a popular new members-only feature when we unveiled the Market Database, since rechristened Words' Worth. As of this writing, the database already has 146 entries from members reporting on their experiences with buyers of writing, editing, project management, or other services.

Now, the last—and most complicated—piece of the puzzle is finally falling into place.

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.

BUDGET SUMMARY

Bank Report	12/31/2005	12/31/2006
Money Market Account	\$ 35,463	\$ 22,578
CDs	115,911	202,451
Mutual Funds	43,129	49,345
Cash	99,601	37,725
TOTAL ASSETS	\$ 294,104	\$ 312,099

2006 Total Income	\$ 373,023
2006 Total Expenses	\$ 333,587
2006 Net (Gain)	\$ 39,436
2007 Proposed Income	\$ 344,900
2007 Proposed Expenses	\$ 381,030
2007 Net (Loss)	\$ [36,130]

BUDGET NOTES

Costs for the 2006 workshop were higher than anticipated because the conference ran for two days. The 2007 workshop in Spokane is scheduled for one day to bring costs in line. Personnel expenses will be higher in 2007 and 2008 due to the hiring of an assistant executive director.

The first and biggest change will be visible only to NASW staff. Our existing member database, which runs on software now considered obsolete, is being revamped and centralized. No longer will each member of the NASW staff have a separate, out-of-synch copy of the database. Instead, all will have access to a single master copy.

Many office functions will be automated in the new database. Creating mailing lists, labels, and reports like the one NASW generates annually to qualify for Authors Coalition funding—all can now be done with a few clicks of the mouse.

And in one piece of bad news for a few people, members in the habit of letting their dues fall into arrears will learn that the new database also automates the now-cumbersome manual process of revoking website privileges and other member benefits. If you fit the description, well, you've now been warned.

On the brighter side, if your membership does lapse and you subsequently rejoin, we will be able to easily reactivate your old website user name and password, rather than making you apply for new ones as with the present system.

Our schedule calls for the new database to be up and running by the end of June. Shortly thereafter, you can expect to see an ad on the Hedgesville, W.Va., craigslist for an extremely used, very old personal computer. (The board recently bought Executive Director Diane McGurgan a new one for use with the new database.)

We'll roll out new features for members on the website later in the summer. They will include pages that:

- List all of the directory information in your membership record—name, address, title and affiliations, areas of expertise and specialty, and other contact details such as e-mail addresses and telephone numbers. Any changes you make will be recorded automatically in the master member database and included in the online member directory.

- Let you retrieve a lost password, as long as you correctly enter your first name, last name, and e-mail address.
- Let you change your NASW website username.

Functions from the present NASW members' website will be maintained and upgraded. As stated above, the online membership directory, formerly updated about twice a month, will now be as current as the master membership database from which its information is drawn.

Just as they do now, members will be able to create, change, and delete their NASW.org e-mail aliases. These aliases allow you to use an NASW.org address as a "mail drop," or forwarding address, that can receive e-mail for you and forward it to any account you specify.

NASW's extensive listserv archives, an unparalleled resource of science-writing know-how dating back to 1995, were revamped and collected in a slick new searchable format in the earlier phase of the website upgrade. And our list of member websites, available on

the public web page for any member who asks to be included, will remain in place and be integrated with the new member database.

At long last, the final phase of the NASW website upgrade is taking place this summer.

What's next on the to-do list? Most likely that decision will be made in the upcoming NASW annual board meeting. Ideas that have been discussed include a collection of resources on self-publishing and collaborative guides to science and science writing, perhaps created using the popular "wiki" format that permits groups of people to write and edit collectively.

Whatever happens next, the goal remains to make www.nasw.org a site that serves the needs of science writers generally and NASW members in particular. Please let us know what you think those needs are—write to me at cybrarian@NASW.org, and send cc's to the board's Internet committee co-chairs, Mariette DiChristina at mdichristina@sciam.com and Kelli Whitlock Burton at kelli_whitlock@NASW.org. ■

PIO FORUM

by Dennis Meredith

Lessons from a Mass Firing

It was a May 1 e-mail that gave the writers in the Duke Medical Center News Office the first ominous sign that something was up. Their boss, Douglas Stokke, assistant vice president for communications, called them to a mandatory meeting that afternoon.

"He had a little baseball that he kept twirling on the desk," recalled one of the writers, who asked not to be identified. "The baseball was going the whole time. He started out talking about how these things were never easy to say, and the office was going in a different direction. And he hemmed and hawed for a few minutes, but then basically said that 'you are now all in a state of what is considered workforce reduction. And by June 30, if you haven't found a job either within the Duke system



Dennis Meredith is a veteran PIO who spent 15 years as head of research communications at Duke. He is writing a book Explaining Research.

or elsewhere, your position will be eliminated.”

Thus began the dismantling of a cadre of medical writers respected by reporters and Duke researchers alike for their journalistic ability, expertise in science, and responsiveness to the media. For example, genetics was covered by Marla Vacek Broadfoot, who holds a Ph.D. in genetics and molecular biology. Other basic sciences were covered by Richard Merritt, a 19-year veteran of the office who had previously covered Oak Ridge National Laboratory as a newspaper science reporter. Writers on clinical science beats included Whitney Howell, who came from the Association of American Medical Colleges, and Tracey Koepke, who came to Duke from a medical laboratory at the University of North Carolina. (A personal note: before retiring from Duke, my duties included editing the writers’ research releases. I found them to be skilled writers and consummate media relations professionals.)

Despite that the firings were labeled as “workforce reductions,” they were actually part of a workforce expansion in the office. Replacing the five writers, Stokke and news office director Christopher DiFrancesco planned to open seven new positions.

They would hire five “media relations strategists” at significantly higher salaries. The positions as described require no expertise in science or medical writing or a medical center background, but rather, according to the online job posting, “a bachelor’s degree in Journalism [sic], English or a related discipline” and media relations or news reporting experience. The duties described include “Analyst [sic] local, regional and national print, broadcast and online media coverage for trends that would influence our media relations tactics, opportunities, etc. Develop close, mutually productive personal working relationships wit [sic] key national reporters.”

***The positions as described
require no expertise in science
or medical writing or a medical
center background...***

The office would also hire two lower-level “senior public relations specialists,” whose duties would consist of writing media pitches for faculty and serving as “oddball” writers on assorted releases. The fired writers were invited to apply for those positions, and at this writing one will take the public relations specialist job and one a media strategist job.

Interviews with Stokke, DiFrancesco, and the fired writers—and with former staff writer Becky Levine, who left before the firings—reveal the Duke Medical Center News Office as beset with management miscues and misconceptions. However, those problems are particularly instructive for any news office because

unfortunately they are all too common and can affect both an office’s internal effectiveness and its ability to serve its institution.

First of all, “What we got here is...failure to communicate,” as the chain gang captain so memorably drawled to Paul Newman and his fellow convicts in “Cool Hand Luke.” The perceptions and memories of the fired writers and those of their managers differ in many ways important to the office’s function.

Writers recall that Stokke and DiFrancesco sought to reduce research releases in favor of story pitching, video and other techniques. Said Levine, “He made it clear that he did not think that we needed to be doing as much writing as we were doing—certainly not as much science writing—but our writing needed to have a much more clinical focus that was more market-driven in the areas where [health system chancellor Victor] Dzau was trying to beef up the institution.

The proposed reduction concerned Levine “because reporters generally, if you just pitch them a story, the next thing they say is ‘send me something in writing.’ It is very difficult to convey the complexities of a science story—or clinical stories that have a research component—if you don’t send them something that really explains the whole process.”

According to Levine, Stokke said he wanted to reduce the amount of writing by “70 percent.” And one writer, who asked not to be named, recalled Stokke declaring “I know that things are changing, and that press releases are a thing of the past, but I can’t tell you what is going to be ahead.”

Countered Stokke: “That is not my view. My view is that the news release is going to still be the foundation of everything that we do. Anything that we would do in the way of video, in the way of other applications to emerging media...are all going to build off of the news release.”

Writers also said that Stokke and DiFrancesco rearranged the writers’ beats with no explanation of the rationale.

Said Levine, the reassignments were “disturbing to me on several levels. One, he didn’t consult anybody about what they were interested in at all; what they would like to be covering. He didn’t explain to us why he was changing beats, so we were left having to guess what was going on.”

Writers said that Stokke and DiFrancesco removed writers from beats that some had covered for many years—developing their knowledge of the field and establishing close working relationships with the researchers. The writers also said that significant basic science beats were not assigned to any of them.

Stokke tersely explained the reassignments as “just a decision to reassign what people were doing. That simple.” The purpose, he said, was “trying to match what I perceived to be individual strengths to various beats.”

One purpose of the beat changes, said the writers, appeared to be to emphasize covering the medical center's "big five" revenue-producing clinical areas—cardiology, neurology, cancer, pediatrics, and orthopedics—at the expense of basic research coverage.

Countered Stokke, "I don't think the mission has changed really at all." He said the purpose of the office remains "do everything possible to create visibility for basic research, the clinical research, and clinical innovations...."

As evidence of the continuing commitment to covering research, Stokke said that newly hired media relations strategists include "people from other major academic medical centers [with] experience in news-writing, science writing. We have one person from an agency background who has worked very closely with several research-based pharm companies."

Writers said that Stokke and DiFrancesco also established a monthly quota system, dubbed "buckets," that the writers had to fill with national media stories. The quotas were arbitrary, said the writers. They did not take into account that some beats were heavy on basic sciences less likely to generate national coverage, and that research releases could vary in number and newsworthiness from month to month.

In the interview, Stokke countered "My mindset is not geared toward starting any month or any week with saying we have X number of news releases that we need to do this month or a quota or anything of that nature. Our interest is in sending out as much news as we can relative to the research being done here, whether it is clinical or basic."

He later added in an e-mail that he did institute "performance targets that included target numbers of news packages that I wanted each person to aim for each month." These targets, he said "were primarily there to illustrate the kinds of performance and execution that we were looking for," and they "would not be the basis for any performance assessment."

If the road to the firings was paved with the cobblestones of miscommunication, the final boulder was performance review meetings in which the two managers met with each writer. According to writers, they received only vague criticism for not being "busy" enough, creative enough, and lacking enthusiasm. And, said writers, their documentation of their productivity was ignored or dismissed.

Said Stokke of the reviews: "Having arrived and had a chance to assess the situation, assess strengths and weaknesses, we provided each person with, I think pretty clear direction, not absolutely clear direction in terms of where they were going, but we talked a lot about the fact that there are these emerging opportunities that we need to amortize, and this is the direction that we want to move in trying to do this. These are the kinds of

behaviors, and these are the kinds of performance expectations that I would have of people trying to do that." Stokke said he wanted to see "demonstration of proactive behaviors, demonstration of increased capacities, sense of urgency."

To Stokke and DiFrancesco, none of the writers except one had performed to their expectations—although all were fired. Stokke said that the mass firings occurred because, after consulting with Duke's human resources office, "that was the mechanism that was recommended."

***...managers would do better
to motivate, inspire, and train
existing, experienced staff
to meet new challenges...***

The objective of the staffing changes, he said, was to achieve "a greater depth of experience in media relations; people who were going to give us the ability to better amortize the emerging opportunities that we had that had much broader skill sets than what the folks in the office had currently."

Said Levine, who worked in the office for 14 years: "I feel terrible for my colleagues because there are some very talented people there who really do a great job. I helped build that news office to what I think is a well respected office amongst reporters nationwide, and to see that just dissolve instantaneously is very upsetting to me. It is as though [Stokke] didn't have any respect for how reporters perceived us or how faculty members perceived us."

Besides the apparent failure to communicate, the case of the Medical Center News Office offers useful examples of management misconceptions.

For example, the idea of attempting to quantify the output of a PIO—whether called "quotas," "buckets" or "performance targets"—is a misguided concept. Such simplistic measures as numbers of news releases, clips or media contacts have never been valid measures of a PIOs effectiveness. For one thing, each PIO in an office covers different beats with different "news value." And from month to month, each PIO handles a different set of stories with different responses required to serve the media and other audiences.

Another misconception central to the Duke managers' thinking is that somewhere out there is a "dream team" that if hired will lead the office to some nirvana of media coverage. However, "You can't buy magic," as science writer Bob Cooke—who encountered all manner of PIOs during four decades with the *Boston Globe*, *Newsday*, and other papers—so pithily says.

Rather than taking such drastic actions as wholesale firings and seeking to hire dream teams, managers would do better to motivate, inspire, and train existing,

experienced staff to meet new challenges of “amortizing emerging opportunities.” Besides avoiding the inevitable resentment and ill feelings that such severe steps engender in an organization, such an approach has practical advantages. Even the dreamiest of teams inevitably experiences a significant nonproductive period of learning the politics, personalities, and research strengths of an institution. And during that time, mistakes will certainly be made.

And even dream-teams will require more time to establish the personal relationships of trust that existing staff have built up over years or even decades. Thus, building on existing strengths and talents seems a far more sensible, and humane, course. ■

NEWS FROM AFAR

by James Cornell

Maybe it's just the magic of Oz, a land where the laid-back effervescence of the natives is contagious and a new multiculturalism has pasta topping pasties and tall-blacks almost beating out beer. Who knows? Or, as the Aussies would say, Who cares, mate?

No matter the reason—or what was brewed with the coffee—the result was the 5th World Conference of Science Journalists, held in Melbourne, Australia, April 16-20, that was perhaps the most congenial, collegiate, cohesive gathering of reporters since the invention of movable type.

Somehow, somehow, a gaggle of cantankerous, contentious, and combative souls who would fight to the death over split infinitives found common ground Down Under.

Even with some 600 delegates from 50 countries, there were few piques of distemper, little grandstanding by media megastars, and no political clashes between haves and have-nots. Indeed, there was remarkable unanimity on most issues: the world is getting warmer, politicians are getting worse, and editors—in whatever culture or language they work—are even worse. More important, there was a palpable spirit of cooperation and collaboration between journalists of the developed world and their counterparts in the remaining two-thirds.

Ironically, to paraphrase another writer who often used Australia as a distant metaphor for hope conquering despair, this is both the best and the worst of times

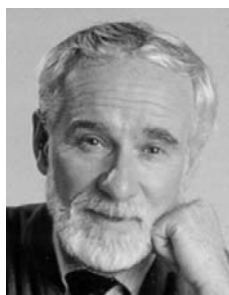


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

for science journalism. While the trade seems to be hurtling down the tube in the USA, elsewhere in the world it seems to be not only surviving, but, by many measures, thriving.

At least, this is one impression drawn from the Melbourne meeting. The conference, and the World Federation of Science Journalists (WFSJ), the organization that co-sponsored it, have become solid, professional entities of international renown, with the latter now representing some 30 national and regional associations—a remarkable total given that perhaps less than a dozen such organizations were represented in Tokyo 15 years ago.

Admittedly, some of these national groups are quite small in terms of membership and impact, but they represent the growing recognition, globally, that science journalism is a distinct and special field, requiring, if not special skills, then special attitudes and approaches. The true benefit of such meetings is experiencing first-hand how universal those attitudes may be—whether one is a reporter in New York, New South Wales, or New Caledonia.

The difference between, say, the U.S. today, and many parts of Africa and Asia is that the people and the publishers in the latter areas recognize the value of good science reporting and support it accordingly. Of course, many science journalists in these countries also get considerable assistance and substantial sustenance from public agencies, philanthropic foundations, and private industry.

For example, over 100 attendees of the Melbourne meeting were supported wholly or partly by “friends of the conference,” funding organizations that ranged from the Academy of Arts and Science of Bosnia and Herzegovina to UNESCO to a host of Australian academic, governmental, and industrial agencies. NASW, too, was a “friend,” sending three Laura van Dam Fellows—Emily Sohn, David Wolman, and Betsy Mason.

Other NASW members seen there included past-president Deborah Blum and new Associate Executive Director Tinsley Davis, as well as Christine Dell’Amore, Robert Frederick, Robin Marantz Henig, Phil Hiltz, Earl Lane, John Rennie, Andreas von Bubnoff, Kate Wong, and yours truly. In addition, and fittingly, many of NASW’s international members were there, too: Peter Pockley of Australia; Peter Calamai, Tim Loughheed, and Hannah Hoag of Canada; and Kenji Makino of Japan.

The diversity of attendees guaranteed that cocktail parties were polyglot affairs and program sessions a wonderful blend of ethnicity, nationalities, and oddly accented English.

The Melbourne conference goal of giving voice to the world’s variety of science writers was certainly achieved. And many speakers used the opportunity to describe the varying conditions—from dismal to dreadful—under which they must work. Lest others think that Western science is immune to socio-eco-political pressures, author

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

Chris Mooney reprised his riff on the Republican war against reason. His remarks resonated with the international audience, and even the Aussies, who reprinted his remarks one week later in the *Sydney Herald*.

The conference program managed to touch on almost all the major topics of the day: climate change, loss of biodiversity, alternate fuels, genetic research, etc., but usually with an antipodal accent, e.g., how global warming may hasten the demise of the Great Barrier Reef.

Somehow, someway, a gaggle of cantankerous, contentious, and combative souls who would fight to the death over split infinitives found common ground Down Under.

Not surprisingly, the conference organizers, led by the indefatigable Niall Byrne and his partner, Sarah Brooker, put together a daily multi-disciplinary mélange of topical lectures, science and technology panels, professional development workshops, lunch-time press briefings, and outstanding social events that left most delegates sated by both science and canapés. There were also a host of post-meeting field trips to local research sites and facilities. A personal favorite: viewing hundreds of “Little Penguins” make their nightly dash from the surf to the safety of tiny burrows on shore.

The conference also served as a major element in the \$2 million peer-to-peer mentoring project coordinated by the World Federation of Science Journalists with support from Canadian, British, and Swedish development agencies, with many current mentors and mentees attending on scholarships from the federation.

And it contributed mightily to advancing the WFSJ’s ambitious “twinning program,” in which well-established associations partner with newer science journalism

associations, particularly those in the developing world. As reported in the last issue of *ScienceWriters*, one of the first of these partnerships was between NASW and the newly formed Arab Science Journalists Association.

On the last day of the conference, WFSJ Executive Director Jean-Marc Fleury organized a frenetic and funny “speed twinning” session during which a score of national organizations met, matched, and mated—hopefully in long-term partnerships of mutual benefit, such as the match-ups between Japanese science writers and fledgling groups in South Korea, Mongolia, and Qatar.

New associations may also get some help from a booklet published by the WFSJ and introduced in Melbourne. *Setting Up Your Own Science Journalists’ Association* is written Barbara Drillsma, administrator of the Association of British Science Writers. As the book’s subtitle proclaims, Drillsma’s pragmatic, no-nonsense approach tells aspiring organizers “How to do it, what to do once it is formed, and what to watch out for!” Copies are available from the Federation (www.wfsj.org).

The WFSJ also used the occasion to hold its general assembly and to elect new officers.

For more on this year’s event, including hundreds of photos, and a blog where you can comment on the conference or query participants visit www.scienceinmelbourne2007.org.

And, finally, London, England, was selected as the site for the 6th World Conference of Science Journalists, in 2009. ■

NEW PROGRAM FUNDS SCIENCE-WRITING STUDENTS AT AAAS MEETING

by Jeff Grabmeier

NASW helped groom the next generation of science writers through a new program at the AAAS meeting in San Francisco in February.

The NASW has long sponsored a mentoring program and internship fair for science-writing students at the annual AAAS meeting. But new this year was a program sponsored jointly by AAAS and NASW that provided stipends for 10 undergraduate students to attend the meeting and participate in the mentoring program and internship fair. The program came about through a generous grant from the William T. Golden Endowment Fund at AAAS. Students received up to \$1,000 in travel expenses to attend the meeting.

More than 20 students applied for the program, sending writing samples and background information.

The NASW education committee selected the 10

Jeff Grabmeier is co-chair of the NASW education committee.

Upcoming international meetings

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” (www.sciforum.hu).

June 25-27, 2008. 10th PCST Conference, Malmo (Oresund Region), Sweden (www.vt.se/pcst).

July 18-22, 2008, 3rd Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF08), Barcelona, Spain (www.esof2008.org).

winners. Eight science-writing students from undergraduate schools around the nation, and Canada, attended the meeting. Two others were funded but were unable to make the meeting because of weather conditions on the East Coast.

Several of the students said they would not have been able to attend the meeting without the funding and all of them indicated they were helped immensely by the experience.

"Being able to attend meetings on topics ranging from deep-sea fishing to advances in our understanding of brain function expanded my science knowledge base and sparked my interest in new areas of science," said Boston University student Aruna Prabhala.

"One of the most stimulating parts of the conference was being able to interact with willing professional science journalists. Most of the science writers I met in the press lounge were willing to give me advice, answer questions and discuss the issues in the field. That chance alone—to speak with fellow science journalists—made attending the conference worth it my mind," Prabhala said.

Many students talked about how they made valuable contacts with scientists and science editors at the conferences, contacts that are already helping them in their budding careers.

"The contacts I made have led me to exciting science-writing opportunities and I have no doubt they will play a huge role in my ongoing job hunt," said Adam Dylewski of the University of Wisconsin.

In fact, several students said they got assignments for stories as the result of contacts made at the meeting. At least one student blogged stories daily while at the meeting. Another student did a story for *The Why Files* (www.whyfiles.org) about computer simulations of cellular phenomena. Another said he met an editor for *The Scientist* at the meeting and is now working on stories for the magazine.

Overall, the students were most grateful to have received the stipend and were convinced of the value of attending the AAAS meeting. As Matt Cunningham of Indiana University said, "I would certainly recommend the meeting to other students, even if they have to fork over the money from their own pockets."

As for the organizers, we concur with the students that the program was a success. We believe it met the goal of exposing bright, talented students to one of the world's premier science meetings and helping them further their career goals as science writers. We believe it will help develop the top science writers of the future.

The good news is that AAAS has agreed to continue the program, next year, possibly funding more than 10 students. The education committee will work with AAAS to make sure the program continues to attract talented students to careers in science writing. ■

WORDS' WORTH A WORTHY CONTEST WINNER

The NASW freelance committee is pleased to announce that **Words' Worth** is the winner of the contest to name the new NASW markets database. Chosen from among 175 entries, this witty pun on the moniker of the great nature poet was submitted by Carol Milano, who receives the prize of a year's free membership in NASW. Similar, but not identical, versions were later submitted by Dan Keller and Sylvia Wright, who are runners-up.

How did Carol come up with the winning entry?

"Lots of time when I see an announcement about a rate survey or ads for freelance projects I sneer to myself Hah! What's a 'word worth' this week?" she said. "So when I saw the contest, I thought maybe I can kind of tweak that."

Carol also credits vestiges of her college English major and "all those romantic poets I read month after month" with providing inspiration.

Carol says winning the contest "really made my month," and she's already placed a bright Post-it® on her December 31 calendar page to remind her *not* to pay her dues. "But, absolutely, I'll fill out the annual Authors Coalition form."

Aside from the free membership and notoriety of winning the contest, Carol is pleased the new market database has become a reality.

"I really want to thank the freelance committee that put it together," she said. "It's going to be a tremendous asset to me and to other members."

Consult Words' Worth (www.nasw.org/members/market) whenever you need accurate, confidential information about the fees, contracts, and treatment that your fellow NASWers have received from a wide variety of markets and clients. And please take a minute to make it even more useful to everyone by filling out the simple form that will anonymously add your own experience. ■



Instead of a corporate head shot, Carol Milano had this illustration created for her website (www.carolmilano.com) because she wanted people to see her as creative, humorous, and accessible. "I can't say for sure a client has hired me because of it," Carol said. "But several have said 'I like that drawing!'"

ILLUSTRATION BY VIC CANTONE

OUR GANG

by Jeff Grabmeier

For those of you too young to know, the theme for this issue's column is the songs of Bob Dylan. We are brimming here with greatest hits, of both the musical and the science writing variety!

Absolutely Sweet Fellowship. Two NASW members were named to the 70th class of Nieman Fellows at Harvard University for 2007-08. The fellowships are awarded to working journalists of accomplishment and promise for an academic year of study at the university. **Dan Vergano** (dvergano@usa.today.com), science reporter for *USA Today*, will study the troubled marriage of science and society as it relates to the debate about stem cell research, evolutionary biology, and climate change. **Christine Gorman** (cgorman.health@gmail.com), science reporter and *Time* magazine contributor, will study how the basic primary health care infrastructure in poor countries develops and the efforts to train and retrain people responsible for making these systems work. Gorman is a Nieman Fellow in Global Health Reporting. Christine says she is also available starting in the fall to talk to student groups—probably in Boston and the New York City area for now—about journalism, ethics, health topics, and what the future holds for our field. She can be found on the web at www.cgormanhealth.com and www.globalhealthreport.com.

The Times They are A-Changing. Mike Lemonick has left full-time employment at *Time* magazine. Mike says that all together three science writers and the science editor took severance packages in the overall downsizing of the magazine's staff. While he is no longer senior science writer, Mike is now a freelance contributor to the magazine and to other magazines as well. He is also teaching the ethics course at NYU's Graduate Program in Science, Health, and Environmental Reporting and working on a scientific biography of William Herschel. In the fall, he will be teaching at Princeton, Columbia, and Johns Hopkins. As if that is not enough, Mike's cover story for *Time*, "Let There Be Light," was selected by Richard Preston for inclusion in *Best American Science and Nature Writing 2007*. Catch Mike if you can at mlemonick@aol.com.

2nd Time Around. Of course, *Time* is not the only



PHOTO BY JO MCNULTY, OHIO STATE

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.

magazine that is downsizing. After being laid off last year (ad and circulation revenue having declined precipitously in the previous half-decade), 11-year *Sky & Telescope* veteran **Joshua Roth** has reinvented himself as a science teacher and will bring his passion for communicating the wonders of the cosmos to his ninth-grade physics classroom at Medford (Mass.) High School. Send your teaching tips to Joshua at rooney-roth@yahoo.com.

Obviously 5 Winners. Five NASW members were among the winners of the 2006 Awards for Excellence in Health Care Journalism. The awards, presented by the Association of Health Care Journalists, recognize the best health reporting in nine categories covering print, broadcast, and online media. In only its third year, the contest drew nearly 400 entries. **Arlene Weintraub**, of *Business Week* (arlene_weintraub@businessweek.com) won second place in General Interest Magazines for her article "Forever Young." **Peter Aldhous** (peter.aldhous@newscientist.com) and **Jessica Marshall** (jmarshall.us) of *New Scientist* placed third in the category for their article "Patient Groups: Swallowing the Best Advice." **Bryn Nelson** (bdnelson@nasw.org), formerly of *Newsday*, won first place in the Large Newspapers category for his story "Saving Bobby." And finally **Joe Neel** (sciencedesk@npr.org) was part of the NPR team that won third place in the Radio category for the report "Seattle at Forefront in Planning for Flu Pandemic."

A Satisfied Mind. Sandra Blakeslee of the *New York Times* was among 10 prominent journalists selected for the third annual Templeton-Cambridge Journalism Fellowships in Science & Religion. In the fellowship program, Sandra and her colleagues will examine key areas in the broad field of science and religion through independent research as well as seminars and discussion groups, led by some of the world's foremost physicists, cosmologists, and theologians, at the University of Cambridge. Fellows are provided a \$15,000 stipend, a book allowance, and travel expenses. Congratulate Sandra at blakes@nytimes.com.

Just Like a Winner. Another award-winning NASW member is **Richard Hill**, science writer at *The Oregonian*, in Portland. Richard has won the Society for American Archaeology's Gene S. Stuart Award. Richard won "for his thoughtful, lively, and engaging articles," which cover archaeological research from prehistoric to historic, often focusing on controversial topics such as Kennewick Man and the Donner Party, with an emphasis on the evidence and what it can tell us about the people being studied. Send your regards to richardhill@news.oregonian.com.

Tangled Up in Fellows. The Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Mass., awarded its prestigious Science Journalism Fellowship to 11 science jour-

nalists this year, three of whom were NASW members. The program provided the journalists hands-on science training during the MBL's famed summer research season, when hundreds of biologists gathered at the institution from around the world to conduct research and to teach and learn advanced-level science and research techniques. The NASW members who participated were **Corie Lok**, an editor at *Nature* (c.lok@boston.nature.com); **Brendan Maher**, senior editor at *The Scientist* and senior editor of *Nature* beginning June 2007 (bmaher@loyola.edu); and **E. Anne Bolen**, managing editor of *Geotimes* (bolen@agiweb.org).

Like a Rolling Stone. Freelancer **Leslie Sabbagh** of Cleveland is off on an adventure. For three months starting mid-June, Leslie will be embedded with the U.S. military covering MEDEVACs, Combat Support Hospitals, Joint Security Station (Iraqi and U.S. troops) outposts, construction, and development projects in Baghdad and the Kurdish north in Iraq. She will also get to spend a week with the combined forces (Army, Navy, Air Force) in Kuwait to learn how troops and materiel gets moved into Iraq and Afghanistan. Then she will spend about two weeks with her first embed unit, about whom she is writing a book—Charlie company 7-101st Airborne, MEDEVAC unit—40 miles north of Baghdad at a big Air Force base near the city of Balad. Then she is off to Afghanistan to cover more construction-development projects and medical care given to the civilians by the combined Egyptian, South Korean, and U.S. military medical services. Along with working on her book, Leslie will be reporting for *Popular Mechanics*, *Readers' Digest*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and the *Plain Dealer*, in Cleveland. You can follow Leslie's blog at www.popularmechanics.com, or write her at leslie.sabbagh@scicom.org.

Changing of the Guards. Changes are afoot at the American Chemical Society. **Marvin Coyner** has retired as manager of editorial services, to be replaced by **Michael Woods**, who was promoted from senior science writer. Marv retires after nearly 23 years at ACS in various positions. Marv, who plans to continue his science writing as a freelancer, can be found at hitchhiker_97@msn.com. Mike's e-mail is m_woods@acs.org.

Paths of Victory. The American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) recently presented 2007 awards to three NASW members for their "outstanding contributions to the biological sciences." **Kenneth Weiss** (ken.weiss@latimes.com) and **Usha Lee McFarling** (usha.mcfarling@gmail.com) received the Print Media Award for their now-famous series with the overall title "Altered Oceans," published by the *Los Angeles Times*. (See separate article on their Pulitzer Prize on page 7.) **David Baron** (davidhbaron@comcast.net) received the Broadcast Media Award for his public radio broadcast for PRI's *The World* titled "Bioko's Endangered Monkeys."

Honors Blowin' in the Wind. The AIBS also gave freelancer **Christie Aschwand** of Cedaredge, Colo. an honorable mention in the print media category for her *High Country News* article about an endangered species controversy. But that's not all for Christie. This spring, she spent three weeks in Vietnam reporting on the legacy of Agent Orange. Her trip was funded by a grant from the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting. And in April, she received the 2007 Outstanding Essay award from the American Society of Journalists and Authors for a piece she wrote for *Health* about bicycling across Kansas with her dad. Say hello to Christie at christie@nasw.org.

AIBS Revisited. Those AIBS awards noted above wouldn't have been possible without the hard work of diligent judges who selected the winners. And, you guessed it, the judges for the media prizes were NASW members as well: **Rick Borchelt** (rborchel1@jhu.edu), **John Carey** (john_carey@businessweek.com), **Laura Helmuth** (helmuth@nasw.org), and **Joe Neel** (sciencedesk@npr.org).

Lynne The Science Writer (The Mighty Lynne). Another high-achieving NASW member is **Lynne Friedmann**, who won the 2007 UC San Diego Athena Pinnacle Award presented to individuals and organizations that, through the development and promotion of skilled and talented women, have had a significant impact within the San Diego technology, life science, and health care sector. In her citation, Lynne was called "a living legend within the Association for Women in Science, where she has worked tirelessly the past 25 years to promote the advancement of women." To speak to a living legend, shoot an e-mail to Lynne at lfriedmann@nasw.org.

Pledging Her Time. Working as a freelancer based in San Diego, **Cathy Yarbrough** will serve as a part-time communications advisor to Singapore's fast-growing research enterprise often referred to as "Biopolis" or "Fusionopolis," the names of the state-of-the-art buildings that house the Asian city-state's 12 new institutes. More than 2,000 scientists of 50 nationalities conduct studies in biomedical research, technology, and engineering at the institutes. For more information about Singapore's research enterprise, called Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR), visit www.a-star.edu.sg or contact Cathy at sciencematter@yahoo.com.

Positively New Employment. **Chris Womack** is the new associate editor of *Southern California Physician* magazine. It's the magazine of several county medical associations, including the Los Angeles County Medical Association, and it covers policy, politics, public health, and business issues of interest to practicing physicians in California (of course, with an emphasis on the southern part of the state). Chris can be reached at chrisw@socalphys.com.

Heart of Mine. **Ruth Papazian** has been named editor of *Heart Insight*, a quarterly magazine published by the

American Heart Association and Lippincott Williams & Wilkins for patients, their families, and caregivers. *Heart Insight* is the first American Heart Association consumer magazine that focuses exclusively on managing and preventing cardiovascular disease and related conditions, such as stroke and diabetes. Send your regards to Ruth at ruth.papazian@wolterskluwer.com.

Things Have Changed. Another NASW member with a new job is **Kathryn Brown**. She has joined The Conservation Fund (www.conservationfund.org), in Arlington, Va., as vice president of marketing & communications. A top-rated environmental nonprofit, the fund partners with corporate and nonprofit organizations to conserve land, train conservation leaders, and foster community development that balances economics and environment. Kathryn can be reached at kbrown@conservationfund.org.

Simple Twist of Great. *Perspectives*, the research magazine at Ohio University in Athens, received recognition in the 2007 Circle of Excellence Awards from the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education. The magazine received a Silver Medal in the Research Magazines category. The editor of the magazine is NASW member **Andrea Gibson**, who is director of research communications at the university. Andrea is at gibsona@ohio.edu.

Got My Mind Made Up. The new editor of *Scientific American Mind* magazine is NASW member **Ingrid Wickelgren**. She started at the magazine in April after working as a contributing correspondent to *Science* and as a freelancer. Ingrid is at iwickelgren@sciam.com.

Ring Them Bells. **Noreen Grice**, a Connecticut-based astronomy educator, writer, and accessibility consultant, has received the 2007 Klumpke-Roberts Award for contributing to the public understanding of astronomy. The award is given by the Astronomical Society of the Pacific (ASP). Noreen received the award for her deep commitment to making astronomy accessible to people with disabilities. She is best known as the author of the book, *Touch the Universe: A NASA Braille Book of Astronomy*. Congratulate Noreen at ngrice5456@aol.com.

When the Night Comes Falling from the Sky. The ASP also awarded Foothill College astronomy instructor **Andrew Fraknoi**, of San Francisco, the 2007 Richard H. Emmons Award for Excellence in College Astronomy Teaching. Fraknoi is the lead author of *Voyages through the Universe*, one of the foremost introductory astronomy textbooks in the country, and has written or edited more than a dozen books on astronomy and astronomy education. His new children's book, *Disney's Wonderful World of Space*, will be published this summer. Andrew is at fraknoi@fhda.edu.

I Shall be Released. After 25 years at *Science News* magazine, **Ivars Peterson** has left to become direc-

tor of publications for journals and communications at the Mathematical Association of America, also in Washington, D.C. Congratulate Ivars at ivarspeterson@gmail.com.

Knockin' on Opportunity's Door. **Janet Ochs Lowenbach**, a freelancer in Bethesda, Md., is now senior medical writer for the Erickson Retirement Communities and the *Erickson Tribune*, in Baltimore. Janet says she is always looking for interesting leads about research results and general news of interest to their six million readers. Contact Janet at jlowenbach@comcast.net.

Mr. Award Man. **Eric Rosenthal** of Wynnewood, Penn., a freelancer and special correspondent for *Oncology Times*, recently received the American Urological Association's Excellence in Urology Health Reporting Award. Eric was honored for his *Oncology Times* article "Prostate Cancer: Pros and Cons of the Integration of Urology and IMRT Services in the Community Practice." Talk to Eric at etr@evocatalk.com.

Talking New York. **Dave Mosher**, former freelancer, intern at *Discover*, and my colleague at Ohio State University, has landed a full-time job. He will be a staff writer for Imaginova Corp., owners of www.space.com and www.livescience.com. Dave got to make the big move from Columbus, Ohio, to New York City. Congratulations, Dave! You can reach him at dave@davemosher.com.

All Along the Potomac. Another former science-writing student who has landed a new job is **Margaret Putney**. Margaret graduated from Johns Hopkins University this year with a master's in science writing, and she currently has a job as assistant editor for the magazine *Science & Spirit*, in Washington, D.C. Send best wishes to Margaret at mputney@gmail.com.

Glad to be Inside of Madison with the Wisconsin Crew Again. **Nancy Shute** of *U.S. News & World Report* says she had a wonderful time as science-writer-in-residence at the University of Wisconsin, in April, where she learned from "direct observation that fellow NASW members **Sharon Dunwoody** and **Deb Blum** and **Terry Devitt** work really hard. So much for the slacker lifestyles of academia." Further, Nancy reports "the local brews in the Memorial Union are excellent, and the view from the terrace is just as pretty as when my mom was hanging out there with frat boys in 1940. The only difference: now most of those students in reverie by the water's edge are staring at laptops." Ask Nancy about being a short-term Badger at nshute@usnews.com. ■

REGIONAL GROUPS

by Suzanne Clancy

Chicago

The mysteries of journal editing, as well as sandwiches, were on the menu in May when about 25 members of the Chicago science writers group gathered at the headquarters of the American Medical Association to hear how journal articles come to be. Dr. Catherine DeAngelis, *JAMA* editor in chief, led the presentation. Science writers learned that of the 5,354 manuscripts submitted in 2006, 39 percent were sent on for external review, with about eight percent eventually published. The journal depends upon the work of about 3,500 reviewers to look over the manuscripts and suggest revisions and point out questions that the research raises. Sometimes manuscripts come in that are too specialized for *JAMA*, so the editors suggest that they go to another one of the journals *AMA* publishes. Because all editing and distribution are now done electronically, this has shortened the time between submission and publication.



New England

Supporting the old saw that things (or is it "good things?") come in threes, the New England Science Writers Association had a busy spring with a trio of talks at Boston-area universities.

In mid-March, NESW heard from a panel of professors each of whom had received \$1 million from the Howard Hughes Medical Foundation to test their proposals for creating more engagement and interest among science students. The meeting was held at Brandeis University.

Also in March, Harvard paleontologist Farish A. Jenkins, Jr., recounted the discovery in the high arctic of a fossil of an amphibious fish that crawled out of the water 375 million years ago to launch the career of vertebrates on land. Jenkins, who is the curator of vertebrate paleontology in Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology, where the event was held, vividly described the rigors of fossil-hunting in a desolate, windy landscape with visits by polar bears always an exciting possibility.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology hosted a May 17 talk by Howard Herzog, head of an industrial consortium's Carbon Sequestration Initiative, and

Ruben Juanes, an MIT assistant professor of civil and environmental engineering. The experts gave an update on proposals and technology to capture CO₂ from emissions sources and storing it underground or underwater to reduce global warming. Afterwards, attendees continued the discussion over carbonated and other beverages in the MIT Stata Center's R and D Pub.

Washington, D.C.

In April, DCSWA members were sobered by a presentation, "Environmental Disruption and Animal-Borne Disease: A Biosecurity Threat?" Ron Atlas, co-director of the Center for Health Hazards Preparedness, at the University of Louisville, delivered the chilling bottom line: More dangerous pathogens will emerge from animals, and the bugs that we already know about are winning. Animal diseases jump to humans more often than most of us realize, yet in the 1960s public health officials had declared infectious diseases defeated. "Talk about a premature declaration of victory," said Atlas. Now, countries are realizing that outbreaks of exotic viruses and bacteria from animals represent a real security threat. The CDC is spending more resources on global surveillance, with an emphasis on places where people and animals closely consort, like China. There, pigs, ducks, and people often all live in the same house—a recipe for human outbreaks of the H5N1 avian flu or an unknown bug. Researchers have identified 177 possible emerging pathogens, said Atlas, more from viruses than bacteria. Cattle and primates serve as reservoirs for many of these, and Atlas is also getting "real worried" about bats. Little research is conducted on bat pathogenesis, yet the flying beasts carry many of the scariest zoonotics, including rabies, Ebola, and SARS.

Next, Jeff Levi, director of Trust for America's Health, talked about policy issues. He pointed to tuberculosis as the "perfect example" of how an infectious disease can resurface long after experts think it's beaten. More virulent forms of the disease are appearing; however, CDC has shifted much of its TB preparedness and prevention budget to HIV. At the federal level, Levi asks, "Who's in charge?" The USDA conducts livestock oversight, the Department of the Interior monitors wildlife, the Department of Health and Human Services has obvious responsibilities over disease surveillance and treatment, and the Departments of Homeland Security and Defense will have large roles to play if a pandemic ever hits the country. Despite this, Levi warned that the "real work" during a pandemic will fall on state and local public health departments, which are egregiously underfunded. [As *ScienceWriters* was going to press, the saga of Andrew Speaker, who went globe trotting after being diagnosed with a drug-resistant form of TB continued to unfold.]

On May 3, the Austrian Embassy's Office of Science

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

and Technology hosted Dr. Gilbert Brown, coordinator of the nuclear engineering program at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell. Brown spoke on what he sees as a new era for nuclear energy. After two decades of being shunned as too costly and too dangerous, nuclear is sexy again. Some 15 new plants are being planned around the United States, and many more worldwide. The U.S. receives between 15 and 20 percent of its electricity from nuclear plants, and Brown sees that figure climbing.

New York

Science Writers in New York (SWINY) and the South Asian Journalists Association were hosted by Weill-Cornell Medical Center on March 13 for an evening program titled "Where is Robotic Cancer Surgery Headed?" Dr. Ash Tewari, professor of urologic-oncology and urology answered the question with a spell-binding 3-D movie demonstration of robotic prostate cancer surgery. As Dr. Tewari showed, robotic surgery can be done with little collateral damage to the surrounding tissue, affording patients a rapid and full recovery. Following Q&A, attendees got to manipulate the robot (sans patient). On March 17, SUNY Stonybrook, in Manhattan, hosted SWINY for a day of forensic investigation. Forensic scientist Jeanne Guglielmo and molecular biologist Joan Kiely presented real cases and provided hands-on demonstrations of currently used lab techniques. On May 17, Andy Shih, Ph.D., chief scientific officer of Autism Speaks discussed with SWINY members current autism research, including recent genetic work and ongoing controversies about environmental causes of the condition.

Philadelphia

Despite a flash thunderstorm, waterlogged members of the Philadelphia-Area Science Writers Association (PASWA) managed to welcome toxicologist and lecturer David Cragin to discuss scientific skepticism and how the news media shape the public perception of risk. Cragin is a faculty member at the University of the Sciences, in Philadelphia. Meanwhile, the PASWA website is growing with the addition of a blog, The What (www.paswa.org/what), designed to inform members and digital passersby of upcoming science-related talks and events in the Philadelphia region.

San Diego

On May 12, SANDSWA held a science-writing workshop. The program consisted of panels exploring topics ranging from Opportunities for Aspiring Science Writers, Institutional Advancement—Getting Beyond the News Release, and The Fine Art of Interviewing. A lively session on The Intersection of Science and Politics featured Richard Halsey, director of the California Chaparral Institute (www.californiachaparral.com) and author of *Fire, Chaparral, and Survival in Southern California* (Sunbelt Publications). In his book, biologist/fire ecologist/U.S. Forest Service firefighter Halsey argues that Southern Californians simply don't get it. "Surrounded by a highly flammable chaparral landscape, we insist on building housing in inappropriate locations that are impossible to defend against wildfires," he says. Halsey challenged writers to question the "common wisdom" when reporting on issues that have public policy implications.

On the same panel was Roger Bingham, a member of the research faculty at the Center for Brain and Cognition, UC San Diego, creator and executive producer of the KCET-TV (PBS/Los Angeles) Science and Society Unit, and the driving force behind TSN: The Science Network (www.csntv.org), which airs unedited, C-SPAN-style talks from science conferences, features on the best science teachers in the country, Q&A's with science authors, and profiles of cutting-edge researchers. An example of TSN programming is the November 2006 broadcast of "Beyond Belief: Science, Religion, Reason, and Survival," held at The Salk Institute, which received widespread media coverage including a *New York Times* article that carries the headline "A Free-for-All on Science and Religion."

The day-long SANDSWA workshop took place at the Arnold and Mabel Beckman Center for Conservation Research, at the Zoological Society of San Diego's Wild Animal Park. Tours of Conservation and Research for Endangered Species (CRES) labs and the Park's Animal Hospital were a bonus for participants. Workshop evaluations for this first-time effort were uniformly positive. More important, six people volunteered to form the nucleus of the next SANDSWA workshop committee. ■



San Diego Science Writers Association (SANDSWA)

Science Writing Workshop

Saturday, May 12, 2007

8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

San Diego Wild Animal Park

SANDSWA's promotion for its one-day workshop at the San Diego Wild Animal Park touted session topics and observed that "at gathering of science writers, you are bound to see a few animals."

MAÑANA'S SCIENCE WRITERS IN NEW MEXICO

by Larry O' Hanlon

I'm pleased to report the modest success of a science-writing experiment in New Mexico. It started with an invitation to the New Mexico Science Writers Association (NMSWA) to set up a table at Albuquerque's first annual Cosmic Carnival. This science festival coincided with National Astronomy Day and Albuquerque's 301st birthday celebration on April 21, 2007.

Amid expected exhibitors like Sandia National Lab, the National Radio Astronomy Observatories, NOAA, The National Solar Observatory, several local science museums, local rocketry and astronomical clubs, our little NMSWA seemed at first a bit out of place. How do you compete with rocket launches, a chance to peer at sunspots or listen to the sun's radio roar? A science writer's rhetorical sleight of hand doesn't quite stack up.

As one of the organizers of Cosmic Carnival, I was determined that NMSWA be part of it. We started to think hard about what a science-writer group could offer to the school-aged children for whom the festival is designed. Should we have brochures? Maybe some of our book writers could sign copies of their books? None of this seemed likely to interest kids much.

The answer finally came from my wife, Leslie, a science writer who is also an elementary and middle school English teacher: a haiku contest. In our case, a science haiku contest.

We pasted together a poster, printed out entry forms, and as a carrot, we bought \$20 worth of fancy pencils and stuck them in a big mug. Our basic sales pitch was "Write a science or nature haiku! Get a cool free pencil! Win a magazine subscription!"

When the day came, it was cold, windy and rainy. Still, there was a pretty good turnout of several hundred people. The more experienced local event organizers told us a sunny day would have brought out 10 times that. In light of our lack of experience, however, we were happy to get about 10 entries per hour—which came to almost 40 entries. I say almost because there were a few from adults who just could not resist entering.

At right are the winning entries. All are by Albuquerque kids. Because of donations by Kristina Anderson and Neal Singer, each child has been awarded a year subscription to *Odyssey* magazine.

All in all, we consider the event was a great success and a learning experience. Already the winning

Larry O'Hanlon is a freelance writer, best known for his long association with Discovery Channel News. He's also the ad hoc leader of NMSWA.



Larry O'Hanlon and Leslie Harris O'Hanlon, partially visible at left, worked NMSWA's Sci-Haiku booth at Cosmic Carnival.

entries are getting a lot of attention by science education organizations here in New Mexico. Everyone wants to include them in their publications—and why not? We all see in these kids not just budding writers, but a reassuring forecast of a brighter future. ■

*The Sun is down now
But the Moon is not up yet
Shh, it's time to rest*
Emma Apodaca, age 9

*Canyon hot, dry, rez
Water flows through the red earth
Beauty I find there*
Brittany Tsosie, age 10

*Atoms are very small
Atoms are smaller than dots
We're made of atoms*
Santiago Ravello, age 10

*Many moons it has
Rings shine bright in the night sky
Beautiful Saturn*
Michelle Schlavin, age 10

NOTICES FROM DIANE

by Diane McGurgan

New dues renewal policy

NASW is restructuring its annual renewal process, beginning with the 2008 membership year. We find this necessary because an increasing number of members (in fact, **hundreds** of members) remain in arrears up to six months past the dues deadline. Timely receipt of member renewals is vital to a dues-supported organization. Please note the following renewal schedule and deadlines.

Renewal invoices mailed: Early December 2007

2007 memberships expire: Jan. 1, 2008

Last date to renew: Jan. 31, 2008

Members with unpaid dues after Jan. 31 will be dropped from the database and all access to NASW services (e.g. nasw.org, e-mail address) will be terminated immediately.

Please keep NASW on a sound fiscal track and renew promptly when you receive your invoice. If these measures are ineffective, late fees may be considered in future years. We hope it doesn't come to that. Thank you for your timely renewal and continued support.



PHOTO BY ANDREW SKOLNICK

New deadline for Authors Coalition Surveys

The schedule change above also affects the deadline of the annual Authors Coalition Survey. Because the survey is part of the renewal package, many surveys this year were returned too late to count toward the 60 percent membership response rate required to keep this important funding stream for NASW members program.

(new) Authors Coalition

Survey deadline: Jan. 1, 2008

Membership directory

The 2007 NASW directory has been mailed to members whose dues were received by the printing deadline. Many thanks to Larry Krumenaker who once again did a marvelous job putting it all together.

Victor Cohn prize

Deadline for the seventh annual Victor Cohn Prize for Excellence in Medical Science Reporting is July 31,

2007. The award will be presented this fall at the CASW 45th Annual New Horizons in Science Briefing for Journalists (www.casw.org/newhoriz.htm).

NASW fall workshop/CASW New Horizons

The NASW Science-in-Society Meeting and Workshops will take place Oct. 19-20, 2007, in Spokane, Wash. Here is a sample of program offerings:

- The New Visual Journalism: Graphics Literacy for Science Writers
- Switching Gears: Journalism to Public Relations
- 21st Century Science Writing
- The (ever popular) Pitch Slam is back
- And, don't miss the Friday field trip to see...grizzly bears

More info at www.nasw.org; online registration goes live on Aug. 1. The 45th annual CASW New Horizons in Science Briefing will be held Oct. 21-23 (immediately following the NASW Science-in-Society meeting). New Horizons hosted this year by the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory. For more information, visit www.casw.org or watch the mail for program and registration information.

Fall meeting fellowships

NASW Travel Fellowships/Graduate Travel Fellows.

Available to offset travel and lodging to the fall meeting. Application deadline: Sept. 1, 2007. Supported by Authors Coalition money.

CASW Traveling Fellowships of up to \$1,000 each to cover the costs of attending the 2007 New Horizons Briefing. The fellowships are intended primarily for journalists from publications and broadcast outlets that do not routinely cover major science meetings or employ a full-time science writer. Application deadline: Sept. 1, 2007. ■

A LOOK INSIDE DIANE'S MAIL BAG

As NASW executive director, Diane McGurgan is called upon to wear many hats. Lately, she's taken on the role of Pinkerton detective. Consider the following:

- A member pens a note stating, "Here's my new address." Unfortunately, they don't include their name or their previous address. No way to determine who the member is; records cannot be updated.
- A member uses PayPal® for online renewal of their membership using a credit card in a name that differs from their professional name. Same result as the above.
- Every year approximately 700 miss the dues renewal deadline. Diane sends out e-mails and performs follow-up on each. You do the math.

The point is, paying your dues on time and providing complete information each and every time you conduct online transactions or write to the national office frees up Diane's time to attend to more urgent matters and provide member services in a more timely manner.

Now if there were a way to stop misdirected e-mails and phone calls from National Association of Social Workers members, that would really make Diane's day! ■

LETTERS

I was saddened to read, in Peter Aldhous's piece in the spring issue of *ScienceWriters* ("Trust Eroded When Health/Medicine Coverage Influenced By Pharma"), of the alleged behavior of my fellow freelancers.

While the piece primarily addressed pharma-sponsored "educational" events for journalists that are clearly slanted to favor the firms' products (what on earth did he expect?), a startling off-topic assertion also indicted some of the author's fellow science writers.

After extensive criticism of Merck for its attempt to sell journalists on its cox-2 inhibitor etoricoxib (Arcoxia)—the drug subsequently failed to receive FDA approval for marketing, so I guess the media bash didn't help all that much—Aldhous went on, in what seemed to me a non sequitur, to point with alarm to another area in which "financial conflicts are rife. Many freelance writers flit between journalism and writing publicity material for pharmaceutical companies."

Really? In my experience and observation, the major drug firms have in-house people and/or agencies to churn out their press materials. In any event, I assume that, as a careful science writer, Aldhous has research to back up his statement. I'd be interested in knowing his sources, as well as what numbers or proportions add up to "many."

Dodi Schultz

Independent Writer/Editor

New York, NY

Response:

Dodi raises an interesting point in querying my use of the word "many" in this context. On reflection, given the lack of hard information available, "some" may have been a better choice. My impression is that it is relatively common in my native U.K. for freelancers to combine journalism with publicity work. I hope it is less common in the U.S.

Quantification is difficult. The main U.S. professional body, the Association of Health Care Journalists, does not currently give a listing of members' commercial interests. However, the U.K. Guild of Health Writers

allows its members to post their commercial interests in its online directory, available to members and to paying customers. Searching this directory in response to Dodi's letter, I found 69 members who listed "pharmaceuticals" among their specialist areas and who also seemed to do some freelance journalism. Of these, 14 said they had no commercial interests, while 28 entries listed some form of publicity work or writing for corporate clients (I excluded cases where this was clearly described as being in the past). The clients were not always made clear, but 10 entries specifically mentioned writing or PR consultancy for manufacturers of health products, including prescription and over-the-counter drugs. In addition, one entry mentioned a contract to produce a magazine paid for by an "unconditional educational grant" from a pharmaceutical company.

I am not sure what to make of this small survey. The declarations were probably incomplete—17 entries included no information about commercial interests. But the most salient point to me is that ordinary consumers of medical journalism do not have access to this directory. Impressions on the extent of the behavior mentioned in my article may vary, but perhaps we can agree that full disclosure of potential conflicts is in the public interest.

Peter Aldhous

San Francisco Bureau Chief

New Scientist magazine

As a communications officer and head of communications at the Virginia Bioinformatics Institute, I read with interest Dennis Meredith's "A letter to researchers" (PIO Forum, SW Winter 2006-07) and plan to share it with the faculty of our institute.

It will serve as a useful tool to promote active discussion of the merits and risks of popularizing research.

Barry Whyte

Strategic and Research Communications Officer

Virginia Bioinformatics Institute

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.

FIRST EARL UBELL STUDENT JOURNALISM AWARDS PRESENTED

Libby Reinish of Boulder, Colo., and Zahra Postum of Newton, Mass., are the first recipients of Earl Ubell Student Journalism Project awards at Hampshire College.

This new grant program recognizes and supports exceptional student work in journalism, with priority given to projects in health and science journalism.

Hampshire College alumnus Michael C. Ubell created the fund to honor his father, Earl Ubell, whose distinguished career has influenced generations of journalists and their audiences.

Reinish, who will graduate from Hampshire College on May 19, produced an hour-long radio documentary, "Tilting at Giants," for her yearlong independent project (comparable to a senior thesis). Using spoken testimonies of local residents with a diagnosis of mental illness, she raised many questions about the ways mental health care is provided in Massachusetts today, and the ways in which dominant understanding of mental health can actually hinder healing.

Postum, a pre-med student who will complete an independent project over the next year, plans to analyze how science journalism serves as an interpreter of complex science for the general public. She has previously done work focused on the representation of science in fiction. ■

(Source: news release)

IN MEMORIAM

Earl Ubell

Science and Health Reporter; CASW/NASW Leader



COURTESY OF THE UBELL FAMILY

Earl Ubell, 80, a journalist who covered the leading health and science breakthroughs of the postwar age with a lively and effective style, died May 29.

An NASW member for more than 50 years, Ubell helped lay the foundations of our craft during a long, distinguished career in print and broadcast journalism.

Ubell, who had a physics degree, first came to prominence as science editor at the old *New York Herald Tribune* from 1953 until the paper folded in 1966. At the newspaper, he won a prestigious Albert Lasker medical journalism award for his series of articles about heart attacks. He later became a science reporter and news director at broadcast network affiliates in New York and spent many years simultaneously as health editor at *Parade* magazine.

Writing about science, Ubell constantly faced a dilemma: how to convey information to lay readers as well as editors who tended to view health and medical coverage as a necessary but often incomprehensible, jargon-filled area. This attitude was perhaps best exemplified by a *Herald Tribune* city editor who once said, "Anything that ends in 'ology' we give to Earl."

Ubell's skill was translating science into English. He detested many conventional journalism practices, including the "inverted pyramid" style of news writing that places the key information up high and becomes increasingly less urgent.

"It says, 'The more you read me, the less interesting I get,'" he told an interviewer.

His stories often tended to feel like features instead of hard news. He began his front-page account of the first Sputnik flight in October 1957 this way: "Our planet has a new moon tonight." This is often cited as one of his best opening lines, which he considered amusing because the story was cobbled together at the last minute.

When the news broke, Ubell was at a conference at the Soviet Embassy in Washington honoring the International Geophysical Year. He immediately went about the conference asking Soviet scientists and bureaucrats about the space launch.

Richard Kluger wrote in a history of the *Herald Tribune* that Ubell "dashed to the *Tribune* bureau and without clips or supporting data at his fingertips wrote up one of the big stories of the century mostly out of his head." Kluger, the *Herald Tribune's* one-time book editor, added that Ubell's story was "written with a panache that made the [*New York Times's*] conventional factuality look positively arid."

While at the *Herald Tribune*, Ubell interviewed physicist Albert Einstein and wrote about Jonas Salk's work on a polio vaccine and James Watson and Francis Crick's discovery of the structure of DNA. He was one of the early chroniclers of sex researcher Alfred Kinsey and was credited by Kluger for his tasteful yet frank analysis of Kinsey's research that very likely was among the first times the word "orgasm" ran on the front page of a family newspaper.

Besides winning a 1957 Lasker Award for his reporting, he received a journalism prize from the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1960 for a story about theoretical astrophysicist Thomas Gold's work on steady-state theory that tried to explain the universe's origin and continuous creation.

Ubell was known for an impertinent style of asking questions that aimed to puncture lofty claims and jargon. Stuart H. Loory, a former *Herald Tribune* colleague who later became a CNN executive, called Ubell "an enfant terrible who did not like being pushed around."

Earl Ubell was born June 21, 1926, in Brooklyn, N.Y., to Russian-Jewish immigrants. He spoke Yiddish until he

went to school and then became fluent enough in English to become managing editor of the high school newspaper.

He joined the *Herald Tribune* as a messenger in 1943, then rejoined the staff as a reporter after returning from Navy service during World War II. He received a bachelor's degree in physics from City College of New York, in 1948.

As a newspaperman, he became an authority on X-ray crystallography, a technique to view atomic and molecular structures, and was invited to study at Nobel laureate Linus C. Pauling's lab at Caltech. He later worked for brief periods at the Weizmann Institute of Science, in Israel, and Jackson Laboratory in Bar Harbor, Maine.

Ubell told Kluger his lab work "was an invaluable way of understanding what drives" scientists.

Besides a stint in the mid-1970s as news director at WNBC-TV, he spent the remainder of his career as science editor at WCBS-TV. He retired in 1995, having completed a two-part series about his struggle with Parkinson's disease.

He was a first president of the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing and NASW president (1960-1961). With his wife, he founded the Center for Modern Dance Education, a nonprofit community arts school near his home in Hackensack, N.J.

(Source: Washington Post)

Lawrence M. Prescott

Infectious-disease researcher prior to medical writing career



COURTESY OF THE PRESCOTT FAMILY

Lawrence M. Prescott, 72, died March 21, in La Jolla, Calif., from complications of lung cancer. He had been an NASW member since 1984.

Prescott traced his medical-writing career back to a childhood Halloween. A candle had set Prescott's Wizard of Oz costume on fire while he was trick-or-treating at age 10, leaving him with severe burns on his face. The injuries and subsequent surgeries kept him in a Washington, D.C., hospital for six months where he had little to do but read.

Once back in school, Prescott excelled, and he never lost his interest in reading. That served him well in later years.

The son of a physician, Prescott was born in Boston and attended Harvard University as an undergraduate. He later studied at George Washington University, earning a master's of science degree and a Ph.D. in clinical microbiology and public health, and was elected to Sigma Xi for his academic and scientific excellence. At that time, he was awarded a National Academy of Science Postdoctoral Fellowship and carried

out studies in microbial and human genetics at the Army Biological Medical Center in Frederick, Md.

On completion of his fellowship, Prescott joined the World Health Organization and spent 12 years as an infectious diseases specialist and public health administrator, in Southeast Asia.

Widowed in 1982, Prescott later remarried and at the suggestion of his new wife, Sharon, he began a second career as a medical journalist. Over the next 24 years, Prescott had more than 6,000 articles published in medical and pharmaceutical magazines on scientific studies of drugs and vaccines, medical breakthroughs and conference meetings.

His work spanned various medical disciplines, including cardiology, ophthalmology, dermatology, and neurology.

Prescott always wrote his stories by hand on yellow notepads, making sure the first draft was suitable for submission.

"I don't think I've ever met any writer as reliable and conscientious as Larry," said Sonja Sherritze, editor of *P&T (Pharmacy & Therapeutics)*, a monthly journal. "He never missed a deadline, and he really felt that the information he was communicating was important. He took his job very seriously."

At medical conferences, Prescott skipped dumbed-down analyses of medical breakthroughs and relied instead on technical reports he would translate into articles that were easily read by lay readers, but conveyed nuances and details that medical researchers required.

As a freelance writer, Prescott had unusual versatility, Sherritze said. His extensive reading prepared him for covering a variety of topics.

"Most writers can cover two or three areas of expertise, but Larry could do anything," she said. "He had this vast knowledge in his background that he could pull from."

Besides his various professional interests, Prescott was an inveterate philatelist and numismatist in his youth, enjoyed bridge and poker throughout his adult life, and had a special love for his dogs. He also wrote in areas outside of medicine, having been the restaurant and movie critic for the Bangkok Business Times for several years, wrote children's stories, and published humorous poetry in *Living in Thailand*.

(Source: San Diego Union-Tribune and Sharon Prescott)

William Rubin

Health Sciences Editor

William Rubin, 79, an editor of publications for doctors and other medical professionals, died May 12, at his home in Chevy Chase, Md., after a heart attack. He has been an NASW member since 1954.

From 1967 to 1991, Rubin was editor of International Medical News Group, publisher of six national medical newspapers. He spent the following nine years as a consulting editor of *Oncology News International*, a medical newspaper for cancer specialists.

"A pleasant development has been the changed attitude of both physicians and the pharmaceutical industry to the medical press," he wrote in 1991 while reflecting on his career. "I entered the field when doctors were still being told that it was unethical for them to speak to reporters, and medical meetings were closed to the press."

"If pregnant women had been warned away from thalidomide the way Roche is doing with Accutane a major tragedy would have been prevented, and a useful drug might still on the market," he said.

Rubin was born in New York City and served as a pharmacist in the Army Air Forces Medical Corps in 1946 and 1947. He was a 1953 biology graduate of Brooklyn College.

Early on, he was a technical and special projects editor at *Drug Trade News*. He moved to the Washington area in the early 1960s to work as editorial director at *FDC Reports* and *Drug Research Reports*.

(Source: Washington Post)

[SCIENCEWRITERS HAS ALSO LEARNED OF THE DEATHS OF THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS.]

Albert Burns

An NASW member since 1969. He lived in Syosset, Long Island.

Clyde White

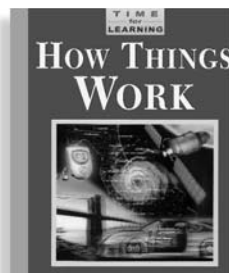
A member since 2000. White (age 46) was president/CEO of CSW Science & Business Consulting, of Burlington, N.C. ■

BOOKS BY AND FOR MEMBERS

by Ruth Winter

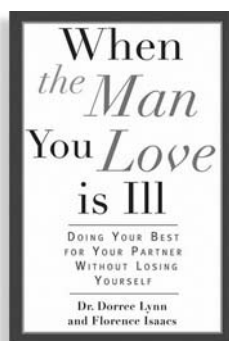
***How Things Work: Time for Learning* by Amy S. Hansen (NASW), published by Publications International.**

This is the book for any child (or grown-up) who has ever asked, "How does it do that?" Race cars and MP3s, cell phones and traffic signals, roller coasters, and bridges: It's all in this book with full-color photographs; screens that pull out, push



in, and twirl. Amy Hansen describes familiar inventions and gives insight to both children and adults. For example, Willy Higinbotham, who invented the first video game. "Every year his laboratory, the Brookhaven National laboratory...held an open house. Higinbotham was bored with the display and wanted to spice things up. His years of research on the development of radar led him to realize he could use a television screen to make something that moved. He created a simple tennis game. Can you believe that Higinbotham never patented the idea, and he never made any money from it?" She also describes how the origins of some inventions have been lost in time. Arched bridges, for example, were built in the Roman Empire more than 2,000 years ago. But today, no one knows the engineer who figured out the strong semicircle design that has proved invaluable. Hansen also says that no one knows the names of people who first recognized that chemicals burn different colors and that black powder explodes "but we may enjoy their legacy every Fourth of July..." Hansen can be reached at 301-441-8312 or amy.hansen@nasw.org. Her website is www.amyshansen.com.

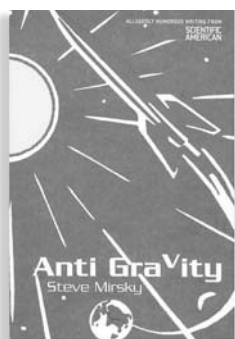
***When the Man You Love Is Ill: Doing Your Best For Your Partner Without Losing Yourself* by Dr. Dorree Lynn and Florence Isaacs (NASW), published by Marlowe & Company.**



This book deals with the emotional and practical problems that occur when your mate falls seriously ill. In author Florence Isaacs' case, her husband had been ill on and off since his mid-forties. "We learned a lot along the way about ourselves and about the medical establishment," she said. Isaacs knew she had a lot to say to other women about how to get through serious illness together and not only survive, but even emerge stronger. Isaacs also knew she wouldn't be able to sell the project or would get only a tiny advance unless there was a Ph.D. or M.D. expert as coauthor. Calling the American Psychological Association, she received the names of 10 or 12 psychologists who might fill the bill. Psychologist and nationally syndicated talk show host Dorree Lynn "turned out to be perfect," Isaacs said. Then Isaacs's husband developed a cough and complained of a painful sore throat. Within days, he was in intensive care hooked up to a ventilator with a rare, life-threatening infection hooked up to a ventilator.

This was just as Isaacs began to write the book which deals with such situations as keeping your family stable, educating yourself about his disease, work and money, when doing your best is not enough, and reaching out for help and hope. Unfortunately, Isaacs's husband died six weeks before deadline. "I had to get an extension," she said, "but believe it or not, it was therapy" and helped pull her through the ordeal. Isaacs can be reached at fisaacs@nyc.rr.com. Her website is www.florenceisaacs.com. The press representative is Karen Auerbach at karen.auerbach@avalonpub.com.

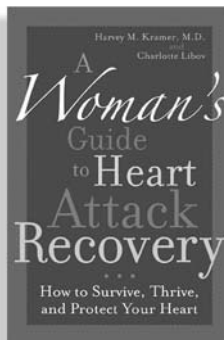
***Anti Gravity: Allegedly Humorous Writing from Scientific American* by Steve Mirsky (NASW), published by The Lyons Press.**



John Rennie, editor in chief of *Scientific American* says in the books' foreword, "Inside the walls of *Scientific American's* laboratory offices in the Fortress of Sullenness, at the North Pole, the editors toil endlessly...leaving them little time for merriment. Steve Mirsky is the exception. He rolls into our office bursting with good humor and wrath at political outrages."

Mirsky has written the Anti Gravity column in *Scientific American* for 10 years covering topics ranging from CSI's influence on college majors to the cheap-Formica billed woodpecker. In his introduction, Mirsky points out that Albert Einstein was a funny guy. He relates that when Einstein was asked for a simple explanation of relativity he said, "When you sit with a nice girl for two hours, it seems like two minutes. When you sit on a hot stove for two minutes, it seems like two hours. That's relativity." Mirsky also describes how the University of Florida football team released 13,000 copies of a media guide featuring an aggressive-looking alligator on the cover—except the gator turned out to be a croc—and not even an American one. "Now, to the untrained eye, mistaking a crocodile for an alligator seems like a trifle," Mirsky writes "But it is a major deal taxonomically. To put the relationship in perspective, human beings are in the family Hominidae, which we share with chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans. Therefore, the Florida fumble is roughly the equivalent of using a photo of a group of gorillas to illustrate the faculty, who probably feel like monkeys' uncles over the entire affair." Mirsky can be reached at smirsky@sciam.com. The publicity representative is Bob Semblante at 203-458-4555 or robert.sembiante@globepequot.com.

***A Woman's Guide to Heart Attack Recovery: How to Survive, Thrive, and Protect Your Heart* by Harvey M. Kramer, M.D., Charlotte Libov (NASW), published by M. Evans.**



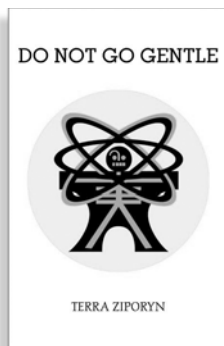
This book is aimed at helping heart-attack survivors empower themselves by learning as much as they can about their hearts, heart-attack treatments, recuperation, and what to do in the event of another heart attack. Chapters on high blood pressure, diabetes, weight control, diet, and exercise address these specific issues. Charlotte Libov says that as she traveled around the country

speaking to female heart attack survivors, she was always struck by:

- How they are often younger than one would assume
- There are few, if any, programs or information tailored specifically for women, especially those in the 40-60 age range
- The information often assumed that these women were retired, no longer raising children or in other ways fit into categories more stereotypical to retired males.

To write the book, Libov interviewed lots of women to learn what they found the most challenging aspects of heart-attack recovery. "I tried to hone in on real-world problems, such as a fear of being left alone by a traveling spouse, or how to present yourself to your boss and co-workers when you return to work, or just basically dealing with the emotions that a life-threatening medical emergency brings." Then, she and her cardiologist co-author Harvey Kramer they looked at the current guidelines for female heart attack survivors to minimize their risk for a second heart attack. "All of the time, my overriding theme was to make this book contain practical advice for female heart-attack survivors." Libov can be reached at char@libov.com. The press representative is Meghan Devine at 301-459-3366 ext.5517 or mdevine@rowman.com.

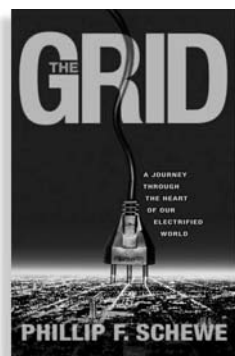
***Do Not Go Gentle* by Terra Ziporyn (NASW), published by iUniverse.**



Terra Ziporyn, a Maryland freelance, former associate editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and author of a number of science books including *The New Harvard Guide to Women's Health*, uses a novel to delve into the mind of a serial murder. Ziporyn's atypical childhood, she says, sparked her interest in mass murderers and the psychology behind their

crimes. Her father was the chief psychiatrist at Cook County Jail. He frequently brought home stories from work, but believed that even the worst criminals were still, ultimately, human beings with value. The central character in her book, Dr. Alvin Forman, is a former child prodigy who struggles to reconcile his desire to save humanity with his desire to destroy it. A single father and allergist living in the suburbs, Dr. Forman finds himself meticulously and ruthlessly dismembering patients, loved ones, and neighbors. "Fiction is most gripping to me when it's honest and shows you how a person is not so different from you," Ziporyn says. She can be reached at www.terraziporyn.com. For more information, query irene@readerviews.com.

***The Grid: A Journey Through the Heart of Our Electrified World* by Philip F. Schewe (NASW), published by Joseph Henry Press.**

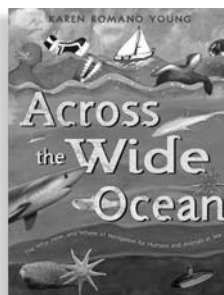


Philip Schewe, chief science writer for the American Institute of Physics, says he was writing a book about the forces of nature, but it became too sprawling. "I decided I needed to write a more focused, more practical book," he said. At that point, Schewe was preparing to write about how electricity came to be an applied technology. "The backdrop was to be the massive blackout in the Northeast in

November 1965...then the largest electrical failure in history. That became the topic of my book." Then August 14, 2003 came along, and the power failure that day (in most of the same places as the 1965 event) became the biggest power failure ever. Schewe decided at that point to open up the narrative to include the whole of electrical development, from antiquity to the present day. Indeed, this book is the first ever full history of the electrical grid; most past histories stopped with the era of Edison and Tesla. Along the way of writing Schewe encountered, and folded in, many of the salient issues we read about in the daily newspaper: namely, the restructuring of the entire power industry over the past decade and the ever more important concern about the impact of electricity generation on potential climate change. *Publishers Weekly* wrote about the book: "With an appreciation of the technical ingenuity, human drama, and cultural impact of the electrical grid, physicist, and playwright Schewe illuminates how electricity has catalyzed both the best and worst of modernity since Thomas Edison devised the first electrical network in 1882. Even as the grid delivered light and mechanization, foremost minds like Westinghouse, Tesla, and Insull continued to refine it, creating a society

totally dependent on its invisible wonders.... The grid's complexity demands predictability, Schewe shows, but even a minor short circuit can trigger a system-wide avalanche." Schewe argues that, economically "we can't afford to throw away two-thirds" of energy as waste and explains how nuclear and renewable resources can reduce pollution. Schewe can be reached at pchewe@aip.org. The publicity director is Matt Litts, Joseph Henry Press, at 202-334-1902 or mlitts@nas.edu.

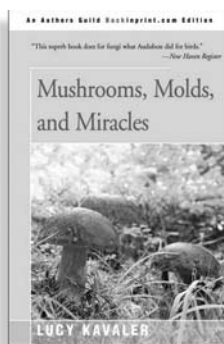
***Across the Wide Ocean: The Why, How, and Where of Navigation for Humans and Animals at Sea* by Karen Romano Young (NASW), published Green Willow.**



When Karen Romano Young was growing up, she and her sisters and brother spent most of their time exploring the wetlands down the road. The mill there was home to a woman who taught her about the wetlands and only once yelled at her for destroying frog eggs by stepping on them. These days the author lives near a marsh full of frogs in

Bethel, Conn., with her husband, three children, two guinea pigs, a dog, and a cat. As part of her research for this colorful book, she went to sea for a month on the research vessel *Atlantis* and dived to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean in the submarine *Alvin* to see hydrothermal vents. She says the ocean is "our unknown territory close to home. Vast, largely unexplored, and teeming with all kind of creatures—the perfect place to discover something new." A former editor at *Scholastic News*, her book combines geography and science with text, multimedia illustrations making it entertaining as well as educational. It includes descriptions of diving in a submarine, docking a container ship, migrating with whales, and hunting with sharks. Young can be reached at wrenyoung@aol.com. The press representative is Melissa Dittmar at 212-261-6792 or melissa.dittmar@harpercollins.com.

***Mushrooms, Molds, and Miracles* by Lucy Kavalier (NASW), published by Author's Guild Back-in-Print Books.**



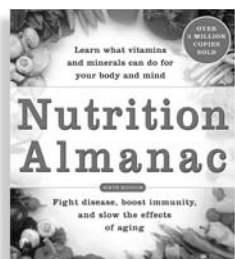
When Lucy Kavalier first sent her manuscript to her agent, the receptionist called to say she thought fungi had to be boring, but she read a few pages and was so caught up, she took it home and read it through the night. When the galleys went out to reviewers, *Time* magazine sent a photographer to Kavalier's house, she went on tour, and the book

was a tremendous success. But alas, after many years, the publisher let it go out of print. Despite that, Kavalier kept getting contacted by people discovering it in libraries and a Cornell professor based an entire course on the book. "Without the process of decay, life on earth would have ended almost as soon as it began," Kavalier says. She wanted new readers to think of fungi in a new way. Since the last paperback was falling apart, the author's Guild was able to get the printer to scan the hard cover. Kavalier reveals: "Every day now I find the book on another website. I used one of the press release distribution sites, and the release turned up on Google™ the day after submission. It is exciting to have a book reappear, particularly one that gave me a great deal of satisfaction, advanced my career, and not incidentally made money." Kavalier can be reached at lekavalier@cs.com. For more information www.lucykavalier.com.

***Cancer Activism: Gender, Media, and Public Policy* by Karen Kedrowski and Marilyn Stine Sarow, published by University of Illinois Press.**

The authors analyze the efforts of breast cancer and prostate cancer activist groups over a 20-year period to show how these groups continue to be successful in sustaining or increasing federal spending on gender-related cancers. In tracing the rise of each movement, the book explores how discussions about the diseases appeared in the media and as part of public and government agendas and how those agendas affected one another. Kedrowski is chair of the department of political science at Winthrop University, in South Carolina, and Sarow is an associate professor of mass communication at Winthrop. The press representative is Michael Roux at mroux@uiuc.edu or 217-244-4689.

***Nutrition Almanac (6th Edition)* by John D. Kirschmann, published by McGraw-Hill.**



When first published 30 years ago, this was one of the first books to address "nutrition in practice" and sold millions of copies through the years. Among the topics in this fully revised, updated edition are "how what you eat can affect more than 100 ailments (and) what science can tell us about dietary supplements." The press representative is Ann Pryor at 212-904-5567 or ann.pryor@mcgraw-hill.com.

***The Encyclopedia of Science & Technology (10th Edition)*, published by McGraw-Hill**

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AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR CELL BIOLOGY ANNUAL MEETING

To register online for press credentials for the American Society for Cell Biology's 2007 annual meeting, Dec. 1 to 5, at the Washington, D.C. Convention Center: www.ascb.org/ascbsec/press.cf. Questions? Contact John Fleishman, jfleishman@ascb.org or Cathy Yarbrough, mail to: sciencematter@yahoo.com. ■

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Science journalists are invited to cover the annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience in San Diego, Nov. 3-7,

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