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National Association of Science Writers, Inc.

Winter 2011-12

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From The Editor

Last summer, the Columbia Journalism Review *and ProPublica conducted a survey of journalists regarding transparency and access to information in the federal government.*

NASW agreed to join the Association of Healthcare Journalists, the Society of Environmental Journalists, and Investigative Reporters and Editors in allowing a survey of a sampling of their memberships on this important topic. The results appeared in the Sept/Oct issue of CJR *and are reprinted with permission in this issue beginning on page one.*

Then sit back and enjoy a recap of selected workshops from ScienceWriters2011 together with extensive photo spreads of the sessions, awards banquet, networking events, and Grand Canyon grandeur. After perusing, if you are kicking yourself for missing this meeting, then mark your calendar for Oct. 26 to 30, when ScienceWriters2012 takes place in Research Triangle, North Carolina.

Lynne Friedmann

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Transparency Watch: A Closed Door

From the EPA to NASA, the FDA to OSHA, President Obama has failed to make science accessible

by Curtis Brainard

In July 2009, just months after President Obama took office promising to revolutionize government transparency, leaders of the Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) participated in an hour-long conference call with public affairs staffers working for Lisa Jackson, the new head of the Environmental Protection Agency. Jackson's office wanted to hear what the reporters' gripes were when it came to access, and Christy George, then the society's president, and her colleagues obliged, outlining their most persistent problems: the requirement to seek permission for interviews with agency scientists and experts and difficulty arranging those interviews; the requirement to have press officers, or "minders," on the phone during interviews; and the glacial pace of processing Freedom of Information Act requests. Jackson's assistants asked for the benefit of the doubt. "We're not the Bush administration," George recalled them saying. "Those days are left behind."

For a while it seemed that might be true. The agency finally released a ruling, suppressed by the administration of George W. Bush, which states that greenhouse gas emissions endanger public welfare by contributing to climate change, and therefore can be regulated under the Clean Air Act. And it took smaller but appreciated measures, like opening more lines on press calls to accommodate reporters from smaller outlets and conducting those calls later in the day to accommodate reporters on the West Coast.

Unfortunately, the honeymoon was short-lived. One of the first signs of distress came during a January 2010 press call to discuss the EPA's new budget. The agency surprised reporters by declaring that everyone on the line except Jackson was speaking on background. When members of SEJ later complained, two press officers conceded that the on-background rule was foolish, as George reported in an issue of group's quarterly newsletter. Yet the agency pulled the same stunt three months later. Then things got even worse.

Responding to President Obama's Open Government Directive, which ordered executive departments and agencies to "take specific actions to implement the principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration," the EPA launched two websites to solicit public comments about how to fulfill that obligation. In March 2010, SEJ weighed in with a list of nine recommendations. Days later, during the group's next conference call with the agency, Adora Andy, the EPA press secretary at the time, "scolded us for daring to comment publicly on their transparency policies," says Ken Ward Jr., chairman of the group's Freedom of Information Task Force, who participated in the call. Moreover, Andy threatened to break off the discussions between the EPA and the society (she never did, and the talks are ongoing). "I was shocked," says Ward, a reporter at the *Charleston Gazette* in West Virginia. "Here we were talking about concerns that journalists have about the lack of transparency. Then we dutifully submit public comments about the way we thought they should interact with the press, and EPA hammers us for it. To me, it showed that EPA just doesn't get transparency."

Ward isn't the only one feeling let down. After Obama issued a number of directives designed to improve general transparency and access on his first day in office, he homed in on science, the environment, and public health as areas needing particular improvement. The focus was a no-brainer. The Bush administration had earned a reputation for quashing the free flow of scientific information. In what became the most infamous example of its meddling, top NASA climate scientist James Hansen told the *New York Times* in 2006 that the administration had tried to stop him from speaking out about the threat of global warming by ordering the space agency's public affairs staff to review his upcoming lectures, papers, and online postings. Today, a slew of reporters complain that such gag orders are still a problem and that transparency and access to information is often just as bad, if not worse in some cases, than it was under the Bush administration.

A survey of science, health, and environmental journalists, conducted by the *Columbia Journalism Review* and ProPublica, suggests that while his record so far is more mixed than the anecdotal evidence from journalists indicates, President Obama has clearly not

Curtis Brainard is science editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review*.

lived up to his promise on transparency and access. As has been the case on many fronts with Obama, the expectations among journalists that things were going to improve were so high, a failure to live up those expectations was almost inevitable.

We surveyed a random sample of members of SEJ, the Association of Health Care Journalists, the National Association of Science Writers, and Investigative Reporters and Editors on several issues, including the processing of Freedom of Information Act requests, access to experts, and overall transparency. Responses were anonymous and nearly four hundred journalists responded out of the roughly 2,100 selected to participate. (Survey results reflect the opinions of those who responded, and may not reflect the opinions of the entire sample.) Those who responded were seasoned, with 19 years in journalism on average, including an average of 14 years covering science, environment, or health beats. Most respondents were either full-time staffers or freelancers for print or online publications.

To some extent, the survey contradicts the impressions of journalists who complain that the situation is worse under Obama than it was under Bush. Neither administration was rated "strong" or "very strong" in any category by a majority of respondents. But overall, Obama received higher marks in nearly every category. Thirty percent gave Obama a "poor" or "very poor" grade on overall transparency and access to information, compared to 44 percent for the Bush administration. Most—42 percent—gave Obama a "fair" grade overall.

Likewise, Obama got better marks than Bush in four specific categories of transparency and access: interview permissions, interview minders, online databases, and processing FOIA requests. Unsurprisingly, given his directive to make more government information available online, Obama showed the greatest amount of improvement over Bush in the databases category, with 31 percent giving the administration a "strong" or "very strong" grade. Progress in the other categories was small to insignificant, however, and in each one most respondents gave both Obama and Bush of "poor" or "very poor." Respondents with more experience tended to have harsher opinions, giving the Obama administration generally lower marks.

Marginal progress does not an open government make…

Marginal progress, however, does not an open government make, and the fact that a third of survey participants said Obama is basically doing a poor job overall does not bode well for the free flow of information. His administration is clearly trying, just not quite as hard as he suggested it would.

Felice Freyer, for instance, who chairs the Association of Health Care Journalists' Right to Know Committee, says the committee's effort to fight secrecy has followed a course nearly identical to the one described by leaders of SEJ. In April 2010, the association began a series of meetings and phone calls with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) about improving access to federal experts. But progress has been difficult to elusive.

Responding to Obama's calls for openness, the FDA created a Transparency Task Force a few months after his inauguration. The health care association joined ten other journalism organizations and more than two dozen individual journalists to send a letter to the task force demanding that it end the requirements that journalists obtain permission to conduct an interview, and that public information officers listen to interviews. Six months later, representatives of the association met with Jenny Backus, who became the top press secretary at HHS, to voice some of the same concerns. Backus defended the department's policies requiring interview permissions and minders, but expressed a desire to work with the press. "She gave us her line about, 'We really want to help reporters, and we believe in transparency,'" Freyer says. "She even told me that HHS believed the regional media were important, and that it wasn't just talking to the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. But she also promised us a list of all the media contacts in HHS, and then never delivered. She talked about having us come to meet with the department's pubic information officer at this convention in September. She said she'd look into it, and then never did. So she never really followed up on most of what she promised."

Such neglect has real-world consequences. Around the same time, Freyer was working on a story for the *Providence Journal*, where she's been the medical reporter since 1989. Ten percent of the obstetrician-gynecologists in Rhode Island had admitted to inserting a type of intrauterine device (IUD), a form of birth control, into hundreds of women, which had not been approved by the FDA for use in the United States and which they'd obtained illegally at discount prices from foreign sources. The FDA launched an investigation, about which Freyer had questions. Unsure which press officer to approach, she filled out the "Timely Response Email Form" on the agency's website. Several hours passed with no response, so she called and spoke with a press officer. He suggested that Freyer email her questions to him, which she did. Nothing. When she called again two days later, the press officer said he was waiting for a response from his superiors. He suggested that she resubmit her questions for a third time. She did, to no effect. Several more days passed and she sent yet another email asking if she could expect answers, and if not, why. "At this point, all we can say is that the FDA is continuing to look into these cases," the press officer replied.

Freyer recounted the saga in an online article for the AHCJ:

> I published my story, stating that the FDA had declined to answer any questions. Four days later, the FDA posted a 'consumer update' on its website referring to the Rhode Island controversy and warning consumers against iuds. It turned out the FDA's position was not the 'no comment' I received. The agency had quite a lot to say on the matter, but had declined to say it in the newspaper serving the hundreds of women throughout Rhode Island who were distressed and frightened by the IUD incident. They deserved better from the agency that was supposed to be protecting them.

Freyer emailed the press officer with whom she'd corresponded as well as the FDA's chief press officer to ask what had happened. When neither replied, she emailed Backus at HHS, who finally got the FDA to apologize for its unresponsiveness and promise to do better. Backus was replaced shortly thereafter, however. As Freyer put it, the association had to "start all over again," and transparency problems have continued under Backus's successor, Richard Sorian.

At the beginning of 2011, for instance, the FDA stunned reporters while announcing changes to its medical-device approval process. The announcement was under embargo and the agency's

PANEL IMAGE FROM EVENT BROADCAST

press officers barred journalists seeking outside comment from sharing information about the changes with experts until the embargo lifted. The association wrote a letter of protest, pointing out that the prohibition "rewrote a long-standing compact between reporters and various public and scientific organizations," which typically allows reporters to share embargoed material with sources while working on their stories. Members of the Right to Know Committee pressed the matter, and in June the FDA reversed course. Around the same time, HHS also finally released the list of senior media officials in each of its divisions, which the association had been requesting for about a year.

Despite these victories, and the launch of what will be ongoing quarterly conversations with HHS's public affairs staff, Freyer is unsure how much progress has been made. "The big issue is that reporters who've been at this for a while remember being able to call up and talk to the people who actually knew what was going on, not just spokespeople, and that's become increasingly difficult," she says. "So I don't see milestones here. It's been an ongoing problem that we're chipping away at."

National Press Club panel on science news and government transparency. Next to NASW president Nancy Shute (right) is an empty seat symbolizing non-participation by the Obama administration in the event.

The Obama administration's transparency problem not only affects access to federal scientists and highly politicized environmental and medical science. It's also about access to government documents and databases, and basic research. In 2006, allegations emerged that an electron microscopy research group at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, in Tennessee, which receives millions of dollars a year from the Department of Energy, had fabricated data. Suspecting lax oversight, freelance reporter Eugenie Samuel Reich, now a contributing correspondent for the journal *Nature*, filed a FOIA request for files related to the ensuing investigation, which had been initiated and organized by the lab itself. The Department of Energy rejected the request, so Reich bided her time until the 2008 presidential election ushered in a new administration. When Obama made his pledge about openness and then appointed Steven Chu and a number of other "scientists with excellent reputations" to the department, she believed there would be a "change of heart." There wasn't. Reich filed a lawsuit under the FOIA in 2009, which a federal district judge in Boston finally dismissed in April of this year, to her amazement.

"This record had nothing to do with national security—not even the government claims it does—so it is a very good test case of how other, non-security-related records are being handled," Reich says. "The government's court filings have been relentless and extraordinary, with numerous deliberate references to the need for privacy, confidentiality, and respecting the proprietary rights of government contractors."

Some of President Obama's most vociferous critics on the transparency front will grudgingly concede, as our survey seemed to suggest, that his administration has made marginal progress. "A lot of colleagues would stone me for saying this, but it actually has

TRANSPARENCY continued on page 32

Science News and Government Transparency Panel

Prompted by Curtis Brainard's *CJR* article, the National Press Club hosted a panel on Oct. 3, to continue discussion on the topic of government transparency and access. The *Columbia Journalism Review* and the Society of Environmental Journalists were co-sponsors of the event titled "Access Denied: Science News and Government Transparency."

Associated Press science writer Seth Borenstein moderated the discussion for the 40 in attendance and for an online audience that filed questions via Twitter.

Speakers include:

- Curtis Brainard, *CJR*'s science editor
- Joseph Davis, Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ)
- Felice Freyer, Association of Health Care Journalists (AHCJ)
- Darren Samuelsohn, Politico's senior energy and environment reporter
- Nancy Shute, National Association of Science Writers
- Clothilde Le Coz, Reporters Without Borders

An empty chair on the dais was a visual reminder that repeated attempts to secure an Obama administration representative went unanswered.

Under the Obama administration, several speakers agreed, science journalists are still hampered by unresponsive public information officers (PIO), by intrusive oversight of interviews, and by long delays in the processing of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. They pointed to one bright spot under the Obama administration: much improved access to online databases.

Borenstein asked panelists to rank the Obama administration on a global scale of transparency, with 1 defined by the former Soviet Union and 10 by the Scandinavian countries of today, to which Reporters Without Borders had given the highest ranking in its most recent Press Freedom Index. The responses ranged between 4 and 10, for an average of 5.5.

Every member of the panel had a personal tale of frustration. Felice Freyer, whose experience is included in Brainard's article, recounted repeated efforts to get a response from the FDA for a medical story she was writing for a Rhode Island newspaper. Four days after she published her story, FDA posted some of the information she had requested—as a "consumer update." Others described new difficulties they were experiencing in reaching and interviewing government scientists. And several provided updates on still-unmet FOIA requests, some filed as long as nine years ago.

The entire press club event can be viewed on YouTube at **www.youtube.com/watch?v=MduHRcXKN_4** ■

Flagstaff Meeting Recap

Don't Say Die: Selling the Story

by Ameé J. Salois

What would you do for the story of your dreams? Could you turn down the *New York Times* when it made an impossible request?

Paige Williams did. After the popular book "Possum Living" by Dolly Freed was reprinted in 2008, Williams realized that Freed had literally disappeared. Freed wrote the book with a 7th grade education at the age of 18. After her parents divorced, her father took her out of school, and for five years the pair lived, as the book's cover says, "without a job and with (almost) no money." Williams was determined to find out what had happened to the spunky 18-year-old who lived off of the land.

After some searching, Williams discovered that Dolly Freed was living in Texas and working for NASA as an investigator into the Challenger tragedy, but still living off of the land. the *New York Times* was immediately intrigued by the story. However, just days before the release, the *Times* asked Williams to reveal the real name of Dolly Freed (which had been kept secret for privacy and because some actions confessed in *Possum Living* were not entirely legal). Williams would not do it, and the *New York Times* said "Farewell."

Left with an amazing story that needed to be published…

Left with an amazing story that needed to be published, Williams self-published, something she does not recommend as a habit. Starting a website with a Paypal "Support the Journalist" request in the corner, Williams was able to hire a photographer, editor, and fact checker. It may not be in the *New York Times*, but the response from people was positive and the story that Williams could not let go was released into the world. As Williams said at the workshop, "I was just happy to birth it."

In fact, all of the authors in the workshop "How to Sell that Story You Can't Let Go" spoke of such passion for the stories they wished to publish that they would do almost anything to see them enter the world.

David Dobbs shared a story from his own past. Just before his mother passed away, she shared a riddle with Dobbs. She requested that her ashes be spread over the waters surrounding Hawaii so that she might be with the man she had met 60 years before, during World War II. It was a secret love affair with a man known as Angus, a married flight surgeon. He had disappeared afterwards and Dobbs was determined to uncover his fate. The only problem was no one would take the story.

For 10 years the story sat on the shelf while the pitches went out and came back rejected until finally a new, completely digital media platform called The Atavist showed an interest.

"Boom! The next thing you know it's out—within three days it was a #1 Kindle single," Dobbs said in the workshop. The piece quickly jumped to number 16 of all Kindle books. After 10 years of pitches Dobbs described a piece so close to his heart as "its own machine that catches fire."

Mark Schrope said it can be a mistake to limit yourself to one or two particular outlets you believe your story to be right for. After a visit to Indonesia, Schrope decided to pursue a story detailing the natives' relationships with the surrounding coral reefs. *Smithsonian* was Schrope's immediate choice for a publisher. Unfortunately, its editors were not interested in the story. After much thought Schrope realized that *Smithsonian* didn't have to be the only magazine he pitched to. With much more hard work, including a trip to Fiji to drink the slightly euphoria-inducing Kava with island chiefs, Schrope saw his piece, "Fiji: Where the Chiefs Rule the Reefs," published in *Sport Diver* magazine, originally an unlikely outlet for his work.

Hillary Rosner shared her passion for bringing to light the collection and safekeeping of seeds near the North Pole that may someday save us all. Again, this story was continually turned down even though Rosner had already traveled to Iceland to research the project. One day *Popular Science* showed an interest, but suggested a different spin on the story. Its editors wanted to know about the people gathering the seeds. Rosner shared her realization in the workshop, "Maybe I'm not trying to tell the right story." With some inventive changes to the piece—and a trip to Africa—*Popular Science* published Rosner's "Seeds to Save a Species."

Finally, Tom Zoellner spoke about the time he nearly went bankrupt so that he might travel to Africa and research diamonds for his heartfelt book *The Heartless Stone*. Zoellner found inspiration for his book after being turned down for a marriage proposal, which left him wondering about the ring he had already bought and why we, as a society, find it necessary to present this particular gem as a sign of love. He described the pitch process in the workshop as, "rejection, rejection, rejection, and then a tiny offer…I would have paid them (to publish the book.)"

Some advice from these five speakers on selling that story you can't let go includes:

- Rework the story
- Share the piece with someone you trust. Get a fresh set of eyes on it for advice

Ameé J. Salois is a senior at the University of Arkansas majoring in physics and English literature.

- Look for the story within the story—what makes it unique
- Look for ways to tie in eternal life themes
- Find the quirky characters and make them come alive in your story
- Do not limit the story to a specific outlet(s); find more
- Upon sending a pitch, prepare it to go out to the next outlet immediately so that upon a rejection you can immediately put it back out there and put the rejection in the past
- Do not become discouraged because there is always another platform to pitch
- Make the work something that keeps you going on a deep, personal level
- Do not give up; do not say die

■ ■ ■

Getting Down with Data Visualization

BY ZOË CORBYN

Representing data graphically or on a map can help journalists spot a story or bring a piece to life for readers—and it isn't as difficult to do as you might think.

This is the message from the session DIY Data Visualization Workshop. The workshop, which built on last year's data visualization session, was a chance for participants not only to hear about the latest web-based tools available to visualize data, but also to try some out themselves.

Led by Dianne Finch, manager of multimedia training at the Knight Science Journalism program at MIT, and data journalist David Kroodsma, participants were first shown how to "scrape" a large data set from the web, convert it into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, and visualize it via Google Fusion Tables and Google Maps.

Using as an example two Excel spreadsheets—the world's nuclear power plants by location and by owner—Finch demonstrated how they could be imported into Google Fusion Tables and combined to create one data set, with locations of the plants displayed as points on a globe.

Finch outlined her tips for converting to Excel here and importing into Google Fusion Tables but a basic start is to ensure the data are in "really good shape" before performing any kind of visualization. She recommended spot-checking to ensure they had been correctly converted into Excel and critically examining any outliers (they could indicate a data entry error or a whole new story to investigate). It is also important to ensure Google Fusion knows which data are geographical coordinates, she said.

Because it can handle a lot of records, Excel is best for big data sets rather than alternatives such as Google Spreadsheets, she added.

Kroodsma then demonstrated how journalists could hack computer code to produce data visualizations. Just a basic understanding of how code is structured and a rudimentary knowledge of html is enough to get started, he believes. "The most important thing is everything is a Google search away," he said.

He showed how easy it could be to "steal" a basic html code used to display interactive markers on a Google map and modify a few lines of it to add new markers or change their positions. There is usually no problem with using code that is already out there, though it is good practice to cite the source, he said.

But, the experts stressed, while displaying data in an infographic can help tell great stories and see patterns and trends, it doesn't mean it is always appropriate to use visualization. Nor does it negate the actual reporting or data analysis: the journalist still needs to tell the story. "I am not selling data visualization as an replacement for reporting," said Finch.

So is it really this easy? Perhaps not as easy as the experts make it look but there are plenty of ways to become more proficient including online tutorials and courses. Good sources for more information recommended included the website FlowingData and the book *Visualize This* by Nathan Yau.

And those needing a little encouragement to explore data visualization should look no further than the graphs and videos of the Swedish statistician and academic Hans Rosling available at Gapminder. Guaranteed to inspire.

■ ■ ■

Give Yourself a Break

BY HELEN SHEN

You don't have to be Superman to juggle tweeting, blogging, writing, and living. The message of the panel session, "I Tweet, I Blog, But Do I Sleep?" was that it can be done, as long as you use social media selectively and remember to take breaks.

Like many busy science writers, Bora Zivkovic of *Scientific American* uses Tweetdeck to manage the more than 7,000 Twitter users he follows. The 30 columns he's created represent his Twitter lists and selected search terms. In daily usage, Zivkovic keeps close tabs on only three or four columns. As a poster, he uses Twitter to support writers on the *Scientific American* blog network. Zivkovic does much of his own writing away from the computer, drafting in his head while walking the dogs or running errands.

For Steve Silberman of *Wired*, virtual life began when he realized that "keeping up with Twitter" was a fallacy. He prefers to think of Twitter as a river flowing past the window that he can choose to sample as he pleases. In practice, Silberman admits that deciding to log on can be less of a choice than a compulsion.

Now that he's working on a book, he's begun to set aside a few hours of forced "write or do nothing" time each day. The experiment is in its early stages, but Silberman says he's already enjoying tremendous productivity and an unexpected feeling of liberation from the barrage of outside information.

Author Deborah Blum also disconnects from the social media stream when she writes. When she does tweet and blog, Blum says she makes the most of her limited time by considering every post strategically. Her social media usage is highest in advance of a book release, when she reshapes her online profile by focusing on topics that are relevant to her upcoming book.

Like Blum, Alan Boyle of MSNBC.com tends to use Twitter as a

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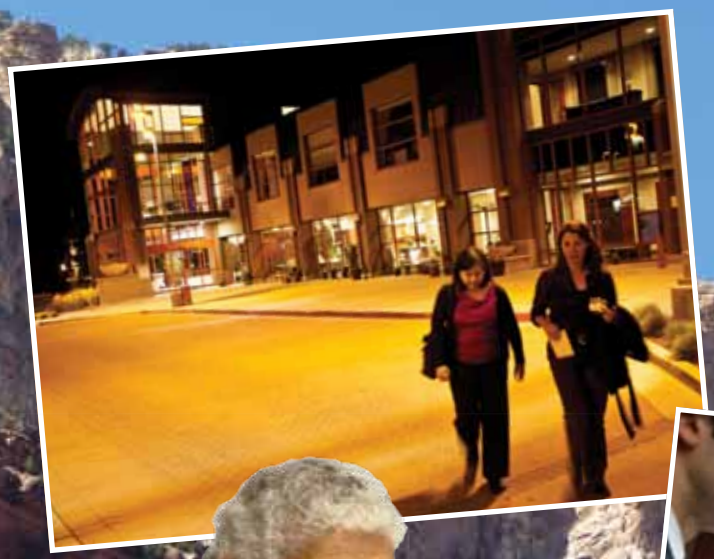
HELEN SHEN IS A STUDENT IN THE UC SANTA CRUZ SCIENCE COMMUNICATION PROGRAM.

Robyn Lloyd, online news editor for *Scientific American*, offers an encouraging smile during the Pitch Slam: Meet the Editors session.

It takes guts. When the Pitch Slam opened, two writers had signed up to pitch. An hour and a half later, nearly a dozen ideas had been put to the panel of seven editors.

Mother Jones editor Michael Mechanic responds to one of the pitches.

Picturesque Flagstaff and nearby Grand Canyon provided an inspirational conference setting.



At left, the state-of-the-art High Country Conference Center, located on the campus of Northern Arizona State University, is surrounded by a ponderosa pine forest.

Below, conference attendees gather around freelance David Dobbs as he discusses the craft of story structure.

Bottom left, Warren Leary, a retired science correspondent for the *New York Times*, impacts sage advice during a session on handling uncooperative or other difficult interviewees.

More conference photos featured on page 30

business tool. He tweets to promote the "Cosmic Log" blog and various others of his projects. He also spends many hours responding to the blog's reader feedback. On the weekend, Boyle says he cuts back on social media, stepping off the "tiny treadmill" of his virtual life in order to enjoy a real life.

Panelists also touched on what social media means for large-scale time management. Boyle says tweeting and blogging accelerates journalism, sometimes at the cost of traditional reporting and due diligence. At the same time, Silberman says that the Twittersphere and blogosphere constitute a "rapid response immune system" that helps put down poor reporting as swiftly as it might arise. Zivkovic argues that social media, especially Twitter, can actually expedite solid reporting by connecting journalists to expert sources faster than ever.

You can learn more about the panelists' social media habits by following them or contacting them on Twitter: @BoraZ, @stevesilberman, @deborahblum, and @b0yle. Or, you can ask Superman how he does it all: @ClarkKentPlanet.

■ ■ ■

Exploring Longform Narrative Story Structure

BY CHRIS PALMER

Led Zeppelin's "Since I've Been Loving You" and "Kashmir" greeted attendees of David Dobbs' "Going Long: How to Structure the Longform Narrative—with Help From Music, Theater, and Film" workshop. Dobbs played portions of the tracks, examples of the rock pioneers' exploration of song structure, to kick off the discussion.

Dobbs informally defined longform stories as 4,000- to 5,000-word pieces, though definitions tend to vary. The acceptance of the term "longform," as opposed to the grammatically correct "long-form," also varies. However, with the proliferation of websites dedicated to hosting and selling longform stories, the term is gaining traction.

Dobbs explained that longform stories cannot be written merely as scaled-up short or mid-length stories. Rather, they require a different structure to keep the reader engaged.

"Music, theater, and film offer analogous models of thinking about how to move stories along, how to structure them, how to transition from one part of the story to another," said Dobbs.

The notion of long narratives resembling musical structures came to Dobbs while writing his third book, *Reef Madness: Charles Darwin, Alexander Agassiz, and the Meaning of Coral*. At the time, he was studying violin, which he courageously took up at the age of 40, and his teacher implored him to use different notes and different timbres to differentiate the various sections of the song. Dobbs soon recognized how to apply this mode of thinking to structure his writing.

"I had been missing the opportunity to use structure as an expressive force," Dobbs said.

Now, when he reads a story he likes, he picks it apart, noting all of the transitions and figuring out the flow of characters and changes of scene. Instead of just jumping into the writing and devising a structure at the end of the process, he now writes in chunks, thinking about structure from the outset.

Dobbs played portions of pieces by Felix Mendelssohn and Franz Schubert, discussing the inspiration he draws from sonata form, a musical structure dating back to the mid-18th century. Paralleling the progression of a feature narrative, sonata form has three main sections. Themes are introduced in the "exposition," elaborated and contrasted in the "development," and revisited in the "recapitulation," in a way that changes the way we think about the initial part of the song and gives it a deeper meaning.

Within the simple three-part structure of sonata form, there can be complex substructure. "There's a macro structure where a piece is cut into a few big chunks which are broken into other structures that may replicate the bigger structure or may not," said Dobbs, making an analogy between longform narrative structure and fractals.

From that simple structure, exploration and execution are the keys to creating something unique. Dobbs illustrated this point by playing short sections of two Led Zeppelin tracks. He points to "Kashmir" as an example of exploration. "They had more musical ideas than they could fit into the usual six-minute pop song, so they elaborated the form."

On the other hand, "Since I've Been Loving You" has a simple form executed to perfection with subtle variations giving it an aesthetic edge. "There's nothing unusual about the form, they just execute the hell out of it."

Dobbs also talked about finding inspiration in film techniques. "I find it helpful to think about camera length. You can signal a transition just by being real up close and then pulling back."

Story narrative can be zoomed in by slowing down the action (via the use of heavy detail) or zoomed out (via compressing hours of action into one or two sentences). Drawing from the experience of writing his *New York Times Magazine* article "Buried Answers" about the dwindling numbers of autopsies performed in the past 40 years, Dobbs explained, "A paragraph can be about three simple physical movements of the surgeon, or a paragraph can describe the next two hours of an operation."

Changing the emotional tone of the prose can also be effective in zooming in and out of the narrative. Dobbs used this technique to signal transitions in his *New York Times Magazine* article "A Depression Switch?" alternating close-up emotional portraits of a woman dealing with depression with prose describing the nuts and bolts of the development and implementation of a controversial treatment for depression.

Finally, Dobbs described how the structure of theater guides structural decisions of his longform stories.

"Do you want to introduce all the exciting characters in the first five minutes? Hell no," he said. "You need to save some for the second act. Somewhere near the 50 percent mark you need to

CHRIS PALMER IS A NEUROSCIENTIST AND SCIENCE WRITER WHO LIVES IN SAN DIEGO.

introduce something new in a piece this long to refresh and quicken the reader's attention."

Dobbs also used a longform analysis of the Greek financial meltdown by Michael Lewis ("Beware of Greeks Bearing Bonds", *Vanity Fair*) to illustrate various ways to manipulate structure. Lewis tells his story, all 18 sections, 77 paragraphs, and 13,000 words of it, within the simple form of a description of his trip to a monastery where monks swindled the Greek government out of billions of dollars. From the overlying form of the story about the trip, Lewis effectively cuts away to give extensive backstory and analysis of the pervasive fraud at the heart of Greece's crisis.

"The form, what we see from the outside, should be simple, even when the underlying structure is complicated."

To end his talk, Dobbs said, "There's always the option to cut away, back up, zoom back in, make a break with a change in character or density in language. These are things you can do at any time. The important thing is to find when the right time is."

Dobbs' and Lewis' stories, along with Dobbs' annotations breaking down the stories, can be downloaded at **http://db.tt/c38y83k7**.

■ ■ ■

Avoid the Seven Deadly Sins of Science PIOs

BY AMANDA MASCARELLI

The original sins of the public information officer aren't quite as deadly as wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony—but close. Some of the most common trespasses for PIOs include not returning reporters' emails and calls in a timely fashion, hyping news, being dishonest or misleading, micromanaging rather than facilitating, not knowing one's audience, and not following through on promises (**http://bit.ly/rtuNGQ**).

"I see a lot of sinners I know," joked Terry Devitt, director of research communications at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, addressing a packed roomful of PIOs for the workshop session he moderated on "The Seven Deadly Sins of the Science PIO (and How to Avoid Them)."

In September, Devitt and other panel members conducted an online survey (**http://bit.ly/rWjOsI**) asking journalists and PIOs to reflect on what drives them crazy about each other and how to improve upon journalist/PIO relationships and interactions. Of the 79 respondents, 61 percent identified themselves as journalists and 35 percent as PIOs. Many of the PIO responders had 20 to 30 years experience on the job.

Some of the most egregious transgressions of PIOs, according to journalists' survey responses, included "too many crappy, poorly written, jargon, acronym and cliché-riddled, out-of-date, simplistic, noncontextual press releases, bugging reporters with calls or unsolicited releases and pitches, and assuming the reporter knows too much or too little."

"A lot of these [sins] are self-evident to those of us who have been in the business," said Devitt, who has been a PIO for more than 27 years. "But what was really surprising was how frequently these criticisms were voiced," suggesting that the problems are quite widespread, he said.

Panelist A'ndrea Messer, senior science and research information officer at Penn State University then discussed the Ten Commandments of the Science PIO (**http://bit.ly/tp7eUU**). The list includes: be responsive, truthful and accurate; be accessible; be selective; be contrite; be patient; be a conduit; be a "potted palm," meaning that PIOs should facilitate interactions between journalists and researchers and then fade into the background; and avoid the use of the word "breakthrough."

Another panelist, David Harris, an independent science communication designer and author of the blog The Enlightened PIO, emphasized the importance of "relationship management" in the role of the PIO. First and foremost, "drink with journalists," urged Harris. It needn't just be over beers; even coffee will do, he said. In sticky situations and difficult circumstances, these relationships can save the day.

The Seven Deadly Sins of the Science Press Officer…and How to Avoid Them* ***http://bit.ly/rtuNGQ*

■ ■ ■

AMANDA MASCARELLI IS A DENVER-BASED FREELANCE JOURNALIST SPECIALIZING IN SCIENCE, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES.

FROM THE SURVEY*

The Biggest PIO Sins

- Timeliness—not responding to journalists emails or phone calls; not being "time responsive" regarding deadlines and source availability
- Control—trying to manage as opposed to facilitating the source/journalist interaction, e.g. sitting in on interviews, unrealistic demands
- Story/news judgment—failure to know implications, context of "news," overselling, hype
- Misrepresentation—promising an exclusive and then being inclusive; not following through on promises of help for access to information or sources
- "Failure of transparency," in the context of negative stories; "willful misrepresentation"
- Sending too many crappy, poorly written, jargony, acronym- and cliché-riddled, out-of-date, simplistic, noncontextual press releases
- Bugging reporters with calls or unsolicited releases/pitches
- Assuming the reporter knows too much…or too little

Things To Do to Avoid Hot Water

- Be honest and forthcoming
- Respect deadlines
- Write clearly
- Ask questions
- Don't promise what you can't deliver
- Be genuinely helpful—find a source or a picture in a hurry, provide as much advance warning as possible
- Help your scientist sources help journalists
- Get to know science journalists and their particular needs
- Know that a journalist's goals are not the same as yours

Know Your Institution

- Strive to create an atmosphere of openness and transparency
- Be skeptical about the studies you choose to write about, know the limits of the research
- Don't try to manage the process of making news
- Plan for contingencies
- Make sure your stories are good ones

When Science News Provokes Controversy

by Meghan D. Rosen

How should writers respond to public concerns about controversial science? Is it better to defend research using blogs and social media, or to post data online and let the research speak for itself?

The workshop "Science News, Spot News, or Both? Managing and Covering Science Protests" featured two very different scientific controversies and the strategies used to address them.

IT ALL STARTED WITH A GAY SHEEP

When Andy Dworkin first covered the "gay sheep" finding from researchers at Oregon Health and Science University, he didn't think it would be controversial. The research was basic: Scientists were trying to understand why some rams preferred to mount other rams instead of ewes. They tracked sexual preference to a specific nerve bundle within the brain. (Rams who mate with rams had a small bundle, and rams who mate with ewes had a large bundle.)

His story was picked up by different news outlets, and many misreported or embellished the facts of the study. Then PETA got involved. A simple article about basic research turned into cruel scientists killing sheep to find a "cure" for homosexuality. In two weeks, Jim Newman, a public information officer at OHSU, received 14,000 angry emails.

OHSU responded to the controversy by blogging, talking to reporters, and doing every radio interview they could find. Eventually, they changed public opinion, but it took years to play catch-up.

Now, OHSU takes a more proactive approach to publicizing research. They keep an open door to the media, bring people into their animal labs, and publish USDA inspection results.

"I learned that when you are a science reporter, controversies are really about how science and society interact with each other," Newman said.

But he's kept his sense of humor about it. At the end of the talk he posted his favorite headline about the story: Brokeback Mutton.

THE TRUTH ABOUT 9/11

After three World Trade Center buildings fell on 9/11, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) embarked on an investigation to discover how and why the twin towers (WTC 1 and WTC 2) and a third building in the complex (WTC 7) collapsed. Their goal was to improve public safety and security. The investigation, which was supposed to take two years, ended up taking six.

NIST collected thousands of videos and photos of the towers' collapse, examined twisted ruins of steel, tracked fire and smoke pathways, and used computer modeling to help visualize the planes' impact. It also developed a plan to keep the public informed about the investigation's progress. Throughout the investigation, NIST strove for transparency.

Michael E. Newman, the spokesperson for NIST's 9/11 investigation, knew some people would disagree with their findings. Because 9/11 was a global event, NIST predicted there would be many different beliefs and viewpoints. "But," Newman said, "I didn't know how prophetic that would be."

After NIST released its reports for the twin towers and WTC 7, it was inundated with counter theories from people who insisted NIST was lying. "I wish I had a dime for every time I've been told to roast in hell," Newman said.

But NIST refused to debate with conspiracy theorists. Instead, it put 10,000 pages of documents online and let the data do the talking. Newman thinks their strategy was successful: Since the report was published, building codes throughout the U.S have been changed to reflect NIST's safety recommendations.

"We knew we would never convince the alternative theorists," Newman said. But that's not who the agency was trying to reach.

For more information about homosexual rams or the WTC check out ***http://scienceorspotnews.wordpress.com****.*

Meghan D. Rosen is a student in the UC Santa Cruz science communication program.

■ ■ ■

Membership Meeting Minutes

by NASW Secretary Beryl Benderly

Beryl Benderly

The membership meeting was convened on Oct. 15, 2011, in Flagstaff, Ariz. President Nancy Shute called the meeting to order at 8:10 a.m.

Shute congratulated the conference committee on the workshop program.

Ron Winslow presented the treasurer's report. He stated that the finance committee has upgraded its procedures to better deal with Authors Coalition funds. He also reported that NASW's audit had been successful. Finally, he thanked finance committee members Mari Jensen and Rick Bogren for their excellent service.

Program committee chair Robin Lloyd reported on the program committee's activities. She thanked the committee members and reported that the committee has received 22 applications and thus far has approved seven, awarding $92,400. Finally, she encouraged members to submit proposals for programs, especially those designed to serve underserved regions.

Shute thanked NASW cybrarian Russell Clemings for his work on the upgraded website.

Internet committee co-chair Adams Rogers introduced the guest editor program, which will provide stipends to individuals who will serve temporarily to bring new ideas to the website. He encouraged members to apply to be a guest editor.

Membership chair Deborah Franklin reported a 10 percent increase in membership over the last year. The committee, she stated, plans to evaluate NASW's membership criteria in light of changing conditions. She also encouraged members to bring to the committee any ideas they have about potential membership benefits.

Vice president Peggy Girshman introduced the staff journalist committee and encouraged members who are staff journalists to join.

Shute introduced the issue of access to government sources and reported that NASW had joined with other journalism groups in protesting the removal of a government database from the Internet. She encouraged members interested in working on the issue access to contact her.

Shute next spoke about NASW's international efforts, telling about the highly successful international conference in Doha, Qatar, of which NASW was co-sponsor. She also introduced NASW's new initiative to collaborate with Latin American science writers organizations.

Shute announced that the winner of this year's Diane McGurgan Service Award is Jeanne Erdmann (see page 25).

Executive director Tinsley Davis thanked all of NASW's many volunteers.

Grievance committee chair Dan Ferber reported that the committee has been on hiatus for about a year, but is now becoming more active. The committee plans to focus on developing methods to help writers protect themselves and also on making more information and resources available on the website.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 a.m.

■ ■ ■

CASW Debuts New Horizons Video Internship Program

As a pilot project at the Flagstaff meeting, CASW awarded New Horizons internships to five student videographers. Mentored by CASW board member Miles O'Brien, science correspondent for the PBS NewsHour, the interns wrote and produced video stories keyed to several presentations offered at the New Horizons in Science briefing.

For the inaugural effort, CASW tapped into the rich pool of candidates available at two Arizona-based institutions. Two of the interns came from ASU's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, in Phoenix. The School of Communication at Northern Arizona University, in Flagstaff, host of the 2011 briefing, provided the other three interns.

The ASU recipients were Maggie Pingolt and Allie Nicodemo. Pingolt, a multimedia journalism major specializing in medical writing, has worked as an online media wire reporter for the nationally distributed Cronkite News Service. Nicodemo, a print journalism major currently training in online media, is a science and feature writer for ASU's Office of Knowledge and Enterprise Development.

Those from NAU were Haley Quiner, Austen Lavery and Yfat (Yffy) Yossifor. Quiner, an electronic media and film major, is production manager of NAZ Today, the student-run daily news program. Lavery, majoring in electronic media and in film and physics/astronomy, is administrative writing manager for UTV-62, the student television channel. Yossifor, a photojournalism student, interns at the Arizona Republic; she also works on video assignments for Channel 12/KPNX in Phoenix.

CASW used funds from its operating budget to launch the video internship program. It is now in active pursuit of outside underwriting support for this new venture. ■

SCIENCEWRITERS2012

RESEARCH TRIANGLE, NC

October 26 to 30

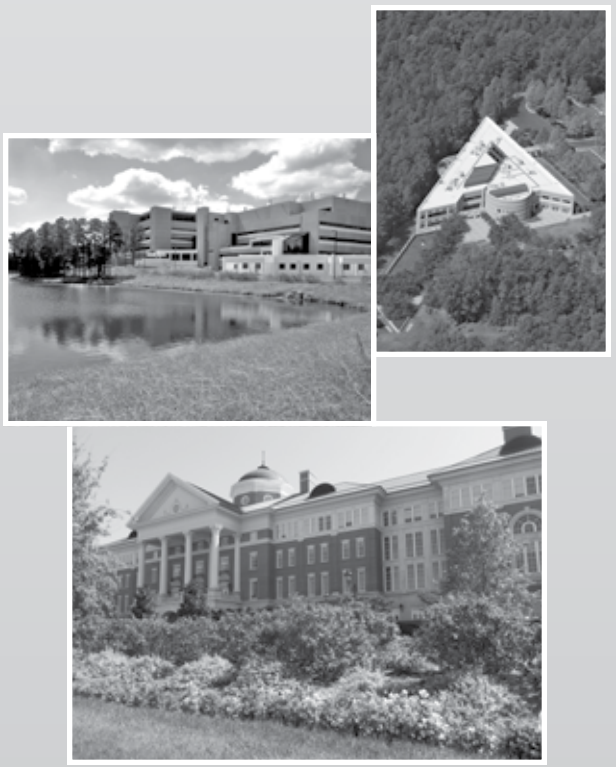
Plan now to attend ScienceWriters2012, Research Triangle, N.C. Organizers promise fascinating speakers, memorable social events, and tours that will fill your ideas folder for a year: Learn how tobacco plants are being used to grow human vaccines, see how the EPA would decontaminate a building after a biological attack, or watch a ring-tailed lemur solve math problems.

You'll also want to stick around for post-meeting destination tours: A visit to marine labs and a boat ride on the sound in historic Beaufort or a day trip to Kannapolis, a former mill town that has given birth to both Dale Earnhardt and a $500-million research campus.

North Carolina is a hotbed for biotech and pharma, smart grid and alternative energy, statistics and clinical trials, environmental health and toxicology, nanotech, gaming, IT, and wireless communication.

If you enjoy the annual meeting for the networking and social events, that's covered, too. Be sure to pack a Halloween mask you can drink through. ■

Learn more: **ScienceWriters2012.org**



NIEHS COURTESY OF NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SCIENCES (NIH); NORTH CAROLINA BIOTECH CENTER COURTESY OF RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK FOUNDATION; DAVID H. MURDOCK RESEARCH INSTITUTE COURTESY OF JIM HATHAWAY, UNC-CHARLOTTE

CASW Announces New Appointment

The Council for the Advancement of Science Writing, Inc., (CASW) has named Rosalind Reid, the former editor of *American Scientist* magazine and currently executive director of Harvard's Institute for Applied Computational Science, to its newly created program director post.

The new position represents a significant expansion of responsibilities for CASW's current and future programs, including the work of the New Horizons program director, a title that has now been retired. As part of her portfolio, Reid will plan and produce the annual New Horizons in Science briefing held in tandem with the National Association of Science Writer's professional development workshops. In addition, and critically, she will coordinate and manage frequent and robust freshening of the CASW website; and, working as part of a team led by CASW's executive director and members of the board's program committee, develop and execute new web-based initiatives. These would include webinar updates and other highly integrated projects that extend the reach and impact of New Horizons while also leveraging the CASW brand. Reid will also help recruit partnerships with other organizations and complement fundraising efforts.

"These initiatives all are aimed at better serving the science writing community as well as other constituencies interested in advancing public understanding of science," said Cristine Russell, president of CASW.

"It's hard to imagine anyone better suited than Ros to take on this new assignment," said Ben Patrusky, CASW's executive director. "Not only is she exceptionally well-informed and conversant with new developments on the frontiers of science—a key prerequisite for anyone tasked with orchestrating the annual New Horizons sessions—but also she is exceedingly knowledgeable about the digital world and, as such, stands ready to help CASW exploit the potential of the web and digital communication and innovate to maximum effect. Beyond that, she possesses just the sort of well-demonstrated organizational and administrative skills that are central to the new post's demands."

Reid was editor of the *American Scientist*, the interdisciplinary magazine of Sigma Xi, the Scientific Research Society, from 1992 to 2008. In 2003, she was selected as the first journalist in residence at the Kavli Institute for Theoretical Science at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and soon after that took another "science immersion" leave as a fellow at the Harvard Initiative in Innovative Computing. Co-organizer of the MIT/Harvard Image and Meaning workshop series on visual communication of science, Reid is currently assistant dean for external programs at the Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Science and executive director of the School's Institute for Applied Computational Science. She will continue her Harvard work part-time.

Reid did her undergraduate work at Syracuse University and earned an M.A. at Duke. She spent eight years writing for newspapers in Maine and North Carolina, then went on to learn the science beat as a research news editor at North Carolina State University. She joined the CASW board in 2007, the same year she was inducted as an honorary life member of Sigma Xi in recognition of her distinguished service to science and science communication. She will step down from the CASW board to assume her new role.

The decision to establish the new position of program director emerged from an ongoing strategic planning process, begun three years ago, by a special committee of the board. The committee was charged with defining how CASW might best fulfill its mission amidst rapidly changing practices in journalism and in the expectation that CASW's future success will depend heavily on

CASW continued on page 33

Call For Workshop Program Entries

BY TINSLEY DAVIS

Each year the NASW workshop committee, which is composed of a diverse group of NASW members, works hard to develop a slate of sessions that reflects the broad and varied interests of our membership. They are, however, limited by the number and diversity of proposals that come in. The chosen NASW workshops directly reflect the depth, breadth, and quality of proposals received.

We need your help to ensure that educators, staff writers, freelancers, public information officers, students, writers, editors, early career, late career, new members, and veterans find something to fit their needs among the workshops. Workshops can be targeted at a specific group, e.g. a master class or newbies, or creatively crafted in such a way as to be applicable to the larger mission and themes of NASW.

To submit a proposal for the 2012 NASW workshops, email your proposal(s) by March 1 to workshops@nasw.org with subject line "Workshop Proposal 2012." Include the following:

- Name and affiliation of organizer
- Email address
- Telephone
- Description of the proposed workshop and format (maximum 300 words). This is your pitch to the committee.

While we realize that applicants cannot pre-book speakers, preference will be given to those proposals with a clear thought toward, and connection to, proposed speakers. Applicants are encouraged to think broadly about of speakers, seeking the best possible experts within and outside the sources field of science writing. Funding is available for speaker travel.

Successful proposals will be notified by May 1. Details of the session and confirmed speaker list are due by mid-June. Questions? Email workshops@nasw.org. ■

■ ■ ■

See Dispatches From the Director on page 21 for information about how you can be involved in selecting the ScienceWriters2012 workshop sessions.

2011 Science in Society Awards

And the winners are:

Book
Maryn McKenna
Superbug: The Fatal Menace of MRSA **(Free Press)**

Science Reporting
Katy Butler
"My Father's Broken Heart"
New York Times Magazine

Science Reporting for a Local or Regional Audience
Barbara Moran
"Power Politics"
Boston Globe Magazine

Commentary or Opinion
Charles Homans
"Hot Air"
Columbia Journalism Review

In her book *Superbug*, Maryn McKenna tells the story of the rise and spread of MRSA, methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. One of the judges said of the book, "This is really original reporting; it had wide impact, particularly in the medical community, and the infectious disease community in a way that popular science writing often doesn't." Another added, "Her reporting was remarkable in digging up the many trenchant anecdotes and speaking with the many medical personnel on what they did and why they did it."

In her award acceptance remarks, McKenna offered:

> *Superbug* is the thing that I did when I realized that my job as a newspaper reporter no longer worked, and I walked away from it to be a magazine writer and social media enthusiast. I wrote *Superbug* because I wanted to have something to point to when people asked me who I was, now that I no longer had that newspaper identity. I wanted to say, here, this quality of work, this is what I do. So I am especially grateful for this award because it says to me that reinvention is possible. It feels to me that, by giving it, you have approved of my own reinvention, and that gives me hope that in this business that is changing around us so rapidly, reinvention is possible for us all.

Winners received $2,500, awarded during the ScienceWriters2011 meeting in Flagstaff, Ariz.

"My Father's Broken Heart," by Katy Butler, appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* on June 20, 2010. Subtitled, "How putting in a pacemaker wrecked my family's life," Butler describes her family's agonizing series of decisions regarding her father's medical care. The judges lauded the quality of the writing, describing it as "spectacular," "evocative," and "extraordinary." One judge said, "It's a memoir with broad societal impact, and that's rare."

"Power Politics" by Barbara Moran appeared in the *Boston Globe Magazine* on May 9, 2010. Moran chronicles the science and politics surrounding the decision to close Vermont Yankee, the state's only nuclear power plant. One judge said, "She has done a marvelous job of taking a national and international story and bringing a very refined local focus to a really pressing scientific topic…In midst of talk of nuclear renaissance, here's this thoughtful, fresh assessment of the nuclear power plant issue. [It was] doggedly and thoroughly reported, without showing evidence of lines drawn, sides taken, and old arguments being rehashed."

"Hot Air" by Charles Homans appeared in the January/February 2010 issue of the *Columbia Journalism Review*. In it Homans examines a curious fact: despite describing themselves as meteorologists, a surprisingly large number of TV weathermen don't believe in the scientific evidence for climate change. One judge said, "It really delved into backgrounds of weathermen and their almost pathological inability to distinguish between weather and climate." Another said, "I felt this piece just dragged the dirty secret of the whole climate change debate kicking and screaming out into the public." And this judge went on to note that Homans gave the television weathermen their due.

"He treated them respectfully. He let them stand forth in the pages of *CJR* articulately and with dignity."

NASW established the Science in Society awards to provide recognition—without subsidy from any professional or commercial interest—for investigative or interpretive reporting about the sciences and their impact on society. The awards are intended to encourage critical, probing work that would not receive an award from an interest group. Beginning with the first award in 1972, NASW has highlighted innovative reporting that goes well beyond the research findings and considers the associated ethical problems and social effects. ■

MORAN BY JOHN G. NIKOLAI; OTHOR PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE WINNERS

Ron Winslow Receives Victor Cohn Medical Science Reporting Prize

Ron Winslow, the New York-based deputy bureau chief for health and science and a veteran medical reporter at the *Wall Street Journal*, has been awarded the 2011 Victor Cohn Prize for Excellence in Medical Science Reporting. Winslow was cited for the "exceptional breadth, precision, and clarity of his coverage about how technological innovation is transforming the world of medicine."

"Ron Winslow has long been at the forefront of authoritative coverage of medical research and its impact on healthcare delivery," said the judges. They took special note of his ability to consistently provide reliable, nuanced reporting about new developments and to place them within the broader social and economic context. "When I read a Ron Winslow story," said one of the judges, "I know I'm in completely trustworthy hands."

The prize committee said that Winslow's career in journalism has been distinguished by a sterling reputation among scientists and fellow journalists for his fair and enterprising coverage. He is considered by many of his colleagues as the current dean of medical reporting.

…(a career) distinguished by a sterling reputation among scientists and fellow journalists…

In her nominating letter, Stefanie Ilgenfritz, bureau chief of the *Journal*'s health and science group, called Winslow "a singular journalist whose contributions to the public's understanding of medical science are unmatched…. It is only someone with Ron's keen eye for detail and innate sense of story who could weave science, personal narratives, and broad economic context into the kind of story that makes even the arcane world of clinical trial protocols compelling to the layman."

"He's also got a keen eye for the quirky story, that good read you just can't resist," said the *AP*'s Marilynn Marchione, the 2010 Cohn Prize winner, in her letter supporting his nomination In others letters endorsing his nomination, several reporters noted how influential Winslow has been in encouraging and mentoring young journalists in this field.

The stories submitted by the *Journal* on Winslow's behalf included "Major Shift in War on Cancer," which combined news announcements at a major national cancer meeting with dozens of interviews to yield, as the judges described it, a "compelling, beautifully framed" account of the role of genetics in targeting cancer treatments. Another story, "A New Rx for Medicine," about the ambitions of two women—a breast cancer patient and her surgeon—to speed up drug testing, highlighted Winslow's masterful feature writing and storytelling skills, the judges said. And a 2007 story, "Opening Arguments—The Case Against Stents," was well ahead of the pack in questioning the conventional medical wisdom that had led to overuse of the device, they added.

Winslow, a graduate of the University of New Hampshire in Durham, began his journalism career 40 years ago as a reporter for Rhode Island's *Providence Journal*, and later, while teaching English and journalism at the University of New Hampshire, continued to write as a freelancer for the *New York Times* and the *Boston Globe* magazines among other publications. He joined the *Wall Street Journal* in 1983 as a reporter covering electric utilities and nuclear power. Two years later he was named assistant national news editor, in charge of the paper's science and energy section, and a few months later, news editor. He returned to reporting as a senior special writer in 1989, covering healthcare and medicine. He subsequently also served as health and science news editor of the paper before his appointment in 2008 as deputy bureau chief for health and science.

The $3,000 Cohn Prize was presented on Oct. 15 in Flagstaff, Ariz., at an awards banquet held in conjunction with ScienceWriters2011.

The annual prize, for a body of work published or broadcast within the past five years, was established in 2000 by the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing (CASW), a non-profit organization of science communicators and educators dedicated to improving the quality of science news reaching the public.

The award honors the late *Washington Post* medical writer and health columnist Victor Cohn, who distinguished himself by the effectiveness of his reporting during a 50-year career. He was also a co-founder, in 1959, of CASW. ■

Featured Column

Scholarly Pursuits

Academic research relevant to the workaday world of science writing

by Ben Carollo and Rick Borchelt

And the Polls are In

Public perception of science varies greatly, but the pundits are still at odds over exactly why.

As the political season ramps up, daily updates on polling numbers are reported by countless news outlets. Politicos in Washington, D.C. live for this horse race, and many science writers and PIOs are probably paying close attention as well to get a sense of what could happen to the budgets of federal science agencies in the coming years.

In the circles in which we run we have also seen the results of polls that seek to tease out how the public perceives science and scientists. For this edition of Scholarly Pursuits, we are taking a look at one of these polls as well as exploring some recent papers that seek to elucidate how and why people perceive science in certain ways.

■ ■ ■

In Science We Trust: Poll Results on How You Feel About Science. *Scientific American*, Sept. 22, 2010. [Accessed online on 12/1/11 at: http://bit.ly/9OZILF]

In 2010, *Scientific American* and its sister publication, *Nature*, teamed up to conduct an online poll to determine if the public still trusted scientists after a series of high profile PR nightmares for scientists. This was seen as a particularly relevant question given how much science would be playing a roll in several pending policy conversations on energy, climate change, health, and technology (little did we know that said policy conversations would be put on hold for a while, but that is the subject of another poll entirely).

At the broadest level, the poll results appear to be positive for scientists. On a scale of 1 (strongly distrust) to 5 (strongly trust), scientists come in at a solid 4, higher than all other groups of people—including journalists. Journalists come in with a score a little over 2.5, just above companies and elected officials. Hold that thought for just a moment.

The poll explores several areas where science intersects with society. For instance, in the United States, only 17 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that scientists should stay out of politics; however, only 21 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that scientists know best what is good for the public. Two other statements were tested: Scientists should speak out about what the science says but avoid advocacy (40 percent agreed) and scientists should pay attention to the wishes of the public, even if they think citizens are mistaken and do not understand their work (26 percent agreed).

There were several other questions asked, and we would encourage you to check the poll results for a full accounting of the details, but we found the responses to one question to be particularly interesting. When people were asked about their level of comfort with the risks associated with nanotechnology, 28 percent of Americans were not comfortable, 10 percent were somewhat comfortable, 27 percent were totally comfortable, and a whopping 36 percent didn't know. This is in contrast to responses of the same question as it related to GMO crops and nuclear power, where there was a much more full accounting of respondents' opinions.

…asked about their level of comfort with the risks associated with nanotechnology…a whopping 36 percent didn't know.

This highlights the complicated situation in which PIOs and science writers find

Scholarly Pursuits features articles from journals produced in the United States and abroad. If you read an article you think would make a good candidate for this column, send it along to rickb@nasw.org.

Ben Carollo leads the issues analysis and response team at the National Cancer Institute at NIH. Rick Borchelt is special assistant for public affairs to the director of the National Cancer Institute at NIH.

themselves when it comes to engaging the public around scientific issues. Most of us in this business probably agree that science should play a role in political discourse (and a relatively unfiltered role at that). However, individuals—and many policy makers for that matter—do not get their information directly from scientists (the trusted source). They must create informed opinions based on information they receive through less trusted mediated parties (journalists). Though the provided poll responses do not provide enough information to determine if all journalists are seen equally, one would hope that science writers gain some additional level of credibility by engaging scientists in their stories. However, a critical question remains: How much interpretation of the evidence should a science writer truly provide? When a third of the participants of a poll of highly science-attentive readers don't have a clue how they feel about the risks of nanotechnology, there is clearly still a vital role for science writers in providing critical context for emerging science issues.

■ ■ ■

Dudo, A., Brossard, D., Shanahan, J., Scheufele, D., Morgan, M., and Signorielli, N. Science on Television in the 21st Century: Recent Trends in Portrayals and Their Contributions to Public Attitudes Toward Science. *Communication Research* 2011 38(6): 754-777.

In this paper, the authors seek to reexamine the work of George Gerbner and colleagues from 1985 on the effect of television on viewers' perceptions of science. This previous work focused on a "cultivation" perspective: That is, television is the most common source of images about many subjects, and thus heavy television viewers will mentally construct the world in a way consistent with what they see on TV. In short, scientists on television were generally portrayed as "good," but with fates in dramatic roles often associated with death or failure. Gerber's team concluded that heavy television viewers were less likely to view science favorably than those who watched less television. Additionally, this negative relationship was stronger among those who traditionally would be more disposed to think favorably of science: the well educated, affluent, and young. Given the many new sources of information and the changes in television programming, the current authors found it timely to see if the previous findings still hold true and determine whether additional factors are at play.

…television watching at high levels displaces other activities that would strengthen science knowledge.

Through social science magic, the authors come to several conclusions. First, television viewing is not associated with negative attitudes toward science (once they accounted for prior science knowledge). The authors extrapolate this to suggest that television viewing does not have a significant direct effect, generally, on scientific attitudes. Second, television was found to be negatively associated with knowledge of science, which in turn resulted in more highly positive attitudes toward science. Third, those classified as heavy viewers of television are less likely to use other media such as the Internet and newspapers, and the authors found that there was a positive association between people having positive attitudes toward science and their use of the Internet and newspapers. Finally, the authors found that the negative effect of television viewing on attitudes toward science was stronger among those who have taken college science courses and vice versa.

These data clearly support a relationship between attitudes toward science and levels of television viewing. The authors suggest that a displacement theory is driving this relationship—television viewing at high levels displaces other activities that would strengthen science knowledge. The authors' concluded that scientists on television are usually portrayed as good. Couple this finding with the finding that lower knowledge of science is associated with positive attitudes toward science among heavy television viewers, and the displacement theory would indeed be supported. We do feel troubled by these findings, however, as they suggest that those who step away from the television long enough to read the products that science writers are producing have less-positive attitudes about science than those who do not. Is the state of science really so bad?

■ ■ ■

Greiffenhagen, C. and Sharrock, W. Does Mathematics Look Certain in Front, but Fallible in the Back? *Social Studies of Science* 2011 41(6): 839-866.

The authors of this paper seek to explore various theories that public perceptions of science and mathematics are often askew from the reality of these fields because the "front" of the field is very different from the "back" of the field, which only serves to reinforce myths about these fields. Simply (and crudely) put, the "front" of science is how science is written and presented, while the "back" of science is how science is practiced in the laboratory. The historical discussion on these issues has focused on how from the front (in written documents and in presentations), science is presented in a neat package and that the audience (some group of outsiders) is to believe that this package accurately and completely reflects what went in to making that discovery happen. Accordingly, the science is perceived by these outsiders as infallible. In contrast, many people believe that this model does not appropriately reflect what happens in science from the back (the activities in the laboratory, where human error and intellectual disagreement can happen) and that only a select group of insiders is privy to the true nature of things.

Greiffenhagen et al. take a relatively interesting approach to assess how segregated the front is from the back of

PURSUITS continued on page 33

The years of work and effort …that go into creating a single research outcome is lost on most people.

New Feature on The Open Notebook

by Jeanne Erdmann and Siri Carpenter

We can't believe that The Open Notebook (www.theopennotebook.com) is over a year old. This project has been a true labor of love, and we've been having a blast! We launched TON in October 2010 as a craft-focused website for science journalists. We decided that the best way to celebrate our first birthday was to introduce "Ask TON," a new feature that invites science writers to send in craft-related questions. We then seek out and share answers from accomplished science writers and editors.

Initial installments of Ask TON have tackled a range of issues that many science writers confront, like:

- What makes a good pitch letter? **http://is.gd/Hf1X3V**
- What is your favorite "dumb" interview question? **http://is.gd/n3JX2j**
- What questions do you ask yourself about a story that you're considering pursuing? How do you decide whether it's a good idea? **http://is.gd/FUBZ47**
- What is the best way to prepare for a scientific meeting? **http://is.gd/IVaQzD**
- When embedded with a scientist I like, how can I maintain an appropriate journalistic distance? **http://is.gd/C7roBY**

Look for more Ask TON posts in the months to come!

The Open Notebook is a nonprofit organization that provides unique tools and resources to help science journalists at all experience levels hone their craft. This project was funded in part by a grant from NASW. ■

Jeanne Erdmann is a freelance medical science journalist based near St. Louis, Mo. Siri Carpenter is a freelance science journalist located in Madison, Wis.

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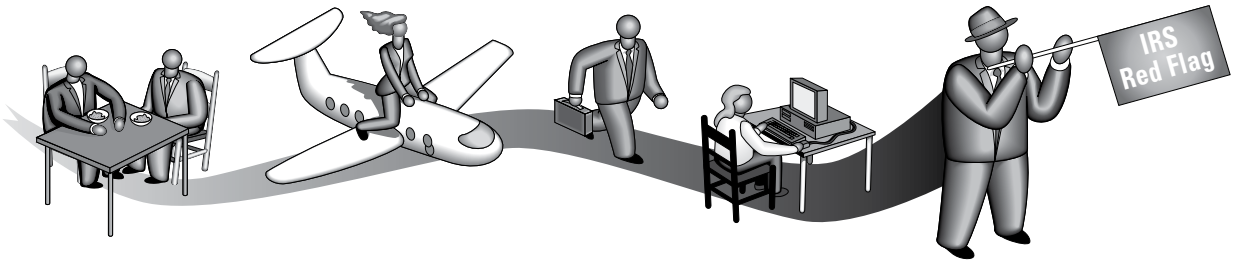
Amending Tax Returns

by Julian Block



An accommodating Internal Revenue Service makes it relatively easy to correct mistakes on previous returns without the need to completely redo the returns or go through any complicated red tape.

Go to irs.gov for Form 1040X (Amended U.S. Individual Income Tax Return), a two-page form, and accompanying instructions on how to explain the reasons for the changes and how to compute refunds or balances due. While you're at the IRS site, download any forms or schedules for the year you're amending. Also get Publication 556, *Examination of Returns, Appeal Rights, and Claims for Refund*, which has helpful information not contained in the instructions. Click on "Forms and Publications;" then click on "Previous Years."

Here's an example of how the rules work. John and Blanche Bickerson are sending a 1040X for 2009 that claims additional deductions for three categories: First, Blanche's Schedule C (Profit or Loss From Business) listings for travel outlays (she overlooked trips to writers' conferences) and home-office expenses. She calculates office expenses on Form 8829. Second, John's Form 3903 computation of job-related moving expenses. Third, their Schedule A itemized deductions for his job-search expenses. The Bickersons also now realize they forgot to submit Form 2441, used to claim the credit for payments to caregivers for their children. *[Information on deductions for home offices and job-search expenses are covered in winter 2009-10 and summer 2011 issues of* SW.*]*

…(the) decision to amend…will not, by itself, trigger an audit.

Along with the 1040X, the Bickersons submit corrected 2009 versions of: Forms 2441, 3903 and 8829; and Schedules A, C and SE (Self-Employment Tax). Why is it important for Blanche to revise her Schedule SE? Those additional expenses for travel and a home office don't just reduce the amount she shows as profit on Schedule C, thereby reducing the amount of her business income subject to income taxes. They also reduce the amount of her business income subject to self-employment taxes, as calculated on Schedule SE. Blanche and many other writers get nicked more for self-employment taxes than for income taxes.

According to IRS officials, John and Blanche's decision to amend 2009's return will not, by itself, trigger an audit. What generally happens is that IRS examiners will sift through revised business deductions for travel and a home office and itemized deductions no differently than if the Bickersons had claimed the same deductions on an original return. Still, the Bickersons should be cautious. They expose themselves to more scrutiny when revisions involve "red flag" categories like write-offs for travel and entertainment, home offices, and job hunting. Examiners can go beyond questioning additional items on 2009's return. They frequently look at returns for other years.

Perhaps John and Blanche are nervous about their original return for 2009 because, say, she claimed some iffy write-offs for business expenses on her Schedule C and, not to be outdone, he claimed some iffy moving expenses and job-search expenses. They may want to forego amending. The examiners could conceivably uncover errors that extinguish the hoped-for refund and saddle the couple with bills for back taxes, plus nondeductible interest and stiff penalties. Something else the Bickersons should remember is that approval of a refund claim for 2009 doesn't preclude a later audit for that year.

…more scrutiny when revisions involve "red flag" categories…

A change to their 1040 form for 2009 also might mean that the Bickersons have to amend their state return for 2009. If so, they need to file the appropriate state version of the 1040X. ■

Julian Block is an attorney and author based in Larchmont, N.Y. He has been cited as "a leading tax professional" (*New York Times*), "an accomplished writer on taxes" (*Wall Street Journal*) and "an authority on tax planning" (*Financial Planning Magazine*). For information about his books, visit julianblocktaxexpert.com.

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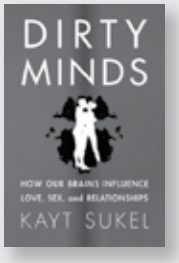
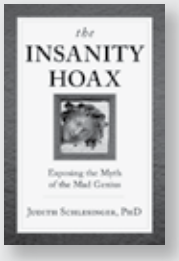
Dirty Minds: How our Brains Influence Love, Sex, and Relationships **by Kayt Sukel (NASW), published by Free Press**



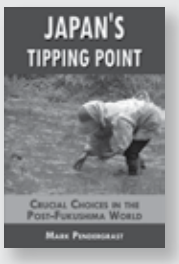
Philosophers, theologians, artists, and boy bands have waxed poetic about the nature of love for centuries. But what does the *brain* have to say about the way we carry our hearts? What is love and why does it torture, delight, and transform us so? In the wake of a divorce, science writer and single mother Kayt Sukel made herself a guinea pig in the labs of some unusual love experts to find out. In each chapter of this edgy romp through the romantic brain, Sukel looks at a different aspect of love above the belt. What in your brain makes you love someone—or simply lust after them? (And is there really a difference?) Why do good girls like bad boys? Is monogamy practical? How thin is that line between love and hate? Do mothers have a stronger bond with their children than their fathers do? How do our childhood experiences affect our emotional control? Who is most at risk for love addiction? *Publishers Weekly* writes: "Sukel leaves no stone unturned as she delves into the complex, cerebral world of relationships…[her] background in psychology allows her to discuss highly technical topics in a way that will be accessible to a broad audience, including armchair scientists and sociology buffs." ■ *Contact Sukel at ksukel@hotmail.com.*

The Insanity Hoax: Exposing the Myth of the Mad Genius **by Judith Schlesinger, Ph.D. (NASW), self-published**



Judith Schlesinger has spent her entire life marveling at creativity and surrounding herself with others who cherish it. Psychologist, psychotherapist, author, educator, musician, jazz critic, and producer, she believes that genius should be celebrated, not diagnosed. In her book *The Insanity Hoax* she sheds light on an old and destructive stereotype: the idea that the highly talented must suffer a lifetime of psychological torment in payment for their exceptional gifts. Despite exaggerated professional claims, widespread popular assumptions, and the dramatic parade of "mad geniuses" in the media, no one has ever proved that creative people are more prone to psychopathology than any other group. *The Insanity Hoax* tracks this fantasy's history from its birth in ancient Greece to today, showing how Plato's benevolent "divine madness" slowly darkened into a symptom of bipolar disorder—and why the myth is too deeply embedded in society to ever disappear. Schlesinger uses her three decades of research and creative and clinical experience to make a convincing case, while providing a witty and entertaining read. ■ *Contact Schlesinger at shrinktunes@optonline.net.*

Japan's Tipping Point: Crucial Choices in the Post-Fukushima World **by Mark Pendergrast (NASW), self-published under Nature's Face Publications imprint**



Japan's Tipping Point is a small book on a huge topic. A developed country that must import all of its fossil fuel, Japan can no longer rely on nuclear power, following the massive earthquake/tsunami/nuclear disaster of March 11, 2011. Author Mark Pendergrast arrived in Japan exactly two months after the Fukushima meltdown to investigate Japan's renewable energy, Eco-Model Cities, food policy, recycling, and energy conservation, expecting to find innovative, cutting-edge programs. He discovered that he had been naive. The Japanese boast of their eco-services for eco-products in eco-cities. Yet they rely primarily on imported fossil fuel and nuclear power, live in energy-wasteful homes, and import 60 percent of their food. That may be changing in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Maybe. As an island nation, Japan offers a microcosmic look at the problems facing the rest of the globe. And as Japan tips, so may the world. This book is his eye-opening account of Pendergrast's trip and his alarming conclusions. "Because this is a timely book, coming soon after the Fukushima meltdown, I decided to self-publish it as an electronic book first followed by a paperback edition," said Pendergrast. "This is an experiment of sorts for me as a science/environment writer." E-book available on Amazon, Kindle, and Smashwords. ■ *Contact Pendergrast at markp508@gmail.com*

Celebrating Science Writing for Children

by Shar Levine

Following the format of last year's successful "Celebrate Science, A Festival of BC Science Writers for Kids and Teens," the Beaty Biodiversity Museum again hosted this festival featuring some of Canada's finest authors of science books for children. Held on Sept. 24, 2011, panelists tackled two topics: "Is Science Everywhere?" and "Yikes. I'm No Einstein."

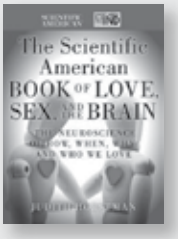
Speakers included Fiona Bayrock, author of children's quirky science books, including *Bubble Homes and Fish Farts*, about how animals use bubbles; Barry Shell, author of *Great Canadian Scientists*, that successfully blends science and biography to engage readers; and Jim Wiese, whose titles include *Sports Science: 40 Goal-Scoring, High-Flying, Medal-Winning Experiments for Kids*.

And how can you not love an event that included the Science of Wine and Cheese? Guests were challenged to identify specific smells that wines may contain. Hint: If you can't recognize the fragrance, "apricot" is always a good guess. Select British Columbia wines were paired with a variety of cheeses. It so happens that blue cheese is a perfect match with ice wine. Who knew?

Proceeds from ticket sales as well as generous sponsorships from TD, Scholastic Canada, Simon and Schuster, Orca, the I.K. Barber Learning Centre, and others helped support the Canadian Children's Book Centre, a not-for-profit organization founded in 1976, dedicated to encouraging, promoting and supporting the reading, writing, illustrating, and publishing of Canadian books for young readers. ■

NASW member Shar Levine is co-author of over 70 hands-on science books.

The Scientific American Book of Love, Sex, and the Brain: The Neuroscience of How, When, Why, and Who We Love **by Judith Horstman (NASW), published by Jossey-Bass/John Wiley & Sons**



Who do we love? Who loves us? And why? Is love really a mystery, or can neuroscience offer some answers to these age-old questions? This is Horstman, a Sacramento, Calif. freelance's third book about the brain. Horstman takes us on a tour of our most important sex and love organ and the whole smorgasbord of our many kinds of love—from the bonding of parent and child to the passion of erotic love, the affectionate love of companionship, the role of animals in our lives, and the love of god. Drawing on the latest neuroscience, she explores why and how we are born to love. Among the findings: Parental love makes our brains larger; sex and orgasm make it healthier, social isolation makes it miserable—and although the craving for romantic love can be described as an addiction, friendship may actually be the most important loving relationship of your life. *The Scientific American Book of Love, Sex, and the Brain* offers a look at how the brain controls our loving relationships, most intimate moments, and our deep and basic need for connection. Horstman has been a Washington correspondent, a journalism professor, a Fulbright scholar, and has written and edited in diverse media including *USA Today*, Gannett News Service in Washington, and publications for Stanford, Harvard, and Johns Hopkins universities. ■ *Contact her at judithhorstman@comcast.net.*

Eye of the Wolf **by Marie Zhuikov (NASW), published by North Star Press**

Zhuikov is an award-winning writer and poet in Duluth, Minn. specializing in environmental and medical topics. In her eco-mystic romance novel *Eye of the Wolf*, she explores the population issues facing the wolves on Isle Royale National Park, a remote island in Lake Superior. Due to isolation and inbreeding, the wolves are dying out. The alpha wolves of the island's largest pack know what will save their pack—they must escape from the island, mix their blood with other wolves—and the only way to do this is by boat. Of course, wolves can't run boats, but people can. How can the wolves communicate this to the humans? The alphas know a way, and lure key humans into supernatural bondage as werewolves. But these aren't just any old werewolves. Zhuikov bases their actions on documented wolf behavior and biology. Will the wolves escape? Will they survive? Zhuikov found out about the plight of the real wolves in Isle Royale National Park while working there two summers during college in the mid-1980s. "Unfortunately, the wolves are currently in trouble on the island again," she said. "Their population is down to one pack with only one breeding female, so even though it took me awhile to write the book, the topic is very timely." ■ *Contact Zhuikov at mzhuikov@msn.com.*

NASW President
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President's Letter

SABINE RIGHETTI COVERS SCIENTIFIC MISCONDUCT FOR *CIÊNCIA DA FOLHA* NEWSPAPER IN SAO PAULO, BRAZIL. THAT'S A TOPIC THAT DOESN'T ALWAYS GET READERS LEAPING OUT OF THEIR BREAKFAST CHAIRS. SO SABINE USES NOVEL TECHNIQUES TO GET PEOPLE INTRIGUED, INCLUDING A CARTOON WITH A SPIDER.

In Guatemala, Lucy Calderón worked with a French anthropologist to publish the adventures of Ixt'zunun, a Maya girl, in *Prensa Libre*, the country's largest paper. Through Ixt'zunun, children learned the ecology and history of the Mayans. In Chile, longtime journalist Nicolás Luco describes how coverage of the February 2010 earthquake was a mix of crowdsourcing and all-out efforts from newsrooms, with science journalists key to countering hype and misinformation.

Those are just three of the dozens of Latin American science journalists I met in late November at a meeting of the Inter-American National Academies of Science, in Buenos Aires. The goal was to talk about how science is covered in the Western Hemisphere and how we could do it better. Several NASW members attended, including Deborah Blum from the University of Wisconsin, Maria-José Viñas from NASA, and Antonio Regalado from *Technology Review*.

It quickly became clear that while we share many common experiences, each country faces unique challenges. While in the United States we're struggling with the collapse of print business models, in many Latin countries print remains strong. Bayardo Aguilar, who cover science for *La Brújula*, a youth newspaper in Managua, Nicaragua, said only about five percent of the country's population had access to the Internet. So traditional forms of mass media remain dominant. In other countries, including Costa Rica and Argentina, journalists are working in ways very similar to what we're up to in the United States: blogging, Tweeting, using video, audio, and graphics in new ways.

I had gone to the meeting looking for ways that NASW members could connect with Latin American science journalists. At our annual meeting in Flagstaff in October, several dozen NASW members had met to talk informally about where our organization would go next with our international outreach efforts now that co-sponsorship of the World Conference of Science Journalists is behind us. We were joined by Valeria Román, a science and health journalist for *Clarín* in Buenos Aires, and Luisa Massarani, director of the Museum of Life in Rio de Janiero, and Latin American coordinator for SciDev.Net. They got us up to speed on professional development efforts underway in the region, including a regional science journalism training program.

The group brainstormed possible projects for collaboration, and decided that Spanish-language translations of chapters of NASW's *A Field Guide for Science Writers*, and training sessions at an environmental conference in 2012, would be good first efforts. Now we need to continue these conversations, figuring out what efforts would be most fruitful, and what NASW can contribute.

I know I could learn a lot from the innovative journalists I met in Buenos Aires. I also think that NASW members would benefit from having access to a network of journalists throughout the hemisphere when covering issues like agriculture, the environment, energy, and medicine. And in a larger sense, it feels good to be connected to our neighbors.

I was struck by the paucity of PIOs at the Buenos Aires meeting. I expect that lack reflects that many Latin research institutions don't have robust public affairs efforts. But it also may be that it didn't dawn on the academies that PIOs have a key role to play in communicating science news. This sounds like a rich topic for future conversation.

I'm looking forward to continuing to explore these nascent ties. Since NASW is a member-driven organization, your input is essential in charting our course. What's your bright idea for Latin American outreach and adventure? Email me at nshute@nasw.org and tell me what you think. ■

Ixt'zunun is the cartoon creation of Guatamala newspaper journalist Lucy Calderon. Through Ixt'zunun's adventures, readers have learned of the ecology and history of the Mayan civilization.

CARTOON COURTESY OF LUCY CALDERON; DAVIS COURTESY OF MARK D. COHEN

Cybrarian
Russell Clemings
CYBRARIAN@NASW.ORG

Cyberbeat

We've got a number of projects planned for the sciencewriters website this year. here are some highlights of what we hope to accomplish, time and budget permitting.

- New front page text and image blocks to call attention to content on our inside pages and elsewhere, including posts on our members' personal blogs. Make sure your blog is listed in your user profile if you want to be included. To check, just log in and use the "edit profile" link.
- Full integration of our popular email discussion lists with the site (possibly before you read this). You'll be able to manage your list subscriptions from your user profile (see the "mailing list subscriptions" tab), and read archives of all our public lists with the same login.
- An online version of your membership card, probably in PDF format, which you can print out and use when you have to show your credentials for conference admission or other purposes.
- Slimmed down versions of both the ScienceWriters (**www.nasw.org**) site and the ScienceWriters annual meeting site for smartphone users.
- More original content for our site, by virtue of a guest editor program now under development.

It's an ambitious list, so while we get busy, please enjoy these excerpts from recent list discussions.

NASW-TALK

Becoming a journalist used to require little more than doing well in high school, then landing a gofer job in a local newsroom. That changed as a journalism degree became a key credential for entry into the business. But is that still true? Don Lyman posed that question in late November.

"I attended a lecture the other night by a feature writer for a major U.S. newspaper who also teaches as an adjunct instructor in a journalism program at a premier

Volunteers Are the Lifeblood of NASW

Dispatches from the Director

Tinsley Davis
Executive Director
DIRECTOR@NASW.ORG

Volunteer Ranks Growing

There are many reasons that I enjoy our annual ScienceWriters meeting: seeing members and friends in person, putting faces with names, and saying a heartfelt thank you to those of you who volunteer for NASW. Because not everyone attends the meeting, last year we instituted formal recognition of all of NASW's volunteers in the winter edition of **ScienceWriters.** ***The tradition continues in this issue on page 24.***

This year's listing includes the names of 289 individuals who have given of their time and talents. This is up from the 220 volunteers recognized last year. Among this year's volunteers are first-timers as well as others who raise their hand year after year and, in many cases, serve in more than one capacity. Contributions range from planning projects on a committee to organizing a workshop session to mentoring younger science writers to starting new committees.

Whether it's adding your talents to an existing committee, lending a hand to start or help member-driven projects, or even running for the board, there is room for you.

Make NASW a reflection of your interests in science writing.

Run a Workshop Session

Each year the NASW workshop committee develops a slate of sessions that reflects the broad and varied interests of our membership, which encompasses educators, staff writers, freelancers, public information officers, students, writers, editors, early career, late career, new members, and veterans writers. This requires a wealth of proposals containing your outstanding ideas. Workshops can be targeted at a specific group, e.g., a master class or newbies, or creatively crafted in such a way as to be applicable to the larger mission and themes of NASW. See page 11 for details on submitting a proposal. The deadline this year is March 1.

Help Choose the 2012 Workshop Sessions

Interested in being part of the committee that reads and selects proposals? Email workshops@nasw.org before Feb. 23 with a sentence or two about your interest. ■

university," Lyman posted. "I was surprised to hear him say that he didn't think journalism programs were particularly helpful in getting into journalism." Lyman asked what others on the list thought.

"When I was first looking into journalism in the early 80s, half the professionals I consulted said I should go to J-school, and the other half said I should avoid it like the plague. Really useful huh?" wrote former *Time* writer Michael Lemonick, now at Climate Central. "I've taught in a couple of grad programs…the students I've taught have generally been very happy that they've gone through them, and many have stepped into journalism jobs they couldn't possibly have gotten without the contacts they got from school (not until many years later, anyway)."

Freelancer Dawn Stover of White Salmon, Wash., said: "To get a decent-paying job these days, it helps to specialize in something (science writing, for example) and to acquire plenty of multimedia skills. Some graduate journalism programs are doing a good job at helping students with both of those things, and at providing valuable networking opportunities that can lead to job offers. People who are shopping around for a journalism program should look at what its alumni are doing."

Becoming a journalist used to require little more than doing well in high school, then landing a gofer job in a local newsroom.

An employer's perspective was offered by Eugenie Samuel Reich: "When choosing interns for *New Scientist* a few years ago, my bias was that someone with a science degree had demonstrated through choosing to do it and complete it (science is hard) the kind of deep-seated interest in science they would need for science writing," she wrote.

"Journalism courses should help focus people on generating and executing story ideas and getting clips. My sense is some courses do this while others focus too much on media criticism and analysis and not enough on doing it."

A'ndrea Elyse Messer, a Penn State public information officer, cast another vote in favor of science training.

"Too little understanding of basic science makes reading scientific papers painfully slow and difficult. Lack of understanding of what's old, also makes it hard to determine what the story is. Over and over I've had newbee science writers who couldn't read the papers or more commonly, thought something in a paper was just absolutely fascinating, when it was old stuff, but new to them."

Two journalism educators also weighed in. First was Boston University's Ellen Ruppel Shell, who wrote, "Technically, our field is uncredentialed…no license or diploma or special training is absolutely required. Many of us got into this business with no formal journalism training. But that was then. I think most of us agree that in journalism—as in most fields today—the traditional career ladder has all but collapsed, and the threshold to entry has grown much steeper."

And Dan Fagin of New York University said, "If you have strong science undergraduate training at a respected institution, the lack of an advanced degree in science is not going to hold you back at all but a very small number of journalism outlets (mostly peer-reviewed journals). If you have great clips and multiple internships as an undergraduate (not so easy these days, but possible), you may not need a science journalism master's degree. One thing's for sure: that go-work-for-a-small-paper-and-work-your-way-up advice may have applied 15 years ago but is completely bogus today."

For more, search the NASW-Talk archives for the thread "Just get out there and do it."

NASW-FREELANCE

Elverson, Pa., freelancer Lisa Bain sought advice on two subjects in early September: book collaboration agreements and the merits of joining the American Society of Journalists and Authors. She got answers on both.

"I looked at the ASJA collaboration agreements some years ago when I was doing one and found them helpful," Tucson, Ariz., freelancer Tabitha M. Powledge wrote. "I was already a member, so it didn't involve additional expense for me."

Orleans, Mass., freelancer Barbara Ravage provided some details on ASJA's eligibility standards: "Becoming a member isn't just a matter of signing up…As I recall, you need to have published at least one book or have one under contract, or have x number of bylined articles in national mags, and then there's an approval process, which can take a while."

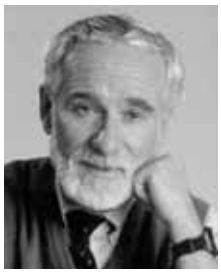
"Editorial Freelancers (Association) is quite a bit less expensive and easy to join… I haven't been a member for a number of years, but when I was, questions about contracts and collaboration agreements were common and the members extremely helpful."

"I'm also a member of Authors Guild, but have never found it in the least bit helpful, though I suppose it looks good on my resume and website."

From Miami Beach, Fla., writer Charlotte Libov: "The sessions at the (ASJA) national conference are usually good, and I went to one that involved grant writing that was an eye-opener to me. On the panel was an ASJA member who had written a bestseller with seed money that started from a grant."

Auburndale, Mass., freelancer Jeff Hecht provided another view of the Authors Guild, saying he joined "because I saw their activity in writers' issues. The Guild has been leading the charge on many copyright issues, and providing services such as BackInPrint.com."

For more, search the NASW-Freelance archives for the thread "book collaboration agreement." ■



James Cornell
President
International Science
Writers Association
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News from Afar

The European Union may not be so hot

ON FISCAL POLICIES, BUT IT SURE KNOWS HOW TO PARTY.

On Jan. 1, Dublin became the EU's official "City of Science," touching off a year-long celebration of all things scientific. Museums, colleges, and learning centers across the Emerald Isle will mount a host of public events, both scholarly and popular, designed to showcase Irish accomplishments in science and technology, past, present, and future.

The highlight of this 12-month affair or, at least, as *The Irish Times* put it, "the spike in its activity," will be the 5th biennial Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF 2012), the multi-disciplinary, AAAS-style, science meeting that has become arguably Europe's largest.

Depending on your point of view, the selection of Dublin as the 2012 ESOF venue is either most appropriate or a bit inopportune. Certainly, Irish R&D, particularly in the computer science and biology technology sectors, was among the many, sometimes mysterious, forces that helped transform Ireland in less than two decades from an agrarian state into one of the world's wealthiest nations.

While its rise may have been inexplicable, the cause of Ireland's fall is very clear. The high-tech, high-finance, high-flying economy helped create a real estate boom that makes that of the U.S. look like Monopoly-Lite. Much of contemporary Dublin, including the area around the new Convention Center where ESOF will meet, now resembles downtown Doha. Poor Leopold Bloom would have a hard time finding his way home.

The bubble started deflating in 2007 and, exacerbated by the worldwide recession, completely collapsed a year later, or, in other words, just about the same time Dublin was making its pitch to host ESOF.

That meeting goes on, of course, and its sponsors—and boosters, including national media—are most optimistic that it will be one of the largest and best editions to date. Perhaps with good reason. The call for paper and panel proposals produced an unprecedented number of responses, so the conference program should be as jam-packed and as eclectic as ever.

The quality of that program can be inconsistent, however. And, like its AAAS model, ESOF sessions are somewhat short on hard news—and even heavier on policy issues. No matter, ESOF still can provide American writers with a good overview of current European research interests and trends.

More important, the impressive line-up of science superstars, such as Jean-Jacques Dordain, head of the European Space Agency; Rolf-Dieter Heur, director of the LHC; and Kan Steffansson, who created the Icelandic gene bank, offers, for U.S. reporters, at least, a rare opportunity to hear European viewpoints on international scientific endeavors.

On Jan. 1, Dublin became the EU's official "City of Science"…

ESOF is also unusual in that its panels on issues in science journalism are suggested and mounted by journalists themselves. The European Union of Science Journalism Associations (EUSJA) has played a very active role in this and, indeed, a rolling discussion of journalistic ethics introduced at ESOF meetings has been continued and expanded in off-years at the world conferences of science journalists.

Journalist attendance has also been encouraged through travel grants, with ESOF providing support especially for reporters from Eastern Europe and smaller EU countries. In addition, Germany's Bosch Foundation provides up to 12 fellowships at each meeting for writers from North America. The closing date for applications is February 10, but some extension may be possible (**www.bosch-stiftung.de/esof-fellowships**).

The Dublin meeting also promises professional—and vastly improved—media facilities, if only because the Irish do that sort of thing so well. For general information on the meeting, go to **www.dublinscience2012.ie**. For media queries, email Breda O'Brien at breda.obrien@chiefscientificadviser.ie.

Given the long-term and seemingly intractable nature of Europe's debt crisis, the future of ESOF, not to mention the EU itself, might seem in doubt. Fortunately, ESOF is a grass-roots organization, largely supported by foundations and non-governmental entities—and about to launch a fund-raising campaign aimed at private donors—so it may weather the economic storm. In fact, Copenhagen has already agreed to host the next meeting in 2014. ■

■ ■ ■

Send items of interest—international programs, conferences, events, etc.—to cornelljc@earthlink.net.

Upcoming Meetings

March 26-29, 2012 • ***The Planet Under Pressure Conference,*** London, UK.
www.planetunderpressure2012.net

April 18-20, 2012 • ***Public Communication of Science & Technology (PCST) Biennial Conference,*** Florence, Italy.
www.pcst2012.org

July 1-6, 2012 • ***62nd Meeting of Nobel Laureates (Dedicated to Physics),*** Lindau, Germany.
info@lindau-nobel.org

July 12-16, 2012 • ***5th Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF2012),*** Dublin, Ireland. www.esof2012.org

September 3-6, 2012 • ***Kavli Prize Science Forum,*** Oslo, Norway. www.kavliprize.no/nyheter/vis.html?tid=49460

September 4-9, 2012 • ***British Science Festival,*** Aberdeen, Scotland. www.britishscienceassociation.org

Volunteers Make a Difference

In fiscal year 2010-2011, the following individuals generously volunteered their time and talent to NASW governance, standing committees,* ScienceWriters *magazine, annual workshop, the Doha conference, student mentoring, and special projects in support of NASW's mission. Thank you!

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Diane McGurgan Service Award Winner

Jeanne Erdmann

Volunteer extraordinaire Jeanne Erdmann is the recipient of this year's Diane McGurgan Service Award. Along with the honor is a check from NASW for $500. This is the third year running that Erdmann has singlehandedly organized one of the most popular sessions at the NASW annual workshop meeting: The Power Pitch/Pitch Slam. She is also the co-chair of the freelance committee, was a workshop organizer committee member, and a contributor to ScienceWriters *magazine. As busy as she is, Erdmann is always asking what more she can do to help NASW.*

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Alan Boyle
Anne Bolen
Siri Carpenter
David Dobbs
Andy Dworkin
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Dan Ferber
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Fraknoi Named Honorary Member of Royal Astronomical Society of Canada


Andrew Fraknoi

NASW member Andrew Fraknoi has been elected an honorary member of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC). Honorary member designation is bestowed on only 15 living people at a time. An astronomy professor at Foothill College in Los Altos Hills, Calif., Fraknoi appears to be the first community college educator selected for this honor in the 143-year history of the RASC.

Educated at Harvard University and UC Berkeley, Fraknoi is an award-winning science educator known for his skill in interpreting astronomical discoveries and ideas in everyday language. He was named California Professor of the Year in 2007 by the Carnegie Endowment for Higher Education and he has also received the Gemant Prize from the American Institute of Physics for a lifetime of contributions to physics popularization and connecting physics to the humanities. Before coming to Foothill College, he served as the executive director of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific. The International Astronomical Union has named Asteroid 4859 "Asteroid Fraknoi" to honor his contributions to the public understanding of astronomy.

Radio listeners know Fraknoi as a frequent guest on local and national news and talk programs. In Northern California, he appeared for over 25 years on the *Jim Eason Show* and *The Pete Wilson Show*, and now is a regular on *The Gil Gross Program* on KGO. He is the

FRAKNOI continued on page 33

Adams Rogers Wins AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Award


Adams Rogers

NASW member Adam Rogers, senior editor at *Wired*, will take home the 2012 American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Kavli Science Journalism Award in the magazine category. He will receive $3,000 and a plaque at the AAAS annual meeting, which will be held in Vancouver, Canada, in February.

Rogers' winning article, "The Angels' Share," (June 2011) explores why a town around a Canadian whiskey warehouse is coated with a strange black fungus. Rogers explored some of the mysteries of microbiology in an unusual locale and took readers on an engaging, lively journey of discovery.

"The story skillfully slips the spinach of science into the reader as smoothly as a shot of fine whiskey," said science reporter Dan Vergano of *USA Today*.

Laura Helmuth, a senior editor for *Smithsonian* magazine, called it "a charming story—unexpected, vivid, dramatic." She added that Rogers "deftly explains the relevant history, chemistry, evolutionary biology, taxonomy, and mycology."

Rogers said he became fascinated with what makes a fungus grow outside distillery warehouses. "And then it turned out that a scientist-detective was looking into the mystery, and he was in love with it," Rogers said. "I think that kind of passion always makes for a good story."

Other award-winning stories honored by the AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Awards covered topics that included the use of genetic analysis to help save a boy imperiled by a devastating disease, the potential impact of climate change in two localities, and the secret lives of scientists and engineers.

The awards, administered by AAAS since their inception in 1945, go to professional journalists for distinguished reporting for a general audience. ■

(Source: AAAS news release)

In Memoriam

Bob O'Rourke
Former Caltech Spokesman

Bob O'Rourke, 72, the former vice president for public relations at the California Institute of Technology, died Dec. 27.

O'Rourke led Caltech's office of public relations from 1986 to 2009, first as director, then as Caltech's first assistant vice president for PR, and finally as vice president for PR. Since 2009, he had been senior advisor for external affairs to Caltech president Jean-Lou Chameau.

"Bob came to visit with me in Atlanta as soon as I was announced as the new president," said Chameau. "I quickly realized that his love and excitement for Caltech was infectious. His energy and Irish charm played a big role in spreading the word about Caltech over the past 20 years. Everybody I met in Pasadena and L.A. knew Bob and associated Caltech with him. He was the Caltech Ambassador Extraordinaire."

O'Rourke's charismatic personality and passion gave the community a human connection to Caltech. He used his media contacts to try to educate the public and raise funds for research with appearances on NBC's "Today" show, NPR's "All Things Considered," and with other news organizations. O'Rourke also involved Caltech in community activities and brought the public to campus in myriad ways. He established Caltech's first visitor's center and developed the Caltech edition of public radio KPCC's popular "AirTalk" show. He was also the force behind "The Loh Down on Science," a syndicated science radio minute heard in nearly 200 countries; "Curious," an award-winning four-part public television program that included Caltech research; the Institute's annual Biology Forum; and the DuBridge Distinguished Lecture Series, which brought to campus such notables as Walter Cronkite, Warren Buffett, and Nobel Peace Prize recipient John Hume.

Charles Elachi, director of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, which Caltech manages for NASA, said O'Rourke was "a special friend and a superb advisor on how to reach out to the public and the media to tell them what Caltech and JPL are all about, and why what we do is important for society at large." ■

(Source: Caltech news release)

FRAKNOI BY SETH SHOSTAK; GORDER COURTESY OF JO McCULTY

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Our Gang

Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU), in San Diego, selected **Brooke Borel** to receive its 2011 Kyoto Prize Journalism Fellowship. Borel traveled to Japan in November, where she spent one-on-one time with each of the three latest Kyoto Prize laureates and attended the 27th annual Kyoto Prize ceremony. PLNU offers the fellowship "to provide talented journalists with an educational opportunity to further their understanding of the sciences and arts, participate in a valuable cultural exchange, and grow as reporters." Congratulate her at brookeborel@gmail.com.

After 12 years at *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, **Jeffrey Brainard** has joined the Maryland Sea Grant College's communications office. In his new job as assistant director for communications, he will write about research, outreach, and public policy aimed at restoring Chesapeake Bay. At *The Chronicle*, Jeff covered science policy, and more recently analyzed data and statistics for investigative stories. Wish him well at jhbrainard@gmail.com.

David Bricker is the new public relations manager for the Methodist DeBakey Heart & Vascular Center and The Methodist Hospital Research Institute, in Houston. Methodist, based at the Texas Medical Center, has only existed as an academic hospital for a few years, and is investing heavily in both scientific output and scientific communications, Bricker reports. He was previously the main science writer at Indiana University Bloomington. Write to him at dmbricker@tmhs.org.

In June, **Richard Tresch Fienberg** became the first American journalist to fly on NASA's Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy (SOFIA)—a modified Boeing 747 carrying a 2.5-meter telescope—when he accompanied planetary scientists who were using starlight to study Pluto's atmosphere. He offers the following excerpt from the adventure, set to appear in the March 2012 *Astronomy* magazine: "Facing the rear of the cabin, you can see the telescope's huge counterweight bobbing gently—except that you soon realize that the telescope is holding rock steady, and it's the plane and its occupants that are doing the bobbing!" Write to him at rick.fienberg@aas.org to find out how you, too, can fly aboard SOFIA.

In October, **Jennifer Huergo** took over as director of media relations in the National Institute of Standards and Technology public affairs office. "I'm very excited to be working with the media again—I was handling NIST's tour program for the previous 18 months—and helping get the word

out about this very cool agency," she said. Learn more at Jennifer.Huergo@nist.gov.

In November, medical writer **Lynne Lederman** received a fellowship to attend the Addiction Studies Program for Journalists in, Washington D.C., sponsored by Wake Forest University School of Medicine and National Families in Action. Lederman writes primarily about oncology, and said that the conference has informed her writing about the use of potentially addictive drugs to treat severe pain in patients with cancer. Meanwhile, her mystery story, "Tell Me About Your Day," was published in the anthology *Murder New York Style: Fresh Slices* by L&L Dreamspell. "It's a total coincidence that my mystery story features a recovering alcoholic and addict," she explained. "My mystery novel-in-progress features a scientist turned amateur detective." Find out whodunit at LynneLederman@aol.com.

Alaina G. Levine was named a fellow of the Institutes for Journalism and Natural Resources. A travel expedition took her and 13 other journalist fellows into New Mexico and Colorado to learn about the green energy initiatives of the native peoples of the region. "The experience was amazing, including having our bus get stuck in the snow twice on mountain passes and at midnight, and having to push the bus to clear it from its snowy trap," she remembered. Congratulate her at alaina@alainalevine.com.

Scientific American has added two new names to its masthead: **Maryn McKenna** and **Deborah Franklin** are now contributing editors. They'll share the monthly "Science of Health" column, edited by Ferris Jabr and fellow NASW member **Christine Gorman**. "Our idea is to take a look at things where there is either an emerging consensus or an enduring controversy," McKenna says. "The first entry, online and in the December issue, covers both those bases: "It's about fecal transplants (an unusual treatment for serious intestinal ailments)." Get the scoop at marynmckenna@gmail.com, deborah_franklin@nasw.org, and cgorman@sciam.com.

Rajendrani (Raj) Mukhopadhyay joined the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, in September. She now wears two very snazzy hats—one as senior science writer for the society membership magazine, *ASBMB Today*, where she gets to cover the latest and greatest in the diverse fields of molecular biology and biochemistry; and the other as technical editor for the society's flagship journal, *Journal of Biological Chemistry*, where she helps authors with their titles, writes commentaries on top-ranked papers, and introduces classics from the journal's treasure trove of articles dating from 1905. Write to her at raj.mukhop@gmail.com.

Paul Raeburn is this year's recipient of the American Chemical Society's James T. Grady-James H. Stack Award for Interpreting Chemistry to the Public. The society cited Raeburn's extensive work at the *Associated Press*, from 1981 to 1996, where thousands of his articles were distributed to more than 1,700 newspapers and 6,000 television and radio stations worldwide. Send congratulations to Raeburn at paulraeburn@nasw.org.

"Stroke is a Family Affair," **Barbara Ravage**'s article about stroke survivor support groups published in *PrimeTime Cape Cod*, won a silver medal from the 20th annual National Mature Media Awards. This was one of the 36 Health and Well-being columns that she wrote for this monthly magazine for seniors before giving up the gig earlier this year. Now, she writes white papers and internal reviews for both commercial and nonprofit ventures related to healthcare delivery, policy, and advocacy. Write to her at barbararavage@barbararavage.com.

Freelancer **Kathleen M. Raven** joined 14 other American journalists for an intensive one-week fellowship in Berlin, Germany, in December. The fellowship, called the Berlin Capital Program, is sponsored by the German-American Fulbright Commission. Raven's goal, in part, was to better understand how Europe—Germany in particular—is handling the euro debt situation. Find out what she learned at kathraven@gmail.com.

At age 73, freelancer and book author **Ed Ricciuti** has become co-president of Green Hill Martial Arts, Inc., in Killingworth, Conn. He is a second-degree black belt and instructor in combat hapkido, and studies Jun Fan gung fu/jeet kune do and black dragon kung fu. Sign up for lessons at ed.ricciuti@sbcglobal.net.

After coordinating outreach for the American Geophysical Union for three years, **Maria-José Viñas** is now part-time science writer on NASA's Earth News team and part-time outreach coordinator for the Cryospheric Sciences Lab at NASA Goddard. Ask her about covering "cool" research at mj.vinas@nasa.gov.

Barry Whyte has joined the European Molecular Biology Organization, in Heidelberg, Germany, as head of public relations and communications. Previously, he led external communications for the Virginia Bioinformatics Institute at Virginia Tech. He said that he misses the Blue Ridge Mountains, but the fall colors in Heidelberg, are also spectacular. Follow his exploits on Twitter (@EMBOcomm) or write to him directly at barry.whyte@embo.org. ■

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Regional Groups

CHICAGO

The Chicago Science Writers celebrated the first day of autumn by visiting the green roof at the Chicago City Hall and having a pizza lunch afterwards. It was a special treat, as the roof is not open to the public. Normally viewed at a distance from the upper floors of nearby skyscrapers, the garden afforded a wonderful midday break for the science writers, walking about the space while honey bees buzzed playfully among the blooms of Echinacea and other late-blooming flowers. The plants are maintained in raised beds on top of the 11-story office building in the heart of the city's downtown.

First planted in 2000, the city hall rooftop garden was conceived as a demonstration project—part of the City's Urban Heat Island Initiative—to test the benefits of green roofs and how they affect temperature and air quality. The garden consists of 20,000 plants of more than 150 species, including shrubs, vines, and two trees. The plants were selected for their ability to

CLANCY COURTESY OF MARC LIEBERMAN

thrive in the conditions on the roof, which is exposed to the sun and can be windy and arid. Most are prairie plants native to the Chicago region. It has encouraged greater environmental awareness among Chicagoans.

Like all green roofs, the city hall rooftop garden improves air quality, conserves energy, reduces storm-water runoff, and helps lessen the urban heat island effect. The garden absorbs less heat from the sun than a tar roof, keeping city hall cooler in summer and requiring less energy for air-conditioning. The garden also absorbs and uses rain water. It can retain 75 percent of a one-inch rainfall before there is storm-water runoff into the sewers.

NEW ENGLAND

The flap over neutrinos accused of breaking Einstein's speed limit was still fresh when New England Science Writers Association (NESW) members gathered at Harvard to hear a physics professor's take on it. The Oct. 20 briefing was organized by NESW steering committee member Eugenie Reich, who has been writing news stories for *Nature* about the perplexing results announced in September by Swiss and Italian physicists. Their detection of neutrinos apparently traveling ever-so-slightly faster than the velocity of light could, if confirmed, shake the certainty of Einstein's special theory of relativity.

"The findings are very likely wrong," said Gary J. Feldman, Ph.D., professor of physics. Among other things, he argued that the recent European results don't agree with measurements of neutrino velocity from a 1987 supernova event. Feldman may help resolve the questions: His Harvard group works on MINOS, a two-detector experiment studying oscillations of neutrinos traveling between Fermilab in Illinois and a deep mine in northern Minnesota. Feldman said MINOS is one of very few experiments equipped to confirm the results.

Physicists have replicated the finding that the subatomic particles called neutrinos seem to travel faster than light. It is a remarkable confirmation of a stunning result, yet most in the field remain skeptical that the ultimate cosmic speed limit has truly been broken. A write-up of the briefing by NESW Noelle Swann appeared in The New England Post, an online news site.

NEW YORK

On Sept. 26, SWINY kicked off its fall season with a debate on the pros and cons of science embargoes titled "BREAKING BAD: The Uses—and Misuses—of Embargoes in Science and Medical Publishing." The evening was organized by SWINY co-chair Joe Bonner and held at Rockefeller University. Panel members were Ivan Oransky, executive editor of *Reuters Health*, who edits the Embargo Watch blog; Steve Sternberg, deputy editor of health rankings for *U.S. News & World Report*; Elaine Larson, RN, Ph.D., FAAN, CIC, editor of the *American Journal of Infection Control*; and Neda Afsarmanesh, a press officer for the journal *Nature*.

On Oct. 4, SWINY member Edmund Blair Bolles discussed his strategy for getting published and explained how his blog on his research into the origins of speech ultimately helped him land a contract for his recently published book *A Natural History of the Origin of Speech*.

SWINY co-chair David Levine organized a SWINY social that was held on Nov. 9 in Manhattan.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Does science fiction feed on the edges of science, or does it actually lead the way? NCSWAians learned some unexpected history this fall from UC Davis scholar Colin Milburn who has detailed science fiction's unmistakable imprint on the origins of nanotechnology. Milburn also showed video games directly inspired by scientific discoveries, and demonstrated how research, in turn, draws on gaming formats and plots. Great stuff, the group agreed.

In November, a nine-member ad hoc NCSWA science quiz team displayed impressive science esoterica chops in a Science Trivia Night contest, held in a Mission district café, as part of the Bay Area Science Festival. Highlights and much more 2011 NCSWA history on the Facebook page: **http://www.facebook.com/NorthernCaliforniaScienceWriters**.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

DCSWA celebrated the arrival of fall, in September, with a trip to the Doukenie Winery in Hillsboro, Va. Aided by geological maps and hydrological studies, DCSWA's own Leanne Wiberg explained how the vineyard's winemakers decided where to plant grapes, managed their crops, and kept pests away. In October, DCSWAns enjoyed the colors of fall at Huntley Meadows Park in Alexandria, Va. An oasis in the middle of suburbia, Huntley Meadows is home to more than 1,400 acres of forests, meadows, and wetlands. Members learned about the history of the park and how the wetlands are maintained in such a developed part of the Washington Metro Area. While strolling along the park's boardwalk through the marsh, DCSWAns spotted a variety of birds, including a bald eagle, as well as beavers and their lodges. Later in the month, DCSWA was invited to a special behind-the-scenes event at the National Zoo, where members visited labs and the vet clinic, and met with the scientists and technicians who keep the animals happy and healthy.

Also this fall, DCSWA continued its popular D.C. Science Café series, held each month at Busboys and Poets. In September, DCSWA pondered the possibility of life beyond earth when *Washington Post*'s Marc Kaufman, author of *First Contact*, discussed why life likely does exist in the far reaches of the solar system and what that life might look like. NASA's Planetary Protection Officer, Cassie Conley, explained NASA's efforts to prevent contaminating other moons and planets with life from earth. In October, DCSWA invited two artists—painter Nana Bagdavadze and sculptor Rebecca Kamen—to talk about how scientific ideas and imagery play a role in their art. ■

ScienceWriters Welcomes Letters to the Editor

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

Mail to:
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email to:
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(L to R) Luisa Massarani, Steve Miller, Alan Brown, Valerie Román, Cathy Dold, and Neal Singer

(Back row, L to R) Nancy Shute, Bob Finn, Charles Homans, Katy Butler, Brian Donohue, and Dan Ferber. (Front row) Maryn McKenna, Christine Peterson, and Barbara Morans.

(L to R) Diane McGurgan, Charlie Petit, Buddy McGurgan, Alan Boyle, Rosalind Reid, and Phil Hilts

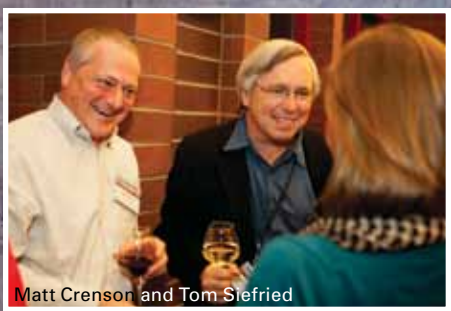
(Back row, L to R) Lizzie Buchen, Tim DeChant, Steve Dobbs, Steve Silberman, and Tinsley Davis. (Front row) David Kroodsma, Boonsri Dickinson, Andrea von Bubnoff, and Danielle Venton.

A look back at ScienceWriters2011 Flagstaff • Arizona

Merry Bruns and Cristine Russell kick up their boot heels

Harvey Leifert

Steve Tally and Susan Gaidos



Matt Crenson and Tom Siefried

Allison Eckhardt, Steve Miller, Jeff Grabmeier, and Rick Borchelt

Melissa Lutz Blouin and Joe Kays

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(Back row, L to R) Rick Borchelt, Pam Frost Gorder, Emily Caldwell, and Jeff Grabmeier. (Front row) Earle Holland, Susan Holland, and A'ndrea Elyse Messer.

(Back row, L to R) Ben Patrusky, Joanne Rodgers, Deb Blum, and Dave Perlman. (Front row) Larkin Warren, Ron Winslow, and Richard Harris.

Merry Bruns, Nancy Shute, and Cathy Dold

Workshop Recaps featured on pages 4-10

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**student member*

TRANSPARENCY

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gotten better," says Joe Davis, the director of the SEJ's Freedom of Information Project. "And I think one of the most illustrative cases in point is the one about coal ash." In December 2008, a coal-ash containment pond at a power plant in Tennessee burst, spreading toxic waste across hundreds of acres and dozens of homes. The spill was the last skirmish in the society's long battle over transparency and access with the Bush EPA, which took 11 days to release the results of its first tests of the sludge. An agency official under the new Obama administration promised to do better, but in June 2009, SEJ accused the EPA of "hiding" a list of high-hazard, coal-ash impoundments across the country, some of which posed potential threats to residential communities. At first, the agency echoed the post-September 11 Bush line about guarding the information for national security reasons. "Terrorists were less of a threat than a good rainstorm, which might sweep away any of those impoundments," Davis says. "But eventually they released the list, so we have that information and the communities [near the impoundments] know about them, and maybe safety measures will be put in place. That information would not have come out under the Bush administration. That's the difference. However, I will also say in my next breath that the Obama administration hasn't lived up to its promises. They raised our expectations so high and the distance we've come is disappointingly short."

One thing that helped raise those expectations was the memo that President Obama sent to John Holdren, then awaiting confirmation as director of the White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), in March 2009. It directed him to draft a plan to improve scientific integrity throughout the executive branch. A key provision was the development of a public communications plan. Obama gave Holdren 120 days to complete the assignment. Now, more than two years later, the plan is still not in place. In August 2010, more than a year after they were due, the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility—a nonprofit alliance of local, state, and federal natural resource

professionals—submitted a FOIA request to Holdren's office for a copy of the recommendations and related policy documents. After two months passed with nothing from OSTP, the group sued.

Finally, last December, Holdren released a memo providing guidance to departments and agencies about how to improve scientific integrity and openness. The document immediately drew criticism from transparency watchdogs for "legitimizing," as the SEJ put it, interview permissions and minders. A few days later, OSTP released the related policy documents—meeting notes, progress reports, congressional testimony—that the public employees group had requested. They were heavily redacted, but in the snippets that weren't SEJ's Joe Davis saw the fingerprints of a suspect he believes has played a key role in thwarting progress toward openness and access over multiple administrations: the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which has the power to review and approve programs, policies, and procedures throughout the executive branch.

The documents that OSTP released revealed that, in fact, Holdren and company had sent their transparency recommendations to OMB by June 2009, on schedule to meet Obama's original deadline, and that the effort foundered there. More than a year later, the two offices were still trying to settle on a final draft of the recommendations, which weren't released until December 2010, more than 17 months behind schedule. Last May, Holdren once again extended the deadline for departments and agencies to submit draft policies, which were due around the time this article went to press.

"OMB, an agency with very little in-house scientific expertise, has been monkeying with science for a very long time, and asserting authority over the science process in the federal government," Davis says. "It provides an ideal mechanism for interference."

There are other mechanisms. Even in departments and agencies with special expertise in the sciences, there is often an entrenched corps of civil servants that resists transparency and access—often as a result of turf battles and a sense that bosses, and their edicts, come and go—and survives from one administration in the other. New appointments often do nothing to help matters. Numerous reporters pointed out that the top press officers at departments and agencies often are recruited from a president's campaign staff, with disastrous results. "They want to run government agencies like they're political campaigns and they don't seem to understand that there ought to be a difference," says SEJ's Ken Ward, Jr. "All the information that EPA has about its inspections, its enforcement, its science—that belongs to the public."

Changing the culture of secrecy is a lot harder than redecorating the Oval Office. Some watchdogs believe that transparency and access have steadily diminished since the 1970s, as successive administrations clamped down more tightly, and with a greater sophistication, on the free flow of information to the public. Indeed, many veteran reporters I spoke to think that the very establishment of press policies and guidelines, not unlike those that Obama called for, are what led to problems in the first place. These edicts were supposed to open and streamline communication between government and the press, but by codifying practices such as the dreaded interview permissions and minders, they actually gave government a mechanism to block journalists when it was politically pragmatic to do so. In early August, for example, the EPA finally released its scientific integrity proposal, as per John Holdren's instruction. But it did exactly what transparency watchdogs feared: it encouraged scientists to interact with the press, but required that they inform their superiors about those interactions and instructed public affairs staff to "attend interviews," thereby formalizing the permissions and minders policy that journalists complain about.

Contrary to the notion that Obama would, as he promised, usher in a sea change in terms of transparency, there is a case to be made that, when it comes to controlling information via press policies, Obama is the savviest practitioner ever. Consider his adroit use of digital media as a defining example. His Open Government Directive made an unprecedented amount of federal scientific data available online. His administration touts that accomplishment as proof of transparency, but critics say that is disingenuous. In practice, the databases demonstrate how the Obama administration treats communication as a one-way street. Data, after all, rarely speak for themselves and reporters want, more than anything, to talk to the officials who collected and analyzed them. As Felice Freyer found out when she attempted to speak with the FDA about its investigation of unapproved intrauterine devices, however, the administration often prefers to publish statements online, or via social media, than make them directly available to journalists. It's a duplicitous game that allows Obama to claim that his administration is living up to its promises. Yet almost any science reporter in the country will tell you that nothing could be further from the truth, and that even if the Office of Science and Technology Policy produces a plan for scientific integrity and transparency, it could make matters worse, not better.

Reporters on the science beat may have to accept that the days of easy access are gone—and plenty of them already do. Groups like the Society of Environmental Journalists and the Association of Health Care Journalists are still pushing for an end to interview permissions and minders, as well they should. But even their most optimistic members merely cross their fingers, knowing that if they held their breath, they'd surely expire. ■

"Transparency Watch: A Closed Door," Columbia Journalism Review*, Sept/Oct 2011. This article was produced in partnership with ProPublica, whose director of computer-assisted reporting, Jennifer LaFleur, analyzed the survey data.*

PURSUITS

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mathematics and whether such a segregation promotes this "myth of certainty." Looking at this in the field of mathematics is particularly interesting since the field is viewed by many as the pinnacle of rational thought. The team observed graduate level lectures (the front) and compared those conversations with individual meetings between graduate students and their advisors (the back). We'll spare you the details of exactly how these conversations panned out, but the authors essentially conclude that exposure to the sausage-making process would not lead to any significant change in perception or understanding of how the end product is perceived.

This particular study only looks at the field of mathematics, but let's assume for a moment that the findings apply to the sciences as well. All else being equal, seeing the scientific sausage being made would not affect a reader's appreciation for or understanding of the outcome featured in the story. Many science writers strive to avoid sharing the particularly complicated process that results in a research outcome because we all know that the average attention span for such content is minimal. However, even if the audience maintains an understanding and appreciation of the outcome, have we nonetheless colored the public's perception in such a way that there is a loss of a fundamental appreciation for the scientific process? We all know that science is about more than creating a product. The years of work and effort of countless people that go into creating a single research outcome is lost on most people, but without a greater shared understanding in society of how science is conducted, sustained public support for research could wane. Finding the right balance is complicated, but this is certainly something of which we should all be mindful as we tell science's story. ■

CASW

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web-based programs and digital media.

In announcing the appointment, CASW paid tribute to journalist and author Paul Raeburn for his outstanding contributions as a longtime board member; for his dedicated labors, during the past seven years, as New Horizons program director and for the important role he played in assuring the continued success of the joint NASW/CASW ScienceWriters meeting.

"Paul's efforts clearly enabled and supported a years-long transition for CASW's hallmark program, efforts that have set the stage for the changes and expansion of CASW services envisioned by the board," said Russell. "We are also pleased that he has agreed to continue as a New Horizon program consultant during the transition." That consultancy is to run through May 1, 2012 when planning for ScienceWriters2012, scheduled for the Research Triangle in North Carolina, will be well under way. ■

(Source: CASW)

FRAKNOI

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"astronomer-in-residence" on the syndicated *Mark and Brian Show* out of Los Angeles. Nationally, he has been heard on *Science Friday* and *Weekend All Things Considered* on National Public Radio. His TV appearances include *The Today Show, CBS Morning News*, and *Larry King Live*.

A prolific author, Fraknoi has edited two collections of science articles and science fiction stories for Bantam Books, and is the lead author of *Voyages Through the Universe* (now in its 3rd edition), which has become one of the leading astronomy textbooks in the U.S. He authored a children's book for Disney called *Disney's Wonderful World of Space* and is a co-founder of *Astronomy Education Review*, an online journal/magazine about astronomy education. ■

(Source: Foothill College news release and website)

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SPEAKERS/WORKSHOP/FACILITY/MENTORING BY JOHN DE DIOS **GRAND CANYON** BY LYNNE FRIEDMANN

for photos on pages 30-31

SIX GROUPS AT BANQUET BY JOHN DE DIOS **BRUNS/RUSSELL** COURTESY OF MERRY BRUNS **LEIFERT** BY JOHN DE DIOS **TALLY/GAIDOS** BY MERRY BRUNS **CRENSON/SIEFRIED** BY JOHN DE DIOS **ECKHARDT/MILLER/GRABMEIER/BORCHELT** BY MERRY BRUNS **BLOUIN/KAYS** BY JOHN DE DIOS **BRUNS/SHUTE/DOLD** COURTESY OF MERRY BRUNS **CAUTION SIGN** BY MERRY BRUNS **GRAND CANYON** BY LYNNE FRIEDMANN ■

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Press Week photograph by Robert Cooke