

INSIDE: QUESTIONS IN IMMERSION JOURNALISM • 10 WITH MARGARET SULLIVAN • ENOUGH UNNAMED SOURCES?

Quill

MARCH/APRIL 2017

A MAGAZINE BY THE SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS

DRIVING NOWHERE WITH NEUTRALITY

Can't journalists be both storytellers and humans with perspectives,
and in so doing still arrive at a truthful destination?

ANNUAL ETHICS ISSUE

THE SIGMA DELTA CHI FOUNDATION PRESENTS THE EUGENE S. PULLIAM FIRST AMENDMENT AWARD

The Sigma Delta Chi Foundation announces the Eugene S. Pulliam First Amendment Award to honor a person or persons who have fought to protect and preserve one or more of the rights guaranteed by the First Amendment. Mr. Pulliam, who passed away in January 1999, was well-known for consistently using his own considerable influence and that of his newspaper to support activities that educated the public about First Amendment rights and values. The Sigma Delta Chi Foundation has established this annual award to honor those committed to the same goals as a tribute to the professional contributions that Eugene S. Pulliam made to journalism and to the freedoms outlined in the First Amendment.

ABOUT THE AWARD

At the Excellence in Journalism 2017 Conference, the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation will honor an individual, group of individuals or organization with a \$10,000 cash award and an engraved statue. The honoree(s) also will receive transportation to the conference in New Orleans, La.

ELIGIBILITY

Nominations are open to any person, persons or organization in the U.S. or its territories who have worked to protect the basic rights provided by the First Amendment. Honorees do not have to be journalists. In fact, the Foundation encourages recognition of those outside the journalism profession for their First Amendment efforts and initiatives, such as, but not limited to, public officials, members of the legal profession, scholars, educators, librarians, students and ordinary citizens.

NOMINATIONS

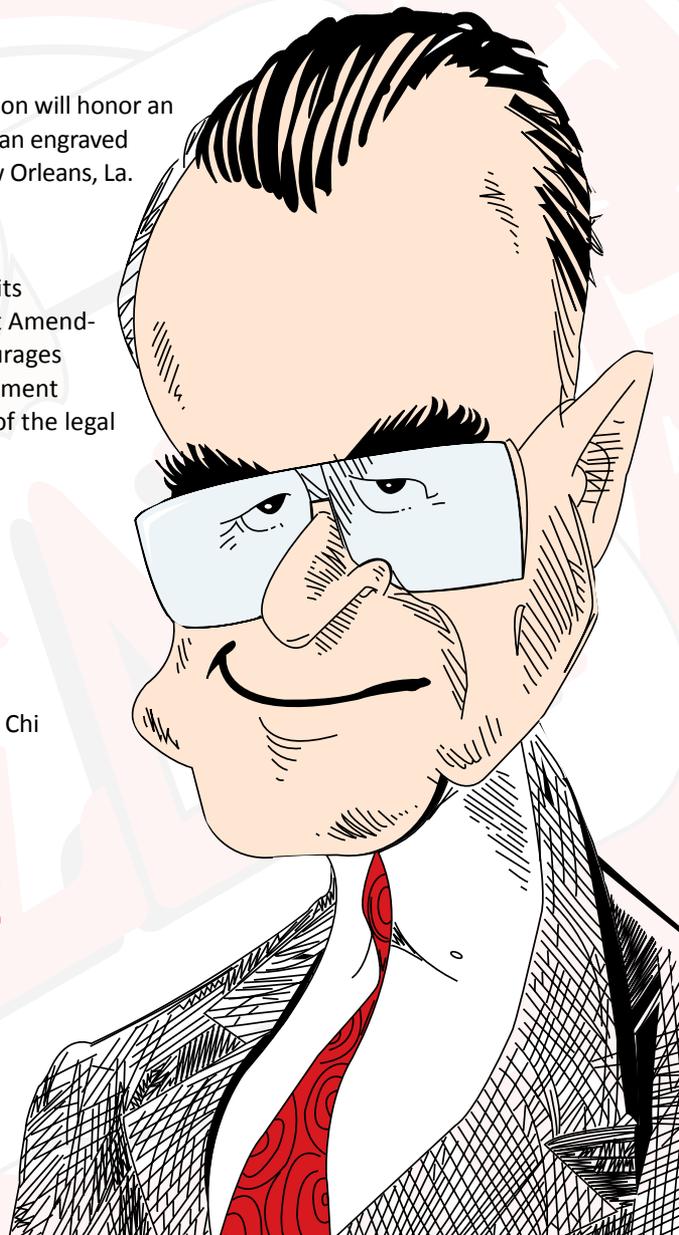
Visit spj.org/a-pulliam.asp for nomination information.

QUESTIONS

Call: 317/920-4788 | Email: awards@spj.org

The Eugene S. Pulliam First Amendment Award is a project of the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation. For more information on the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation go to spj.org/sdx.asp.

THE NOMINATION DEADLINE IS
JUNE 22, 2017





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The concept of “immersion journalism” isn’t new. It’s inherent in the New Journalism and gonzo-style reporting of the past 50 years. But being embedded in and experiencing a story as subjects and sources see it doesn’t necessarily mean taking a Hunter S. Thompson approach to reporting. It does, however, open up journalists to seeing a story from a different angle — and comes with a litany of ethical considerations.

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Few terms in journalism are as used — or argued over — as the notion of objectivity. Can anyone really be objective or neutral in everything they do, see and report? Aren’t we really looking for fairness and accuracy? Don’t we all bring our identities, experiences and worldviews to everything we do? Lewis Wallace was fired from his job as a reporter for the public media show “Marketplace” for writing — and refusing to delete — a personal blog post explaining his thoughts on neutrality as a transgender journalist. Wallace explains why he thinks no journalist can truly be neutral.

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\$10 each plus \$2 shipping for up to five copies. (Call for bulk orders; subject to availability.)

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Volume 105, No. 2

Quill (ISSN 0033-6475) is published bi-monthly for \$75 per year by the Society of Professional Journalists, Eugene S. Pulliam National Journalism Center, 3909 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46208.

Periodicals postage paid at Indianapolis, Ind., and additional mailing offices.

Printed in U.S.A.

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Send via email: quill@spj.org. Only signed letters (include telephone number) will be considered for publication.

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An ‘aha moment’ on anonymous sources

ONE OF THE BIGGEST “aha moments” I’ve had since joining the national SPJ board occurred while visiting South Florida several years ago.

I was invited to speak on a panel, representing SPJ and the Code of Ethics. The purpose was to discuss journalism ethics with gaming journalists, bloggers and enthusiasts. The event was built around the “Gamergate” controversy, which involved online harassment and ethically questionable gaming reporting.

This was my first real exposure to the gaming community and my introduction to “Gamergate.” SPJ’s participation and organizational role in the event were controversial. Some national SPJ leaders did not feel it was appropriate to engage in a movement that had so much bad press. They wondered if the event could harm SPJ’s reputation.

I pushed for support of the event and participation on the panel. Why? SPJ needs to share its Code of Ethics with more than traditionally trained journalists. This event was a start. It also solidified my belief that SPJ needs to share its Code of Ethics outside of journalism: with the public, bloggers and all people sharing information.

The event solidified my belief that the public, bloggers and anyone sharing information should be introduced to SPJ’s Code of Ethics. This idea and belief became even more ingrained in me after the panel and a key moment that took me by surprise: my “aha moment.”

While discussing how journalists report information, the direction turned to the use of anonymous sources. Very quickly I realized the gamers and I had very different definitions of an anonymous source.

The consensus in the crowd was that when journalists attributed information to an anonymous source, the journalist has no idea who the anonymous source is — that sometimes journalists were taking quotes from unverified, unknown Twitter accounts and just including them in news articles.

I quickly explained that if an anonymous source is being used in a story, it is someone who the reporter and sometimes that reporter’s editor knows. They may have met before, many times, but their identity is withheld from the story for some reason — protecting their identity because of possible retaliation, safety concerns, etc.

When I explained this, I remember hearing so many surprised reactions from the crowd. They didn’t realize journalists knew the individuals they were citing as anonymous sources. The assumption was that neither the journalist nor the public knew who the anonymous

source was, thus bringing into question information attributed to them.

The exchange made me realize how important it is for SPJ to reach out to the public about how and why journalists do their jobs. We need to explain why we share certain information but choose not to publish other information, how we report on sensitive topics and how we chose stories.

I think the easiest way to do this is by sharing and explaining our ethical code with the public.

As SPJ Ethics Committee Chair Andrew Seaman wrote last month, “the Society of Professional Journalists’ Code of Ethics stresses the importance of journalists identifying their sources. The public is entitled to as much information as possible to judge the reliability and motivations of sources.”

Seaman continues and explains that “cases do exist when the importance of the information outweighs the need for journalists to identify their sources, however. Those include cases when the source may ‘face danger, retribution or other harm, and have information that cannot be obtained elsewhere.’ In those cases, journalists

The consensus in the crowd was that when journalists attributed information to an anonymous source, the journalist has no idea who the anonymous source is — that sometimes journalists were taking quotes from unverified, unknown Twitter accounts and just including them in news articles.

and news organizations must thoroughly explain why sources were granted anonymity.”

More importantly we need to push for more information to be told on the record and sourced to named individuals. This may mean not getting exclusive interviews or tidbits of information in certain situations, but if we continue to allow sources to talk on background and not be named, this will become the norm. It’s my opinion that the public deserves more than this, and we as journalists should work to get them what they deserve: information attributed to actual people, not agencies and not anonymous sources.

Reaching out to the public to explain journalism and what we strive for in our Code of Ethics is something I set out to do this year. What will you do to help me? ❖



LYNN WALSH

Lynn Walsh is 2016-17 national SPJ president. She leads the NBC7 Investigates team in San Diego. She loves holding the powerful accountable and spends more time than she would like fighting for access to public information. Connect on Twitter: @LWalsh. Email: lwalsh@spj.org



***It isn't getting any easier to fight for press freedom.
It's getting worse.***

The First Amendment Forever Fund is a sustained war chest to guarantee someone is always fighting for press freedom. If we don't do it, who will? Press freedom isn't free. And it isn't forever, unless we make it so.

spj.org/firstamendmentforever.asp

A peek into the future of journalism



Courtesy Keem O. Muhammad

No matter what SPJ does next, (Muhammad) thinks the most critical step is to include voices of diverse communities. In the end, it comes back to raising the bar together: Improving media literacy in consumers is just as critical as building news organizations' ability to produce compelling news.

BY RACHEL SEMPLE

Although he's still a student at New York University's Tisch School, Keem O. Muhammad already has big plans for his career. First, he plans to get more education. After graduation, his goal is to get two master's degrees: one in strategic communications from Columbia University and another in art and public policy from New York University.

What does he want to do with those degrees? He wants to educate others as a media studies professor and work as a chief communications and operations officer in a non-profit. He also hopes to start a media organization and even enter public office.

This desire to educate others comes from his father's passion for people to have access to information. Muhammad recalls childhood summers selling newspapers with his brother while their father taught them about the importance of the news media. That early education in media literacy and freedom of information has inspired his goals. Acknowledging that it will take a considerable amount of work, he hopes to positively affect American civic engagement and bring about a revolution in news media. At the end of his career, he wants to see a more educated, better-informed public.

Muhammad has some lofty aspirations, but he's started getting to work by joining the SPJ board as a student representative and planning to start a student chapter at NYU. For now, he's using his resources to help others become more aware of journalism training and tools like the ones that SPJ offers its members. He thinks those tools could provide value to the average person. His term as editor of Louisiana State University's Legacy magazine gave him a chance to personally help educate new staff writers with little journalism experience.

As a student himself, Muhammad also has plenty of advice for future journalists. First, he encourages taking full advantage of university resources and other organizations, like SPJ. He said students should explore niche topics and take opportunities when they're available. The most important bits of advice he has, however, are simple: Learn to edit your work. Apply for as many positions as reasonably possible. Don't stop writing.

Unique for a student, Muhammad has spent time working as an election stringer with The Associated Press, later becoming a consultant to the Elections Unit and working to make information such as final election tallies and demographic research available to news organizations. He calls it the "impartial, yet 'dirty work' of journalism: the importing, organizing and exporting of raw data."

The Elections Unit he worked with only collects the data and doesn't report. So his time was spent leading a project working to collect headshots and background information on each candidate for congressional, gubernatorial and presidential elections.

Muhammad sees the future of journalism in educating others and being an example of ethical decision-making. The SPJ Code of Ethics and training tools could become critically valuable resources to everyone in the U.S. and beyond, even those without journalism training. He believes that the increase in citizen journalism during the 21st century allows a huge opportunity for new information to arise in areas as varied as protest coverage and niche media.

What is SPJ's role in this vision? To connect journalists, students and citizens to education, journalism tools and resources, as well as to connect media organizations, freelance journalists and other organizations to each other. He hopes to see SPJ at the forefront of expanding media's ability to cover local and regional communities through programs like Muslimmedia, which brings journalists to mosques to increase their understanding of Islam.

No matter what SPJ does next, he thinks the most critical step is to include voices of diverse communities. In the end, it comes back to raising the bar together: Improving media literacy in consumers is just as critical as building news organizations' ability to produce compelling news.

The future of journalism, according to Muhammad, is as simple as what his Nana told him growing up: "Always mind your momma, keep your head in them books and leave places better than you found them." To him that translates easily to strong journalism; it's a journalist's duty to uphold ethics, make your work about the facts and tell the truth so compellingly that others listen and understand. ❖



PCLI scores governments in open records audit

An audit by the SPJ chapter Press Club of Long Island on the responsiveness of 195 municipalities and agencies to New York State Freedom of Information Law requirements revealed almost two-thirds failed to respond to requests for public records before the deadlines set by the law. Nearly half did not provide a list of documents they're required to maintain. Almost one-third of the villages did not provide a required written freedom of information policy, although these policies are already in their municipal codes.

Released in March for national Sunshine Week, the audit of local government compliance was conducted over 16 months by Timothy Bolger, freedom of information chair for PCLI. It is the biggest project in the history of the club, which was founded in 1974.

The overall average grade that Long Island local governments and agencies received for open records compliance is a C. That was calculated by averaging the grades of all 195 municipalities and agencies. Nassau County agencies scored an average of D+. Suffolk agencies got a C+. The 13 towns and two cities averaged a B grade. And the average grade for the 96 villages was C.

"If the Long Island governments and agencies we tested were high school students with a cumulative grade of a C, they would not be getting into the college of their choice," said Bolger, managing editor of the Long Island Press, which supported the project by giving him the time to conduct the audit. "Many local officials are frequently quoted touting their commitment to transparency, but what we found is that actions don't always match the buzzwords. We are encouraged that some officials had already begun improving their responsiveness to records requests before we contacted them about their grades and others took their grades as a call to action to do better."

See the full report card and audit information at tinyurl.com/PCLlreportcard.



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STRUGGLING TO REPORT THE FIGHT FOR A FEDERAL SHIELD LAW

Cases like Joe Hoseny and Jana Winter show: Journalists are not always protected by their First Amendment rights. Unjust requests from the government ordering reporters to reveal sources are unfortunately becoming more and more commonplace. It's happening to reporters of all calibers, from all over the U.S. — this is why it's important now more than ever to support the passing of a federal shield law in the U.S. Congress.

Weak shield laws affect not only reporters; they are a consequence to our nation. If citizens can't trust journalists to protect their identity, they won't feel comfortable revealing information that's crucial to having a transparent government. As Past SPJ President David Cuillier has said: "This isn't about the press. This is about democracy."

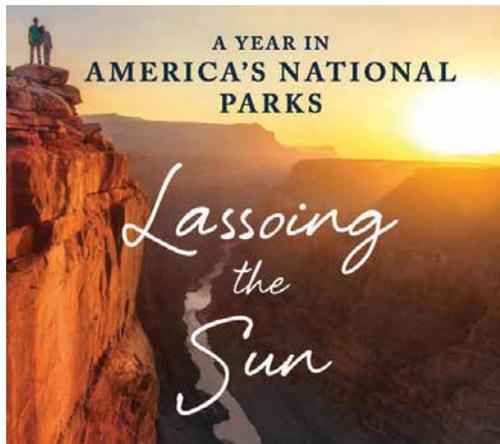
To read about the history of the shield law, as well as the current bills, visit SPJ online at spj.org/shieldlaw.asp.



The nonprofit Sigma Delta Chi Foundation supports the educational programs of SPJ. Learn more and make a tax-deductible donation at spj.org/sdx.asp

Pulliam fellowship recipient wins award for book

SPJ member Mark Brooks was recently awarded a Florida Book Award in the General Nonfiction category



for "Lassoing the Sun," which chronicled his journey to U.S. national parks.

The book was made possible through the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation's Pulliam Fellowship for Editorial Writing, which Brooks was awarded in 2011. The fellowship allows an editorial writer or opinion journalist to take a year to complete a project of his or her choosing and of significance to the journalist's audience and career. Brooks is a columnist at the Florida Times-Union in Jacksonville.

Farah Stockman, the 2014 Pulliam Fellowship recipient, won a 2016 Pulitzer Prize for her work on Boston's racial segregation and school busing policies, which she completed as part of the fellowship.

For more on the Pulliam Fellowship deadlines and past recipients, see spj.org/a-pulliamfellow.asp.

Calling chapter leaders for Scripps Leadership Institute

SPJ's Ted Scripps Leadership Institute helps participants become better leaders by offering a mix of sessions focused on interpersonal and organizational leadership skills, as well as sound chapter management practices. Leaders can immerse themselves in everything SPJ, take an intuitive look at their own leadership style and make time for serious personal reflection, all while building new relationships with other SPJ leaders.

Previously based in Indianapolis, the Scripps program is now a traveling show meant to arrive in each of SPJ's 12 regions over the course of three years (four regions per year).

Upcoming stops:

Kansas City, Mo.: April 28-30, 2017

Region 1: TBA later 2017

Participants in the interactive program learn:

- About their individual leadership style, its strengths, and how to better interact with others.
- The importance of building a sense of community among chapter members and how that can be accomplished.
- The role of the leader in recruiting, developing and rewarding talent.
- The dynamics of group decision-making and how leaders can help groups make better choices.
- New insights on how to engage and motivate peers.

- How to effectively manage responsibilities while remaining focused on important goals.

Participants are responsible for their travel costs to and from each location, but lodging and meal costs are provided.

To apply, complete the online application (at spj.org/scrippslt.asp) before the deadline for each location. Applications will be reviewed and invitations will be extended to participants. A submitted application does not guarantee an invitation to the program. ❖



Scripps participants in Dallas, February 2017.



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Eugene C. Pulliam

FELLOWSHIP FOR EDITORIAL WRITING

The Eugene C. Pulliam Fellowship was established to enable a mid-career editorial writer or columnist to have time away from daily responsibilities for study and research. The cash award allows Pulliam Editorial Fellows to:

**TAKE COURSES • PURSUE INDEPENDENT STUDY • TRAVEL
PURSUE OTHER ENDEAVORS THAT ENRICH THEIR KNOWLEDGE
OF A PUBLIC INTEREST ISSUE**

HISTORY

The Eugene C. Pulliam Fellowship is a Sigma Delta Chi Foundation educational program of the Society of Professional Journalists. The Society first offered the fellowship in 1977. It is funded by a grant from Mrs. Eugene C. Pulliam honoring the memory of her husband, one of the original members of the Society, which was founded in 1909 as Sigma Delta Chi. Eugene C. Pulliam was the publisher of The Indianapolis Star, The Indianapolis News, The Arizona Republic and The Phoenix Gazette.

WHAT THE FELLOWSHIP PROVIDES

The Pulliam Fellowship awards \$75,000 to an outstanding editorial writer or columnist to help broaden his or her journalistic horizons and knowledge of the world. The annual award can be used to cover the cost of study, research and/or travel in any field. The fellowship results in editorials and other writings, including books.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To be eligible for a Pulliam fellowship, a candidate must:

- Hold a position as a part-time or full-time editorial writer or columnist at a news publication in the United States.

- Have at least three year's experience as an editorial writer or columnist.
- Demonstrate outstanding writing and analytical abilities.
- Secure assurances by the editor or publisher that the applicant will be allowed sufficient time to pursue the fellowship without jeopardizing employment. (fellows do not have to leave their jobs.)
- Demonstrate ability and intent to publish work within 18 months of selection. (If selected, work must be published within 18 months of receiving the fellowship.)

The selected applicant must provide a post-fellowship written report on how funds were used. Each fellowship recipient will become a mentor to the following year's recipient.

SELECTION AND PRESENTATION

A panel of judges will review materials submitted by all the applicants and select the fellow. The fellowship presentation will take place during the 2017 Association of Opinion Writers Convention.

QUESTIONS?

For more information contact SPJ Headquarters at **317/920-4788** or by email: **awards@spj.org**.

Visit spj.org/a-pulliamfellow.asp for application information.
APPLICATION DEADLINE: JUNE 22, 2017

Report for meaning to find a story's heart and soul

IF WE ALL AGREE that a good story is built on good reporting, then it follows that good reporting requires good questions.

But what does that mean?

A storyteller reports on three levels:

1) The most basic of facts: Gathering names, correct spelling and the news, or what makes the event special.

2) Scenic reporting: Watching the character, or characters, in the world in which they live. Details to put readers in that world. For example, the sounds in an operating room.

3) Reporting for meaning: What is this story about? Why do we care? What is the theme? Where is the feeling?

The first two categories are obvious. Read the most basic news story and you see it's built on reporting category No. 1. Features and narratives have elements built on category No. 2.

The greatest stories, though, require reporting from category No. 3.

You learn this reporting by being in the world, talking with people, listening, being curious, contemplating, going with your gut and instinct, and asking open-ended questions.

One my favorite stories, one that was little more than a news story when written by another reporter, won a national writing award after I discovered the real story when I asked one of the characters a series of simple question: Is that true? If so, great. But if it's not the truth, tell me the real story. She thought about it and began to cry. In that moment, the young woman revealed to me both her heart and her story. In another case, I learned the real story when I asked the woman, who wasn't sure why I had come to her house to interview her, why she kept a Bible on a table in her living room.

Remember, the people you are interviewing are not newsmakers. They don't hand you a press release. Through your questions, both you and the person you are writing about discover the story. What they might not think to be important — an afterthought, a minor detail, a bit of history — is the key to unlocking the story. But if you don't report with purpose, the person you are writing about never tells you what you need.

An example:

A reader sent me an email about a woman who worked in a Portland warehouse. The oldest employee, she rode her bike to and from work each day, about a 20-mile commute. At 73, she'd been working at the warehouse for 25 years, never called in sick and has no plans to retire. Portland being Portland — our love of bikes is well documented (and parodied) — I approached it as a nice feature,

built around the No. 1 and No. 2 categories of reporting. Here is a passage in the story:

She took a break and told me that working keeps her active and young. Ben St. Clair, a 32-year-old who works at a station just behind Bayless, laughed and said he hustles just to keep up with the pace she sets.

What also makes Bayless unique is that she rides her bike to work and home, about 20 miles, roundtrip, from her home in outer Southeast Portland. She began riding more than 20 years ago when gas prices were high and she needed to save money. At the time, she said, she was spending about \$40 a week on gas, and getting a bike was a wise investment. But she also discovered a certain peace by commuting on two wheels.

"In the morning, I get to see the sun come up," she said. "I ride the Springwater Corridor, and I've seen deer and coyotes."

She's now on her third bike, a 24-speed that Donovan lets her park inside the warehouse so it won't get stolen. Over the years, she's had five accidents. She's been clipped by distracted motorists, and by other bicyclists.

"But even though I've been banged up," she said, "I've always made sure I got to work."

A bit of a scene, good details with a serviceable quote.

The real story, the better story, the one that was shared online more than 1,200 times, was revealed only when I turned to reporting category No. 3.

I even showed readers what I was doing, letting them in on the discovery:

I closed my notebook.

I had my story, a very Portland story about an older woman who commutes to work on her bike.

But late that night, I got to thinking about Bayless riding on the Springwater Corridor, a place in the news because of complaints about homeless people camping along the route. The next day, I called Bayless to see what she felt about riding the corridor at her age.

That's when I discovered a better story, one that reminds us that the best stories come from the heart.

When I asked Bayless better questions, I found a better story, one she'd never shared with anyone at the warehouse.

Bayless had a tough life; divorced when she was in her 20s, she had to raise four kids by herself. With only a high school degree, she worked a series of odd jobs, at times having to scrounge for food in garbage cans.

My questions led Bayless to reveal not what was in her head — reporting categories No. 1 and No. 2 are for that purpose — but what was in her heart and soul.



**TOM
HALLMAN JR.**

Tom Hallman Jr. is the author of "Dispatches From 1320," an anthology of his work. The book is available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). He can be reached at tbhbook@aol.com

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19



SEE MORE ONLINE

Twitter: @Sulliview

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MARGARET SULLIVAN

**Quill poses
10 questions
to people with
some of the
coolest jobs
in journalism**

BY **SCOTT
LEADINGHAM**

It's a cliché in journalism to find people who say they always knew what they wanted to be. Margaret Sullivan doesn't exactly say that, but she admits that she only remembers having one serious idea of what she wanted to be. Coming of age during the Watergate hearings, she remembers watching them on TV with her parents and being inspired by the work of Woodward and Bernstein. It's fitting, then, that all these years later, she's true to her ideals of being a journalist — and at the same outlet as journalism's most famous investigative duo.

Growing up in Buffalo, N.Y., she was editor of her high school newspaper. After college at Georgetown, she returned to her hometown to intern at the Buffalo News, and eventually held most available jobs in the newsroom, from reporter to metro columnist to assistant city editor to editor-in-chief. In 2012, The New York Times named her public editor (i.e. ombudsman). Sullivan left the Times shortly before her four-year stint expired and landed in Washington, D.C., as the Washington Post's media columnist and critic. It's all proven true the prediction of her brother, who as a college student came home to his high school sister and told her the career for her was, without doubt, "journalist."

Answers have been edited for length and clarity.

1 **How have you transitioned from leading a newsroom in Buffalo to critiquing a newsroom at the Times to examining and critiquing the news media writ large? That seems like three very distinct job functions that might be hard to reconcile.**

It hasn't been hard. In both of those changes, the new job has flowed out of and built on what I was doing before. When I started at the Times, I was prepared because I had done all of the jobs at the Buffalo News. I had sort of a bigger view of the journalism world, being on the

Pulitzer board and a director of the American Society of News Editors. It seemed like a logical and good fit.

People said to me it seemed like I was born to do that job. It was tough, it's a highly uncomfortable job, there's a lot of tension built in. But I did feel like I was well prepared for it. It was helpful to have an outsider's point of view (not being from the New York City news media). When I was in that public editor's job for about three years, I started to feel like less of an outsider. It got to be more difficult to feel truly independent.

How about some word association?

Objectivity: I like the idea of impartiality and independence more.

Fairness: Possibly the most important thing we have as journalists.

WikiLeaks: Mixed feelings. It's a complicated subject.

How do you view these sometimes competing or hard-to-balance ideas of ethics, like seek truth and report it versus minimize harm?

You do have to place truth at the highest level. The idea of minimizing harm is a good way to look at it. You may not be able to ever eliminate it. You must minimize it and be still faithful to the truth.

You're at the Post, which has its recognized history of journalism watchdog excellence, particularly with Watergate. Do you think it's harder to have an "All the President's Men" moment now, in this time, with so much news media competition and a fractured landscape?

I immediately think of something like the NSA stories both at the Guardian and The Washington Post or The New York Times doing stories on China's ruling family. Or the "Spotlight" movie and The Boston Globe. I think that the best news organizations are still able to distinguish themselves by doing out-of-the-ordinary investigative work. So I don't really agree with the premise.

I don't know how many times a week I cringe and try to correct people who resort to blaming "THE MEDIA" for whatever their issue or complaint is. Do you try to correct people in your own personal circles and explain the differences and nuances in "media" and "the press"?

I sometimes will go down that road. And what I do and what I say if I do is that "the media" is an almost meaningless term. Are you talking about The Washington Post or Breitbart or CNN or National Enquirer? I do think there is an entity that we can call "the press," and by that I don't just mean newspapers. I mean that kind of journalism that grows out of a respectful legacy. I would put BuzzFeed and ProPublica in that category. They're doing the kind of work that can legitimately be referred to as the press. "The media" is a broader and amorous term. It's an almost meaningless term. When I think of the press, I think of the things that are noble. I don't know for my kids, who are in their 20s, if it would mean anything to them.

In the weeks and months after the election, doing the navel-gazing thing, this explanation became popular of "journalists took Donald Trump literally but not seriously, and his supporters took him seriously but not literally." One, do you think that's accurate generally, and two, does it still hold up?

I was taken by that notion when I first heard it, and quoted it in a column. But honestly, now that President Trump is in office, I think a lot of what he was talking about did need to be taken literally. I think that concept seemed attractive and appealing, but I'm not sure how well it's holding up.

In your area of work you're hyper-tuned into the news about the news, and it seems like it's all media all the time. Do you go home and still consume all the insider baseball geekery stuff or try to decompress and detach?

A little of both. I definitely stay pretty connected all day. It's not unusual to be reading stuff pretty soon after I wake up and pretty close to when I go to sleep. Right now I'm trying to watch all of the Oscar-nominated Best Picture movies. "Moonlight" is the best so far. I've always read a lot of fiction. (*Right now reading a lot from Irish author Tana French.*)

You're a longtime upstate New York resident, worked for the Times, now in D.C. at the Post. So who are you cheering for on Sundays in football season or for any sport for that matter?

Of course, I have never moved away from being a Buffalo Bills (football) and Sabres (hockey) fan.

It's no secret that journalists, particularly those in the newspaper field, have had a rough ride in the past few decades, particularly with layoffs and career uncertainty. "Newspaper reporter" of late is consistently ranked as one of the "worst jobs" in these kinds of lists. So who's more downtrodden, bedraggled and beat up in the past 25 years: newspaper reporters or Buffalo Bills fans?

Having lived through the Jim Kelly years of going to four Super Bowls in a row and losing four in a row, that's hard.

(Washington Post editor) Marty Baron said recently that your outlet isn't "at war" with the Trump administration, but at rather "at work," which is a nice sentiment. How do you view the role

of not just the Post but all journalists, particularly those who don't cover press briefings and daily D.C. news, in this time?

I think we have to remember, whether we're covering the president or the local school board, that our job comes with a mission attached to it, to do the best possible job for our audiences and the citizens — to stay close to that mission that brought almost all of us into this business and not get dragged into this opposition role. That doesn't mean we can't be adversarial; sometimes we have to be. We need to do the job of holding powerful institutions accountable. If you're a pop music critic, you're not necessarily going to hold powerful institutions accountable, but you still have a core mission (to serve your audience).

There's a good case for now being the "best of times and the worst of times" for journalists, or for those wanting to get into journalism. So for the younger people out there considering a journalism line of work, what do you say?

My feeling is just if you're really committed to it, you absolutely should pursue it and not let anything distract you. It's a wonderful way to do something worthwhile.

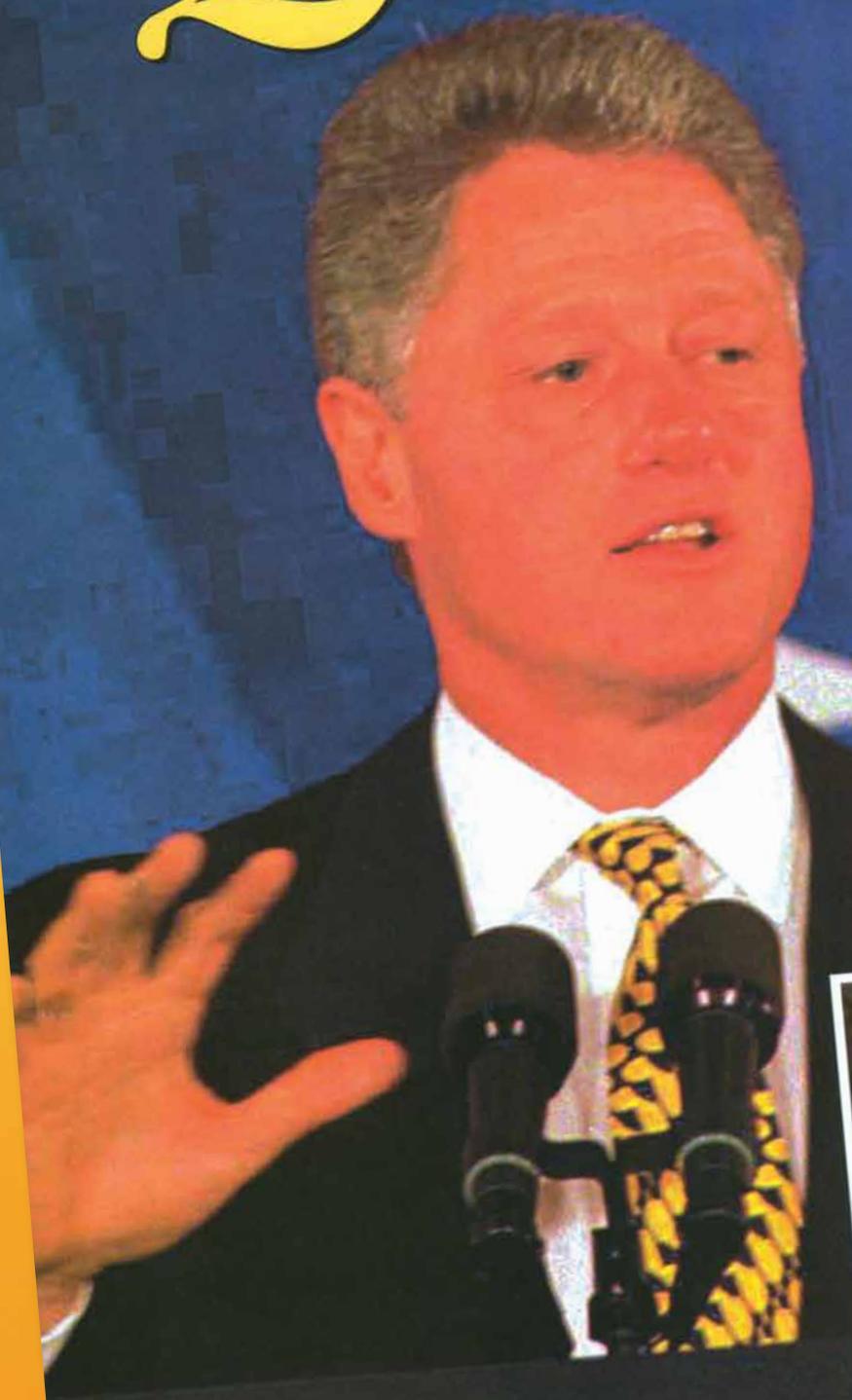
I would say for people who may be uncertain, there are certainly paths that are easier, more lucrative, more secure ways to go through life. But I can't think of anything I'd rather be doing. ❖



QUILL

MARCH
1998

published by the Society of Professional Journalists



**HOW
WILL
THE NEWS
MEDIA
BE
JUDGED?**



THROUGH THE YEARS...

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March 1998

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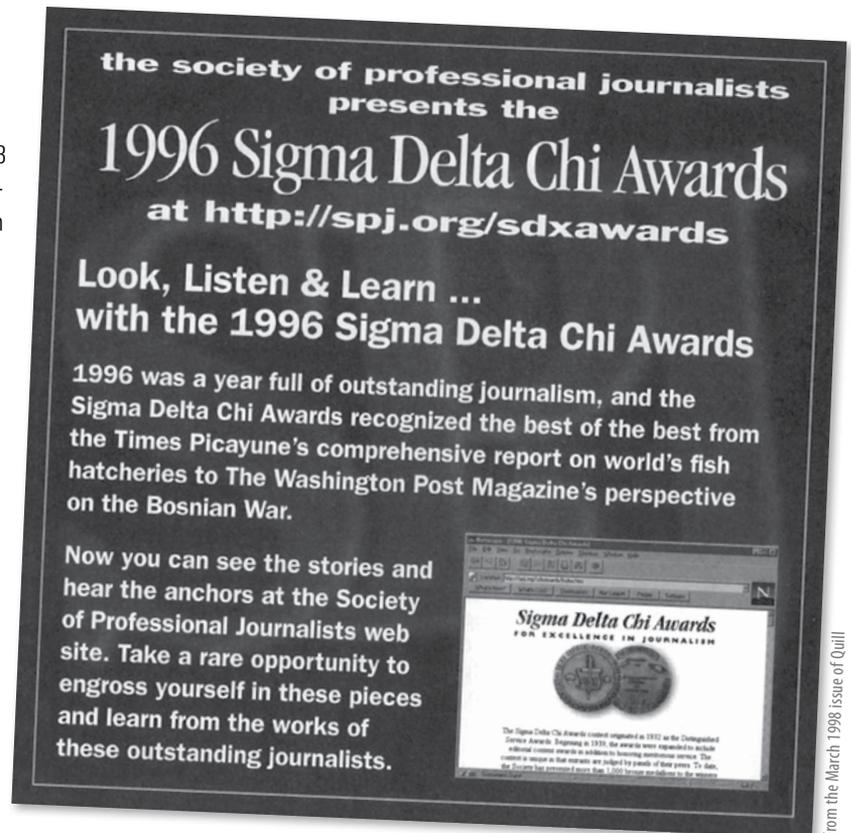
A RUSH TO JUDGMENT?

One defining moment of journalism in 1998 was the coverage of allegations involving President Bill Clinton and former intern Monica Lewinsky. This issue of Quill offered a variety of perspectives on the reporting surrounding the coverage of allegations.

Analysis varied, but the general consensus pointed to a rush to be the first to report information, leaving little or no time for verification. An analysis titled "First or right?" explored the problems with geyser journalism and sloppy sourcing. The pressure to uncover allegations and judge forced outlets to pick up a story, sometimes without being able to verify sourcing and reporting. Author Bill Kirtz, associate professor of journalism at Northeastern University, concludes that although "anyone with a computer can disseminate misinformation, he said he thinks eventually people will want to have their information verified, 'just like you look for brand names when you shop.'"

Another column by Steve Geimann, immediate past president and chairman of SPJ's Ethics Committee, lamented coverage of the allegations relying on a single source and passing along details from other news organizations, instead of first-hand reporting. Stressing the problems with not identifying anonymous sources or clarifying leaked information, Geimann concluded that many in the press failed the basic tests of ethical journalism.

A concluding note from SPJ President Fred Brown reminded readers that the public cares most about who gets a story right than who gets it first. He said it's impossible to avoid the fear of being beaten to the story thanks to the round-the-clock news cycle, but that is no excuse to abandon ethical reporting. "Remember, citizens now watch how the sausage is made. Being right is better than being first," he cautioned.



From the March 1998 issue of Quill

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- Tips for verb tenses in photo captions, warning against pairing a present-tense verb with a past-tense time element.
- Analysis about how the new DSL connection will allow better access for online news, calling the web "a print design transplanted to a new medium," thanks to the ability to have an internet connection whether or not the phone is in use.
- A reminder that 3M makes the only Post-it Note®, asking journalists to protect the trademark by using ® when writing the proper name.
- SPJ's bookmark mini-catalog, including an order form for the more than 40 options. ❖

IMMERSION AVERSION?

BY JENNIFER COX

Embedding ourselves into a story isn't the first reporting method journalists learn. But when done with care — ethically — it can open doors to better storytelling

The email came in shortly after 1 a.m. on a Tuesday during spring break.

"Dr. Cox," it read, "I have a couple questions."

It was the first semester of my new experimental class, "Participatory Journalism," and we were facing our first real ethics test. The assignment paired each student with a city official for a ride-along, including police officers, firefighters, water treatment supervisors and even the mayor. The goal was to teach narrative storytelling by having students spend a day in the life of these officials and produce a piece of journalism based on the experience.

It was all part of an attempt to get students to go beyond the traditional bounds of objectivity, to immerse themselves in the story in search of greater truths. But when I created the class, complete with a Habitat for Humanity build, eco-kayaking trip and virtual reality texting-while-driving simulator, I knew we were going to face some ethical challenges.

During her ride-along, this student thought she witnessed several incidents of racial profiling. Throughout her email, she wavered between her interpretation of the events and her own bias and ignorance of official procedures. Was what she saw really what it appeared to be, or did she just misunderstand?

Then, the kicker: She said she didn't want to portray the official in a bad light because she was grateful for the experience, but she also did not want her concerns to go unchecked. "What should I do?" she asked.

Great question.

ETHICS OF IMMERSIVE JOURNALISM

Beginning journalism students need rules. Short paragraphs and ledes, inverted pyramid structure and AP style are all good guidelines for breaking down preconceived notions about writing that haunt students from their Thesaurus-driven English essay days.

They also need conceptual rules explaining how and why journalism is not "just another job," that news organizations have obligations to rise above most profit-hungry business models to serve their communities. Rules outlining conflicts of interest, balance and an array of unique ethical issues need to be embedded alongside lessons on basic story structure.

During my first years teaching journalism at a university, I stressed the importance of objectivity. I carefully coached my students not to get involved with their stories or too close to their sources for fear of compromising their journalistic integrity. I emphasized detachment, encouraging them to become observers of human behavior rather than participants in the experience.

I still work as a freelance journalist, and the type of immersive feature packages I often do directly contradicted the lessons I was teaching. I often relate an experience to my audience by becoming a part of it myself. Whether it's writing about child surfers by paddling alongside them in the waves or producing a video package about wine-making as I go through the process with my sources, my involvement can often enhance the story by adding color and a sense of truth obtained only by putting yourself in someone else's shoes.

I wondered what a class that bends the rules of objectivity would look like. What could we accomplish? What issues would we face? I set out to create an experimental class to explore the principles of immersive journalism.

This type of reporting comes with a unique set of ethical challenges. By experiencing a news event alongside their sources, immersive journalists dispense with boundaries urging them not to become part of the story. But immersive journalists are still charged with serving up news that is unbiased and free of influence from outside sources.



After experiencing the VR simulator, students in Jennifer Cox's immersion journalism class discussed the ethics of involving them in an article on the topic. Students concluded the immersive experience was valuable for the story, and a transparent explanation of Cox's relationship to her sources in the article would negate any ethical breaches. (Photo by Jennifer Cox)

So the question becomes: How do immersive journalists maintain their commitment to journalism ethics while becoming part of the story?

First, it's important to examine the value of the immersive experience. As passive observers, journalists can only uncover a certain degree of the truth. They can use interviews to explain a source's perspective, but until they have experienced it for themselves, reporters cannot really know for sure whether the source's portrayal is accurate or whether their own retelling will do justice to the story.

Journalist and author Ted Conover has dedicated his career to immersing himself in unique experiences in search of truth. He recounts experiences of riding the rails with hobos and serving as a prison guard at Sing Sing as research for his journalism articles and novels in his new book, "Immersion, A Writer's Guide to Going Deep."

"Because we are human beings, journalists can learn things in other ways, such as experience; not just the five W's, but the five senses," Conover told me. "It

seems silly not to take advantage of that way of learning when it comes to reporting, and so I've always seen participation not just as an adjunct way of learning but as a core way that we can learn.

"Participation functions on a visceral level that can make an interview seem trivial."

The benefit of engaging with sources at that level might not always be worthwhile if it comes at the cost of ethics. Immersive journalists are susceptible to ethical blunders on both ends of the scale, from those who might turn a blind eye to a source's misbehavior to those who betray a source by failing to recognize when a private moment is not appropriate for publication.

"As you get to know your source, and you're participating in something so you get to know them on a personal level, it pushes you away from professional distance," Conover said. "There's an important idea in journalism that you keep yourself at an emotional distance to improve your objectivity and maintain perspective. That said, by refusing to engage more closely on an

emotional level, I think the journalist misses out."

Immersive journalism "allows you access that gives you a special kind of insight. But that access could come at the cost of objectivity."

There is a reason ethics are not enforceable by law: They are subject to interpretation and rife with gray areas, forcing us to consider each case circumstantially. What is negotiable for one story may not be for another, and adding the challenge of an immersive approach only complicates matters.

The Society of Professional Journalists carefully crafted four tenets of journalism ethics, each containing guidelines for reporters' behavior that are generally agreed upon by news organizations aiming to be professional and credible. Immersive journalism bends many of these rules, creating situations that the average passive reporter does not have to contend with. But within each of these tenets, flexibility may be appropriate to allow the journalist a deeper insight into the story with the potential of getting closer to the truth.



SEEK TRUTH AND REPORT IT

Appearing first in the SPJ Code of Ethics, "Seek Truth and Report It" is the most detailed tenet, containing 18 bullet points dictating journalists' behavior. It is arguably the most important, and it can both justify and trouble immersive journalists.

Under this tenet, reporters are urged to "Label advocacy and commentary." But before we can label it, we have to be able to recognize it.

As my immersive journalism students set out to help build a home for Habitat for Humanity, I wrestled with the implications of the assignment. Few could accuse journalists of problematic bias toward philanthropic organizations, even if their stories turned out to be a bit promotional. Civic and public journalism enthusiasts have gone so far as to say journalists *should* become active members of their communities, promoting its success and unity. But how could we cover this experience without becoming advocates and inserting our own opinions into the narrative?

The idea behind immersion is to reveal a deeper truth, so settling for the experience alone was meaningless. Building on that concept, the activity became just one aspect of the assignment in subsequent iterations of the class. We discuss the concept of "Restorative Narratives," which the non-profit media group Images & Voices of Hope defines as: "recovery, restoration and resilience in the aftermath, or midst of, difficult times." After the build, we assemble a panel of speakers to address the larger issues at play, such as "Why does our community even have/need this organization?"

Rather than parachuting in with a heartwarming puff piece, journalists can use their immersive experience as a jumping off point to really convey the impact of an issue on the community, adding value to a story that otherwise might have been relegated to a midweek inside page of the newspaper or feel-good feature at the end of a newscast.

Several SPJ ethics code principles of seeking truth and reporting it could even be seen as encouraging immersive journalism. "Avoid stereotyping," "Boldly tell the story of the diversity and magnitude

REPORTER

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of the human experience" and "Provide context" all suggest reporters go beyond the basic collection of facts and figures to tell fuller, richer stories about the human experience.

The concept of objectivity suggests reporters remove their personal biases from their stories, but some journalists have begun to question its feasibility. Former Marketplace reporter Lewis Wallace was fired earlier this year, allegedly for violating the program's objectivity and neutrality standards.

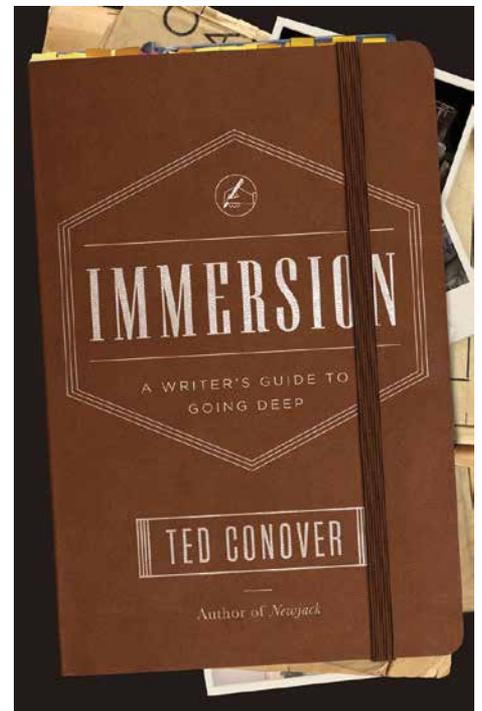
In a commentary on Medium titled "Objectivity is dead, and I'm okay with it," Wallace argued, "Neutrality isn't real: Neutrality is impossible for me, and you should admit that it is for you, too."

(Read Lewis Wallace's *Quill* essay in this issue on page 24.)

Many in academia agree. In their oft-updated text, "Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content," researchers Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese argue that as human beings, it is impossible for reporters to remove themselves from the story. From biological characteristics, such as gender and race, to social influences, such as education, religious beliefs and parental upbringing, journalists cannot divorce themselves from their own process of forming opinions. But by engaging with those whose backgrounds are different from their own, Conover argues, journalists can add context and diverse voices through an immersive experience.

"One benefit of immersion is it lets you move beyond whatever shorthand version of a person that might exist in

your mind," Conover said. "We stereotype and shortcut people, but participation and immersion take you deeper. It reveals complexity and nuance and can turn a stereotype into an actual person."



MINIMIZE HARM

In his "Immersion" book, Conover points to many anecdotes in which his sources have been unintentionally hurt as a result of his immersive reporting. It might be the inclusion of a small detail — noting how a source limps when describing him — to something much more problematic, like when a young subject forgets his company and begins dropping racial slurs into casual conversation. The problem, he says, is the blurred perception of roles.

"I think probably the single biggest challenge is the tendency toward friendship," he said. "If their subject is letting them spend a lot of time together, the subject may mistake the journalist's interest as friendship, and the journalist might, too, if he or she is not sophisticated or paying attention or well prepared.

"You're not becoming somebody's friend; you're becoming friendly with them."

The "Minimize Harm" doctrine urges journalists to be sensitive toward our sources' privacy and comfort levels. Immersive journalism can help reporters uncover what is really going on in someone's life, but that doesn't mean every facet of that experience needs to be included. By getting involved in the story, we run the risk of forgetting how the publication of certain information we have witnessed — even though we have access to it — could be harmful.

As journalists, we crave oddities and anecdotes. We're trained to look for them and use them to produce a good story people want to read, see or hear. But getting close to a source through immersive journalism may mean we have to swallow those impulses and sacrifice a juicy tidbit we are often inclined to include.

When covering a family riddled with stress and sickness early in my career, I was invited into their home to be part of the experience with them. They were willing to show me the good, bad and ugly side of dealing with disease and a lifetime of uncertainty.

One afternoon, a family member shakily lit a cigarette and began to smoke. About halfway through, she turned to me and said, "Please don't put this in the article. I don't usually smoke." It would have been a great illustration of the stress and dealing with pain, but I honored her wishes without hesitation. I could tell their story without it.

Conover said that making these choices is easier when you are clear about your role and forthcoming about your concerns. Even though we want sources to act naturally and even forget you are there, it is important to regularly remind people that your status is different. Keeping your notebook or camera out at all

times and asking tough questions about what you witness can help mitigate a source's expectations for when your work is published.

"It could be seen as a betrayal if the journalist is acting one way and thinking another way," Conover said. "I just think it works better if you are sharing your reservations and your motivations. You have to be candid."

ACT INDEPENDENTLY

I had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do a piece of immersive journalism that I had to decline.

Jupiter, Florida, is a small, affluent town that is home to an unusual migration of lemon sharks at the same time and place each year. A local scuba company offered to certify me for free and supply me with the equipment and a tour so I could do a story. Unfortunately, the small bi-weekly newspaper I worked at could not cover the actual cost, so I had to decline. It was the right call, but not being able to do that story still nags at me.

Sources are often inclined to offer freebies to immersive journalists. A free surfing lesson, a discount on dinner, a ticket to a show — it all seems harmless

enough, especially when you need what is being offered in order to do the story. But because of the already blurred lines of an immersive experience, it is even more important that journalists decline favors, avoid conflicts of interest and resist info-tising.

When a source offers something, even as a friendly gesture, they are pushing the boundaries of the reporter-source relationship. Whether they realize it or not, the source expects a sort of quid pro quo in exchange for the openness and hospitality they showed just in allowing you to immerse. Adding a tangible gift only enhances those expectations.

"You need to draw these lines to prevent misunderstandings and to make it possible to write freely when the time comes," Conover said. "You don't want to be constrained, nor do you want the person to be surprised or upset when it doesn't come out the way they would want it."

BE ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT

Conover calls transparency "the new objectivity." Immersive journalists can use it to describe their reporting process, adding credibility to the piece and allowing



Salisbury University students embarked on an eco-kayaking trip with their cameras to take part in a photo elicitation project. They drew on their photojournalism training to take pictures during the experience and were then required to conduct interviews and put together a photo essay using others' photos and experiences in place of their own. (Photo by Jennifer Cox)

the audience valuable insight into the reporting process. But it is not a license for unrestrained bias.

Disclosing conflicts of interest does not give us free reign to advocate for our friends or adjust our stories to highlight our own causes. Transparency simply acknowledges that a completely objective perspective is not possible.

Whenever I ask students to get into groups for discussions, they always choose the people around them. Usually, these are people who were already their friends, or else they would not have chosen seats together in the first place. To teach them about objectivity, I asked them to look at the group they picked. Was their choice objective, free from personal motive? Of course not.

I ask them to try again, but this time, we would use an objective method for dividing up into three groups: those who love green olives, those who hate them and those who are indifferent toward them. The class divided into three completely different groups based on a shared opinion that had absolutely nothing to do with the class discussion. Is that sort of objectivity attainable in reporting? No, they agreed.

As human beings prone to individual and environmental influences, we have to accept that we cannot put our brain on hold while reporting a story. Immersive journalism experiences that encourage those involved to share real insight about what they are seeing and how they came to see it in a particular way can help audiences better understand the event, the characters and even the storyteller. No matter how they feel about portrayals in the story, the process is clear because the reporter will have witnessed it, thoroughly described it and shared it in a meaningful way.

“WHAT DO I DO?”

Because my student’s police ride-along spanned only one night, I urged her to gather more information. What possible explanations could there have been? I encouraged her to speak with the officer about her concerns and seek clarification, perhaps even go on another ride-along and see what happens.

Giving it more thought, she concluded she was probably overreacting, and it was no big deal. Was her change of heart the result of real reflection or out of fear of confrontation? I’ll never know. I was disappointed, but I understood. This was uncharted territory for my students, and it’s something that may have troubled many more-experienced journalists.

This teachable moment illustrates two important points. First, immersion journalism is not for everyone. It takes a special kind of reporter to dive deep into a story, become part of it, then re-emerge and tell it in a way that does justice to the experience while maintaining journalistic integrity. A willingness to engage on a level sometimes discouraged due to the boundaries of journalism ethics takes stamina, clear-headedness and guts.

The second is this: Journalism ethics exist to protect everyone involved in the story: journalists, news outlets, sources and subject, and the entire public. The SPJ Code of Ethics gives us plenty of reasons why we should not get involved in our stories or with our sources, but it also tells us why we should. Providing context, reducing harm, promoting vigilance and accuracy: These are all results of immersive journalism, not the obstacles to doing it.

Immersive journalists can use journalism ethics to help them recognize boundaries, avoid conflicts of interest and be accountable to everyone involved. ♦

Jennifer Cox teaches journalism at Salisbury University. She was previously a reporter for the Naples Daily News and Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers and keeps her reporting skills fresh as a freelancer. Email: jbcox@salisbury.edu.

NARRATIVE WRITING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

When you get to a character’s heart and soul, you have the story. Bayless told me that she related to the homeless on the route she rides to work. She stops and talks with them, brings them food and coffee.

And that’s how I found the story not of an older woman on a bike, but of a woman the homeless people call the angel on a bike.

Yes, a better story. The *real* story. ♦

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CODE of ETHICS

PREAMBLE

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. Ethical journalism strives to ensure the free exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough. An ethical journalist acts with integrity.

The Society declares these four principles as the foundation of ethical journalism and encourages their use in its practice by all people in all media.

SEEK TRUTH AND REPORT IT

Ethical journalism should be accurate and fair. Journalists should be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

Journalists should:

- ▶ Take responsibility for the accuracy of their work. Verify information before releasing it. Use original sources whenever possible.
- ▶ Remember that neither speed nor format excuses inaccuracy.
- ▶ Provide context. Take special care not to misrepresent or oversimplify in promoting, previewing or summarizing a story.
- ▶ Gather, update and correct information throughout the life of a news story.
- ▶ Be cautious when making promises, but keep the promises they make.
- ▶ Identify sources clearly. The public is entitled to as much information as possible to judge the reliability and motivations of sources.
- ▶ Consider sources' motives before promising anonymity. Reserve anonymity for sources who may face danger, retribution or other harm, and have information that cannot be obtained elsewhere. Explain why anonymity was granted.
- ▶ Diligently seek subjects of news coverage to allow them to respond to criticism or allegations of wrongdoing.
- ▶ Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information unless traditional, open methods will not yield information vital to the public.
- ▶ Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable. Give voice to the voiceless.
- ▶ Support the open and civil exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- ▶ Recognize a special obligation to serve as watchdogs over public affairs and government. Seek to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open, and that public records are open to all.
- ▶ Provide access to source material when it is relevant and appropriate.
- ▶ Boldly tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience. Seek sources whose voices we seldom hear.
- ▶ Avoid stereotyping. Journalists should examine the ways their values and experiences may shape their reporting.
- ▶ Label advocacy and commentary.
- ▶ Never deliberately distort facts or context, including visual information. Clearly label illustrations and re-enactments.
- ▶ Never plagiarize. Always attribute.

MINIMIZE HARM

Ethical journalism treats sources, subjects, colleagues and members of the public as human beings deserving of respect.

Journalists should:

- ▶ Balance the public's need for information against potential harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance or undue intrusiveness.

- ▶ Show compassion for those who may be affected by news coverage. Use heightened sensitivity when dealing with juveniles, victims of sex crimes, and sources or subjects who are inexperienced or unable to give consent. Consider cultural differences in approach and treatment.
- ▶ Recognize that legal access to information differs from an ethical justification to publish or broadcast.
- ▶ Realize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than public figures and others who seek power, influence or attention. Weigh the consequences of publishing or broadcasting personal information.
- ▶ Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity, even if others do.
- ▶ Balance a suspect's right to a fair trial with the public's right to know. Consider the implications of identifying criminal suspects before they face legal charges.
- ▶ Consider the long-term implications of the extended reach and permanence of publication. Provide updated and more complete information as appropriate.

ACT INDEPENDENTLY

The highest and primary obligation of ethical journalism is to serve the public.

Journalists should:

- ▶ Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived. Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- ▶ Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and avoid political and other outside activities that may compromise integrity or impartiality, or may damage credibility.
- ▶ Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; do not pay for access to news. Identify content provided by outside sources, whether paid or not.
- ▶ Deny favored treatment to advertisers, donors or any other special interests, and resist internal and external pressure to influence coverage.
- ▶ Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two. Prominently label sponsored content.

BE ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT

Ethical journalism means taking responsibility for one's work and explaining one's decisions to the public.

Journalists should:

- ▶ Explain ethical choices and processes to audiences. Encourage a civil dialogue with the public about journalistic practices, coverage and news content.
- ▶ Respond quickly to questions about accuracy, clarity and fairness.
- ▶ Acknowledge mistakes and correct them promptly and prominently. Explain corrections and clarifications carefully and clearly.
- ▶ Expose unethical conduct in journalism, including within their organizations.
- ▶ Abide by the same high standards they expect of others.

The SPJ Code of Ethics is a statement of abiding principles supported by additional explanations and position papers (at spj.org) that address changing journalistic practices. It is not a set of rules, rather a guide that encourages all who engage in journalism to take responsibility for the information they provide, regardless of medium. The code should be read as a whole; individual principles should not be taken out of context. It is not, nor can it be under the First Amendment, legally enforceable.

Journalists can't afford lost trust, anonymous or otherwise

ANONYMOUS SOURCES are one of the sexiest things in journalism. The idea conjures images of late-night meetings in parking garages, voice modulators and Watergate-era intrigue. The fact that someone feels the need to be protected makes their information *feel* more valuable.

Like a lot of news consumers, I've become increasingly less skeptical of anonymous sources. If I trip over every one and hesitate on who to trust, I'll never get to the bottom of a national security story again. I've begun reading "senior administration official" the same way I'd read it if it were a named source: I take in the information and use it to inform my understanding of the world.

Here's the thing, though: It's not the same. Anonymous sources fundamentally shift the way audiences interact with news sources, and they shift accountability away from government officials (the vast majority of anonymously sourced stories come from coverage of the U.S. government and national politics) and onto news outlets.

Think about it.

Article 1 reads:

"We're confident the program is working," said John Smith, director of strategic programs for the agency.

Article 2 reads:

"We're confident the program is working," said a senior agency official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss active programs.

The journalist in Article 1 is asking for a very basic level of trust from the reader: *Trust me as a journalist to accurately report a quote, name and job title from a government official.* If the audience uses the information in Article 1 to reach the conclusion that the program in question is successful, then the reader is also placing trust in John Smith, and in the government to hire a "director of strategic programs" who is qualified and capable in that job.

In Article 1, the reader's trust in the success of a government program is placed in a clearly defined system, and in an accountable public employee responsible for that government program. The audience's perception of the government is informed by journalism that serves as a simple conduit for information. News consumers don't have to place trust in the journalist or news organization to make any qualitative assessments of *anything*. If the government program in question turns out to be a failure, audiences could be justifiably upset with John Smith for misrepresenting the program, but not with the news outlet

(at least based on that line in the story) for documenting what Smith said.

The dynamics are fundamentally different in Article 2.

In order for a audiences to reach a conclusion about the government program described in Article 2, they must trust the journalist and news outlet a great deal: *I trust you to choose a government official with an appropriate level of knowledge and involvement with the government program in question, and I trust you to choose an official whose assessment of the program is free of unpredictable bias or influence.*

If the reader uses the information in Article 2 to reach the conclusion that the program in question is successful, that conclusion is based on the completely (and necessarily, if anonymous sources are to be protected) un-transparent methodology that the journalist used in choosing the source. What if that government official doesn't know anything about the program in question? What if that government official is lying? What if the program fails?

If any of those things happen, there's no one for the public to hold accountable for the program's failure, or lies that covered it up. The reader could be justifiably upset only with the journalist who interviewed the wrong official, or trusted a liar to tell the truth. No government official is on the record making false statements, and the public has misplaced its trust *in journalism*, not in government.

Viewed through this lens, the strong negative sentiment toward journalists in the United States makes sense in some ways. Anonymous sources helped push the United States into the Iraq war, the consequences of which are still playing out. People are frustrated that government isn't serving them as they want it to. Yet many nationally focused news outlets insist on creating an accountability screen, a wall of secrecy that prevents people from understanding who is really speaking on behalf of the government. It prevents people from holding those officials accountable when things don't work right.

None of this is to say there aren't very valid, responsible uses of anonymous sources. Some of the best journalism to come from the first months of the Trump administration has been based on unnamed sources. The best of these stories verify information with multiple sources, use documents whenever available and get as much from named sources as possible.

When trust is in short supply, journalists can't afford to misplace their own. ❖



TAYLOR DOBBS

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Like, as if you needed to know the difference ...

WHEN THE UNGRAMMATICAL JINGLE

"Winston tastes good — like a cigarette should" appeared in the 1950s, it unleashed a national controversy over the proper uses of *like* and *as*. In fact, Walter Cronkite, then host of CBS News' "The Morning Show," disliked the error so much that he refused to read the offending words on the air, and an announcer had to do the deed.

It could have been what educators call a "teachable moment." Instead, both ad and cigarette vaulted to the top of the U.S. market and remained there until the early 1970s.

And *like* and *as* errors — along with related *likely* and *liken* mistakes — continue apace to this very day:

Do like you are told. Pretty is like pretty does. Write like you speak. She looked at him like she hated him. Buy a computer like you would buy a car.

Like properly precedes nouns and pronouns but is in error when it precedes phrases and clauses. The five examples in the above paragraph are incorrect because in every case, *like* precedes a clause. (A phrase is a group of two or more grammatically related words. A clause is a group of grammatically related words containing a subject and a verb.) We correct such errors by deleting *like* and substituting *as*, *as if* or *as though*:

Avoid *likely* as a substitute for "probably." Not all words ending with *-ly* are adverbs, and *likely* is not. It is an adjective, parallel to the adjective *probable* rather than to the adverb *probably*.

Do as you are told. Pretty is as pretty does. Write as you speak. She looked at him as if she hated him.

Correct: Buy a computer as you would buy a car.

Correct: Buy a computer as if you were buying a car.

Correct: Buy a computer as though you were buying a car.

We often find other errors in the "like" word family — with the word *likely*, for example. We might read: "The situation likely will worsen." That's wrong. The sentence should read: "The situation *is* likely to worsen" or "The situation *will* probably worsen."

Avoid *likely* as a substitute for "probably." Not all words ending with *-ly* are adverbs, and *likely* is not. It is an adjective, parallel to the adjective *probable* rather than to the adverb *probably*. *Likely* therefore acts as other adjectives do, with a "be" verb usually preceding: *The situation is likely to worsen*.

Incorrect: It likely will rain this weekend.

Correct: It is likely to rain this weekend.

Correct: It probably will rain this weekend.

Incorrect: They likely will go.

Correct: They are likely to go.

Correct: They probably will go.

Exception: These guidelines do not apply when the superlatives *very* or *most* precede *likely*.

Correct: They most likely will win. They are very likely to win.

Another often misused word in the "like" family is the word *liken* — especially when confused with the word *compare*:

"You have ideas that people need to hear, but don't compare disagreement with your ideas to suppression."

Liken would be a better word than *compare* for that writer's context. Comparing deals with unlikes as well as with likes, with contrasts as well as with similarities. Also, it may be an extended rather than snapshot analysis. When focusing only on similarities, *liken* is more precise than *compare*. "Hitchcock likened Kelly to an ice princess" is more exact than "Hitchcock compared Kelly to an ice princess" because Hitchcock's statement involved no actual *comparison*.

"He says comparing the rise of Trump to the rise of Hitler is easy, but he doesn't say the comparison is inaccurate."

Better: "He says likening the rise of Trump to the rise of Hitler is easy, but he doesn't dispute the likeness."

The colloquial "feel like" — instead of *think*, *believe*, *imagine*, *reflect*, etc. — is an inelegant expression that seems to be gaining traction: "Don't you feel like there's a creative you inside your cerebrum, just itching to get out?" Once again, all we have to do to improve the sentence is delete "like": "Don't you feel there's a creative you inside your cerebrum ..."

A note on the use of "-like" as a suffix: When coining such terms as "godlike," "childlike," "manlike," such terms are usually hyphenated when a word ending in L abuts a words beginning with L. For example: "devil-like." However, when the coined word has three L's, it is always hyphenated: "bull-like."

We've reached the end of this column without even mentioning what some linguistic experts call the "casualism" of using *like* instead of *said* when describing a conversation. *He's like, "Don't do that." And I'm like, "Yeah? Well, don't tell me what to do." And he's like, "Somebody should." And I'm like —*

I mean. Don't get me started! ❖



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Empower Yourself

Visit SPJ's reading room for more articles that will help you on your path to becoming a better journalist. spj.org/rr.asp

Freelancing through upheaval

BY DEFINITION, upheaval uproots. Practices and institutions that that once felt secure suddenly seem flimsy. Even if you didn't like them to begin with, you may find yourself wishing for them again, for the familiarity. Upheaval, by its nature, isolates.

Independent journalists work in a constant state of upheaval: We work without roots, often alone. Rewards abound for the risks we take. Yet freelancing through the current upheaval has thrown many for a loop.

Cara Strickland, a freelancer based in Spokane, Wash., and former restaurant critic, writes mostly about food, drink and faith. For now.

"I've been thinking a lot about what I want to look back on during this time," Strickland said. "I want to take time to write things that matter, to me as well as to the world."

Strickland is in good company considering a shift in her mission. Donald Trump's election brought Hazel Becker out of retirement. For a few years, she'd taken only hourly editing clients. Now, Becker is back to freelance reporting, largely as a show of solidarity.

"I have great respect for journalists who are persevering in the face of difficulties getting the information and access they need to do their jobs," Becker said. "I want to stand with them as a professional journalist doing what we do in the best way we can, working under strict ethical standards that I have adhered to throughout my career."

But beyond such existential dilemmas, despite snipes that undermine the press and aside from problematic access to government, freelance journalists face our own logistical challenges by virtue of our location outside a newsroom.

A few of these challenges are outlined below, crowdsourced from two online freelance groups. They're presented with solutions synthesized from the freelancers themselves; my experience; insights from freelance journalist and writing coach Rebecca Weber; and advice from Raymond Joseph of South Africa, a reporter since 1974, who recently joined Weber for a webcast interview about "Freelancing in the era of Trump."

1 Editors' inboxes have morphed into black holes through which only the highest-profile, heaviest-hitting, urgently breaking scoops survive

With much at stake and news flying furiously, editors are struggling to keep up, too. As always, follow up on your pitches, and consider editors' needs. Most are not likely to assign high-profile political stories to freelancers, Joseph said. That's especially true for contractors an editor has not worked with before. Plus, newsroom resources may have been re-arranged to handle the current onslaught.

So, pivot. Instead of breaking news, illuminate the implications of pending policy changes. Explain what it means that federal uncertainty is leaving states and businesses in limbo. Hit the streets and work social media to find human stories — then tell them from the bottom up, Joseph said. This reporting is harder for newsrooms to devote their resources to, when top-down news is so consuming. Fill that gap.

2 There's no market for light features

This may be true particularly for certain outlets or specific beats. But anticipate "Trump fatigue" and pitch accordingly — whether it's a fresh angle on current events, or an unrelated story to offer momentary escape or rejuvenation.

3 I've never done this type of reporting before

As Strickland said, the current political and social upheaval feels like everyone's beat right now. "I've read amazing pieces lately from people who I know as food or relationships or faith writers," she said.

This may work for certain topics or in essay form, but be cautious of wading casually into political or policy reporting. If you decide to branch out in this direction, do so systematically: Read widely, source carefully and contextualize fully to avoid getting played and inadvertently misleading your audience. Then when it comes to pitching, be picky. You want to work with reputable editors you trust — not those who are learning the beat alongside you.

Joseph also offered logistical advice for American reporters who may be unfamiliar with reporting through upheaval. First: hone your verification skills. "Don't rush in to be first," he said. "No one's going to remember who was first ... but they'll remember that you were wrong."

Joseph recommends FirstDraftNews.com as a repository of training resources. He also suggests anticipating your editor's concerns about verification by demonstrating rigor in your submission. Embed links to source materials; include footnotes to say how you know what you know; be open with your editor about your sourcing and reporting process. Such protocols may be familiar to investigative reporters, but in this era of skepticism amid alternative facts and fake news, they should be adopted by all.

4 Reporting through upheaval is stressful

Responses to my inquiry show that upheaval's toll on freelancers is multifaceted. Ubiquitous uncertainty plagues many business considerations (about health insurance, where to live) and throws a wrench in our pitching routines. And for those in the thick of presidential and policy reporting, the heightened stress and emotional impact of many stories can be severely draining.



HILARY NILES

Hilary Niles is a freelance data journalism consultant, multimedia investigative storyteller and award-winning researcher based in Vermont. She's secretary of the SPJ Freelance Community, a member of the FOI Committee, and an alum of the Missouri School of Journalism graduate program. Her reporting has been featured in The Boston Globe and on Vermont Public Radio; NPR's "Only a Game," "Here and Now" and "All Things Considered"; and the BBC World Service.

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NOTHING IS NEUTRAL

ADMITTING OUR BIASES AND PERSPECTIVES CAN HELP US TELL THE TRUTH

BY LEWIS WALLACE

Everyone has a story. When I became a journalist, I put much of my story behind me: I had come out as transgender in 2000, at age 16. I had worked as a baker, a barista, a busker and a sex-toy salesperson.

My friends were sex workers and anarchists and third-wave feminists; most people around me had dropped out of school at least once. I grew up in Ann Arbor, Michigan, but I left home when I was 17, hitchhiked halfway across the country and rejected much of my background. I disliked liberal politics almost as much as I disliked frat parties.

When I became a full-time journalist about five years ago, I didn't talk about my friends in prison or my friends in the sex industry; I did talk occasionally about my Northwestern degree and what my parents did for work (lawyer and professor). This was partly because I'd been encouraged to steer clear of any stories or work that might reflect a bias on my part, and talking about the activist outsider scene I moved in seemed like it would have made certain biases clear.

But this reflected unspoken standards: In the newsroom, a lawyer for a father or professor for a mother was fairly normal, while being a transgender activist was clearly not. In each place I've worked, I've been the only out trans person. Some life experiences were treated as neutral: "Where did you go to school?" is a standard newsroom question. Others were outsider or unusual: "What

pronouns do you use?" is a question I have literally never heard in a newsroom, yet it is a standard aspect of etiquette in my own community.

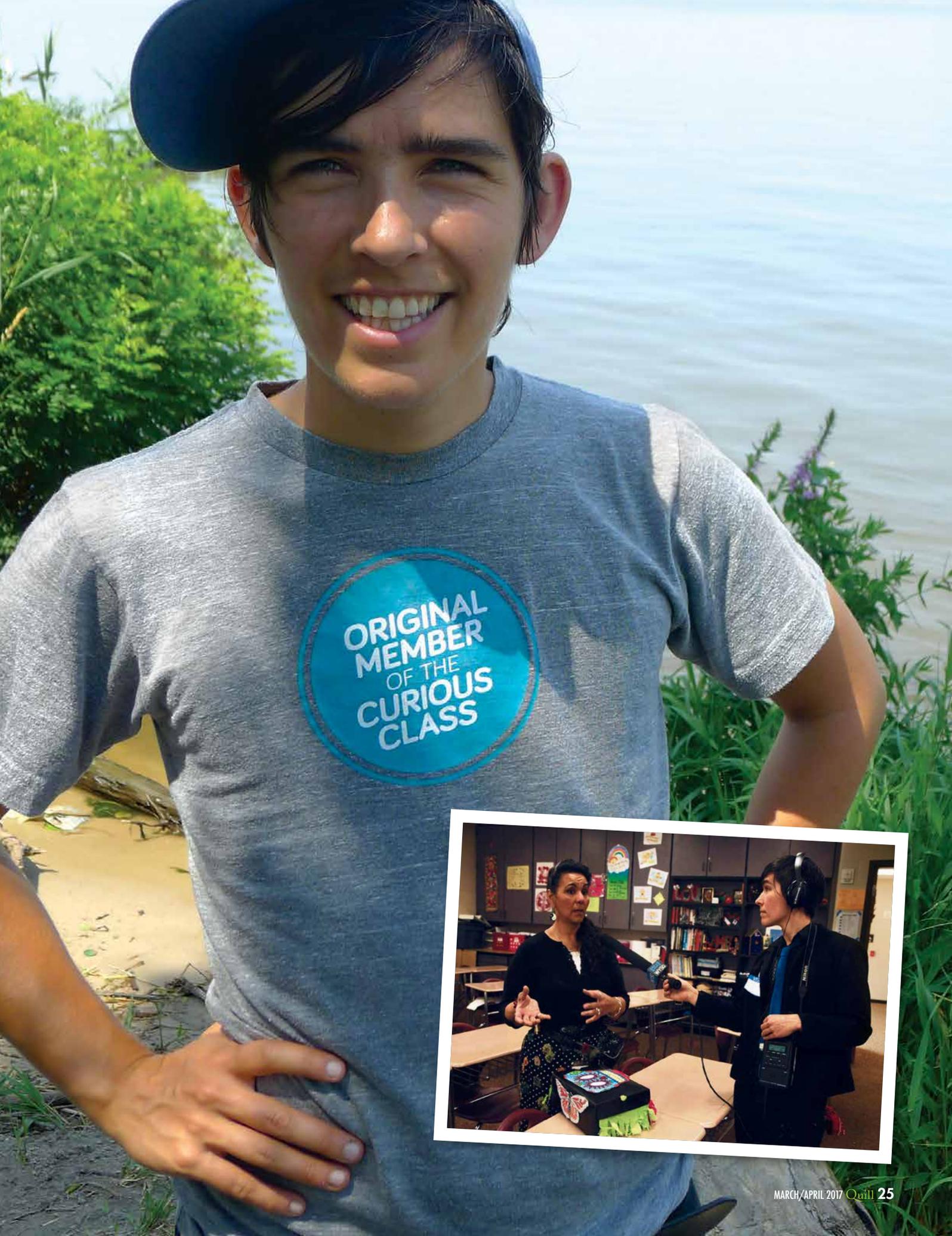
Then, earlier this year, I got fired from my job as a national journalist for the public radio show Marketplace. It was in the news, and you can read all about it; but long story short, I was fired over a blog post I wrote about neutrality. It was just a few days after the inauguration of Donald Trump. Here's a bit of what I wrote:

Some argue that if we abandon our stance of journalistic neutrality, we let the "post-fact" camp win. I argue that our minds — and our listeners' and readers' minds — are stronger than that, strong enough to hold that we can both come from a particular perspective, and still tell the truth. ...

As a member of a marginalized community (I am transgender), I've never had the opportunity to pretend I can be "neutral." After years of silence/denial about our existence, the media has finally picked up trans stories, but the nature of the debate is over whether or not we should be allowed to live and participate in society, use public facilities and expect not to be harassed, fired or even killed. Obviously, I can't be neutral or centrist in a debate over my own humanity.

I didn't propose that we should all become opinion writers, but I did call for an exploration of the idea that none of us can be neutral, and that perhaps in an era of open attacks on journalism by a sitting president, it is not in our best interest as journalists

TOP RIGHT: Courtesy of Lewis Wallace. BOTTOM RIGHT: Covering the education beat for WYSO in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Photo by Juliet Fromholt/WYSO.



ORIGINAL
MEMBER
OF THE
CURIOUS
CLASS



to claim neutrality. My employer thought my public statements rejecting neutrality and objectivity didn't represent the organization's views on journalism, and after a bit of back and forth, I declined to remove the post from my personal blog on Medium and was fired.

One of the questions I've been asked since then is: What does journalism "from a particular perspective" actually look like, if not mediocre leftist drivel or Breitbart-esque propaganda?

My answer is simple and hardly revolutionary: I think all journalism comes from a particular perspective. We all have identities and lived realities that shape the ideas we pitch, which voices we include and what questions we ask. I'm just suggesting self-awareness about that perspective. This is important in part because media bias skews toward a perceived center, and more often than not, white, male, educated and pro-capitalist perspectives serve as a standard for neutrality.

I want to consider a couple of examples of perspective, based on my own coverage of major events in 2016. One is the Pulse massacre, the mass killing in a LGBTQ nightclub on Latino night in Orlando. The other is Donald Trump's election. I'm focusing on my own work only because I know how to explain the thought that shaped the stories.

ORLANDO

First, to Pulse: After 50 people (including the perpetrator) died in Orlando in June, I was shaken, as were many people in my community. But I was also angry. The hypocrisy of politicians from both parties attempting to exploit this tragedy bothered me deeply.

That anger transformed into a story. I pitched a piece about job discrimination, noting that in more than half the states in the U.S., including Florida, it is still legal at the state level to fire someone based on gender identity and/or sexual orientation. My editors decided to send me to Florida a couple of weeks after Pulse to report on the economic conditions for queer people.

I was delighted, and I also had an agenda. Victims of job discrimination

among LGBTQ people are disproportionately trans women of color. I had also heard through my personal networks that many LGBTQ Latinx people and groups were upset at how coverage of Pulse had focused on white-run and English-speaking organizations, even though almost everyone killed at Pulse was Latino/Latina/Latinx. So I was determined to do stories that represented the voices of Florida's

My answer is simple and hardly revolutionary: I think all journalism comes from a particular perspective. We all have identities and lived realities that shape the ideas we pitch, which voices we include and what questions we ask. I'm just suggesting self-awareness about that perspective. This is important in part because media bias skews toward a perceived center, and more often than not, white, male, educated and pro-capitalist perspectives serve as a standard for neutrality.

marginalized queer populations accurately, which to me meant centering on the voices of trans women of color and Latinx people.

I ended up with two stories, one about a trans woman named Kat Gonzalez who'd been discriminated against over her gender identity in central Florida multiple times, and one about Latinx LGBTQ groups struggling to get money and resources to the families of victims. It's clear that I had a very particular perspective in reporting these stories. I pitched angles based on conversations in my own community, I knew approximately what I was looking for before I went, and I hustled to find the types of voices I wanted.

I also outed myself as trans to my interviewees, which I don't always do. That helped me make strong connections on a short deadline. Many non-trans journalists don't have any trans contacts; I know because they ask me for help making those connections. For me, the opening question wasn't how to find someone, but which type of voice would be best.

The stories aired for audiences of millions, and no one accused the stories of bias or unfairness. Yet a non-trans person, or a person with different ideas

about race, or a person who spoke Spanish, would likely have all done very different stories than I did.

And, of course, even another trans person might have done a very different story. My friend Meredith Talusan, then working for BuzzFeed, also traveled to Orlando after Pulse. She is trans and Filipina, among other identities. Her piece was entirely about queer resilience; she wrote that she was welcomed into the

private world of grieving queer Pulse employees as if she were herself a part of their queer family, and the piece was empathetic and moving.

No doubt her particular perspective shaped both the framing of the story and the access she had to private, intimate spaces. This is part of why diversity must go beyond tokenism: We are each more than any single identity.

DAYTON

I was in the newsroom at Marketplace in New York on the day of the 2016 presidential election. Many were surprised by the outcomes; Ohio, the state I'd only recently left after reporting there for a few years, ended up going for Trump, against many journalists' expectations. National newsrooms immediately started grasping for a new narrative, and largely settled on surging support from "the white working class" as the stated reason for the election outcome.

Ohio, to me, was not a monolithic place full of angry white men. It was complicated, like any swing state.

It had been profoundly burned by deindustrialization and the Great Recession. It was scarred by institutional racism and residential segregation, even as

white people and people of color work alongside each other in factories and service jobs. And many impoverished Ohio communities had been very eager to welcome immigrants, many of whom are also working class or poor.

I insisted on being sent back to Dayton, Ohio; my supportive editor obliged. On Nov. 11, off I went.

As with Orlando, I went with some clear goals and a lot of questions. I wanted to challenge assumptions about “the working class” that had appeared in much national media. Dayton proper is largely poor or working class, surrounded by wealthier suburbs, an Air Force base, and a lot of farmland; while some still work in aerospace or auto manufacturing, many now work in service and health care. Montgomery County was split down the middle in the election.

I was determined to do stories that weren’t based on stereotypes (the angry fired factory worker, who is almost always male; the elite Clinton voter, who is very rarely poor). I wanted to talk to working-class black people; poor white people who were also pro-immigration; Trump voters who were well-off. And I wanted to understand what motivated people in as complex a way as possible.

I ended up with several stories. In one of them, two women who work together in a factory talk about their political convictions, class and race.

The white woman, Kate Geiger, admitted concern about Trump’s views on women and immigrants, but votes primarily based on small government and anti-abortion views, a traditional Republican. In my conversations with Geiger, I asked pointed questions about race and immigration, which produced one of the strongest pieces of tape I’ve ever recorded: “If I were a Muslim woman, and I didn’t know me,” she said, “I’d be scared of me.”

Her black co-worker, Robin Pink, was repulsed by Trump’s takes on race and gender; she voted for Clinton. But she also felt that Democrats had done little for the struggling people in her community. “I don’t know how people are making it today,” she said.

Another of my stories focused entirely on people I met outside a food pantry in Dayton. The crowd was split down the middle in terms of candidates they’d supported but had one point of agreement in my random survey: that politicians had always represented the interests of the rich.

For the Trump supporters, there was a hope he’d be different. For opponents, there was a conviction that he most certainly would not. But not everyone voted on economics; there was a rousing argument about women’s rights while I stood by with my recorder running.

For a counterpoint to that work, just search the phrase “white working class voters.” Too often (though not always, of course), it seemed like reporters from D.C. or New York flew into Ohio with a goal of finding a white man who voted Trump for economic reasons. Often that man actually had a good job himself; the logic of this was rarely questioned. And in Ohio, you can find pretty much any kind of person you go look-

ing for. I felt these interviews mostly reinforced a narrative that had already been written.

I couldn’t tell you what motivated or informed these approaches, but I know the perspective I brought to my Ohio reporting had a lot to do with the desire to bust apart assumptions about the middle of the country and the people who live there. My coverage wasn’t revolutionary, but it was different than the stories we’d already been hearing, which was an explicit goal of mine.

PERSPECTIVE

Admitting that we have a perspective, and that this perspective shapes our journalism, is scary. We have to ask ourselves uncomfortable questions:

- *What might I be missing because of who I am and how I think?*
- *What questions am I not asking?*
- *What am I actively seeking that might obscure other truths?*
- *What does my privilege prevent me from noticing?*



Photo by Andy Snow

- What if I am not the kind of person my sources would normally open up to?
- What is the role of race in my interactions with sources?
- What about class and education?
- What questions might I ask if I were from here, or if I were from another country, or in another body?

If you are not disabled, when is the last time you thought about how your lack of a disability might affect what stories you tell and how you tell them? If you are white, do you go into interactions with other white people considering how your race affects those interactions? If you are not trans, how much time do you spend

be a journalist — a curious storyteller who puts power under the microscope — is just another falsehood in a time when we ever more desperately need to defend truth. ❖

Lewis Wallace is an independent writer, editor and multimedia journalist. He got his start in radio as a Pritzker Journalism Fellow at WBEZ in Chicago. His work focuses on the voices of people who are geographically, economically and politically marginalized. He is transgender and goes by "he," "they" or "ze." On Twitter: @lewispants

The ways we are shaped by race, class, language, geography, ability, gender and a whole slew of other life experiences tend to be less visible to people who are in positions of privilege and power (with privilege).

The ways we are shaped by race, class, language, geography, ability, gender and a whole slew of other life experiences tend to be less visible to people who are in positions of privilege and power (with privilege). For example, editors, disproportionately white men, often make decisions based on impulses or on assumptions about what our audiences want. But it's a privilege to assume your impulses and views are reflected by everyone else.

navigating your gender identity in public spaces, in interactions with sources?

And yet, a practice of not asking these questions limits the ability of newsrooms to report on our world as it actually is, to see stories that aren't being told, and to report with nuance and depth.

I'm committed to continuing these interrogations, and to say that I have an agenda is broadly correct. I think we all do, whether we're conscious of it or not. To say that a person with an agenda cannot also

FREELANCE

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Self-care to stay strong for the long-haul becomes essential. Look for inspiration in great reporting from turbulent times throughout history and around the world. This includes communities close to you whose longstanding challenges you may only just be learning to recognize.

Most important: Resist isolation. SPJ's Freelance Community is one of several vibrant online forums where independent journalists share resources, celebrate successes and help each other through tricky situations.

Freelancing is lonely enough. Don't try it alone. ❖

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Society of Professional Journalists members could save on car insurance with a special discount from GEICO.

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Beware rewards of some awards

EMAILS SOLICITING ENTRIES for various awards flood journalists' inboxes toward the end of each year. Organizations like SPJ and the Online News Association administer most major contests, but many advocacy organizations offer similar awards intended to recognize journalists' work.

Non-profit organizations that advocate for cancer or environmental research, for example, may sponsor award contests for journalists covering those beats. While awards — especially ones so specific to a person's area of expertise — are attractive and desirable, those administered by such advocacy organizations present complex ethical challenges for journalists.

SPJ's Code of Ethics does not explicitly address journalism awards, but one of its main tenets tells journalists to act independently. The document also says they should avoid any conflicts of interests "real or perceived" and "refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment."

Awards administered by advocacy organizations likely don't have nefarious intentions. The mission is often to encourage responsible and accurate reporting on a specific subject or field. But as noble as their intentions may be, submitting entries and accepting awards from these organizations may lead some journalists into sticky situations.

A journalist could realistically find himself in an ethical quagmire if he previously accepted an award that included a cash prize from a group that lobbies for more nuclear research, for example, but later needs to report on the

same organization. The journalist may report that story impartially, but members of the public may wonder if a person who accepted an award from the group treated it differently or not as harshly.

The best solution to these problems is not to get into them in the first place. Journalists should be very selective about the award contests they enter and the awards they accept.

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Journalists should first see if their news organizations restrict the type of contests they may enter. Freelancers should also check the policies of their most loyal clients.

When company policies don't provide the needed guidance, journalists should ask themselves whether accepting an award from an organization may complicate their professional life months or years later. If journalists are still on the fence about entering such award contests, they should either err on the side of caution or seek additional input from a fellow journalist or editor.

Also, a safe rule is to automatically rule out any contests from advocacy organizations that include cash prizes or other expensive gifts like travel.

When journalists do win and accept awards administered by advocacy organizations, they have a responsibility to disclose that relationship and award in any of their future reports that include mentions of that group or its leaders.

While it may seem self-serving to encourage journalists to only enter contests administered by the Society of Professional Journalists and other professional journalism organizations, those awards are generally not controversial and are not likely to bring up ethical questions down the road.

Contests administered by advocacy organizations may be appealing since most don't charge for entries and may look good on a resume, but protecting one's reputation is a lot more valuable than any tangible award or cash prize. ❖



ANDREW SEAMAN

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Struggling with a dilemma on deadline, or just want to talk about a tough call you've had to make? Call SPJ's Ethics Hotline at (317) 927-8000, ext. 208. Leave a message, and a member of SPJ's Ethics Committee will soon be in touch.



EXPLORE

JOURNALISM

WITH YOUR PEERS

Become a member of SPJ's communities and help shape your future and journalism's future.

BY BECOMING A MEMBER, YOU CAN:

- Build your network by engaging with like-minded members
 - Utilize and debate new ideas about your journalism
- Inform and engage members by collaborating on programs and content
 - Learn new tips and skills for your career
 - Develop a better industry

IT'S YOUR SPJ. MAKE A DIFFERENCE BY JOINING THE COMMUNITIES TODAY.

Questions? Email Chrystal Parvin, Membership Coordinator,
at cparvin@spj.org.



International Community



Community Journalism
Community



Digital Community



Freelance Community



Gen J Community

SPJ.ORG/COMMUNITIES.ASP

Digging out of the ‘fake news’ sinkhole

THE “FAKE NEWS” AVALANCHE began a few months ago, and I continue to dig myself out.

I am ignoring the adage that “If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging.”

Within a few days, along with reading a bevy of news reports on fake news, I served on a panel that in part focused on fake news; a student organization asked me to serve on a panel on how to identify fake news; I did several newspaper and TV interviews on fake news; and a student working on a class project interviewed me about fake news.

How exciting would it be if the masses were this interested in real news?

Meanwhile, some good real news comes from the SPJ Education Committee: It is creating a coalition of journalism organizations to re-ignite interest in the media literacy curriculum.

As to student interest in fake news, I think we can be helpful.

Many students are stunned to learn that “fake news” isn’t new. It existed long before the 2016 presidential election.

It’s a broad term. I start by breaking it down:

- **Propaganda:** This effective tool for circulating misinformation can come directly from the source, and in many cases gets circulated by the news media, unwillingly and willingly.

- **Sponsored content:** The excellent example of “marketingspeak” is information in all formats packaged to look like news, when in fact it is paid advertising. Sponsored content routinely appears on legitimate news sites these days. And in print, some of the devices used to distinguish it from non-advertising content have been eliminated.

- **Video news releases:** Through the years, SPJ has been on the record opposing use of these slickly packaged TV reports not created by news organizations but aired by them.

- **Parody/comedy:** One of the most popular places for students to get their “news” is from programs such as “The Daily Show,” and others similar to it, and from comedy skits on late-night TV. These creative endeavors come with threads of truth — some thicker than others. The Onion also falls into this category. Some of its stories have made it into mainstream news delivery.

- **“Fake news”:** This slickly packaged fiction delivered primarily through social media led one of its creators, Paul Horner, to crow that his work helped win the election for President Donald Trump.

So how do we help students avoid getting duped? Some suggestions:

- **Don’t pass along:** In Rich Martin’s excellent primer for aspiring journalists, “Living Journalism,” he warns against reporting that passes along news reported by others. Find the source of that information, and if it’s legit, report it originally.

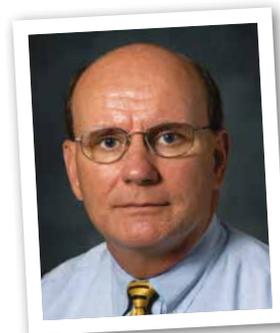
- **Find the primary documents:** So much of the information used to create news stories is available for people to view for themselves — whether it’s local ordinances, federal legislation or lawsuits. Go to the source, rather than accepting what an information provider tells us.

- **Media literacy:** Some wise people years ago recognized the need for media literacy in curriculum, and it got some “buzz” for a while. But as is often the case, those things that catch journalism education’s fancy quickly get replaced with the next great idea. Hopefully, the SPJ Education Committee initiative will give it some lasting traction.

- **Fact-checking drills:** The number and quality of fact-checking entities is on the rise, and some are eager to partner with schools and offer training. The folks from PolitiFact came to my campus in the fall, and students packed the auditorium for the insightful and entertaining presentation.

- **Give them the tools:** The Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Safety at Harvard University offers a toolbox for helping to sniff out fake news. It also provides a compilation of research on the kinds of fake news floating about (see “resources” links).

And a piece of advice that I routinely offered when speaking to civic groups about the news business: “If you are really interested in an issue — if it’s really important to you — a news report is a great place to start. But it’s not the place to stop. Keep digging.”



MAC MCKERRAL

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RESOURCES:

- **Journalist’s Resource: Fake News and the Spread of Misinformation**
tinyurl.com/JResourceFakeNews
- **Journalist’s Resource: Verification Tips for Social Media and User-Generated Content**
tinyurl.com/JResourceVerificationTools
- **Project Looks Sharp: Media Literacy Resources**
projectlooksharp.org

Get professional perspective from online connections

JOURNALISM IS IN A QUANDARY. From questions of trust to how the business model can survive in the digital age, the conversation about keeping the industry afloat is ongoing. News of layoffs, lost advertising revenue and the blunt, uneasy criticism of the press from the Trump administration have become ever-present norms in the media world.

Also the norm: competition for jobs, as well as the anxiety of navigating a career, whether you're a younger journalist fresh from college or a laid-off industry veteran trying to find your next step. They're asking themselves if they can truly make an impact in this industry.

Social media has undoubtedly revolutionized journalism in the 21st century. Yet its effects go beyond the realm of disseminating information. It has allowed aspiring journalists as well as those currently in the industry to network and exchange ideas.

In this time of unease and high stress in journalism, social media has given us new ways to invest in ourselves and our future, whether it's soon-to-be graduates getting acquainted with the industry or professionals trying to gain a new perspective to help with their next career steps.

That perspective is a click or tap away. Here's some advice on how to best go about it.

Engage with people who inspire you

Follow and interact with them on Twitter or Facebook. Their advice may help as you try to make sense of evolving trends in journalism.

Ask for a conversation

If you're on Twitter, send a tweet to the person you want to speak to. Make it simple, e.g. "Could you follow me so

I can DM (direct message) you about something?" Then, take it offline and arrange a time to connect. If contact information is listed on their bio, use that to make arrangements, and then have a conversation.

Ask a friend or colleague

Crowdsourcing advice within your own network can also help. Find time to sit down and get a cup of coffee and just chat. It may also allow you to reciprocate and help the person you're talking to if they need it.

Do a group LinkedIn email

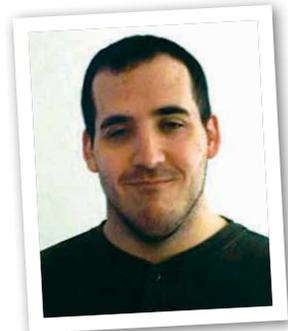
If you're on LinkedIn, there's an option to export your connections onto an Excel spreadsheet or as vCards. Take those email addresses and write for advice, but don't bombard your group; tell them in the beginning of your email that this is a one-time thing. The responses you get from your network will help broaden your horizons.

Stay in touch

Your initial conversation may have ended, but stay in touch with that person and don't be afraid to ask more questions in the future. It'll not only give you more necessary insight but also help expand your network.

You may feel nervous or uncertain at first, but getting perspective to help your prospects is an investment that is simple and has far more pros than cons. We may work at different organizations with different beats, but our goals at the end of the day remain the same: to inform, educate and engage the public the best we can.

The time you put in and the conversations you have will benefit not just you and your self-esteem, but your ability to make a difference for the people that matter most in journalism: your audience. ♦



ALEX VEENEMAN

Alex Veeneman, a Chicago-based SPJ member, serves on SPJ's Ethics Committee and contributes to SPJ's blog network. Outside of SPJ, Veeneman is a managing editor for Kettle Magazine, an online publication in the U.K. On Twitter: [@alex_veeneman](https://twitter.com/alex_veeneman)

Stay up-to-date on the latest digital media trends, skills and news with the Digital Media Community's "Net Worked" blog at blogs.spjnetwork.org/tech.



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HELP SPJ HONOR OUTSTANDING SERVICE TO THE SOCIETY

Every year the Society of Professional Journalists recognizes students, advisers and professional members who play a vital role in the Society's fight to improve and protect journalism. Nominate an SPJ member today for one of the following honors:



HOWARD S. DUBIN OUTSTANDING PRO MEMBER AWARD

The award salutes individual professional members who have made significant contributions to the Society.

JULIE GALVAN OUTSTANDING GRADUATE IN JOURNALISM AWARD

The award honors a graduating journalism student who is outstanding in his or her class on the basis of character, service to the community, scholarship, proficiency in practical journalism and significant contributions to his or her SPJ chapter.

DAVID L. ESHELMAN OUTSTANDING CAMPUS ADVISER AWARD

The award honors an individual who has done an outstanding job serving as SPJ campus adviser and who has contributed to his or her chapter and the national organization over an extended period of time.

REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

The award honors an outstanding SPJ regional director.

NOMINATION DEADLINE:
APRIL 17 2017

For more details and nomination forms, visit spj.org/awards.asp or contact SPJ at 317.927.4788 or awards@spj.org.



SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS
REGIONAL 2017
CONFERENCES



Visit the Regional Conference in your area

REGION 1

NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

April 7-8, 2017
John Jay College of CUNY
CONTACT: Michael Arena
(michael.arena@cuny.edu)

REGION 2

ELON, N.C.

April 7-8, 2017
Elon University
CONTACT: Colin Donohue
(cmdonohue@gmail.com) and
Anthony Hatcher (ahatcher@elon.edu)

REGION 3

FALL 2017

CONTACT: Sharon Dunten
(sdunten.region3@gmail.com)

REGION 4

DETROIT, MICH.

March 31-April 1, 2017
St. Regis Hotel
CONTACT: Walter Middlebrook
(wmiddlebrook@detroitnews.com)
and Mike Ramsey (Michael.Ramsey@gartner.com)

REGION 5

INDIANAPOLIS, IND.

April 8, 2017
NCAA Hall of Champions
CONTACT: Michelle Day (daymi@nku.edu)

REGION 6

BLOOMINGTON, MINN.

March 31-April 1, 2017
Crowne Plaza MSP Airport
CONTACT: Christine Paige Diers
(contact@midwestjournalism.com)

REGION 7

MANHATTAN, KAN.

May 5-6, 2017
Kansas State University
CONTACT: Kari Williams
(williams.kari09@gmail.com)

REGION 8

STEPHENVILLE, TEXAS

March 24-25, 2017
Tarleton State University
CONTACT: Dan Malone
(dmalone@tarleton.edu)

REGION 9

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

March 24-25, 2017
The Leonardo Museum
CONTACT: McKenzie Romero
(kenz.rae@gmail.com)

REGION 10

PORTLAND, ORE.

May 16, 2017
Eliot Center
CONTACT: Ethan Chung
(ethan.chung@gmail.com)

REGION 11

SAN DIEGO, CALIF.

April 28, 2017
Humphreys Half Moon Inn
CONTACT: Claire Trageser
(claire.trageser@gmail.com)

REGION 12

KNOXVILLE, TENN.

April 1, 2017
*Multicultural Center,
University of Tennessee*
CONTACT: Amanda Womac
(spjamanda@gmail.com)