

The Newsletter of The National Association of

# ScienceWriters

## FEATURES

Rick Weiss Chit-Chats  
About Victor Cohn 3

CASW is Resolute in  
Honoring Jerry Bishop 4

Focus on String Theory 6

AAAS News Briefings  
Sends Moderator to the Dogs 7

COSMOS Nets  
Bell Magazine Awards 9

Business Travel Tax Update 10

Balancing Bioethics 11

## NEWS

NASW Fall Meeting Minutes 13

Coulda, Shoulda, Woulda Tools 18

Amor and Frazier  
Named AAAS Fellows 22

AAAS Science Journalism Winners 22

Plant Pathology Journalism Award 24

Nieman Fellowships 24

DCSWA Symposium 30

CASW Fellowships 31

## COLUMNS

President's Letter 13

Cyberbeat 15

The Free Lance 16

PIO Forum 20

In Memoriam 24

News From Afar 25

Our Gang 27

Regional Groups 28

Notices from Diane 30

Letters to the Editor 32

Books By and For Members 32

New Members 34

Bulletin Boards/Ads 35

## CASW LAUDS RICK WEISS WITH 2005 VICTOR COHN PRIZE

by Lynne Friedmann

Rick Weiss, a science and medical reporter for the *Washington Post* who has produced in-depth coverage of stem-cell research and the accompanying public debate, along with spot stories, features, and analytical pieces on a wide range of medical subjects, has been awarded the 2005 Victor Cohn Prize for Excellence in Medical Science Reporting.

Weiss is recognized for his extraordinary coverage of the life sciences, from the lab bench to the halls of Congress. Award judges cited his particularly distinguished reporting on genetics and molecular biology, following the science as well as the associated societal, political, and ethical issues that often surround them. This in addition to filing daily copy for the *Washington Post*, generating more than 100 bylines a year.

Asked about the challenges of covering science news today Weiss observes, "Science for its own sake seems to not be appreciated by editors." Therefore, in order to carve out space for process-and-methods stories Weiss advises writers to aim at editors' "soft spots." And, no surprise, at the *Washington Post* that soft spot is politics.

By looking at the intersection of science and politics Weiss has found opportunities to both inform and educate about the process of science.

"I used to complain that science writers are expected to educate," said Weiss. "These days, given the debate on stem cell research, intelligent design, etc., I'm feeling more of a responsibility to educate. But this is not what I signed up for."

Of course, a science news story that educates takes more than a "find the policy link/find a character" approach.

"I'm not sure the anecdotal lead works well any more," said Weiss. "It's an ineffective method of story telling and education. Works better in magazines."

Furthering hampering science coverage is the general trend in newspapers toward shorter stories.

"There's less and less space to explain how something in science 'came to be,'" he said.

And when editors responsible for day-to-day decisions on news cover-



Rick Weiss is the recipient of the 2005 Victor Cohn Prize for Excellence in Medical Science Reporting.

PHOTO BY LYNNE FRIEDMANN

Lynne Friedmann is editor of ScienceWriters.



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## SUBMISSION DEADLINES

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Summer . . . . . June 1, 2006

Fall . . . . . September 1, 2006

Winter . . . . . December 1, 2006

age don't understand science well the result can be bad decisions—in both directions. That is certain science doesn't get published, and other science that doesn't deserve to be covered gets on page one.

Weiss would like to see scientists and their institutions put together programs aimed not at science writers but at top decision-making editors.

"Science editors are already on board," said Weiss. "It's the high-level editors above them that need to get some of the spark of science in them."

Weiss recalls that former NIH Director Francis Collins once organized a presentation on genetics for executive editors at the *Post*.

"(It was) a two-hour, dog-and-pony show," said Weiss. "But the editors all walked out saying 'We need to do more stories on genetics.'"

In the end, in order to succeed, science writers must possess good writing and storytelling skills.

"Nothing sells like a good story," said Weiss. "Any editor will fall for that."

Weiss has been a reporter for the *Washington Post* since 1993. Prior to that, he covered biology and medicine for *Science News*. Weiss holds a bachelor's degree in biology from Cornell University, and he has worked as a medical technologist in hospital laboratories.

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***...certain science doesn't  
get published, and  
other science that doesn't  
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gets on page one.***

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The Victor Cohn Prize for Excellence in Medical Science Reporting carries a cash award of \$3,000. It is given annually for a body of work published or broadcast within the last five years. The prize was created by the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing (CASW) and first awarded in 1999.

The award is named for veteran *Washington Post* medical writer Victor Cohn, who distinguished himself for the clarity, honesty, and effectiveness of his reporting during a 50-year career. Cohn was also a co-founder of the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing.

This year's entries were judged by Paul Raeburn, a New York City-based journalist and the CASW New Horizons in Science program director; CASW Vice President Cristine Russell, a former *Washington Post* science writer, now freelancing from Connecticut; and Ben Patrusky, CASW executive director. ■



PHOTO BY LYNNE FRIEDMANN

**Rick Weiss, of the *Washington Post*, receives the Victor Cohn Award from Cristine Russell, CASW vice president.**

## **RICK WEISS CHIT-CHATS ABOUT VICTOR COHN**

*[Rick Weiss delivered these remarks on Oct. 24, 2005, at the CASW awards dinner held during the New Horizons in Science Briefings, in Pittsburgh, Pa.]*

I am very happy to receive this year's Victor Cohn award. Happy for the recognition by all of you, my science-writing peers and mentors, which means a lot to me, but especially happy because this award keeps the memory of Victor alive.

I'd like to read you a letter I received from Vic 11 years ago last week: Oct. 18, 1994.

*Dear Rick,*

*This is a fan letter.*

*I just read your latest story on gene therapy, and it's really good!*

*I haven't read such a masterpiece of clarity since some things I've written.*

*Constant Reader,  
Vic*

I've never received a fan letter quite like that, and that says a lot about why we are all here today.

Victor was on the brink of retirement from the *Washington Post's* health section when I arrived there in the fall of 1993. I'd worked at several magazines at that point, but had never worked at a newspaper. When I got there, Victor stood out to me as the iconic, veteran newspaperman I'd seen in all those 1940s and '50s movies—a wry, curmudgeonly, and sometime garrulous guy—but with a wholly unexpected Woody Allen twist. Half Ben Bradlee, half Zero Mostel, he was funny,

moody, and seemingly comfortable in the knowledge that, having achieved a modicum of legendariness over the years, he could now devote himself to becoming a finely tuned caricature of himself.

That he succeeded in this endeavor is apparent from the handful of conversations I recently had with colleagues who worked with Victor. "What do you remember most about him?" I asked. Virtually every one of them responded: "Enough of this chit-chat!"

That was Victor's famous way of cutting conversations short, whether they were watercooler gossip sessions or telephone interviews with sources. If he was sitting down, he'd say it while slapping his hands on both knees. It was a very effective way of dispersing co-workers—whom he had inevitably attracted to his desk in the first place. Victor, after all, had that mix of gregariousness and intense desire to be left alone that helps explain why so many of us find ourselves trying to perform the profoundly personal act of writing in ridiculously social settings like newsrooms.

In fact, large chunks of Vic's career were spent in his home office, away from the crowds, where his natural writing rhythm was revealed, according to Jeff Cohn, his son and a neighbor of mine. For those who aspire to Vic's success, here was his method:

"He'd sit there in his office, in his pajamas and bathrobe, and work for a minute or two," Jeff told me. "Then he'd go upstairs and put on water for a pot of tea. He'd go back down, then the pot would start to whistle. He'd go pour the tea. Work a little. Then pour another cup or heat the first one up. Eventually he'd get dressed."

And those were his productive days.

"My father," Jeff said, "was very adept at getting grants to do nothing, including a six-month sabbatical from the *Post* to clean out his closet, literally."

What always got him back to work was his love of writing and the pride he took in being in print, though he was quick to make fun of that pride. One time, when he broke his arm, his daughter Deborah told me, he told people he broke it while trying to pat himself on the back.

When Vic wasn't writing science stories, sipping tea, or cleaning his closet, he was writing letters—some to friends or colleagues but many of them to journals and other outlets for publication. "Half of my letters to the *New England Journal* were about flatulence," he once told Jeff, without elaborating. None is known to have been published.

Victor was not one to bow to the authority of scientists. He saw them as curiosities, worthy of our attention not for their particular brilliance but for the strange things they did.

"Scientists are to journalists what lab rats are to scientists," he used to say.

*continued on page 6*

## CASW RESOLUTE IN HONORING JERRY BISHOP

### CASW Council for the Advancement of Science Writing, Inc. RESOLUTION of the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing, Inc. whereas Jerry E. Bishop

has served with unsurpassed distinction for two score years as a member of the Council and, since 1997, as CASW's masterful President, and

**W**hereas he has provided sage counsel and actively promoted the goals and aspirations of the Council without stint, and

**W**hereas his tireless efforts have notably advanced the profession of science journalism; be it therefore

**R**esolved that the Council hereby declares its profound gratitude to Jerry E. Bishop for his judicious leadership and extraordinary commitment to the craft of science writing.

October 24, 2005

Diane McGurgan  
administrative secretary

Cristine Russell  
vice president

Ben Patrusky  
executive director



The University of Pittsburgh cosponsored and Carnegie Mellon University hosted the CASW New Horizons in Science Briefing, held October 23-26, 2005. Pitt's CASW planning subcommittee (l to r) Provost James V. Maher, Jr., CASW President Jerry Bishop, Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for University News and Magazines John Harvith, Associate Director of the UPMC News Bureau Lisa Rossi, and Senior News Representative Karen Hoffmann. The briefing was held in conjunction with the NASW annual meeting and workshops. Together, CASW and NASW brought to the Pittsburgh area more than 300 science writers and communications professionals.





The CASW board and former *Wall Street Journal* colleagues honored CASW President Jerry Bishop for his many years of dedicated and inspired leadership to the field of science writing. Back row (l to r) Ron Winslow, Mike Waldholz, Alan Boyle, Charles Petit, Joann Rodgers, Cristine Russell, Diane McGurgan, and David Perlman. (Seated) Ben Patrusky and Jerry Bishop. Waldholz shared with the audience a letter to the editor (see column right), published that morning, in the *Wall Street Journal*, that extolled Bishop's spot-on reporting.



James V. Maher, Jr., provost and senior vice chancellor, University of Pittsburgh (l) and Jerry Bishop (r) flank Lawrence M. Krauss, chairman of the department of physics, Case Western University. Krauss was the after-dinner speaker at the October 24 CASW awards banquet. Krauss is author of *The Physics of Star Trek* (Harper Paperbacks, 1996). His new book, *Hiding in the Mirror: The Mysterious Allure of Extra Dimensions, from Plato to String Theory and Beyond* (Viking) was published that day.



Jerry Bishop listens as CASW Vice President Cristine Russell reads a heartfelt resolution from the CASW Board. Bishop steps down as CASW president in spring 2006.



CASW Executive Director Ben Patrusky and CASW President Jerry Bishop.

## Nobel Prize in Medicine Was Old (Good) News

I have to thank the *Journal* for saving my life, or at the very least, relieving the possibility of lifelong pain and illness.

In 1989, I was completing my residency in ophthalmology, and like most young and vigorous men, I was free of disease and took no prescriptive medications. But I began awakening in early morning with severe hunger pangs, which were temporarily relieved by drinking cold water or milk, and with eating. The area of my gut just below the center of my rib cage was tender, and I downed antacid tablets like candy.

I sought treatment at Mount Sinai in New York, and an ulcer was found. I was promptly placed on Zantac, which was a new member of a class of drugs known as Histamine-2 antagonists designed to reduce gastric acid secretion. My symptoms promptly abated. Three months later, the Zantac was discontinued, and within three weeks, the symptoms recurred. I was again placed on Zantac, this time for six months. But again the symptoms recurred upon discontinuing the medication. So again I was forced to restart Zantac, this time indefinitely. If I missed even one daily dose, I experienced a gnawing discomfort.

Two years later, my parents, subscribers to the *Journal*, spotted an article by reporter **Jerry Bishop** about a study that threatened to dispel the common notions regarding the etiology of ulcers ("Study Suggests Cause and Cure for Ulcers," May 1, 1992). The article stated that most peptic ulcers were caused by a bacteria known as *Helicobacter pylori*, and that the bacteria could be eradicated by a one-month course of Pepto-Bismol and antibiotics.

I presented the article to my gastroenterologist, who was, not unexpectedly, skeptical. But to his credit he agreed to try this therapy. Within one week, my symptoms disappeared. Following the protocol, the medications were discontinued after one month, and my symptoms never recurred. Since I was among the first American patients to be successfully treated by this new regimen, there was much interest on behalf of the gastroenterologists at Mount Sinai.

As this year's Nobel Prize in Medicine was awarded to Drs. Barry Marshall and Robin Warren of Australia, I had to smile for the good fortune of getting my hands on a copy of Jerry Bishop's article that saved me from chronic illness and discomfort. Oh, and by the way, I just renewed my subscription to the *Journal*, just in case I need to be saved again.

**Paul Krawitz, M.D.**  
Cold Spring Harbor, N.Y.

**VICTOR COHN AWARD** *Continued from page 4*

At a time when many of our ilk were content to trumpet scientists' proclamations about the latest miracle cure or pending disaster, Victor maintained a more skeptical perspective.

"There are two kinds of stories," he used to snort, "New Hope and No Hope."

Committed to finding the truth between those extremes, Victor more than anyone officiated at the shotgun wedding of statistics and science writing. And of course his book on that subject, *News & Numbers*—written, by the way, during not one but two Harvard fellowships he managed to wangle—remains a classic to this day.

That Victor managed to write that bible is especially remarkable given the dirty little secret I recently learned about Vic: He hated numbers.

"My dad was horrible at statistics and math," Jeff told me. "He had no sense of that stuff. My mother handled the checkbook, the financial accounts, and the investments. After she died...paying bills could be an all-day process."

Thumbing through *News & Numbers* the other day, I came across Vic's list of most important questions to ask scientists, and was taken aback by the power of the first on his list—one so simple that it tends to get forgotten.

The question is: "How do you know that?"

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***...Victor more than anyone  
officiated at the shotgun wedding  
of statistics and science writing.***

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In this age when evidence—the core commodity of science and of all rational thinking—is so often discounted as having no greater standing than simple belief, I can't think of a more important question to be pressed, not only by science writers but by journalists of all bents.

A wonderful thing about Vic was that he applied the same how-do-you-know-that standard to journalists.

Once, Don Colburn, a wonderful *Washington Post* health reporter who now writes for the *Portland Oregonian*, was scheduled to give a talk to reporters about how best to get a complicated story right without oversimplifying, hyping, or demonizing. How, that is, to not get a story wrong.

He asked Vic, who thought a moment and said, "Leave out what you don't know."

"Of course I laughed," Don recently told me. "The wise man being a wise guy, right? How glib. How clever. Nice one-liner. Cool sound bite. But think about it. Those six words, like much of what Vic said, get more complicated the more you think about them and the

more you live."

Here's my take: We hear editors complaining a lot these days that stories need to be shorter. What better way to accomplish that goal than by leaving out what we don't know to be true? (Of course, that'll never happen. For one thing, goodbye political desk!)

But enough of this chit-chat.

Vic died almost five years ago. But he is alive today in my heart and now, I hope, in yours. ■

## GETTING TANGLED WHEN DESCRIBING STRING THEORY

*by Lawrence Krauss*

In describing humankind's fascination with extra dimensions for the *New York Times* recently, I made the mistake of mentioning string theory and intelligent design on the same page. My purpose was not to claim they are similar. Quite the opposite. I wanted to describe how both science and religion sometimes provoke heated debates about features of the universe we cannot measure. While string theory has yet to make contact with the empirical universe, it is a legitimate part of science, even if it proves a failure, because its practitioners are ultimately aiming to produce falsifiable results. The proponents of intelligent design, on the other hand, do not seem to have this intent.

My choice of examples provoked a furious discussion on several physics blogs. The juxtaposition particularly irritated a number of string theorists who seem sensitive to any scepticism regarding the whole string enterprise. This was not my intent, although I have been sceptical of many claims and accomplishments by string theorists in the past 20 years.

But the online discussions raise an important issue at a time when science is under attack on a number of fronts—particularly in the US—by groups who wish to change what we teach as science to include concepts that are traditionally the domain of theology.

I want to state up front that the string enterprise has produced a very impressive body of theoretical work and has been pushed forward by many talented and hard-working scientists. However, I believe that what we normally call string theory is not what most scientists would call a theory in the traditional scientific sense.

A scientific theory is a logically coherent and predictive system that has been tested against experiment or observation. It explains observable phenomena and

*Lawrence Krauss is Ambrose Swasey Professor of Physics, at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio. His latest book is Hiding in the Mirror (Viking, 2005).*

makes falsifiable predictions about them.

Instead, the string enterprise (as one might choose to call it) is a broad set of mathematical concepts which have yet to be incorporated into a rigid theoretical structure that makes precise predictions—unlike the electroweak theory, for example, which makes predictions about particle physics. Nor does it make specific falsifiable assertions about observable phenomena, as evolutionary theory does in biology.

The string enterprise is not the only culprit. Another example of incorrect use of the term “theory” arises in cosmology, where scientists commonly speak of inflationary theory to describe the hypothesized growth of the universe soon after it began. Inflation is not so much a theory as a paradigm, a generally accepted perspective that is not associated with any particularly compelling mathematical model at this point.

The label “string theory” is actually an anachronism. The mathematics of the relativistic quantum mechanics of one-dimensional string-like objects was so named to distinguish it from that of point particles. The former was created in an attempt to circumvent various apparent mathematical infinities that beset the latter, called quantum field theory.

Maintaining this semantic distinction is not merely contentious nitpicking. A key part of the argument made by those who wish to introduce religion into science classes is that evolution is “just a theory.” By “theory” these individuals are referring to the common lay usage of the word, meaning a hunch or a guess, and not the more restrictive sense in which the term is normally discussed in science. Because most members of the general public are not familiar with this distinction, the claim has resonated in the popular consciousness.

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*When debating the nature  
of science with advocates of  
intelligent design, I am frequently  
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string theory is no more  
scientific than intelligent design.*

---

This causes problems. When debating the nature of science with advocates of intelligent design, I am frequently confronted with the claim that string theory is no more scientific than intelligent design. While I am satisfied that this is not the case, the fact that we probably use the term “theory” inappropriately in this case doesn’t help quash the confusion.

Eugenie Scott of the National Center for Science Education, a U.S. organization that defends the teaching of evolution in schools, has argued that we should train ourselves to not use the term “believe” in a scientific

context because it blurs the distinction between science and religion. My argument is the same. String theory is better thought of as a hypothesis or paradigm—a working framework upon which to develop a theory.

Of course there are those who will be offended by my suggestion that we should make it clear that the string enterprise has not produced anything that yet rises to the level of theory in the sense that scientists usually use this term. To them, I would argue that we can save ourselves grief down the line if we more precisely and more accurately represent to the public what we are doing, independently of how exciting those activities may seem to the participants. ■

*“Mind Your Scientific Language,” New Scientist, Dec. 3, 2005.*



Reporters good-humoredly storm the gates during a briefing marking the end of Lynne Friedmann’s ten years as AAAS Annual Meeting news-briefing moderator.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL J. COLELLA, COLELLA PHOTOGRAPHY  
PHOTO BY COLELLA PHOTOGRAPHY, COLELLAPHOTO.COM

## AAAS NEWS BRIEFINGS: A DECADE OF DATA, DRAMA, AND DELIGHT

by Lynne Friedmann

The speakers and their companions climbed four highly polished wooden steps onto an auditorium stage when one suddenly tripped. Reminiscent of a Looney Tunes cartoon, feet became a whirlwind blur in an attempt to regain balance. But the effort failed and, spread eagle, the Weimaraner did a face plant on the stairs. Fortunately, it wasn’t badly hurt.

What on earth was I doing on stage with a pack of dogs?

The answer: conducting a news briefing on dog genetics; one of more than 300 briefings I presided over in the course of ten years during the American

*Lynne Friedmann is editor of ScienceWriters.*



Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) annual meeting.

I held the job for so long that many assume I am an AAAS staff member. But it was a once-a-year consulting gig. As news-briefing moderator, my job was to start and end briefings on time, make sure speakers didn't monopolize the time allotted, call on reporters during the question-and-answer period, escort speakers to a follow-up interview room, and repeat the entire process upwards of 35 times in a five-day period. In order to run a tight ship, I called upon skills gained from an unlikely source.

Twenty-five years earlier I was a secretary in a detective bureau of the Los Angeles Police Department. The desk I occupied eight hours a day, typing crime reports on an IBM Selectric typewriter, was less than 20 feet from a public counter. Through osmosis I learned from hard-as-nails, chain-smoking sergeants (both male and female) the demeanor necessary to take control of heated or otherwise chaotic situations. Keeping order in a news briefing, I reasoned, would be a breeze by comparison. In truth, it took a couple of self-conscious years of trial and error before a "system" emerged that saw me through most briefings and several emergency situations.

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***What on earth was  
I doing on stage with  
a pack of dogs?***

---

Preparation for the annual meeting briefings began months in advance with the AAAS staff doing the heavy lifting by pouring through the meeting abstracts to identify topics with news and/or public-appeal value. Then came weeks of e-mails and phone calls by staff to determine speaker availability, travel schedules, and the final briefing lineup. My responsibilities kicked in once the meeting began.

A typical news briefing began by meeting speakers in a pseudo greenroom 10 minutes prior to instruct them on the route to/from the briefing room, explain any idiosyncrasies of the microphones, determine the speaker order of the panel, outline the manner in which Q&A would be handled, and calm the sometimes visible jitters of those going before reporters for the first time.

But not all scientists are novices when it comes to the media. In 1997, famed undersea explorer Robert Ballard listened politely while I began my pre-briefing spiel. Partway through, I abruptly stopped and said, "It occurs to me there's probably nothing I can tell you about a news conference that you don't already know." He laughingly agreed, but did so in such a gracious manner that I didn't feel like an idiot.

And then there were those who felt no need of my advice. These tended to be government officials and

agency heads who arrived late and in the company of a large, self-important entourage. Their handlers would interpose themselves and attempt to tell me how the news briefing would be conducted. A withering LAPD stare and they got the message we'd do things my way.

Celebrities added additional challenges, not because they're demanding but because people are star struck. When author Michael Crichton met with reporters in 1999, an AAAS official—who heretofore had never played a role in a news briefing—pulled rank and told me that he would escort Crichton out of the briefing room. I smiled inwardly and thought "good luck."

As Q&A concluded, I stepped to the side of the room and watched in amusement as reporters mobbed Crichton while the hapless interloper's entreaties to clear a path to the door were ignored. Finally, in a huff, he stomped toward me and snapped, "It's your room. You get him out of here." Without a word, I stood next to Crichton, raised my left arm, and tapped the face of my wristwatch. Conversation ceased, the journalists respectfully stepped back, and I escorted Crichton from the room past the dumbstruck AAAS official. Point, set, match!

Over the years, AAAS staff and I tried to anticipate which briefings held the potential for being mobbed in order to work out alternative routes that allowed rapid entrance/exit of speakers. Sometimes this meant going through a hotel kitchen or a dark service corridor. Once I prayed for a trapdoor.

It was the 2001 briefing by Francis Collins and Craig Venter announcing the completion of the human genome sequence. The briefing room had only one door and the speakers couldn't have been farther from it. A couple of hundred reporters, standing room only, and TV camera crews engulfed every aisle. As the minutes ticked by, and even more people somehow managed to squeeze into the room, my palms began to sweat.

No choice but to plow through the middle. So at the briefing's conclusion I announced:

Those of you in seats remain seated. Those of you standing in the back of the room exit to the hallway. The center aisle must be kept clear so the speakers can leave the room. Thank you for your cooperation.

Everyone complied, and I sighed with relief. As I led the speakers out the room and down the hall, Craig Venter whispered in my ear, "Did you used to load cargo for the airlines?"

Because I kept a cool demeanor in the news briefings I made it a point to attend the meeting's numerous social events so reporters got to know me "off duty." My first year as moderator, I noted quite a few reporters offered to buy me drinks and/or talked to me with their body turned at a jaunty angle that allowed a clear line-



of-sight to their name badge. I concluded there must be some kind of cachet in being called by name at the briefings, so I made an effort to memorize names and faces. Over the years, reporters have commented on my terrific memory. It's part memory and part illusion. Because AAAS name badges are printed in large type, I could easily read the names of anyone seated in the first three rows.

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***Celebrities added  
additional challenges,  
not because they're  
demanding but because  
people are star struck.***

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Not all news briefings offered edge-of-your-seat excitement, and over the years reporter watching became a favorite way to amuse myself. For example, noting how many reporters are left-handed or observing who hunts and pecks on their laptop. One year I noticed a number of reporters using fountain pens and later learned all of them were Europeans. I've also held post-briefings discussions with journalists on the merits of Pitman vs. Gregg shorthand with practitioners of both. I'm a Gregg shorthand writer myself.

As the 10th anniversary of my tour of duty approached, I decided to step down as news briefing moderator because I'd shifted the focus of my business away from PR/media consulting to freelance writing. At future briefings you'll see me in the audience instead of the front of the room.

The 2005 AAAS meeting marked my last as news-briefing moderator and it was an uneventful week until the last day. As Q&A was about to begin for an AIDS vaccine update, complete bedlam broke out as reporters jumped to their feet, rushed the speaker table where National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony Fauci was seated, and, arms waving, shouted, "Choose me! Choose me!" In the split second that I thought to myself "WHAT THE...!?" it dawned on me that I'd been set up like a bowling pin. (I learned later that even Dr. Fauci was in on the joke.) I quickly called for the first question and order was restored. Several reporters later told me they were disappointed that I didn't appear flustered by the outbreak. If they only knew.

But that concludes the time we have for this story. ■

## NEW MAGAZINE AND EDITOR TAKE TOP HONORS

Australia's glossy new popular-science magazine, *COSMOS*, less than six months after making its debut, has taken home an armload of industry honors Down Under. This includes NASW and member Wilson da Silva being named Editor of the Year for what judges described as the debut of a "stylish, ambitious, and erudite publication, realized through the vision of an editor."

The Bell Magazine Awards, given annually by the magazine industry association, Australian Business and Specialist Publishers, were presented on Nov. 25, 2005 at a ceremony in Sydney's Four Seasons Hotel.

"It is an honor to be recognized by your peers, and to have the excellence that we seek to bring to *COSMOS* lauded and supported by the industry," said da Silva.

"Readers today are savvy, intelligent, and global in their outlook. We're not just competing with titles in Australia and New Zealand; we have to be competitive in editorial terms with the best publications coming out of New York or London," added da Silva, who is currently president of the World Federation of Science Journalists.

Billed as a monthly magazine of "ideas, science, society, and the future," *COSMOS* ([www.cosmosmagazine.com](http://www.cosmosmagazine.com)) was launched in July 2005 and has already attracted a loyal following. Among its many fans is Australia's Minister for Education Science and Training, Dr. Brendan Nelson, who has arranged for all science teachers in the country to receive a copy of the October 2005 edition.

*COSMOS* is supported by an advisory board that includes Apollo 11 astronaut Buzz Aldrin, renown paleontologist Mike Archer, noted medical researcher Judith Whitworth, and veteran science broadcaster Robyn Williams. ■

(Source: News release)



***COSMOS* won Best Consumer Magazine**  
Cover for its September 2005 issue (pictured), which judges commended for its "good design and cover lines, strong masthead and excellent use of colour and illustration." Recognized were Rodney Lochner (art director, *COSMOS*), Frank Lindner (cover photography), and Wilson da Silva (cover concept and cover lines).

Kylie Ahern, the publisher of *COSMOS*, was also recognized with a Highly Commended citation for Best Consumer Magazine Launch; while Sara Phillips, the deputy editor of *COSMOS*, was a finalist for the Best Single Article category.

## TAX MATTERS: BUSINESS TRAVEL WITH YOUR SPOUSE

by Julian Block

Some kinds of deductions always trouble the tax takers. For instance, baleful bureaucrats become suspicious and demand a detailed accounting when science writers and other business travelers journey to meetings or conventions at plush resorts or exotic locales and (gasp!) decide to combine work with play and take their spouses along.

Consequently, Internal Revenue Service regulations set stringent guidelines for deductions of a spouse's travel expenses. Worse yet, legislation enacted in 1993 included a little-noticed measure that imposes far stricter requirements.

To be sure, the IRS grinch has to allow you to deduct part of the tab for the cost of tending to business chores. All is not forfeited just because your mate tags along for no reason other than to see the sights, although, in that event, strict limits are placed on what and how much qualifies as a business-travel deduction.

The key requirement is to show that your attendance at, say, a convention is primarily for business. Then, there should be no problem about a write-off for what you spend to get to and from the convention, as well as outlays for hotels and meals during the meeting. Travel and hotel expenditures are 100 percent deductible, but meals are only 50 percent deductible.

Previously, the IRS balked at any deduction for the portion of the outlays attributable to your spouse's travel, meals, and lodging unless you could show a genuine business reason for his or her presence at the convention.

Those expenses did not become

deductible merely because your spouse performed some incidental services—for instance, typing notes or accompanying you to and remaining awake throughout convention gatherings. According to IRS regulations, what counted was whether your spouse's presence was "necessary," as opposed to "helpful," to the conduct of your business, though in a number of cases the courts ruled against the agency.

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***All is not forfeited just  
because your mate tags along  
for no reason other than  
to see the sights.***

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Now, there's no deduction whatsoever for travel expenses of your spouse. It makes no difference that he or she goes along for business reasons.

This blanket prohibition is subject to a limited exception, one that will allow relatively few travelers to salvage write-offs for a mate's travel expenditures. The exception kicks in only if these requirements are satisfied. First, the spouse (or dependent, or any other individual) accompanying you on business travel is a bona fide employee of the outfit that pays for the trip. Second, the spouse undertakes the travel for a bona fide business reason. Third, the spouse is otherwise entitled to deduct the expenses.

Some frequently missed tax relief remains available for lodging costs, notwithstanding your spouse, significant squeeze, or some other person tagging along just for fun. The

law authorizes a deduction for lodging that reflects the single-rate cost of similar accommodations for you, not half the double rate you actually paid for the two of you.

To illustrate, you and your spouse journey by car to a writers' convention in Orlando where the two of you stay at a hotel that charges \$250 for a double and \$220 for a single room. In addition to a deduction for the entire round-trip drive (the driving costs the same whether you are accompanied by your spouse or not), claim a per-day deduction of \$220 for the room, rather than just \$125, half of \$250. To make it easier to pre-



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serve the deduction in the event of an IRS challenge, remember to have the hotel bill specify the single rate, or get a rate sheet.

Even better, some of your spouse's meals might pass muster as deductible dining. Suppose your convention schmoozing includes dining with a business associate and the associate's spouse. Because of the presence of the associate's spouse, your spouse attends on a business basis. ■

## IN THE WAKE OF KATRINA: HAS BIOETHICS FAILED

*by Jonathan D. Moreno*

Hurricane Katrina and its sequel will force policymakers to revisit previous assumptions; the same should be true of bioethics as it has come to be understood.

The catastrophe in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast was threefold: the original hurricane, the breaching of the levees, and—perhaps most shocking and distressing—the transparent failure of institutions to provide security and succor to the victims in the immediate aftermath. But history will bear witness that the medical and public health crisis rested on decades of exploitation of the geology of New Orleans and the ecology of the Gulf of Mexico by energy, gambling, and real estate interests. Government at all levels failed to enforce prudence over self-interest. While the levees were designed to withstand a flood that could occur once in 200 years, the Dutch dikes are hundreds of times more resilient.

In 1970, Van Rensselaer Potter coined the term bioethics to refer to, in Peter Whitehouse's recent concise formulation, the "integration of biology and values... designed to guide human survival." Nearly two decades later, exasperated by the adoption of his language by a field that underwent explosive growth without acknowledging his contribution, Potter wrote of global bioethics to signify a broader understanding that encompassed medicine, environmentalism, public health, and spirituality.

Although Whitehouse, Al Jonsen, Warren Reich, and a few others have kept Potter's contribution in memory, on the whole he has been at best a marginal figure in the minds of most who work and study in the field. Potter is often not included in the pantheon of bioethics' founders, and those of us who got our start while he was still professionally active mostly did not know him. Yet it was arguably his felicitous term that

captured the imagination of physicians, theologians, philosophers, journalists, and the educated lay public in the 1970s. "Bioethics" has a far sharper edge than clunky early descriptors like "human values in medicine" or "society, ethics, and the life sciences." In immediately calling forth both science and morality, "bioethics" is a sexy conjunction.

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***It is no secret that  
bioethics has followed  
popular trends rather  
than led them.***

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Katrina and its aftermath have caused epidemic disease and shocking levels of death; what little morbidity and mortality the hurricane did not cause, it gravely complicated. This disaster painfully illustrates Potter's conception of the nexus of human values in medicine and the environment. And who better to appreciate the delicate balance of nature, exemplified by land reclaimed from the sea, than a Dutchman? This tragedy also may be the shock that awakens the field of bioethics from a false consciousness and moves it closer to Potter's vision.

It is no secret that bioethics has followed popular trends rather than led them. In the past 40 years, as the wider society lurched from controversy to controversy and case to case—organ transplants, artificial organs, resource allocation, gene therapy, Karen Quinlan, HIV/AIDS, Baby Doe, Nancy Cruzan, "Debbie," Jack Kevorkian, Dolly, Jesse Gelsinger, cloning, biosecurity, Terri Schiavo, and on and on—American bioethics has been there. This is not to deny that much important and enduring work has been done in clinical and research ethics and public policy, but more often as not the field in general has rushed to the scene of the hot topic.

How to account for these developments? Francis and colleagues observed that bioethics emerged just as the era of infectious disease seemed to be ending and—I would add—as the valorization of personal autonomy was beginning. Reviewing early bioethics texts, they note that "systematic discussion of infectious disease is manifestly absent...even cases and examples involving infectious conditions are rare at best." The central doctrine of bioethics, informed consent, instead has emphasized the consequences of treatment decisions for individuals and virtually ignored the consequences for the health of others. Even discussions of distributive justice fail to take into account public welfare beyond our rather porous borders. If the paradigmatic medical problems that stimulate ethical debate are infectious diseases, rather than acute conditions, the commonly cited principles of biomedical ethics would have been recited

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in a different order or even formulated quite differently.

Followers of bioethics in much of the rest of the world are familiar with this conclusion. They tend to see American bioethics as anomalous in this regard, as just another manifestation of the land of plenty. This point was personally driven home in March of 2005 when I spent a week in Karachi teaching a bioethics course. The pressing ethical issue in Pakistan is the dire shortage of facilities and organs for end-stage kidney patients while villagers simultaneously take payment from foreigners in exchange for their healthy organs, leaving them sicker and poorer. Pakistani bioethicists and their allies in the healthcare system are pressing the government to establish a national allocation network for cadaveric organs, using arguments from both distributive justice and Islamic law to support their case.

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***The Katrina disaster  
partly resulted from  
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In the U.S. academic world, offerings in ethics and public health are beginning to make their appearance, but the literature is still disgracefully sparse. A modest foundation-sponsored project to develop a model curriculum for public health ethics was completed a few years ago, although these efforts have been somewhat distorted by the widespread American preoccupation with bioterrorism. The issues raised by the prospect of a biological attack are important, but the contribution that biodefense preparedness can make to an oft-neglected public health system is controversial. Public health professionals have complained that government investment in biodefense is, on the whole, a distraction from the need to rebuild the public health infrastructure after years of negligence. Nor do discussions about responses to a terrorist attack necessarily lead to more general discussions about ethical issues in public health.

The Katrina disaster partly resulted from a failure of public institutions, and bioethics must shoulder its share of the blame. Many commentators have observed that the field has wrapped itself in the embrace of the privileged and their problems. What contribution have we made to the debate about access to health care since the President's Commission in the early 1980s? The failure to create and execute an escape plan for New Orleans' impoverished residents is part of a continuum of inadequate services that often prove deadly even under ordinary circumstances.

More transparent is the lack of intellectual

exchange between bioethics and environmental ethics, either in the literature or within academic institutions. We shouldn't exaggerate the influence of bioethicists' voices, but the media does provide many of us with a soapbox that should be exploited for purposes other than simply to comment on the ethics crisis du jour. The American environmental movement is in its own period of self-examination, following a series of regulatory setbacks. Two influential environmentalists recently roiled the field when they pronounced "the death of environmentalism." Bioethicists could help reinvigorate their own field by providing new voices and fresh ideas, helping enrich our understanding of the reach and significance of our own work.

In the short run, the reconsideration of the scope of bioethics that is proposed could even unite opposing voices in the culture wars. While conservative and liberal thinkers might continue to disagree about familiar ethical issues like suitable limits on enhancement technologies, they should find common cause in the need to care for a fragile and increasingly ailing planet. In some ways, such a discourse would return us to the insight that gave rise to both fields—namely, that human happiness and well-being is dependent upon a complex ecological system in which we are all inextricably linked, a system in which we are all actors and patients, doers and sufferers. We ignore these brute facts at our peril.

Or, to adapt another insight attributable to the notorious 1960s, you don't need a hurricane to know which way the wind blows. ■

*"In the Wake of Katrina: Has 'Bioethics' Failed?"*  
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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

by Laura van Dam

What great pleasure I find in NASW's continuing development. Our organization may be more than 70 years old, but it's going gangbusters, with ever new growth and ideas. The latest example is a committee to address members' grievances about freelance work contracted by publishers.



PHOTO BY HOWARD SAXNER

The need for a grievance committee came to light in late 2004, when NASW accepted an ad for the jobs listserv seeking freelance writers for *Seed* magazine. Several individuals complained that we shouldn't carry the ad because the publication was delinquent in paying freelance writers—several of whom were NASW members. The magazine owed significant amounts of money and was several months in arrears.

NASW withdrew the ad and hired an attorney to craft a strongly worded letter sent to the publisher. That pressure, plus similar reaction from the American Society of Journalists and Authors and an article in the *New York Observer*, helped resolve the issue in favor of the writers, who were eventually paid.

***In a perfect world, of course,  
no NASW member would  
need a grievance committee.***

The experience made the board recognize that a formal mechanism was needed to address grievances on behalf of its members. During the February 2005 NASW board meeting the matter was formally addressed. Following that, board member Robin Marantz Henig and freelance committee chair Dan Ferber worked together to outline the structure and function of an NASW grievance committee. During its October 2005 meeting, the NASW board unanimously approved the proposal.

The inaugural grievance committee consists of freelance Dan Ferber (chair), NASW board member Robin Henig, and member-at-large Ellen Ruppel Shell. They will review complaints from members who have experienced serious payment delays for work performed. The committee will also consider inappropriate use of

members' freelanced work by publishers, such as publication in outlets that stretch beyond the scope of original contracts.

Once a complaint is deemed significant, a letter will be drafted, reviewed by the NASW officers, legal counsel (when appropriate), and—signed by the grievance committee chair and NASW president—sent to the publisher.

Should the initial letter not resolve the issue in a timely fashion, the committee chair will place a follow-up call to the publisher. If this still does not produce satisfactory results, the committee may exercise the option—after consultation with NASW officers and legal counsel—of listing the complaint in the publications database now being developed for the NASW Web site. At the same time, the committee will provide the aggrieved NASW member with a list of appropriate lawyers, one of whom he/she might decide to hire independently.

In a perfect world, of course, no NASW member would need a grievance committee. But given that problems sometimes do arise, there's a new resource in place, with the muscle of NASW behind it, to take action on your behalf. ■

## NASW FALL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES

by NASW Secretary Nancy Shute

The NASW membership met at 9 a.m. Sun., Oct. 22, 2005, during the NASW workshop in Pittsburgh, Pa. About 75 people attended, despite the early hour. Could it have been the free breakfast?

NASW vice president Lee Hotz called the meeting to order. No budget was presented because the membership had met in February and approved a budget then.

### ***Committee reports:***

**Workshop Committee.** Conference organizer Tinsley Davis reported on registration for this, the first NASW meeting to be held in conjunction with the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing's New Horizons meeting. The meeting drew a total registration of 307. The breakdown: 221 members, 12 nonmembers, 20 students, 12 organizers, 31 speakers, and 10 student

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*Nancy Shute is a senior writer at U.S. News & World Report.*

volunteers. Student registration was down from a typical 40 to 50. The registration fee included the Saturday night reception, whereas in the past that was a separate paid event. Registration for the Sunday NASW/CASW lunch was 254, including 30 scientists. About 500 people registered for the NASW workshop in February 2005, but Davis said the higher numbers were attributable to the fact that meetings in Washington D.C. always have bigger attendance, and that the Pittsburgh session was the second NASW meeting this year.

The registration numbers for the CASW meeting were 226 for the Sunday night reception, 209 for Monday morning programs, 112 for the Monday awards banquet (which required a \$50 separate charge), 175 for Tuesday morning, 142 for the Tuesday party, and 135 for Wednesday morning. NASW Executive Director Diane McGurgan reported that those numbers were a little better than those for last year's CASW meeting in Arkansas.

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***...[Tinsley Davis] had accomplished the superhuman task for staging two workshops in one year, and still emerged smiling.***

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Davis said that NASW is taking pains to fund its meeting independent of CASW, with the joint luncheon costs being split fifty-fifty. The 2006 NASW/CASW meeting will be in Baltimore, with the CASW portion sponsored by Johns Hopkins University. The weekend of Oct. 27 is being considered because of space conflicts at the hotel earlier in the month.

Hotz, who chaired the workshop committee, thanked Davis for making NASW's workshops a tremendous success, noting that she had accomplished the superhuman task of staging two workshops in one year, and still had emerged smiling.

**FOIA Committee.** Co-chairman Tom Paulson reported that NASW had been approached by other writers' organizations about taking a position on pending efforts to amend federal laws protecting FOIA rights. He thought NASW could provide a unique perspective because the group has members on both sides of the issue, as writers and as PIOs and government officials. There are problems on both sides, he noted, with both officials and reporters abusing the laws. The committee plans to poll members on their interest and concern on FOIA issues. Paulson asked members interested in working on the issue to contact him.

**Freelance Committee.** Chairman Dan Ferber said the committee had about 18 active members and was

putting considerable effort into the freelancers' portion of the NASW Web site. There is a series of new articles in the works, including two pieces by an accountant, on bookkeeping and tax issues, and four from a lawyer—two on contracts, one on indemnity, and one on getting clients to pay up. Early in 2006, a searchable markets database will be added to the NASW Web site. The database has been in the works for two years. It will include information on major freelance markets and will allow members to post information on payment and other issues. The committee also worked on creating a grievance procedure for writers who have been stiffed by publications.

**Education Committee.** Co-chairman Jeff Grabmeier reported that NASW would host a mentoring and an internship fair at the AAAS meeting in February 2006, in St. Louis, despite the fact that NASW will not be holding workshops there. He encouraged members to volunteer as mentors to avoid a last-minute scramble if there is a greater number of mentees who sign up.

**Awards Committee.** Co-chairman Bob Finn reported that the deadline for NASW Science-in-Society Awards is Feb. 1, 2006, with awards presented at the October 2006 NASW meeting in Baltimore.

**Membership Committee.** Chairman Nancy Shute reported that member Linda Wang took the initiative to organize a science-writing workshop at the Asian American Journalists Association meeting in Minneapolis, in August. Panelists included members Kenneth Chang, Lewis Cope, and Corinna Wu, who discussed how to cover stories with a local public health scientist. About 30 people attended. The diversity committee will try to present similar science writing programs for African-American and Latin-American journalists' organizations in 2006.

**Web Site Committee.** Cybrarian Russell Clemings presented a demo of the redesigned NASW Web site, which includes science news (supplied by RSS feeds from various news organizations), and Movable Type software that should make it easy for non-techies to post new content. Final signoff on the design templates is still to come, and discussion on content is still ongoing within the committee. The redesign is expected to be launched in the spring, with new content added as it is available. The redesign received an enthusiastic round of applause from members.

Hotz ended the meeting by noting that this year's stand-alone meeting was a big experiment for NASW, the first time the organization has met outside of AAAS. Hotz noted an energy and excitement in the sessions, as well as at Saturday night's reception celebrating the second edition of NASW's *A Field Guide for Science Writers*.

NASW, Hotz said, is really coming into its own. The meeting adjourned at 9:45 a.m. ■

## CYBERBEAT

by Russell Clemings

Let's say you check your e-mail one morning and find an official-looking (sort of) message about "Your Nasw account."

Dear Nasw Member,

Your email account was used to send a huge amount of unsolicited spam messages during the recent week. If you could please take 5-10 minutes out of your online experience and confirm the attached document so you will not run into any future problems with the online service. If you choose to ignore our request, you leave us no choice but to cancel your membership.

Virtually yours,  
The Nasw Support Team

Woe to those who follow the message's instructions, especially if their anti-virus software is out of date. It's quite likely that the "attached document" is actually a small bit of code that can wreak havoc on your system. Ironically, it might even turn your computer into a "spambot" that generates a huge amount of unsolicited spam e-mail.

How can you protect yourself against a scam like that? Subscribing to a good anti-virus product like Norton, McAfee, or Trend is a good start. But a healthy dose of skepticism may be your best protection.

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### *If it looks fishy, it probably is.*

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Look at that message again and you may see several tipoffs to its fraudulent nature. First of all, there's no person's name attached. Just a nebulous "Nasw Support Team." And what's with the funny capitalization? Our organization's initials are "NASW," not the unpronounceable "Nasw."

Second, while we may not be poets, we're not about to resort to hackneyed expressions like "your online experience" and "Virtually yours." We have standards, you know.

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



Third, why is the important stuff apparently relegated to the attachment? Why isn't it in the main text of the message?

The bottom line is simple: If it looks fishy, it probably is.

If you're skilled enough to find and read the routing headers that come with such a message, you'll almost certainly see that it really didn't originate from an nasw.org address at all.

Forging the contents of the "From:" field that appears in most e-mail readers is a trivial task. Only the "Received:" headers, which take some detective work to find, can show where the message came from. And even those may not identify the real villain. It may just be some unwitting sap whose computer has been hijacked by a similar virus.

So the lesson is this: If it looks fishy, don't click on its attachment. Instead, ask me at [cybrarian@nasw.org](mailto:cybrarian@nasw.org).

### ***nasw-talk***

"I was wondering if any of you who write or ghost-write papers for academic scientists have a style manual or online reference that you find helpful for arcane scientific usage issues," Massachusetts writer Karen L. Allendoerfer asked, in late November.

Allendoerfer's specific problem was "trying to figure out the correct way to describe PrP-null mice (a line of knockout mice missing the gene for the prion-forming protein PrP)." Some of the responses addressed that specific point. But two more generally useful titles were also mentioned:

From Massachusetts writer Richard Robinson: "The *AMA Manual of Style* is probably as authoritative as you'll get."

And from Texas freelancer Merry Maisel, seconded by Daryl McGrath: "For style in bioscience, the best guide is the *Council of Biology Editors Manual for Authors, Editors, and Publishers*—and most of the bio journals give at least lip service to using it. The short title of this work is *Scientific Style and Format*, and I have the Sixth Edition from Cambridge University Press, which dates to 1994."

### ***nasw-freelance***

Student Raphaëlle Derome revisited an often discussed topic in November by asking: "Do you guys let scientists review your articles before you send them to your editor? Or do you only check quotes or parts where you're unsure?"

Michigan freelancer Catherine Shaffer quickly staked claim to the middle ground: "I've never allowed any scientist or other source to read an article in its entirety. Sorry. Not gonna happen. But I have allowed them to review copy or quotes in some cases. It really helps sometimes in getting things accurate."

Indiana freelancer Dan Ferber expressed a similar view, but made it clear that the source doesn't make the rules: "What matters is that the you, the journalist, have the ultimate say in what goes in the article. Your responsibility is to tell the truth as you see it."

The discussion heated up when new subscriber Jacquie Corness weighed in from Sweden. Describing herself as a scientist who may become a writer, she spoke from the viewpoint of the former.

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***What matters is that you,  
the journalist, have  
the ultimate say in what  
goes in the article.***

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"I can't believe the egos of some of you—not seeing the best explanation of the work as paramount," she said. "Your job (in this example that was mentioned, at least) is to explain research which isn't yours. And your collective overall track record in this area is not good, so what can we do to change that?"

A few correspondents echoed her view. But others challenged the broad-brush criticism and warned about the pitfalls of allowing sources to review (and in some cases rewrite) copy.

"The hardest part about showing the piece to (many, not all) scientists is that they want it written for their colleagues, not their relatives," wrote Idaho freelancer Mary Beckman.

San Francisco freelancer Monya Baker offered some cautionary anecdotes from her experience:

A postdoc strenuously objected to an analogy comparing the assembly of a nanosomething to tinkertoys. The researcher admitted the analogy was accurate, but thought it wasn't sufficiently "dignified."

A professor failed to answer a specific question about the accuracy of a two-sentence description, and instead sent me a half-page excerpt from a press release suggesting I use it verbatim.

A head of institutional research wanted to cut the phrase "that's very scary" from a comment on experimental therapies because "scientists should only talk about facts, not feelings."

A graduate student felt that research on using plants to detoxify soil could not be explained properly without a technical definition of "vacuole." ■

## THE FREE LANCE

by Tabitha M. Powledge

Some things were different at NASW's new-form annual meeting last October in Pittsburgh, our first not adjacent to the AAAS meeting. But some events were comfortably the same. The workshops, for example, still emphasize practical information about the business and craft of science writing.

But the traditional meet-the-editors panel, always popular with freelances, has morphed into something fresh: the pitch slam. Akin to a poetry slam, the pitch slam, organized by freelance Rebecca Skloot, featured science writers with gumption enough to try out article ideas in public on a panel of four editors from well-paying slick magazines. On the panel: Mariette DiChristina, executive editor of both *Scientific American* and the new bimonthly *Scientific American Mind*; Nicole Dyer, senior associate editor of *Popular Science*; Toni Hope, health editor of *Good Housekeeping*; and Corey Powell, senior editor of *Discover*.

Reassuringly, a couple of the pitches elicited initial interest from editors. Let us hope subsequent contacts went well, too, and that pieces based on those pitches are now in the works.

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***Some things were different at  
NASW's new-form annual  
meeting...some events were  
comfortably the same.***

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But for me the take-home message was that writers (very much including me) need constant reminding about some pitching basics. These were embodied in editor comments that came up again and again. Among them:

- Editors—at these magazines, anyway—are not interested in topics or overviews. They are interested in stories, tales with a strong narrative.
- Editors also want novelty—if not a new subject, then a new angle on the subject.
- But these magazines are all monthlies, with a lead time of three to six months, which makes coming up with novelty extremely difficult. They sometimes lose stories for that reason, Hope noted.
- Editors like to feel that you admire their magazine and understand what it wants. For instance, editors at *Discover* look for a sense that you read and like the magazine and know what it has published in the past six months, Powell said.
- Similarly, editors are annoyed when they get pitches

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for stories that the magazine has already published, showing that you haven't really checked into it. Said DiChristina: Read issues from the past year to see what we've done recently.

- A pitch is much more than a pitch. It's evidence for how you write and how you understand the magazine. Don't include the lead in your pitch, but it's useful to practice writing heads and decks for your story idea—this advice from Skloot.

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***Editors like to feel that you admire their magazine and understand what it wants.***

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First things first: all these magazines pay between \$1 and \$2 per word, depending on the usual factors, such as which department you're writing for, your level of experience, whether you're a regular contributor, and the amount of work involved. Some other facts about the magazines:

*Scientific American's* new entry, bimonthly *Scientific American Mind*, follows the lead of its parent, emphasizing articles by scientists and experts rather than journalists. Only a couple of features are open to journalists in each issue, DiChristina (mdichristina@sciam.com) said, and stories require a lot of legwork. They like controversial topics and unique expertise.

At *Good Housekeeping*, health—including psychology—is a very important topic for the magazine, according to Hope. Every month it runs a service piece of 1,200 to 1,500 words. The article must emphasize translating scientific findings, and sources should include all the experts in the field. Almost every month there are pieces on controversies such as food testing, genetic testing, recall of medical devices. Hope said the magazine loves to attack agencies such as USDA and FDA, bringing a campaign to the topic. Most article ideas come from staff editors, who then assign writers. Hope (thope@hearst.com) invited writers to make themselves known to her and to send clips. "I'm always looking for new writers," she said.

*Discover* magazine was recently sold, and will probably be redesigned, Powell said. He speculated that in future it may further emphasize narrative and investigative reporting. Powell (corey.powell@Disney.com) noted that *Discover* does a lot of what *Scientific American* does—except that its features are written primarily by freelance journalists rather than scientists. The magazine wants pieces that stress narrative and are personality-driven. In addition to the feature well, the magazine has a review section that's a good place for trying out new writers, Powell said. It also uses some freelance material in the news section. According to Powell,

the real test is the element of surprise. The magazine is looking for strong narrative that people haven't heard elsewhere.

"We cover a lot of hard, shiny objects," said *Popular Science's* Dyer (nicole.dyer@time4.com), who reported also that a lot of changes are going on at the magazine. It is in the throes of redesign; the new design—which she said was very dramatic—will probably have appeared by the time you read this. The magazine emphasizes exotic technology and emerging technology, topics like robotics, space and aviation, automotive and military technology. A front-of-the-book section emphasizes what's new and cool in the way of gadgets and wants to break this news six months before it appears anywhere else. The news section is "our anchor to reality" and uses a lot of infographics, she said. Writers should think visually because readers are curious about how things work. Stories emphasize inventors and the mechanics of things. They run profiles on people inventing new technology that focus not necessarily on the technology, but on innovation. Idea generation almost always comes from the editors; they accept few pitches. Among the new sections will be one called Concepts and Prototypes, a photo section, and Instant Experts, a five-minute guide to topics such as black holes or the 11th dimension. She said approaches may do better by snail mail rather than e-mail because they get so many pitches.

Here are a few examples of ideas from writers gutsy enough to stand up in public and try to pitch a story in a few seconds—and some editor responses to them:

A piece on reforming the immune system, developing reverse vaccines to educate the immune system to call off a misguided attack. This approach has led to therapies now in clinical trials.

**Hope:** You might follow a patient through a clinical trial.

**Dyer:** Get to the upshot quicker. What is the ultimate payoff?

**Powell:** When, where, and who is doing this? *Discover* deals with the process of science.

**DiChristina:** Why shouldn't we have an expert do this article?

A piece on prospects for developing complex Hal-like algorithms to watch people—for example, watch how they walk. Psychologists think this can't be done.

**Powell:** An interesting idea is the skeptical take on this—"this is why all this cool sounding securities stuff is a crock."

**DiChristina:** A possibility for *Mind* if the pitch was, "No matter how we design machines, humans are going to fool them."

**Dyer:** Call me. What stage is this technology

at? Is it feasible? For *Popular Science*, never mind if it can be done. We are interested in people who are thinking about solving giant problems, not so interested in it when it works.

A piece specifically for *Good Housekeeping* on how to close the gap in medical costs not covered by insurance.

**Hope:** Would be interested in hearing more.

From one writer, suggestions for pieces on regenerative medicine, hydrogen fuel, and nanotech and you.

**DiChristina:** Been there, done that.

**Hope:** For regenerative medicine, we would need a nut graph.

**Powell:** Don't pitch three stories. You're better off taking a single story and developing it.

**Dyer:** Too broad. Put a head and deck on the story. Packaging pitches might be OK for the front of the book, but not for a feature.

A piece on the technology used in the TV show CSI, and how you can get this technology and use it on your loved ones.

**Hope:** Done it.

**Dyer:** We've done a story on a high-tech stalker. We would ask whether these technologies are new.

**Powell:** Too much applied consumer technology. Possibly a good piece for *Esquire* or *GQ*.

**Sklott:** A possible angle: Here's how not to get caught.

A piece on the science and politics of sequencing the flu genome.

**Powell:** Don't quite hear what the story is. Potentially it's a tough investigative journalism story. We would want to know whether you can invest the time and have the chops to do this—and what you know about the principals and subtleties.

A piece on suspended animation and a company that is researching drug therapy based on reducing the metabolic rate of cells.

**DiChristina:** Did it six months ago.

**Powell:** We'd need more details. What's the focus and point of view? What's new, and will it be new in April?

**Sklott:** Do your homework and find out what is unpublished.

**Dyer:** Call the company and ask scientists what's new. That's how you get a new angle. ■

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE: MUST HAVES, COULD HAVES, AND MIGHT HAVES

by Sean Henahan

The new reporter was having a meltdown in the press-room at a large medical conference. First he had been unable to recharge his laptop, and then he couldn't get online. Finally, the recorder he had bought was simply not up to the job of recording sessions, especially with no external microphone.

As his editor, I had spent some time preparing the reporter for his first assignment overseas, reviewing the program, planning the coverage. But I had not spent a lot of time reviewing the tech side. Big mistake. One by one we were able to sort through the technical problems, but it was nerve wracking and time consuming.

The experience reminded me how much we have come to depend on our tech toys. We are often only one battery away from potential disaster. Journalists have always been among the early adopters of new communications technology, as a matter of necessity. But the ground is always shifting, with newer, faster, better, and cheaper stuff coming along all the time.

Even as we become more dependent on our tech gear, new sorts of problems emerge.

Difficult network connections, problematic Internet access, crashing hard drives, uncooperative file formats—these are just some of the more recent arrivals to the list of things that can really ruin your day. Face it, Murphy was an optimist. If it can go wrong, it will go wrong, and new equipment will go wrong in stressful new ways at the worst possible time.

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***We are often just one battery  
away from potential disaster.***

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### ***Rage against the machines***

For example, one reporter friend had just acquired a new digital recorder. Interviewing a scientist at a conference, she clipped a lavalier mic to his lapel and started recording. Suddenly the interviewee took a step back, yanking the recorder out of her hands. The new gear crashed to ground. Flustered, the interviewee then stepped on the recorder, damaging it beyond repair.

Another reporter had completed an important interview on tape and was preparing the audio for radio broadcast. The professional equipment began smoking

*Sean Henahan has been a road warrior for 20 years. He is currently the editor of EuroTimes, a European monthly medical magazine.*

and eventually exploded in a shower of sparks. Fortunately, no one was hurt.

One friend had managed to get himself flown onto an aircraft carrier for a plum assignment. As he climbed a ladder to the bridge, his brand new everything-on-it laptop somehow slipped out of its shoulder bag and fell 20 feet to the deck, shattering to pieces.

And then there's the technophobic associate who finally switched over to a minidisk digital recorder. He was ecstatic at the audio quality and ease of use. The joy turned to despair when he realized he had inadvertently put the machine on pause for hours' worth of nonexistent recording.

So, here are a few hard-earned tips that can make the difference between catastrophe and success.

- Before you buy some new gear, talk to working journalists and research online reviews.
- Practice with new gear at home. Review the manual and learn all the options.
- Remember to bring plenty of batteries. Plan on changing batteries every day (or recharging every night).
- Use a belt-and-suspenders approach. In addition to your latest, greatest digital recorder, carry a small cassette or microcassette as a backup. A backup microphone is also not a bad idea. Bring more tapes or disks than you think you will need.
- Have a strategy for backing up files. Choices include a CD-burner, USB Flash drive, portable hard drive, FTP to a remote server, or sending e-mail to yourself. Windows XP and Mac have backup and recovery utilities. Use them.

And here is my, admittedly personal, current list of suggested gear for the traveling journalist. What you need will depend on your assignments.

### ***Must have:***

**Notebook and pen:** Anticipate technical problems. Your handwritten notes can save you after your laptop crashes and your digital recorder fries.

**Laptop:** The ideal laptop for the road warrior should be light. It should include a good-sized hard drive, multiple USB ports, WIFI, Ethernet, modem, and CD burner. The Mac G4 laptops meet these criteria. On the PC side, the IBM ThinkPads are a good choice for travelers because of a good network of service centers worldwide. Unless you have tiny fingers you might think twice before getting a super-light, sub-notebook computer since typing on the smaller keyboard quickly becomes annoying.

**Laptop accessories:** Don't forget to pack disks with the operating system and essential programs. USB flash drives have become indispensable for file sharing and backup. Don't forget cables—you'll need power, USB, RJ-11, and Ethernet cables. You'll also need an assortment of adapters for phone and power outlets when trav-

eling abroad. Finally, get a decent bag, preferably with wheels. Your back and shoulders will thank you.

**Cell phone:** If you work mostly in the US, just about any phone will do. If you travel farther afield you might consider a tri-band phone. Cingular and T-Mobile use the GSM standard and work with SIM chip-swappable phones, best for traveling abroad. For a short trip abroad it is also possible to rent a cell phone once you arrive.

**Recording device:** You have many choices. Regular or microcassette, digital audio tape, digital minidisc, digital recorder, i-Pod. I recommend the Sony Net MD minidisc series. Make sure you get the one with the microphone jack. Some iPods have a microphone jack, but I have no experience recording with that format. Whatever you use, it always pays to use the best microphone you can afford.

**Digital camera:** A good example of smaller, better, cheaper. In addition to headshots, the camera is handy for snapping slides, posters, and papers. The flash drive or memory stick doubles as a backup medium for the laptop.

**Credentials:** Register for conferences in advance whenever possible. Notwithstanding the recent mysterious rude behavior of the AAAS, the NASW membership card is very helpful when registering at conferences. A business card and/or letter of assignment can also help.

**Miscellaneous:** A small flashlight. A toolkit with essentials for repairing your gear. A power inverter if you are traveling by car. A mini first-aid kit. Sunglasses, umbrella. You know if you forget them you'll need them.

### ***Could have:***

**PDA:** More essential for some than others. Blackberry and Treo addicts can brag about the convenience of phone, organizer, and e-mail in one package. Handhelds such as the HP iPAQ can do much of what a laptop can do.

**Security:** A locking cable is the minimum requirement for laptop security. A motion sensor alarm is the next step up. At the more paranoid level, screen attachments known as privacy filters enable only you to see what you are working on. For ultra-high security, biometric fingerprint and iris security devices are now available for your laptop.

**VoicePath:** this reasonably priced interface allows high-fidelity recording of phone interviews directly into your computer.

**Multiports:** A USB multiport hub often comes in handy, as does a multiple format flash-card reader.

### ***Might have:***

**Laptop surge protector:** These have gotten much smaller. I have heard of laptops being fried by voltage surges.

**Noise canceling headphones:** Replace the roar of the airplane with a library hush. [These are on my must-have list.] Bose and Sony make good ones.

**Retractable cables:** Reduce the tangle and clutter in your bag.

**Mini-mouse:** A wired or wireless mouse may prove easier than the trackpad.

**Digital voice recorder with voice recognition software:** Properly tweaked, this tool allows you to read your notes or copy into your word processor.

**Logitech Personal Digital Pen:** Take notes then download later into your computer.

**Portable scanner:** Useful if you need to convert a lot of printed matter on the spot.

**Evac-U8 Emergency Escape Smoke Hood:** For major worriers, protects your head and filters the air as you escape from a burning hotel or plane.

**Satellite phone:** Useful if you are leaving the developed world. ■

## PIO FORUM

by Dennis Meredith

### ***Embargoes: Not as important as you think***

Coping with news-release embargoes has become more complicated for PIOs, with the advent of instant online publication. I've certainly had embargo deadlines sneak up on me, with the sometimes surprise posting of a news release by journals whose editors didn't even notify the authors that the paper was being put up.

Many journals do give early warning of publication by sending PIOs automated e-mail notifications of articles in their forthcoming issue. *Science* and *Nature*, for example, offer such notification. And, bless their hearts, many journals, such as *Science*, *JAMA*, *PNAS*, and Cell Press journals post information on articles even earlier when they have been accepted but not yet scheduled. (Journal embargo policies and listings of forthcoming articles can be found on EurekAlert! by logging in as a PIO).

Certainly, we PIOs need all the lead time we can get, given the difficulties of cornering the researcher, doing the interview, writing the release, getting it

approved, and managing distribution.

Instant online publication has also introduced new complications into the lives of PIOs. For example, *PNAS* has found it necessary to adopt the unusual policy of setting a Monday afternoon embargo for papers that may be posted sometime during that week, but they don't know exactly when. The reason for the uncertainty is that they try to post papers as soon as they're ready and cannot predict when a given paper will emerge from the editorial process that week.

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***I argue that (embargoes) are becoming less and less relevant to a PIO's decision about what research to publicize.***

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There has long been controversy over the entire process of embargoes. On one side are the journals, whose PIOs argue cogently that embargoes give reporters time to decipher the article, interview authors and independent commentators, and prepare an accurate story. More Machiavellian, of course, is that embargoes create some urgency and competition, which works to the advantage of all us PIOs to spur media to do stories on our papers. My media colleagues—although they may not admit it, may also use embargoes to their benefit with their editors. I suspect more than a few reporters employ a looming embargo as a small stick with which to prod their editors into running a story on the "breaking" news from a scientific paper.

There are also very cogent arguments against embargoes, perhaps most articulately argued by veteran PIO Harvey Leifert of AGU ([www.aip.org/pt/vol-55/iss-10/p48.html](http://www.aip.org/pt/vol-55/iss-10/p48.html)). For one thing, he decries the gag rule that some journals impose on scientists. By this rule, they may not discuss their research with media before publication, even when they are presenting that same research publicly at scientific meetings. Harvey cites, for example, that at the latest AGU meeting, at least three news conferences were canceled because scientists feared their participation would compromise publication in a journal with such an embargo policy.

"Scientists seem to find this normal, that a journal can tell them when they can talk about their own research, with whom and when," Harvey told me. "It's mind-boggling that scientists would accept it." Thus, AGU has long promulgated an open policy of posting research papers online, with no embargoes, as soon as they're available.

Despite the drawbacks of embargoes, it's almost certain they'll continue. But I argue that they are becoming less and less relevant to a PIO's decision about what research to publicize. By no means should we ignore or break embargoes, but they may not be as important,



PHOTO BY JIM WALLACE, DUKE U. PHOTOGRAPHY

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given the new realities of research communication.

For one thing, important media don't necessarily peg their stories to an embargo. For example, the *New York Times* routinely publishes stories on published work long after its embargo is passed. And I've found that many major online news sites, such as MSNBC, happily publish stories on releases even when I issued them some time after the journal embargo.

Another compelling reality is that we are no longer restricted by the media filter in reaching key audiences. We *are* media. The releases we post on EurekAlert!, Newswise, or Ascribe appear on Google News, Yahoo News, and other online news sources right along with media stories. And much to my surprise—at the request of our Web manager—the Googlebot has begun to directly crawl our university news site for releases to post on Google News. (To request to have your news site crawled, send a message to news-feed-back@google.com. Include the URLs of the news pages you want Google to crawl. One search engine consultant suggests that sites are more likely to be crawled if they have a prominent site index.)

Another reality is that besides the potential for media placements, there are many other valuable purposes for news releases. Many times those purposes have persuaded me to do a release even after the embargo has passed, and even about research not likely to immediately generate media stories.

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***...important media don't  
necessarily peg their  
stories to an embargo.***

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To me, releases are also important as:

- **Information sources for key internal audiences.** They give your own top administrators information about what your researchers are doing. And your releases provide them with fodder for their own communications to their constituencies. For example, the people who prepare our president's report to trustees, our annual report, and letters to legislators draw on releases for content for those communications.
- **Solicitations to donors and potential corporate partners.** Our development and corporate relations people use releases as background material on research for these audiences.
- **"Investments" in promising young researchers.** I often do releases on young researchers' initial papers to build up a compendium of background information. It pays off. For example, I wrote features and releases about the less-than-"newsworthy" basic studies of a couple of young neurobiologists for several years, only because I thought they were doing very good work. They

subsequently won major awards for that work, and those news releases came in very handy in garnering attention for those awards, and in explaining their work. And selfishly, they made me look good because I'd recognized their work from the beginning.

- **Statements of record.** Unlike a scientific paper, a news release contains such additional information as the researchers' statements about the implications of their work and their future plans. It also constitutes a public acknowledgment of credit to colleagues, which could protect the researcher against charges that he/she is trying to hog the glory. In contrast, media stories never list all the research collaborators and may miscommunicate their roles.

- **"Googlable" information.** Scientific papers are not picked up by search engines, but news releases are. So posting news releases online makes it more likely that prospective patients, prospective corporate partners, other researchers, and potential donors will find out about your researchers' work.

- **Family news.** So many times researchers have told me that because of my release "at last my [husband, wife, kids, Mom, Dad] will know what I do." In fact, I once did a special version of a news release for one researcher to send to his elderly mom. I inserted "[Mom's name]" after his name throughout the release. She delighted in showing it off to her friends—of course with the knowledge that it was a special "Mom-enhanced" version for her to boast about.

As I see it, all these important uses for news releases place added responsibilities on us PIOs. They mean that we need to decide whether to do a release, not just based on the likelihood it will be picked up by our favorite news outlet, but on whether its research is deserving of attention by these many other audiences.

We also need to ensure that our releases are more than merely brief news nuggets suitable for garnering a few column inches, but are truly comprehensive, fair statements of a piece of research and its implications.

Finally, given that our releases are now more than just research summaries for the media, we should give more thought to augmenting them with multimedia to enhance the accessibility and appeal of the research to lay audiences. ■

## CORRECTION

In the PIO Forum (SW, Fall 2005) the Carnegie Foundation was incorrectly identified as the Carnegie Corporation. Also the network television show "20/20" should have read "Primetime." SW regrets the errors. ■

## ADLAI AMOR AND KENDRICK FRAZIER ELECTED AAAS FELLOWS

NASW members Adlai Amor and Kendrick Frazier have been elected Fellows of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). They will receive formal recognition of this honor at a ceremony during the 2006 AAAS Annual Meeting, in St. Louis. Both are members of Section Y (General Interest in Science and Engineering).



**Adlai Amor** is director of communications for the Asian American Justice Center, based in Washington, DC. Amor's election as an AAAS fellow recognizes him "for extensive work as a media trainer in the international arena and for focus on science communications as a journalist." Amor has written extensively on science and environmental issues in Asia and the Pacific with much of his coverage focused on the relationship between science, environment, and development. He was deputy editor of *Depthnews Asia*, which ran the first science news service in Asia and the Pacific. He was also founder-publisher of *NewsTime Daily*, a business newspaper in central Philippines. He is co-author of the book *Science Reporting in Asia: the Craft and the Issues* which has become a standard textbook in the region's journalism schools and has been translated into Thai, Bahasa Indonesian, and Nepali.

To support science and environmental journalists, Amor has served as chair of the Asian Science Writers Association and the Asia Pacific Forum of Environmental Journalists. He played a behind-the-scenes role in the creation of the International Forum of Environmental Journalists, held in Paris. As a communications professional, Amor has increased public awareness of environmental issues by heading the communications or media departments of three of the world's largest environmental groups: World Wildlife Foundation International (Switzerland), Greenpeace USA (Washington, DC), and World Resources Institute (Washington, DC).

As a media trainer, Amor has trained several generations of science and environmental journalists in Asia and the Pacific. This includes workshops that trained others to conduct their own training programs. In addition, he re-established the Philippine Press Institute, and assisted in setting up the Press Development Institute of Thailand and the Press Institute of Pakistan.

Amor holds a bachelor of journalism from Silliman University, The Philippines and a master of science degree from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.



PHOTO BY RANDY MONTOYA, SANDIA NAT'L LABORATORIES

**Kendrick Frazier** is a well-known science writer and editor with long-standing interests in astronomy, space exploration, geophysical sciences, archaeology, technology, the history of science, public issues of science, and the critical examination of pseudoscience and fringe science.

Frazier is recognized by AAAS for distinguished contributions to "the public understanding of science through writing for and editing popular science magazines that emphasize science news and scientific reasoning and methods."

Early in his career, Frazier served on the staff of the National Academy of Sciences as editor of the *NAS/NRC/NAE News Report*. He then joined the staff of *Science News* magazine, first as earth sciences editor, then managing editor, and finally editor. Frazier is the author or editor of nine books, including *People of Chaco: A Canyon and Its Culture* (W.W. Norton & Co, New York), about the pre-Pueblan culture of Chaco Canyon, New Mexico (AD 850-1150). First published in 1986 and still in print, the book has been highly acclaimed by archaeologists.

Since 1977, Frazier has been editor of *The Skeptical Inquirer: The Magazine for Science and Reason*, a unique, bimonthly international journal that promotes good science, critical thinking, critical inquiry, and science education, and evaluates fringe science, pseudoscientific, and paranormal claims from a responsible, scientific point of view. Since 1983, Ken has also been a full-time staff member at Sandia National Laboratories and is editor of the award-winning *Sandia Lab News*. Frazier holds a B.A. in journalism (science specialty) from the University of Colorado and an M.S. in journalism from Columbia University. He lives in Albuquerque, N.M. ■

## 2005 AAAS SCIENCE JOURNALISM AWARD WINNERS NAMED

Stories about nature in all its complexity, from the impact of climate change to the frontiers of cosmology to the mysterious stranding of dolphins in a Florida mangrove swamp, are among the winners of the 2005 Science Journalism Awards from the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

The awards will be presented on Feb. 17, 2006, during the AAAS Annual Meeting. Sponsored by Johnson & Johnson Pharmaceutical Research & Development, LLC, the awards honor excellence in science writing for print, radio, television broadcast, and

online categories. This year an inaugural award for writing about science news for children was added. The new category opened the competition to international publications and news outlets for the first time since the awards program's inception in 1945.

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***This year an inaugural award  
for writing about science  
news for children...***

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***Newspapers with a circulation  
of more than 100,000***

Dennis Overbye of the *New York Times* is being honored for three articles: "String Theory, at 20, Explains It All (or Not)" (Dec. 7, 2004); "Remembrance of Things Future: The Mystery of Time" (June 28, 2005); and "The Next Einstein? Applicants Welcome" (March 1, 2005). The print judging committee was impressed by Overbye's wit and erudition in walking readers through the arcane world of string theory, the mysteries of time, and the prospects for another Albert Einstein.

"Overbye's articles reflect the fearlessness that a science reporter needs to explore the cutting edge of science and even sometimes step over it into realms where scientists themselves are not so surefooted," said awards judge Tom Siegfried, a freelancer and former science editor of the *Dallas Morning News*.

***Newspapers with a circulation  
of less than 100,000***

NASW member Richard Monastersky of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* was selected for a series of three unrelated pieces that showed a broad grasp of science, from the politically sensitive debate over how boys and girls learn about math to the risks of fish farms to the search by physicists for an elusive force that shapes the universe and accelerates its expansion. They are: "Women and Science: The Debate Goes On" (March 4, 2005), "The Hidden Cost of Fish Farming" (April 22, 2005), and "Come Over to the Dark Side" (June 3, 2005).

"Monastersky's work stands out for its meticulous explanatory reporting of a remarkably broad range of scientific controversies," said judge Robert Lee Hotz of the *Los Angeles Times*.

***Magazines***

Two awards are presented this year in this category: Elizabeth Kolbert, writing for *The New Yorker*, and Atul Gawande, also for *The New Yorker*.

In her series "The Climate of Man" (April 25, May 2, and May 9, 2005) Elizabeth Kolbert put the global warming issue in historical perspective, dug beneath the surface of the ongoing political debate, and visited

locales where climate change is having an impact. The series "is everything science journalism should be," Siegfried said. "It's thorough, accurate, compelling, and dramatic. It weaves the science of global warming into the story of the people who grapple with it, from policy centers to the Alaskan permafrost."

A doctor's use of science and skill may be the easiest part of patient care, Atul Gawande wrote in his piece "The Bell Curve" (Dec. 6, 2004). But the best outcomes can depend on other, more nebulous factors "like aggressiveness and consistency and ingenuity."

"Gawande's article described how doctors respond to the sometimes painful product of good scientific analysis," said Neil Munro of the *National Journal*, who served as a judge.

***Television***

Taking home this honor are Joseph McMaster, Martin Williams, Lara Acaster, and Alex Williams for NOVA-WGBH "The Wave that Shook the World" (March 29, 2005).

The judges noted the thoroughness and timely production of the hour-long NOVA program that aired within three months of the Dec. 26 2004 earthquake and devastating Indian Ocean tsunami that struck Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and elsewhere. "A great combination of science and human drama," said Warren Leary of the *New York Times*. "A fine documentary done in a very timely manner."

***Radio***

In his report "Dolphin Necropsies" (March 21, 2005) John Nielsen of National Public Radio took listeners on a hunt for clues to why 65 dolphins stranded themselves in a mangrove swamp near the town of Marathon, in the Florida Keys. Many of the animals died. As marine scientists were cutting up the dolphin carcasses, Nielsen was on the scene, providing his audience a graphic experience in hands-on research, as well as an intriguing description of the matriarchal dolphin society that may have triggered the stranding event.

Dan Vergano of *USA Today* called the segment "a beautifully executed piece, with great use of on-the-scene sounds and very human quotes from the scientists involved."

***Online***

Daniel Grossman's winning entry (for wbur.org) is "Fantastic Forests: The Balance Between Nature and People of Madagascar" (June 3, 2005) [www.wbur.org/special/madagascar](http://www.wbur.org/special/madagascar). The judges were impressed by the lively quality of Grossman's work, which looks at the struggle to preserve biodiversity in Madagascar, an African island smaller than Texas but home to a prodigious diversity of fauna and flora more varied than that of all of North America. Grossman introduces online visitors

to a rich catalogue of critters, including the fossa, a remarkable predator that looks like a cross between a cat and a dog and loves to snack on lemurs, the tree-dwelling primates for which Madagascar is famous.

Diedra Henderson of the *Boston Globe* said Grossman gives "a clear sense of discovery, wonder, and excitement" in his reporting, including "captivating details and a nice use of audio, visual, and written storytelling." Grossman's reporting from the jungles of Madagascar includes compelling video interviews with working scientists.

### **Children's science news**

The winner of this category is **Elizabeth Carney** of Scholastic's SuperScience for "Mammoth Hunters" (March 2005). Carney gave her young readers an inviting description of the field work by scientists who are studying the remains of an ancient mammoth in Siberia. Laura Helmuth of *Smithsonian* magazine commended Carney's use of "inviting, non-patronizing language," including the amusing image that a mammoth weighs more than 230 fourth graders.

Carney, who wrote her story while working as an intern for Scholastic publications after completing a master's degree in biomedical journalism at New York University, also told her readers that many questions remain unanswered, such as why the mammoths died out. Her piece provides a vivid description of field work and gives kids the message, Helmuth said, that "they could go do this when they grow up." ■

(Source: AAAS news release)

## **NEW PLANT PATHOLOGY JOURNALISM AWARD ANNOUNCED**

The Plant Pathology Journalism Award, sponsored by The American Phytopathological Society (APS), recognizes outstanding achievement in increasing public awareness, knowledge, and understanding of plant pathology, as concerned with the improvement of plant health through the identification, prevention, and management of plant diseases.

Eligibility is limited to science writers and journalists of information concerning the science of plant pathology or issues related to plant health appearing in mass media, including print (newspapers and periodicals only) and broadcast media readily available to the general public. Books, Web sites, and institutionally sponsored publications are not eligible. Individual items and series are eligible.

The award consists of a \$1,000 cash prize, a commemorative plaque, and travel expenses to attend the APS

Annual Meeting for presentation of the award. Deadline: March 15, 2006 for work published or aired in 2005.

Send a letter explaining how the work submitted contributes to public awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the science of plant pathology; a statement of when and where the work appeared; and four copies, either published or taped, of the submitted work. Applicants may nominate themselves. Mail entries to Plant Pathology Journalism Award, The American Phytopathological Society, 3340 Pilot Knob Road, St. Paul, MN 55121. For more information contact Amy Steigman at [asteigman@scisoc.org](mailto:asteigman@scisoc.org). ■

(Source: News release)

## **NIEMAN FELLOWSHIPS IN GLOBAL HEALTH REPORTING**

The Nieman Foundation for Journalism, at Harvard University, has announcing a three-year, \$1.19 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to fund Nieman Fellowships in Global Health Reporting. The fellowships are a joint initiative of the Nieman Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health.

Three Nieman Global Health Fellows—one from the United States, one from Europe, and one from the developing world—will be chosen annually, starting with the 2006-07 academic year.

During their Nieman year, Nieman Global Health Fellows will participate in weekly activities at the Nieman Foundation in addition to their Harvard courses. The fellowship will include four months of field work in a developing country at the end of the Nieman year at Harvard.

The field-work phase of the fellowship is designed to provide an intensive learning experience about a pressing health issue in a developing country.

The Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University administers the nation's oldest mid-career fellowship program for journalists. More information at [www.nieman.harvard.edu](http://www.nieman.harvard.edu). ■

(Source: News release)

## **IN MEMORIAM**

*ScienceWriters* has learned of the death of **Karl Abraham**, who died on October 15. He had been an NASW member since 1989. ■



## NEWS FROM AFAR

by Jim Cornell

The executive board of the World Federation of Science Journalists (WFSJ)—meeting at the World Science Forum (WSF) in Budapest, in early November—has announced an ambitious Peer-to-Peer Support of Science Journalism in the Developing World Project (P2P). This program will offer training and mentoring of fledgling science and technology writers in Africa and the Middle East, through exchanges, workshops, and telecourses, while also helping to establish associations of science journalists in those regions.

International Science Writers Association (ISWA) cybrarian and freelance writer Larry Krumenaker, represented ISWA in Budapest, where he attended WSF sessions, sat in WFSJ business meetings, and chaired a panel on narrative journalism. He reports:

I'm not an association president. I just act the part. The road show opened in Budapest to mixed reviews. There's always a critic. But the job isn't too shabby, and the perks are great.

Budapest is like Prague, only in need of some maintenance. The paprika is much tangier than American versions, as I found out at a working lunch at the Central Cafe where the general meeting of the WFSJ took place on my first full day in the city.

With one exception, anyone I know here is known to me only by e-mail address. I don't really have much of a part to play here—my time comes later—but it's a good intro to WFSJ people and activities.

On my second morning, in the midst of a cacophony in at least five languages, the dozen members of the WFSJ Program Committee met over breakfast, huddled around two side-by-side small tables. As ISWA's stand-in, I am accorded committee status for the duration of the meeting.

The committee reports to the board what

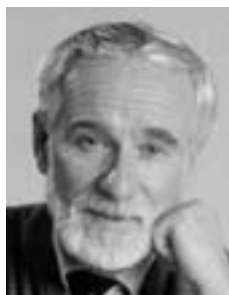


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

things, besides the P2P project, need to be done. Chairperson Nadia El-Awady, of Egypt, points out that current members of the WFSJ—already well-established associations—will also expect some services and benefits.

Discussion centers around the WFSJ Web site and newsletter. The committee ultimately decides, among other things, to support an idea of mine: to get the various volunteer mentors to write their thoughts on journalism and put them on the Web site as part of a multilingual, multinational manual. Other Web ideas include instructions on how to set up and maintain a science writers' organization.

The meeting breaks up and I dash to my room and edit my speech for the third time. The latest revised program schedule gives me only two hours of session and 10 minutes of talk time; down from three and a half hours and 20 minutes just two days before.

Also, I need to switch to my best suit. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences, site of the WFS sessions, is so ornate and formal that it can make one feel underdressed.

I am moderating the WFSJ's panel on narrative science journalism, storytelling as a journalistic form, as opposed to the simple reporting of facts. Our speakers are here to discuss the basics of how and why to do this, and in some cases, how it can be done in non-written forms (such as graphically or on radio).

After panel introductions are made, I give my thrice-spliced speech. While there's not enough time to discuss my desired point—the parallel decline in education and science interests in schools along with newspaper circulations and science coverage—I do get to throw in the discovery of Copernicus' grave as a narrative story, and the new technologies as a journalism parallel to Thomas Kuhn's Paradigm Shifts.

Narrative journalism is at a crossroads, I suggest, with these new technologies demanding new approaches to reporting. I hope my fellow panelists—and the audience—will follow up on this.

I conclude and the room goes silent. I thought it was me. But it was also silent after

*Jim Cornell is president of the International Science Writers Association. Send items of interest—international programs, conferences, events, etc.—to [cornelljc@earthlink.net](mailto:cornelljc@earthlink.net).*

the other speakers. I've just learned a truth. In Europe, nobody questions the speakers until every panelist has spoken.

The session, which is going badly (at least as far as I and one critic are concerned), suddenly becomes a lot of fun. I ask the panel members to comment on the influence of new technologies, such as blogs. We began to pass the microphone around when a comment about our disrespect to bloggers from a woman in the back of the room opens the floodgates of hands and responses.

Suddenly I'm dancing around like Oprah with the microphone. The audience and the panel get all involved and things get rollicking. The once draggingly slow session now runs way too short.

My work is done here. It's time for the road show's wrap party. For a freelancer-cum-moderator, that consists of admission to the after-panel lunch and drinks and the free champagne and buffet dinner on a nighttime Danube riverboat cruise. I wonder where the act goes on stage next?

### ***Upcoming international meetings***

**May 17-20, 2006. The 9th International Conference of the Public Communication of Science and Technology (PCST9)**, Seoul, Korea. "Scientific Culture for Global Citizenship" is the theme of this major meeting of science communication professionals and research specialists. More information is at [www.pcst2006.org/main.asp](http://www.pcst2006.org/main.asp).

**June 24-26, 2006. Annual Meeting of the Canadian Science Writers Association**, St. Johns, Newfoundland. Details available at [www.sciencewriters.ca](http://www.sciencewriters.ca). This site also contains a report by new CSWA President Tim Loughheed on last year's meeting in Jasper, Alberta.

**July 15-19, 2006. EuroScience Open Forum (ESOF)**, Munich, Germany. The second edition of this pan-European scientific meeting is shaping up as a major event for scientists, public policy mavens, and media. Program information at [www.esof2006.org](http://www.esof2006.org).

**April 16-20, 2007. The 5th World Conference of Science Journalists (WCSJ2007)**, Melbourne, Australia. Information at [www.scienceinmelbourne2007.org](http://www.scienceinmelbourne2007.org).

The WFSJ panel in Budapest, including a second special session on "knowledge, ethics, and responsibility in science journalism," was part of the continuing effort to establish brand recognition for this international "association of associations."

The WFSJ now numbers 26 members, including NASW. The next conference in this series, the Fifth World Conference of Science Journalists, takes place in Melbourne, Australia, in 2007. Niall Byrne of the WCSJ2007's local organizing committee reports that the conference plan will be guided by "international e-mail consultation" in which journalists around the world comment on everything from the best meeting dates to session topics. Provide your input by contacting Byrne at [niall@scienceinpublic.com](mailto:niall@scienceinpublic.com).

In recent years, AAAS has ramped up efforts to serve the increasing numbers of foreign reporters attending its annual meeting. For example, for the past three years AAAS has sponsored fellowships for science writers from the developing world—China (2004) and Africa (2005). In 2006, AAAS will sponsor science writers from Latin America.

This will be the fifth year that the Robert Bosch Foundation of Stuttgart will sponsor German science journalists to the AAAS annual meeting. The 2006 Bosch Fellows are: Michael Brendler (*Badische Zeitung*), Anke Brodmerkel (*Berliner Zeitung*), Michelle Fincke (*Nordwestdeutsche Verlagsgesellschaft mbH*), Thorsten Naeser (*Münchner Merkur*), Katja Nellissen (ARD—German National TV/Radio), Sascha Ott (ARD), Martin Schmitt (*Rheinpfalz Verlag und Druckerei*), and Daniela Tominski (*Hamburger Abendblatt*).

***The WFSJ [World Federation of Science Journalists] panel in Budapest...was part of the continuing effort to establish brand recognition for this international "association of associations."***

In cooperation with ISWA, the Bosch Fellows have the opportunity to receive informal advice and counsel from American journalists attending the AAAS. If you'd like to join this mentoring process, contact me at 520-529-6835.

The Bosch Foundation will sponsor "reverse fellowships" for U.S. reporters to attend the Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF2006) in Munich next July. Information at [www.bosch-stiftung.de](http://www.bosch-stiftung.de). ■

## OUR GANG

by Jeff Grabmeier

**Double Exposure.** When people say **Wilson da Silva** is out of this world, the following is probably not what they mean. But da Silva, editor of the Australian popular science magazine *COSMOS*, is scheduled to take a space flight in 2008. He and *COSMOS* co-founder Alan Finkel will ride aboard Richard Branson's fledgling Virgin Galactic service. "It's the kind of thing that the editor of a popular science magazine like *COSMOS* should be doing! I'm hoping to be the first Australian journalist in space—and possibly, the first magazine editor," said da Silva. "I wonder if I'll be able to accrue frequent flyer miles?" As if that wasn't enough excitement, da Silva won the "Editor of the Year" honor in November from Australia's Bell Magazine Awards. In addition, *COSMOS* won for "Best Consumer Magazine Cover" (see page 21). Send your congratulations to Wilson at [wdas@nasw.org](mailto:wdas@nasw.org).



PHOTO BY JO MCNULTY, OHIO STATE

**Zooming in on Medicine.** Freelancer **Barbara Ravage** of Orleans, Mass. participated in a panel discussion in October on The Coconut Grove nightclub fire—one of the worst disasters in Boston's history. The discussion, sponsored by the Boston Public Library, focused on the 1942 fire that killed nearly 500 people. Barbara explored the medical impact of the fire, expanding on the history and evolution of burn treatment covered in her book, *Burn Unit: Saving Lives After the Flames*. Barbara is at [bravage@earthlink.net](mailto:bravage@earthlink.net).

**Space: The Ultimate Darkroom.** Freelance science writer and editor **Carolyn Collins Petersen** has been working since April 2005 as the senior science writer for the new astronomy exhibits program at the Griffith Observatory, in Los Angeles. While based in Massachusetts, Carolyn has been traveling weekly to New York City to work with the exhibit design team at C&G Partners, LLC, and to Los Angeles to coordinate exhibit content with the observatory's curatorial team. The newly renovated Griffith Observatory is set to reopen in 2006. More information on the renovations is at [www.griffithobs.org](http://www.griffithobs.org). Carolyn is also associate editor for *GeminiFocus*, the twice-yearly publication of the Gemini Observatory, based in Hawaii. Contact Carolyn at [carolyn@lochness.com](mailto:carolyn@lochness.com).

**Portrait of Success.** New York-based freelancer **Maia Szalavitz** received the Edward M. Brecher Award

for Achievement in the Field of Journalism from the Drug Policy Alliance. The award "honors those in the media who question official drug war propaganda." Maia has written for numerous major publications including the *New York Times*, *New Scientist*, *Newsweek*, *Elle*, *Salon*, and *Redbook*. She is the author (with Dr. Joseph Volpicelli) of *Recovery Options: The Complete Guide: How You and Your Loved Ones Can Understand and Treat Alcohol and Other Drug Problems*. Her latest book, *Help at Any Cost: How the Troubled-Teen Industry Cons Parents and Hurts Kids*, is reviewed in this issue (see page 32). Maia is at [maiasz@gmail.com](mailto:maiasz@gmail.com).

**A New Point of View.** **Joanna Downer** is leaving Johns Hopkins to accept a job at Duke University Medical Center, where she will be responsible for executive communications for some of the institution's top leadership and will help formulate institution and leadership policies and positions on issues affecting scientific research. For the past four and a half years, she has headed communications for the basic sciences, cell engineering, and genetic medicine at Johns Hopkins Medicine. You can reach Joanna at [jdowner@nasw.org](mailto:jdowner@nasw.org).

**Looking for More Exposure.** Sick of the same ol' Coldplay and Beatles songs on your iPod? **Mignon Fogarty** is hoping you consider downloading some science news to your portable player. She has launched a podcast called *Absolute Science*, where every week she and her colleagues pick a few current news stories and delve into the science behind them. For example, in one recent podcast, they discussed the case of a UK man who claims to have "fought off" HIV, and explored why the HIV virus is different from the flu or a cold. This was used as a launching off point for a discussion about other HIV issues. People can download the podcast from iTunes or from Mignon's Web site at [www.welltopia.com](http://www.welltopia.com). She is at [mignon@welltopia.com](mailto:mignon@welltopia.com).

**A Developing Career.** After "bouncing around the science writing world" for about four years **Jason Gorss** reports he has settled down. Jason started a new job as a science writer at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, where he will cover primarily engineering and nanotechnology. Previously he worked as a science writer for the American Chemical Society, then as a freelancer, then back to graduate school at Cornell for a brief stint. Catch Jason at [gorssj@rpi.edu](mailto:gorssj@rpi.edu).

**Focusing on New Opportunities.** British science writer **David Bradley** continues to collect science-related Web sites. After acquiring the science news forum Sciscoop.com earlier this year, he has now taken control of Chemspy.com. Chemspy is a portal for anyone (including science writers) looking for chemical information, such as safety data sheets and molecular structures, chemistry tutorials, and direct access to the PubChem database of five million-plus molecules. You can also get to the American Chemical Society's

Jeff Grabmeier is assistant director of research communications at Ohio State University in Columbus, OH. Send news about your life to Jeff at [Grabmeier@nasw.org](mailto:Grabmeier@nasw.org).

Directory of Graduate Research and find any of tens of thousands of researchers in the chemical sciences. David is also hoping to soon add a chemistry-focused blog, so there will be some writing. Learn more by e-mailing David at davidbradley@nasw.org.

**Picture Perfect.** Another NASW member in the Web site business is New York-based **Blair Bolles**, who runs TellingIt.com, a site devoted to the promotion of nonfiction narrative. It includes daily links to online nonfiction, narratives, and has regular reviews (mostly books and TV shows) that discuss narrative. Blair would welcome any submissions or reviews, although he says the pay is "zilcherino." You can write him at editor@tellingit.com.

**Smile and Say "Emissions."** Across the ocean from the United States, **Sandra Katzman** reports she has become the Tokyo stringer for Platts energy industry publications, including *Emissions Daily*, where she writes about commercially oriented reduction of greenhouse gases. Sandra is at skatzman@nasw.org.

**Photo Shoot Rained Out?** If you were to tell freelancer **Daniel Pendick** of Glendale, Wis. that he's all wet, he just may take that as a compliment. Daniel has been invited to contribute a chapter to a book, *The Ideas of Water*, to be published by UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme. Daniel's chapter will be called "Scientific Rainmaking: Premises, Problems, Possibilities." As part of the deal, he made a presentation at a joint meeting of UNESCO and the International Water History Association, which was held in Paris, in early December. His presentation was "Cloud Seeding: A Solution to Water Shortages or Scientific Flight of Fancy?" Contact Daniel at dpendick@nasw.org.

**Close-up on Alternative Medicine.** **Lori Oliwenstein**, of Los Angeles, was recently named managing editor of *Alternative and Complementary Therapies*, a bimonthly journal published by Mary Ann Liebert, Inc., which provides health-care professionals with information to evaluate unconventional therapies and their place in patient care. Talk to Lori at lorio@nasw.org.

**New Frame of Reference.** After 13 years as a freelancer, **Ivan Amato** has taken a staff position. He is now senior editor at *Chemical & Engineering News*, published by the American Chemical Society, and based in Washington D.C. His new e-mail address is i\_amato@asc.org.

**Health in High Definition.** The new assistant communications director for the Boston Public Health Commission is **Marty Downs**, formerly a freelance writer from Mansfield, Mass. Her new beat will encompass 30 programs, including HIV/AIDS and homeless services, environmental health, emergency preparedness, infectious disease, asthma control, LGBT (Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, and Transgender) programs, and adolescent wellness. You can reach Marty at mrdowns@earthlink.net. ■

## REGIONAL GROUPS

by Suzanne Clancy

### Chicago

The Chicago affiliate of NASW launched its new program year on Nov. 22 with a topic close to the thoughts of all Chicagoans as winter approaches—the weather. The group had a behind-the-scenes tour of local NBC station WMAQ-TV, with the morning weather anchor, Andy Avalos.

Avalos showed the group the equipment he uses to forecast the weather, then took the group outside to explain how a slight shift in the winds over Lake Michigan can have a big impact on where lake-effect snow lands. Members watched as Avalos presented spots for the Weather Channel as well as the weather forecast during the 11 a.m. news broadcast. The closing segment for the newscast was done from outside the station's studio. Avalos ushered his group of "new friends" over for an on-air wave goodbye, saying the group represented the National Association of Science Writers.



PHOTO BY MARC LIEBERMAN

### Northern California

At the full-to-capacity September NCSWA's dinner meeting, Pulitzer Prize winner Richard Rhodes described how he started out as a writer by interviewing card-shop owners for in-house articles at Hallmark, then moved into feature writing for *Playboy* Magazine. Writers tend to "move sideways" into what becomes central to their careers, he said. His book, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, began with a failed attempt at a novel and ended with several prestigious prizes, plus an acclaimed successor, *Dark Star: The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb*. Besides paring down a 1,500-page manuscript into an accessible book, Rhodes said a big problem was finding money to support himself during the years he needed to research atomic energy and the Manhattan Project. He urged would-be book writers to do as he did and find a way to the grant world, a world that helped him write many of his 20 books, including four novels. Rhodes also explained how his experiences drew him to science writing. Science can be bleak, he said, but because it must be supported by evidence, it shows we are "part of a universe that will survive us." Rhodes, who lives with his wife in Half Moon Bay, Calif., gave a disarmingly honest talk about his work

*Suzanne Clancy is a science journalist and communications consultant in San Diego, Calif. Send information about regional meetings and events to sclancyphd@yahoo.com.*



and his life. A major theme running through his books is human violence, a topic he was drawn to in part because of abuse he suffered as a child. Writing about the roots of violence, which was sometimes emotionally difficult, has led him to be hopeful about the ability of communities to understand and control it. In addition to writing books and feature articles, Rhodes has been a visiting scholar at MIT and Harvard and worked as a host and correspondent for public television's *Frontline* and *American Experience*. He has received grants from the Ford Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

### Philadelphia

This summer, the Philadelphia Area Science Writers gathered over drinks to reaffirm its commitment to hold monthly events or, at least, go out for dinner.

In October, member Karen Kreeger hosted PASWA at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, where Douglas Smith, MD, discussed the amazing stretching abilities of neurons and how they might be used to correct nerve damage. No neurons were harmed during the tour and, indeed, some were put to good use. In November, PASWANian Leslie Stein, of the Monnell Chemical Sciences Center, introduced the group to Pamela Dalton, PhD, who discussed real-world applications of her research on cognitive influences on odor perception.

### San Diego

In October, SANDSWA members were given a "sneak peak" at the new California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology (Calit2) building, on the UC San Diego campus ([www.calit2.net](http://www.calit2.net)). The six-story, 215,000-square-foot structure is believed to be the most wired building of any US university campus with its 220 offices designed to facilitate wireless communication. Calit2 was launched in 2000 with the goal of creating multidisciplinary teams to conduct research on the future of telecommunications and information technology. For example, one futuristic outcome might be customized medical care based on analysis of genetic variation coupled with real-time readouts of a patient's vital signs and response to environmental stresses. Calit2 is also home of CRCA (Center for Research in Computing and the Arts) ([www-crca.ucsd.edu](http://www-crca.ucsd.edu)). An Organized Research Unit of the University of California, CRCA's mission is to facilitate the invention of new art forms that arise out of the developments of digital technologies.

In November, SANDSWA members attended an advance screening of "When Things Get Small," a half-hour cable TV program that takes viewers on an irrelevant, corny romp into renowned physicist Ivan

Schuller's real-life quest to create the smallest magnet. The film's trailer can be found at [www.ucsd.tv/getsmall](http://www.ucsd.tv/getsmall). This NSF-funded program is the first production from Not Too Serious Labs, the creative collaboration of Rich Wargo, science producer for UCSD-TV, and Professor Schuller.

### Southern California

What made us human? How can our evolution be traced? When did the human species leave Africa to settle throughout the world? Two eminent scholars addressed these questions in a symposium at the Torrance Marriott Hotel, in suburban Los Angeles, on Nov. 17. Co-sponsored by Southern California Science Writers and the MIT Club of Southern California, the symposium was entitled "Where Man Began: Genetic and Cultural Origins in Africa."

The first speaker was Douglas Wallace, PhD, the Donald Bren Professor of Molecular Genetics at UC Irvine. Although there was no Eve in the sense of a single female ancestor of humanity, Eve occurred in the form of mitochondria, according to Wallace. He showed how human migration from Africa to Europe and Asia can be traced by following routes taken by specific variations in DNA. The second speaker was Merrick Posnansky, PhD, professor emeritus at UCLA and a noted Africanist archaeologist, who discussed both physical and cultural development in Africa. An historian and anthropologist, Posnansky explained there were two main migrations out of Africa: the first by *homo erectus* one million years ago and the second 100,000 to 200,000 years ago, coinciding with the time element described in Wallace's mitochondrial studies.

### Washington, DC

On Oct. 1, the D.C. Science Writers Association held its first professional development symposium, "Science Writing: Endangered or Evolving?" (see page 29). Co-sponsored by the Johns Hopkins University Master of Arts in Writing Program, the all-day event was attended by nearly 100 registrants and speakers, some from as far away as California, Florida, and New York.

### New York

SWINY (Science Writers in New York) has had a busy agenda this fall. It started with one of SWINY's quarterly socials at The Windfall Lounge, in midtown Manhattan, in early September and was followed by a trip to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden later that month. The day at the garden, which, amazingly, is located in the heart of Brooklyn, included presentations by staff botanists and a tour of the grounds. In the garden's laboratory, plant molecular systematist Susan Pell, PhD, demonstrated her work genotyping plants. SWINY moved indoors for its next event, on science blogging,

which was held at the New York Academy of Sciences in November. Three science journalists—a technology expert at Columbia University's journalism school, an editor at *Nature*, and a self-confessed (and popular) blogger—talked about how blogging is changing the way science information is communicated. The next event, a media preview for the new Darwin exhibition at the American Museum of Natural History, gave 25 SWINY members an opportunity to be among the first to see the largest and most complete collection of Darwin's specimens and artifacts ever assembled. Link to SWINY's Web site ([www.swiny.org](http://www.swiny.org)) to get more details on these events and find out what's up next. ■

## NOTICES FROM DIANE

by Diane McGurgan

### *Dues, roster, database*

Your dues are due. If dues are not received by March 15 you will NOT be listed in the 2006 Roster of Members and you will also be removed from the Web site. This means no more Web benefits (jobline, member-section access). So, please remit ASAP. Reminder: If paying by Visa or Mastercard, the credit card number, expiration date, and 3 digit-security code are needed. If you choose the PayPal option ([nasw.org/NASW/renewals.htm](http://nasw.org/NASW/renewals.htm)), make sure to include your billing address.



PHOTO BY ANDREW SKOLNICK

### *Award deadlines*

The NASW Science in Society Award deadline is Feb. 1, 2006. The CASW Victor Cohn Prize in Medical Science Reporting deadline is July 31. Both awards will be presented at the NASW/CASW Banquet, Oct. 29, 2006, in Baltimore.

### *Authors coalition*

The largess of Authors Coalition monies to NASW continues to surprise and delight. Recently an unexpected check for \$21,789 arrived in the mail representing a one-time back payment. This brings the 2005 total of Authors Coalition monies paid to NASW to \$118,838. Of this, \$97,049 was based on the percentage of NASW

member surveys submitted. Now do you believe how important it is to turn in those annual surveys? Believe it and be sure to submit your survey today!

### *NASW Board Election*

This is an election year. So if you are interested in running for the board, let Diane ([diane@nasw.org](mailto:diane@nasw.org)) know by May 1. A nomination committee will assemble a slate of candidates. Candidate bios will be published in the summer issue of *ScienceWriters*. If you are not nominated by the committee, your name can still be added to the ballot through a petition supported by 20 NASW members in good standing. Ballots will be mailed to members on Oct. 20.

### *Found Fellows*

Thank you Andy Skolnick and Roberta Friedman for letting me know you were Haseltine Fellows. We continue to be on the look out for Haseltine Fellows from the years 1980, 1981, 1982, and 1991. So if that happens to be you, please contact Diane ([diane@nasw.org](mailto:diane@nasw.org)). Once the list is complete, it will be posted on the CASW Web site. ■

## DCSWA HOLDS FIRST PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SYMPOSIUM

On Oct. 1, the D.C. Science Writers Association (DCSWA) held its first professional development symposium, "Science Writing: Endangered or Evolving?", cosponsored by the Johns Hopkins University Master of Arts in Writing Program. Nearly 100 registrants and speakers attended the all-day event, some from as far away as California, Florida and New York.

The opening plenary session set up the symposium by tackling the question plaguing all of us: Where is science writing, and therefore all of us, going? Historian Marcel LaFollette gave the long-term view by reminding attendees that finances have dictated what gets published since the invention of the printing press. Alexandra Witze, now at *Nature*, recounted her own experience as a reporter witnessing the death of a science section at a daily newspaper, saying she felt that this was indeed the trend for daily newspaper science reporting as both the advertising and editorial support for such sections are lacking. Stephen Burns, executive vice president of production and science editor for the U.S. Discovery Networks, suggested that perhaps we should

all move over to the excitement of high-tech science television programs, as Discovery seems to be thriving.

Concurrent morning sessions addressed the current freelance market, covering everything from books to magazine articles to public relations pieces, and how to write for new media, from the Web to broadcast. In one session, editors Laura Helmuth (*Smithsonian*) and Stephen Pelletier (*HHMI Bulletin*) explained what they were looking for in submissions (clear, yet original storytelling), and freelance entrepreneur Kathryn Brown proclaimed that writing public relations and outreach pieces does not mean going over to the "dark side." *Online Newshour's* Larisa Epatko moderated the other session's panel in which television producer Chad Cohen, *ScienceNOW* Editor David Grimm, and freelance writer Bijal Trivedi debated the differences, if any, in writing for various forms of media.

At lunch, attendees had the opportunity to listen to professional poets Patricia Garfinkel and Myra Sklarew, hear physicist and historian David Lindley tell what it is really like being a book author, or ask editors for the inside scoop on how to be a full-time freelancer.

In the afternoon, NPR's David Malakoff and NSF's Curt Supplee and Mitch Waldrop revealed how to be a successful career jockey and change from one media outlet to another without riding into the sunset. (Evidently, this has a lot to do with being in the right place at the right time. Go figure.) In a parallel session, Pulitzer Prize winner Jon Franklin treated his audience to his recommendations on how to perfect the time-honored craft of storytelling.

The day concluded with a discussion moderated by Johns Hopkins' Ruth Levy Guyer on the social, political, and cultural pressures on science writing. During the latter part of the session, speakers Ron Bailey of *Reason* magazine, *Seed* correspondent Chris Mooney, and George Washington University public health professor and writer David Michaels, as well as audience members, debated how much sources are manipulating the media to get their views into the press. They also discussed whether journalists are feeding the media machine simply by writing about what the next guy has already covered. Chris' advice? Don't let the other reporters' articles or your sources dictate your story—or if there is a story at all. Find that out for yourself.

DCSWA wishes to thank David Everett, Ruth Levy Guyer, and Mary Knudson at the Johns Hopkins University Master of Arts in Writing Program, who arranged the donation of the meeting space at its D.C. campus, as well as to all our speakers and moderators, who generously donated their Saturday. Their contributions helped make the first DCSDWA symposium a great success. ■

(Source: DC Science Writers)

## CASW AWARDS FELLOWSHIPS

Two programs administered by the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing (CASW) recently provide journalists and students with the opportunity to attend the New Horizons in Science Briefing meeting, in Pittsburgh, Oct. 23-26, 2005.

### CASW Traveling Fellowships

Ten CASW Traveling Fellowships help defray the costs of attending the New Horizons in Science Briefing. The fellowships assist journalists from publications and broadcast outlets that do not routinely cover major science meetings or employ a full-time science writer.

The 2005 CASW Traveling Fellows were: Jennie Laidman, *Toledo Blade*; Dee Anne Finken, freelance, California; Graciela Flores, contributing writer to *Nature*, and *The Scientist*, New York City; Rachael Seravalli, *Lincoln Journal*, Nebraska; Katie Wong, *California Wild* magazine; Doug Fox, freelance, San Francisco; Fanella Saunders, *American Scientist*; Erin Seiling, *North Carolina Sea Grant Magazine*; Robert Frederick, reporter, KWMU (NPR affiliate); Naseem Sowti, *The Star Press*, Muncie, Ind.

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

### McGrady/Allard Fellowships

CASW occasionally makes funds available to aspiring science journalists to help underwrite the costs of travel to other major science meetings.

This year the awards went to six students in the Graduate School of Journalism, at Columbia University. The students (and their employment prior to undertaking graduate studies): Ivan Gale, *Point of Light*, a northern Calif. weekly; Brandon Keim, *Gene Watch*; Bethany Lye, freelanced for the *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune*; Victoria Schlesinger, *Pt. Reyes Light* and *California Wild*; Sandra Upson, Dow Jones Newswires; and Moises Velasquez-Manoff, feature writer and graphics designer.

Funding for the Patrick McGrady/Leo Allard Fund is part of a bequest to CASW from the American Tentative Society (ATS). The (late) Patrick McGrady and Leo Allard played key roles in the evolution of ATS, a not-for-profit organization that for three decades served to promote public understanding of science and the scientific process.

### Future Meetings

NASW Workshops/CASW New Horizons in Science Briefing: Oct. 27-31, 2006, in Baltimore, Md., hosted by John Hopkins University.

- NASW Workshops, networking luncheons, general-member meeting: Oct. 27-28, 2006.
- CASW New Horizons Briefing: Oct. 28-31, 2006.
- NASW/CASW Awards Banquet: Sunday evening, Oct. 29, 2006. ■

## LETTERS

The obit for George Dusheck (SW, Fall 2005), whom I knew, was extremely well done. I had never heard the story of his talking back to (Robert) Oppenheimer. I also enjoyed David Perlman's remarks to George. Years ago, I once told a fellow science writer that I thought that David Perlman was the best science writer in the country. He told David. Later that day, David walked by and said, "I always thought that it was Gene Bylinsky."

Ben Zinser  
Long Beach, Calif.

I was immediately drawn to the obituary of George Dusheck after reading the subtitle, "Took Pride in Asking Stupid Questions." Carol Pogash's collection of anecdotes from Dusheck was wonderful. I laughed out loud, and then read them to colleagues. What reporter hasn't squirmed with what seems like a simpleminded question before an expert in a scientific field? Yet, Dusheck reminds us how important it is to forge ahead, and not be cowed by fame and prestige. Asking Robert Oppenheimer to be more concise is priceless—and undoubtedly made for a better story, one non-scientists could understand. Dusheck's approach to getting the facts right and being clear in the retelling, reminds us that as reporters it's not our job to make friends while chasing down stories, and that enduring the occasional pang of embarrassment with a "stupid" question may even be a kind of courage. Thank you to Carol for capturing some of the spirited character of George Dusheck. I never had the pleasure of meeting him, but hope to carry some of his fearlessness with me to the next press conference!

Molly Bentley  
BBC Radio  
Berkeley, Calif.

### 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  
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lfriedmann@nasw.org.

Clearly, Watson/Crick DNA base-pairing was a fundamental discovery, so James Watson and Francis Crick may seem joined at the hip. But they haven't actually swapped names. *Francis* Watson and *James* Crick just doesn't ring right. How about swapping them back? (Dusheck obit, SW, Fall 2005)

Bob Cooke  
Stow, Mass.

I attended the workshop on freelancing at the NASW-CASW meeting in Pittsburgh in the hope that I would find a way to increase my freelance income, but after a few glances around the room I realized I could do much better by selling black pantsuits to women.

Gershon Fishbein  
Bethesda, Md.

Earle Holland's article on his response to the hijinks by ABC News in sending students to snoop on the Ohio State University research reactor (PIO Forum, SW, Fall 2005) was so insightful that it's been reprinted (with permission, of course) in the PIONet newsletter.

Roger S. Johnson, PhD, President  
Newswise

[Editor's Note: Started 12 years ago, PIONet currently has a subscriber base of 1,000 members from around the world. It focuses on media relations at higher education institutions. It also has a Web site and monthly newsletter. For more information or to join, contact Johnson at [rjohnson@newswise.com](mailto:rjohnson@newswise.com).]

## BOOKS BY AND FOR MEMBERS

by Ruth Winter

*State of the Wild 2006: A Global Portrait of Wildlife, Wildlands, and Oceans* by Wildlife Conservation Society, Sharon Guynup (NASW) Editor, published by Island Press.

Sharon Guynup, a Hoboken, N.J., freelance says the Wildlife Conservation Society hired her to create, sell, and launch a "State of the Wild" book series. "They'd trademarked the name, but didn't really know what they wanted," she writes. "I envisioned books that compiled





essays on the most pressing global conservation issues—and successfully argued for a literary, readable style that includes all the important science, but is accessible to a wide audience. Why preach only to the choir?” Thus she chose hunting and the wildlife trade as the cover topic for this first volume, which focuses about one-third of content on issues such as the trade in animals for the traditional Asian medicine trade, bycatch, and diseases that could come with a bushmeat dinner (or your new, exotic pet). The book also looks at other issues, such as how to protect migratory species, the need for a global network of marine reserves, the impact of climate change on species and ecosystems, and the vast changes to U.S. public lands policies under the Bush administration. The book is a hybrid of sorts, with upfront, magazine-like “departments” that detail global conservation news, new methods, technologies, and regulations. But most of the volume is composed of original essays by experts such as George Schaller, Sylvia Earle, Carl Safina, Alan Rabinowitz, Rick Bass, and Bill McKibben, among others. Guynup can be reached at [sguy@cybernex.net](mailto:sguy@cybernex.net) and 201-798-0781. The press representative is Evan Johnson at Island Press ([johnson@islandpress.org](mailto:johnson@islandpress.org)).

***Halley's Quest: A Selfless Genius and His Troubled Paramore* by Julie Wakefield (NASW), published by Joseph Henry Press.**

Julie Wakefield, a Virginia freelance, said she wrote the book because she found it fascinating that Edmond Halley, although famed for his comet work, undertook the first mission funded by a government for the sake of science, and for the most part, his adventures 300 years ago aboard the *Paramore* represented an untold story. Moreover, his role as the founder of geophysics was not widely appreciated. “I learned about his expedition while doing research at the Library of Congress for another project,” Wakefield said. “A librarian told me about his Atlantic chart of magnetic variation, and then I built the narrative of his voyages from there. It proved to be an original way to write a biography of Halley.” John Rennie, editor in chief, *Scientific American*, said of the book, “Julie Wakefield’s meticulously researched history makes wonderfully clear this brilliant adventurer braved court intrigue, shipboard treachery, and tropical disease while inventing the field of geophysics—even before the astronomical studies of comets immortalized him.” Wakefield can be reached at [jwakefield@earthlink.net](mailto:jwakefield@earthlink.net) and 703-528-8070. The press representative is Matt Litts at [mlitts@nas.edu](mailto:mlitts@nas.edu) and 202-334-1902.

***Black Bodies and Quantum Cats: Tales From the Annals of Physics* by Jennifer Ouellette (NASW), published by Penguin.**

Jennifer Ouellette traces key developments in the

field, setting descriptions of the fundamentals of physics in their historical context, as well as against a broad cultural backdrop. For example, Newton’s laws as found in the film *Addams Family Values*, and the finer points of relativity in *Back to the Future*. Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Purloined Letter* serves to illuminate the mysterious nature of neutrinos, and Jeanette Winterson’s novel *Gut Symmetries* provides an elegant metaphorical framework for string theory. Ouellette’s literary references undoubtedly emanate from her background as an English major. For several years she wrote the “This Month in Physics History” column for *APS NEWS*. Serendipitously, at the same time Ouellette was considering reworking pieces from her column into a book for non-physics majors, Penguin was looking for a “physics-for-poets” type of book that would do the same. The book evolved into a collection of short historical pieces that wove art, literature, theater, music, history, and other aspects of pop culture together with the most basic physics concepts and discoveries—everything from the Golden Ratio, black body radiation and the quanta, and special relativity, to the top quark, string theory, even Reddi-Wip and the invention of Velcro. Ouellette refers to the book as “cocktail-party physics.” *Library Journal*, in a starred review said of the book, “Ouellette does a commendable job of making the underlying science accessible to the average reader without changing its essence.” Ouellette can be reached at 202-462-9451 and [lucrezia@mindspring.com](mailto:lucrezia@mindspring.com). The press representative at Penguin, Yen Cheong, can be reached at 212-366-2275 and [yen.cheong@us.penguingroup.com](mailto:yen.cheong@us.penguingroup.com).

***Time To Lose: Using Creative Time Management Principles to Finally Win Your Battle with Weight* by Jan Yager, PhD (NASW), published by Hannacroix Creek Books.**

Time management and relationships consultant Jan Yager says she noticed something important about the weight challenge: “Too many approached it in a haphazard way or failed to apply—to the goal, losing weight, and maintaining the weight loss—the business skills that were working.” That idea led her to create the motivational guide intended to be read and used alongside any healthy diet being monitored by a physician, nutritionist, or weight loss specialist. “Applying proven time-management techniques that work in business to the weight challenge is a fresh approach,” Yager, a Connecticut freelance writes. She maintains that the first of the seven principles of creative weight management is to find out what’s behind the eating problem. She includes before and after pictures documenting her own 45-pound weight loss using her techniques. Yager also has a new novel, *The Binge*, by the same publisher, which is about an abused woman who battles with an eating disorder. A sociologist, Yager addresses the

insatiable hunger attached to eating disorders. The book's message is, "if you are strong enough, and determined enough, you can begin to fix the problem." Yager can be reached at [hannacroix@aol.com](mailto:hannacroix@aol.com). The press representative is Gladys Rose at 203-321-8674 and [hannacroix@aol.com](mailto:hannacroix@aol.com).

***Help at Any Cost: How the Troubled-Teen Industry Cons Parents and Hurts Kids* by Maia Szalavitz (NASW), published by Riverhead Books.**

Maia Szalavitz, a New York freelance specializing in neuroscience, brings unique credentials to the writing of this book. "As a former addict, I knew the idea of 'tough love' treatment had deterred me from getting help—and I also knew that the research showed it didn't work. I wondered why such treatment was so popular with parents of troubled teens despite the lack of evidence and despite a decades-long history of abuse scandals." Her research included hundreds of interviews with teens, their parents, program employees, and former employees—as well as psychologists, sociologists, psychiatrists, and attorneys. The book covers tough-love residential treatment for disturbed teens and shows how, despite a complete lack of evidence for efficacy or safety, a billion-dollar industry has grown to sell such programs to desperate and vulnerable parents. "It exposes the abusive nature of 'boot camps,' tough 'wilderness programs,' 'emotional growth' and 'behavior modification' boarding schools, and uncovers their roots in a drug-treatment program started in the 1950s that became a violent cult," according to Szalavitz. "It also shows how serious harm can occur when the media accept anecdote as evidence in selling 'cures' for drug and psychiatric problems. Maia can be reached at [maiasz@gmail.com](mailto:maiasz@gmail.com) and 212-879-2305. For review copies contact: [megan.lynch@us.penguingroup.com](mailto:megan.lynch@us.penguingroup.com).

***A Chaos of Delight* by Geoffrey Dobson, PhD published by Equinox Publishing.**

Geoffrey Dobson, associate professor of molecular science, James Cook University, Queensland, Australia, has to be admired for taking on a comprehensive tour into the succession of ways human beings have constructed order and meaning about the world and their place in it. Dobson says the book was conceived when he was working at NIH and his neighbors asked him what he did during the day and why science was important. "The project turned out to be much larger than I had imagined," he writes. "I try to promote science by presenting what it is *not* through the eyes of history." The book examines how various cultures, from the early Sumerians, Egyptians, and Greeks to contemporary Western society, have looked at the same phenomena and devised totally different worldviews. He concludes that one unifying feature that stands out above all oth-

ers as the most certain thing about human knowledge in general, and science, religion or myth in particular, is uncertainty. Dobson can be reached at +61-7-47-814097 (phone), +61-7-47-816279 (fax), or [geoffrey.dobson@jcu.edu.au](mailto:geoffrey.dobson@jcu.edu.au). The press representative is Janet Joyce at [jjoyce@equinoxpub.com](mailto:jjoyce@equinoxpub.com) or [www.equinoxpub.com/books/showbook.asp?bkid=85](http://www.equinoxpub.com/books/showbook.asp?bkid=85). ■

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mind. The award carries a \$1,000 prize. Print and online media are eligible. Deadline: Aug. 15, 2006. Submission information at: **www.apsa.org/ctf/pubinfo/NewsRoom/award.html**. ■

### Submissions to *ScienceWriters*

To place an ad or classified listing in *ScienceWriters* or on the NASW Web site, contact Diane McGurgan at NASW, 304-754-5077 or diane@nasw.org. ■

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**MARCH 1, 2006**