

Part 1: The Reporter at Work



1 On the Job

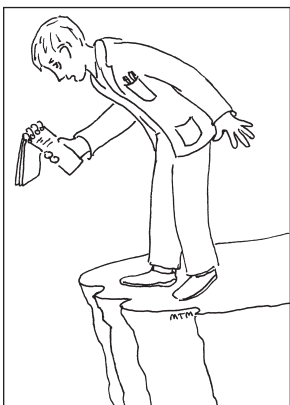


Curt Hudson

At the scene, a reporter obtains information for her story.

Preview

Watching journalists at work we see that they respond quickly to events that interest and affect people. They are tenacious in their search for relevant information. They have a passion for accuracy and a determination to be fair.



Follow the facts,
wherever they take you.

- The caller was furious. His wife had been airlifted out of Iraq where she was serving in the Army and sent to a hospital at Fort Stewart, Ga. He had visited his wife and saw that hospitalized soldiers were in barracks with no running water, no air conditioning; showers and toilets were in an adjacent building that was filthy and buggy. Can you do something? he asked a reporter.
- The farm labor recruiter has an enticing offer. He tells the homeless men at a Florida shelter he has a good job for them, and he promises hot meals, a solid roof over their heads and all the crack they want.
- Ray Charles, the pianist-singer known over the world for his soul and rhythm and blues music, dies of liver failure.
- A killer tornado strikes Spencer, a small South Dakota community.
- Plane crashes into World Trade Center.
- A Houston lawyer discovers problems in the way the police department's laboratory is doing forensic testing.
- A shooting breaks out at a high school in northeastern Arkansas.
- A 2-year-old Denver boy dies after his father throws him on the bathroom floor.
- The mountaintops of southern West Virginia are being relentlessly cut away by coal companies, and the leftover rock and earth is shoveled into nearby valleys. So far, 700 miles of streams have been buried.

Journalists at Work

We learn about these events and situations because journalists tell us about them. These journalists, some just out of college and some 20-year newsroom veterans, are our link to the world beyond our direct experience. Using their judgment, experience and a set of journalistic guidelines, they decide what is worth calling our attention to—what is newsworthy.

The Guidelines

The journalist's job begins with selecting what is newsworthy from the multitude of events that occur every day. By newsworthy, the journalist means what's important to readers and viewers, what will interest, affect and entertain them.

Hospital Conditions The husband of the hospitalized soldier called Mark Benjamin of United Press International because he had read Benjamin's stories about strange illnesses afflicting some of those returning from service in Iraq. He told Benjamin that the treatment and the conditions at the Georgia service hospital were deplorable. He said his wife had to wait six weeks before a doctor saw her.

Benjamin knew at once that the situation was *important*, that if he could verify the caller's assertions the story would have *impact*. Shabby treatment of those who serve their country is clearly newsworthy. He immediately flew to the base in Georgia to see for himself. Here is the beginning of his story:

FORT STEWART, Ga. Oct. 17 (UPI)—Hundreds of sick and wounded U.S. soldiers including many who served in the Iraq war are languishing in hot cement barracks here while they wait—sometimes for months—to see doctors.

Labor Recruiting Ronnie Greene of *The Miami Herald* had noticed a number of cases brought by the federal government against labor contractors seeking Mexican and African-American workers to pick oranges, tomatoes and other crops in Florida. The government called the conditions under which the men and women worked “servitude.” The workers called their housing “slave camps.”

The laborers sank into debt for rent and meals and could barely pay the 100 percent interest the contractors charged. At some camps, liquor and drugs were supplied at exorbitant prices. Not only was the story *important*, but all this was happening in Greene's backyard. Its *proximity* gave the situation added news value.

Greene was also guided in his decision to dig into the migrant labor market by another of our guidelines, *necessity*. Greene felt compelled to reveal the deplorable conditions in which those who pick our fruit and vegetables work. He felt it necessary to do the story. Perhaps exposure would lead to reform.

It did. Greene's series, “Fields of Despair,” led the state legislature to increase the penalties for farmworker abuse.

Death of an Entertainer The obituary of Ray Charles was news over the country. At the same time, the death of a local band leader was noted in an obituary

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that only ran in his hometown newspaper. Why the difference? Charles was well-known, and *prominence* is one of our guidelines. The band leader was known in and around Topeka. His death was newsworthy there only.

Spencer Tornado The tornado was big news in South Dakota, but the farther from that state the less newsworthy it was to news editors. *Proximity* played a role in determining newsworthiness.

Some events transcend borders. The Sept. 11 World Trade Center bombing was a momentous event, one of enormous *impact*. *USA Today* sold a record 3,368,600 copies of its report the day after the twin towers collapsed in searing flame and jumbled metal. Much of the world has been living in the shadow of the event since.

Before we continue with the events outlined at the start of this chapter, let's go back to the day terrorists struck the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and watch how some journalists reacted to the event.



The Bombings

ABC news correspondent Don Dahler was looking out his window at home when the first airliner hit one of the World Trade Center towers. He watched a huge plume of smoke envelop the upper stories. He saw people jumping out of windows in a frantic attempt to escape the inferno.

Dahler grabbed his telephone and called ABC. "The whole building has collapsed," he reported. Then he ran downstairs to what became known as Ground Zero, the scene of twisted metal girders, smoke and fire and futile rescue attempts. He stayed there, on camera, for 18 straight hours.

Three weeks later, Dahler was sent to Pakistan to cover the war against the Taliban.

In Washington, several staffers of *USA Today* were on their way to work driving past the Pentagon when a third plane struck. Mike Waller said, "Time stood still as I watched the plane descend and then head for the building. There was a gigantic fireball and then sheer terror.

"I don't know how I am going to sleep after this," he thought. But he went on to the office to help put out the newspaper.

To see how the paper was put out under pressure, see *USA Today* in *NRW Plus*.

David Handschuh, a photographer for the *Daily News*, was nearby when the terrorists struck the World Trade Center. The force of the explosion threw him more than a hundred feet. He lost his glasses, his cellphone and his pager. But his digital camera was intact and despite broken bones and the loss of his eyeglasses, he stayed to record the continuing horror. As he scrambled through the ruins, he tripped, fell, lost his bearings.

Emergency crews pulled him from the rubble three times that day. "They saved my life," he said.

In the four hours following the terrorists' strike, the Associated Press moved on its wires 40 flashes, NewsAlerts and bulletins. See **Terror Bombings** in *NRW Plus* for a rundown of this coverage.



More on the Guidelines

The Houston lawyer who was disturbed by reports of incompetent forensic testing in the local police department laboratory called KHOU—Houston. An alert sounded in the station newsroom. Lab work, reporters knew, is the key evidence in thousands of criminal cases. The lab tests can send a woman to prison for 20 years, a man to death row. If the lab work is tainted, innocents suffer, and trust in the police and the courts is eroded. The lawyer’s tip was *important*.

Harris County, in which Houston is located, sends more men and women to death row than any county in the nation. So when David Raziq and Anna Werner of KHOU learned of the possibility of flawed lab tests, they investigated.

Flawed Tests They sent some of the lab’s DNA test results to forensic experts. The findings confirmed the reporters’ concern: The experts reported “egregious errors . . . repeated gross incompetence . . . errors that seem to favor the prosecution. . . .” One report said that the lab work done in a rape case was “the equivalent of a scientific train wreck.”

The result of the TV station’s digging: A thousand cases were reopened and new tests ordered. Among the victims of the lab’s work was a prisoner convicted of rape at 16. He was freed after serving four years in a state prison.

Doped Athletes One of sports’ ongoing stories is the suspicion that several of its star athletes have been taking banned substances to improve their performance. Super-fast sprinters, home-run hitting outfielders, aquatic marvels—all have been suspect. The story simmered for years until authorities raided a drug laboratory in California. Among its customers were several headline athletes who had set world records.

Suddenly, athletes and banned substances became big news. We call this news guideline *currency* . . . a simmering situation boils to the top of the news, becomes current.

Next, let’s look at the coverage of a school shooting. The reporting of this event illustrates another of our guidelines, *timeliness*. An event that happens today is more newsworthy than the event had it happened yesterday or last week. The school shooting also illuminates the relationship of the reporter and the public.

The Agreement

An implicit understanding exists between the reporter and the public.

1. **The reporter** will do his or her best to give the public a complete and accurate account of the event as soon as possible. After the AP learned of a school shooting in Jonesboro, Ark., the Little Rock bureau immediately put the information on its wire:

a0662 11:41 AM

BC—APNewsAlert, 0021 <

Shooting at Jonesboro, Ark., middle school; school office reports one dead, at least 13 hurt.

Then it informed news editors:

An AP reporter and photographer are heading to the scene of the school shootings in Jonesboro, Ark.

Within 15 minutes of moving its NewsAlert, the AP had this story on its wires:

JONESBORO, Ark. (AP)—Two youths wearing camouflage opened fire on middle school students Tuesday as they assembled outside during a fire alarm. At least one person was killed and other injured.

2. **The public** presumes that the reporter's account is honestly and accurately reported and written. Although pollsters tell us that people are wary of the news they see and read, the reality is that people act on the information they obtain from their newspapers and broadcast stations:

The mother of three children in Little Rock schools who is disturbed by the Jonesboro shootings asks her state senator to press for stringent gun-control laws.

When newspapers and broadcast stations carried the proposal to do away with the study of evolution in Georgia public schools, public pressure forced the head of the state department of education to back off. A similarly aroused public spoke up when *Denver Post* reporters found that child abuse was a systemic problem, that the state's foster care system was failing in its responsibilities to children.

In West Virginia, *The Charleston Gazette* has been less successful in its long campaign to force coal operators to abide by the law that requires them to rebuild what they have destroyed. State and federal authorities, says reporter Ken Ward, Jr., look the other way, and the public has not mustered the strength to cope with the powerful political presence of the operators. But Ward continues to write about the destruction of the environment.

Continuous Coverage

Some of the events we have been looking at were breaking news stories—the killer tornado, Ray Charles' death, the terror bombings in New York, the Arkansas school shooting. Others were what journalists call enterprisers, stories the reporters developed themselves—the terrible conditions Iraq war wounded encountered in a Georgia Army hospital, the Florida slave camps, the incompetent Houston police lab, Colorado's poor foster care system, mountain-top removal in West Virginia.

Breaking story or enterpriser, the reporters stayed with the event until they felt they had covered it completely, had answered the questions readers, viewers and listeners might have about the event.

Reporters for the *Argus Leader* spent a week in Spencer to tell the full story of the tragedy. Let's watch a couple of them go about their work. Then we will go out to Arkansas and look over the shoulder of Kelly P. Kissel, the news editor of the AP Little Rock bureau just as he sends newswoman Jenny Price to Jonesboro following state police reports of a shooting at the Westside Middle School.

First to Sioux Falls.

A Tornado Hits Spencer

The skies are darkening over southeastern South Dakota. In the *Argus Leader* newsroom, the small Saturday night staff is alerted to the possibility of worsening weather. Assistant City Editor Rosemary McCoy calls reporter Rob Swenson at home to tell him he may have to go back to the newsroom to help with coverage.

David Kranz, another reporter, has Saturday off but decides to go in when he hears of the gathering storm. He shows up at 9 P.M., just as a weather bureau warning of a tornado rushing toward Sioux Falls sends everyone into basements from 9 to 9:30 P.M., not the place to be with a 10:10 P.M. deadline for the first edition.

As the Sioux Falls alert is ended the newsroom hears that the tornado has hit the small town of Spencer, 50 miles west of Sioux Falls. The tornado struck the town with its full fury.

McCoy sends Swenson and a photographer to Spencer. “Our mission was to get there quickly and call back with observations in time for the Sunday edition,” Swenson says. “The deadline was a major factor the moment we left the parking lot.”

Blocked But police had cordoned off the town and Swenson had to park about a quarter of a mile outside town. “The town was dark except for a slow-moving parade of flashing lights from ambulances, fire trucks and other emergency vehicles, which stretched from where we stood to the center of town,” Swenson said.

In the Newsroom

Knowing that Swenson and photographer Ken Klotzbach were unable to get into Spencer, Kranz started to work the phones. He had good contacts, having been the editor of *The Daily Republic* in Mitchell, which serves the Spencer area. “I was fairly familiar with the town,” Kranz says, “but I only knew a handful of people. I began calling them and got no answer. I then worked the phones in the area, thinking some rural Spencer people may have been in the town to check on things. No answer anywhere.”

Enterprise “At that point, I shifted my attention to law enforcement types. I called the wives of two law enforcement or emergency people that I knew would be there. First, I called the Minnehaha County Emergency Management director’s wife. I asked for his cell phone number.”

He continued to call and hit paydirt by finding the Davison County sheriff’s cell phone number.

“The sheriff saved our day. He stood in the middle of the debris and described the situation to me. He pointed out areas familiar to me. He then handed the phone to the U.S. Marshal who gave us a vivid description of the way Spencer was and what he was now seeing.

“As deadline neared, the sheriff told us he knew there were fatalities. He saw one for sure, but expected there were others.”

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Ken Klotzbach, *Argus Leader*

The Morning After

With 10 minutes before the deadline for the last Sunday edition, Kranz asked the sheriff if the governor were anywhere near. “He told me he was standing five feet away. I asked him to hand the governor the phone and I asked the governor how many people were dead. He put the number at four.”

With the minute hand sweeping toward deadline, Kranz made one more call, this one to a woman in an area outside Spencer. Again, he was lucky. She had driven into Spencer to check on her mother. Her observations of the devastation in the town added a “real people” voice to the story, Kranz says.

Continued Coverage Within minutes of putting the Sunday paper to bed, the staff began planning further coverage of the disaster. Jill Callison, the religion writer, was to cover church services. Six other reporters would go to Spencer. In the Sioux Falls newsroom, several reporters would write obituaries and gather information on how people could help the town.

Under a banner headline were two stories. One was about the tornado’s effects. Written by Kranz and Swenson, it begins:

SPENCER—Shocked survivors wandered their ripped-apart community Sunday searching for tornado-scattered belongings and mourning six neighbors who died.

The whole community reeled from the devastation that Saturday’s vicious storm left behind.

The other story began:

Here are ways people may help victims
of the Spencer tornado:

Summing Up the Coverage

Managing Editor Peter Ellis says, “We covered every angle of this story we could think of. We told about the heroes, the 8,000 volunteers who showed up to help, the governor who camped out there for a week, the prisoners who were happy to help, the minister who was spared while his wife died a few feet away from him.

“The main lesson from Spencer, I think, is that nothing beats good reporting, and lead reporter Dave Kranz is one of the best. He is always working his beat, including keeping up with former sources from years ago. It was because of this that we were able to get the sensational coverage, especially on the first day, that we did.”

School Shooting

Next to the AP bureau in Little Rock. It is getting on to noon and Kelly Kissel, the bureau’s news editor, is about to have his chicken sandwich when he hears that the state police have been asked to set up a perimeter outside Westside Middle School. There has been a shooting at the school in Jonesboro. A person has been killed. Kissel shoves his lunch aside, tells reporter Jenny Price to take off for Jonesboro.

He wants her to call him every half hour. During her first calls, Kissel, who knows northeastern Arkansas from having spent summers at his grandparents’ farm there, gives Price shortcuts: Take a left a mile past the grain elevator, another left, then right just past the railroad tracks. But even with these instructions, it will take Price two hours to reach Jonesboro and Kissel must put something on the AP wire quickly.

Early Stories

Kissel calls state police, local reporters in Jonesboro, the school superintendent’s office. It isn’t until he has the superintendent’s secretary on the line that he has something good enough for the wire. He writes these three paragraphs:

JONESBORO, Ark. (AP)—Two men wearing camouflage opened fire on middle school students Tuesday as they assembled outside during a fire alarm. At least one person was killed.

“It’s just like a bomb hit us,” Tom Simons said. “Just like a bomb hit.”

Most of the homes had been reduced to rubble.

“This whole town is gone,” said Gov. Bill Janklow.



Connie Tolbert, secretary to the school district superintendent, said eight to 13 people, mostly students, were injured. Other reports put the number of injured at up to 16.

Jonesboro is a city of 46,000 about 130 miles northeast of Little Rock.

Kissel calls the AP general desk in New York to discuss coverage. He is given the green light to send another reporter, Peggy Harris, to the scene. Over the next week, seven AP staff members will be rotated in and out of Jonesboro.

As Price is making her way to Jonesboro, Kissel and other staffers gather more information to try to flesh out the story.

Escalating Deaths Bulletins, more NewsAlerts, new leads follow in rapid order through the day. At 12:07, a NewsAlert reports a second death. At 12:11, the second lead has 15 injured. In a few minutes, a third lead corrected the 15 to 13. Then, at 12:31, the AP reports two suspects, ages 11 and 13, have been taken into custody. Then a story with background about other school shootings and the figure of 13 injured is reduced to 12. At 13:03 (1:03 P.M.), a NewsAlert reports a third death. At 13:37, a NewsAlert goes out about a fourth death.



Price has now reached the scene, and it is time to collect the bits and pieces for a definitive story. Price will write this, and it will be followed for the next six and a half hours by 10 Writethrus, each with new information. To read how this coverage unfolded, see **Jonesboro School Shooting** in *NRW Plus*.

An Announcement and a Fire

We are in the newsroom of a midwestern newspaper with a circulation of 25,000. The telephone on the city editor's desk rings and, after listening for a moment, the city editor calls out to a young reporter. "Bob, the publicity director of the Lions Club has a story."

The caller tells the reporter his club intends to donate some equipment to a city playground next Saturday at 10 A.M. at a ceremony the governor will attend.

The reporter calls the governor's press secretary to check the governor's itinerary in case he is making other local stops. In 15 minutes, he has written a short piece, putting the governor in the lead. He again checks the date, time and location of the ceremony against his notes.

A few minutes later, he is told to cover a fire with a photographer.

An hour later, Bob returns to the newsroom.

Human Interest "It was a small fire, about \$7,500 in damage, but there's some good human interest in it," Bob tells the city editor.

"Don't tell me you've got three columns on a three-paragraph fire, Bob," the city editor replies. "What's it about?"

Without looking at his notes, he answers. "The story isn't the fire but the background. I found out the family bought the house a few months ago. They had just

remodeled it, and this week the wife went to work to help pay for it. She leaves their 10-year-old boy home with his 12-year-old brother for a few hours every day.

“Well, the 12-year-old wanted to make some money cutting grass. He knows they’re short of money. He was filling the lawn mower with gasoline in the garage when the tank tipped over against the water heater. Woosh. Lucky he wasn’t hurt.”

The city editor thinks a moment.

“Got any good quotes from the older boy?” he asks.

“Yes.”

“Well, it sounds as though it’s worth more than a couple of paragraphs. But don’t make it a chapter in the book, Bob.”

At his desk, Bob pauses before writing. He can start his story like most accounts of fires he has read:

A fire of accidental origin caused \$7,500 in damage to a house at 1315 New Hampshire St. today.

No one was injured in the blaze that started in the garage when the 12-year-old son of the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Earl Ruman . . .

Direct Lead He has put a direct news lead on the story, which he knows his newspaper prefers for stories of this sort. But he is unhappy with this start. This is not the way he described the fire to the editor, he recalls. Then he remembers advice he was given by a reporter: “Every story demands to be told a certain way. Don’t impose a form or style on it. The way you write it has to flow from the nature of the event.”

The nature of his story was the youngster’s good intentions gone awry. So he starts again:

Two months ago, Mr. and Mrs. Earl Ruman moved into a three bedroom house at 1315 New Hampshire St. It was their dream house.

After years of skimping and saving . . .

At this rate, he will write the book his editor warned him against, he thinks. Although he wants a dramatic story—one that will build to a climax—he cannot take forever to develop the point. Readers will drift away.

Feature Lead His editor has been telling his reporters to try for feature-type leads when the event makes it possible. Perhaps this is one of those events. The youngster is the heart of the story, Bob reasons, and the boy must go into the lead. He tries again:

Teddy Ruman knew his father and mother had skimped and saved to put aside enough money to buy their dream house at 1315 New Hampshire St.

This morning, he decided to help, too. But his well-intentioned efforts turned to tragedy.

The 12-year-old . . .

That seems to be more like it. In 40 minutes, he has the story in good shape, he thinks.

The city editor reads through the copy.

“Yes, it’s a sad story,” he tells his cub reporter. “It’s hardly a tragedy, but it would be sadder if they didn’t have insurance to cover their loss.”

Bob makes for the telephone on his desk. He remembers another bit of advice: “Don’t leave unanswered any questions the reader may have. Don’t leave any holes in your story.”

Next, to another fire, this one far more serious, that is covered by a TV reporter.

TV Covers a Fire

It is Christmas Day in the newsroom of a New York City television station. A teletype clicks off a story about a fire in a small town in New Jersey. The AP reports that while a family was asleep, a fire broke out and flames raced through their house. Four died. Only two boys escaped.

The news editor calls to a reporter, “Elaine, take this one on.”

On the way to the fire, Elaine thinks of questions to ask and the locations in which to shoot the story.

“When I go out on an assignment I am conscious of the need for pictures,” she said later. “I look for things that have an immediate impact, because I have a short time to tell the story—maybe two-and-a-half minutes.

“So I look for the strongest statement in a talk, the most emotionally appealing part of the running story. When I arrive at a story, I want to be the first one to interview the eyewitness, so that the person is still experiencing the event. The emotional facts have to tell the story.”

On the scene, Elaine learns from the fire chief that the surviving youngsters had run to a neighbor’s house during the fire. As crews from competing stations arrive, she and her crew approach the neighbor’s house through the backyard to avoid being spotted.

“When I spoke to the woman next door, I asked her what happened when the boys burst into her home. She became tense and distraught as she described one boy’s face, burned and blackened by the fire,” Elaine recalled.

“On a breaking story, a broadcast journalist usually asks fewer questions than the print journalist. On this story all I needed to ask the neighbor was two or three questions and let her tell the story.”

On the return drive, Elaine structures the script in her mind. She has pictures of the fire scenes and interviews of the neighbor and the fire chief. She works the script around these, the most dramatic shots.

A Child’s Death

It was a drive-by shooting. The victim: 2-year-old Heather Brown. The family had been to church and stopped on the way home at McDonald’s for ice cream. At home, Heather was fidgety and wouldn’t go to sleep, so her father took her into the living room and began to rock her to sleep on the couch.

Suddenly, 60 high-caliber slugs tore into the house. One struck Heather in the head and she died in her father's arms.

For Diane Sugg of *The Sacramento Bee* the story was not so much the shooting death but the story of a lovable little girl. She found that story by driving out to the Valley Christian Church and waiting for its pastor, A.D. Olivan. He was close to Heather's parents and had spoken to them since the shooting.

Sugg had telephoned the minister but he didn't want to talk, so she drove to the church and waited. One hour. Two. After three hours, he arrived and Sugg persuaded him to talk to her about the child who used to run around the church singing to herself and hugging everyone she saw. There was something special about Heather, and everyone knew it.

"I would never have gotten Heather's story if I hadn't waited in a dark parking lot for three hours, hoping the family's pastor would come back to the church," Sugg says. "He did, and he could see I was sincere."

A Metro Daily

We are on West 33rd Street in New York City in the newsroom of the *Daily News* and the phone rings. An assistant city editor takes the call and turns to the city editor.

"This fellow says the governor's daughter is going to get a marriage license at 2:30. Maybe we ought to get a picture," he suggests.

The city editor is not enthusiastic.

"We had her announcement a few weeks ago," he says. But he decides they may as well take it. Nothing better may turn up for inside pages. (Nothing does, and the picture will run on page 3.)

A courthouse reporter calls about a suit he thinks will make a good story. A 21-year-old woman on welfare has won \$925,000 from a car-rental company. The reporter is given the go-ahead and is told to slug the story "Suit." (The slug is important, for this is the story's identifying mark.) Usually, the desk will tell a reporter how long the piece should run, but the city editor knows that his courthouse man, an experienced reporter, will hold it to 450 to 500 words.

Longer Stories

Let's look at stories that took time to develop, report and write, stories that are important but are not immediate.

First, to Jere Downs who moved to the transportation beat after covering breaking news for several years for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

"I'm writing less—perhaps twice a week at most. But my stories have more impact," she says. Crucial to her coverage, she says, is her "habit of scooping up all paper from an agency whenever I have the chance: operating budgets, capital budgets, requests for proposals, studies, board meeting minutes." She organizes

the material, after carefully reading it all, even the inch-thick operating budget of the local transit agency.

“This is going to be boring,” she thought. But she kept reading and underlining budget items that seemed unusual. One jumped at her—\$32 million for paying lawsuit claims. That turned into a story.

The Big Hole

Sources are essential for reporters, and Downs has lunch with one on Monday, visits the office of another Tuesday. Wednesday she was shooting the breeze with a highway construction engineer.

“In the course of our chat about the Route 202 construction project, he mentioned that construction was bogged down by a troublesome sinkhole that had so far swallowed \$4 million in concrete,” Downs said. Sinkhole repairs had been budgeted at far less, \$30,400. But a warren of limestone caverns was discovered directly beneath the location of the \$224 million interchange. Downs knew at once she had a story, and after her chat with the engineer she set out to gather information.

Her story begins this way:

The long-awaited solution to one of the state’s worst highway traffic nightmares—King of Prussia’s congestion of cloverleaves—will take longer and cost more money because of unexpected and huge sinkholes in the construction zone.

“There is no bottom to it,” said Carmine Fiscina, the Federal Highway Administration engineer overseeing the Route 202 project. “We all knew there were sinkholes, but this is an unbelievable turn of events.

“This is a Pandora’s box.”

That was just the beginning. “PennDot is still pumping cement into the ground—\$8.5 million to date,” Downs says. The agency exhausted the region’s supply of cement. “So it is building a cement plant on the construction site.” More holes, more cement, more stories.

Downs is assigned to the transportation beat, as we have seen. There are education, court and police beats. There are politics, sports and local government beats. And then there are newer types of beats that seek to give readers information the traditional beats do not turn up—personal finance, health and fitness, families and children—this last the beat that Laura Sessions Stepp has carved out at *The Washington Post*.

Children and Families

“Readers devour issues presented up close and personal,” Stepp says. One, she found, is adolescence, its perils and its promises. She wrote about the growing confidence of Josh, a 12-year-old she watched dig fence poles and stretch wire on his parents’ farm in southwestern Kansas.

Josh told Stepp that if he “stretched the wire too tightly it might snap, and the herd of Hereford crossbreeds would wander onto the highway, perhaps into the path of an 18-wheeler.”

Stepp told Josh’s growing up story.

Sleep Problems Stepp discovered that sleep deprivation is prevalent among many young people. “Beginning at age 15, kids need more sleep than younger children,” she quotes a sleep researcher. They need nine hours of sleep but are getting only six, Stepp was told.

“This three-hour debt accumulates over a couple of days,” her source told Stepp, “until their bodies take over and fall asleep regardless of what they’re doing.” When that happens, disaster can be moments away, and this is how Stepp begins her story about sleep deprivation among teen-agers:

There wasn’t a day when Erik Utterman, a junior at Sidwell Friends School, didn’t leave school a little tired. But on this particular March evening two years ago, he felt a little drowsier than usual. He had been up all night, finishing an English composition. He had skipped lunch, then spent two hours after school at baseball practice.

He was two miles from home as he steered the family van east down Westmoreland Street in Falls Church about 6 P.M. Edward Lee Rogers, an environmental lawyer who lived in nearby McLean, was driving west on the other side. . . .

Utterman dozed off and his van struck Rogers’ Volvo on the driver’s side, killing him almost instantly. Rogers’ seat belt was of no avail.

Utterman, also belted, escaped without serious physical injury but with a vision he will carry always.

As he whispered to his mother when she arrived at the scene, “Mom, I know I killed him. I know what his head looked like.”

Christmas Fund

When Cailin Brown took over the Christmas Fund stories for the *Times Union* in Albany, N.Y., the newspaper had been running brief pieces taken from material submitted by local social service agencies. Fictitious names were used for the people briefly profiled. The reporters handling the Fund drive never interviewed those whose stories they told.

Brown decided to change everything. She believed that the “same tenets of journalism” that work for other stories should be applied to the fund-raising drive.

“After countless meetings and some heated disagreements, the newspaper, social service workers and I came to terms on my plan,” she says. She would interview the elderly the newspaper profiled and the paper would run their photographs. The pictures, Brown says, “made sense to me because newspaper readers are drawn to illustrated stories.”

The stories, which appear on page 1 of the *Times Union*, are tales of courage and despair, devotion and loneliness. Brown, a general assignment reporter during the year, says that the people she interviews “are usually forgotten by their families, something unthinkable to our readers.

John Carl D'Annabile, *Times Union*

Downed, But Still Feisty

Stella Jabonaski makes her point emphatically to reporter Cailin Brown, who covers the Christmas fund drive for the *Times Union*. The drive is devoted to aiding the elderly needy in the Albany, N.Y., area. During the holiday season, Brown profiles

25 men and women for front-page stories of courage and perseverance despite debilitating physical conditions and too often forgetful families. Brown's stories have led to a steady increase in donations to the Christmas fund.

"I have covered my share of crime, both violent and white collar. I have written the story of a vibrant 3-year-old waiting for the death knell of leukemia. Yet never in 13 years as a reporter have I been so moved by the human condition as I have been listening to these people talk about getting old."

At "Nightline"

Let's drop in on Tom Bettag, the executive producer of "Nightline." It's 10 A.M. in Washington, D.C., and Bettag is making a conference call to the ABC News bureau chiefs around the world. The program won't air until 11:35 P.M., more than 13 hours later, but Bettag has been thinking about the news for that day from the moment he awoke.

In Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi, the champion of the country's democratic movement, who had been under house arrest for six years, was suddenly released. Bettag asks his correspondent what this means.

He takes a breather from the task of laying out the day's news agenda. "Our job is to illuminate the major issues of our time," he tells a visitor. He makes no apologies for the seriousness of the "Nightline" program. "People turn on 'Nightline' to find out if there's something they need to know, if there's something people are going to be talking about in the morning."

When "Nightline" anchor Ted Koppel used an entire program to read the names of the war dead in Iraq a bitter controversy ensued. Koppel was accused of using the program to fuel anti-war sentiment, of engaging in sensational journalism. His defenders said the program gave a face to what had been a studied attempt by the Bush administration to play down war casualties.

Investigative Stories

We expect the media to do more than keep us informed of the day's news. While that's important enough, we also want the media to keep track of those in power, to tell us how well and how honestly they are performing. This is the watchdog function of the journalist.

With the Disabled A few weeks after Cammy Wilson took a reporting job with the *Minneapolis Tribune*, her city editor gave her a feature assignment: Spend a day with a woman in a wheelchair to see how disabled people get around in the city. Wilson accompanied the woman as she went about her chores, shopped and had lunch. At the end of the day, the woman remarked to Wilson, "Isn't it awful how much we have to pay to be taken to the doctor?" "How much?" Wilson asked. "Forty to fifty dollars," she replied.

Wilson sensed a story of greater impact than the feature she was assigned to write. Wilson asked the woman if she had a receipt for a trip to the doctor. The woman did.

Overbilling By the time she finished her reporting, Wilson had a major scandal laid out: The transportation of the disabled was a multimillion-dollar operation in which people were being billed \$40 to \$120 for a round-trip to a medical facility. Companies were billing at an individual rate even when they took groups from a nursing home or a senior citizen center to a clinic.

Her stories interested the Health, Education and Welfare Department in Washington D.C., and, because Medicaid money was involved, HEW investigated. The Minnesota legislature held hearings and enacted several laws to regulate the transportation firms.

Exploitation A couple of weeks later, Wilson was house hunting. In one house, she noticed that every item was for sale. From worn-out washcloths to underwear, everything had a price tag. "Has the owner died?" she asked the realtor. "No," he said, "the owner is in a nursing home." "Why is he selling?" "He's not selling. The conservator is," the realtor replied.

An Ethic

"Making a living is nothing; the great difficulty is making a point, making a difference—with words."

—Elizabeth Hardwick

Once again, Wilson had a story. She learned that the owner, Ludvig Hagen, 86, suffered a fall and was taken to a nursing home to recover. While there, the church that he had named in his will marked the house and all of Hagen's possessions for sale. Wilson began her story this way:

“4415 17th Ave. S.”

“4415 17th Ave. S.”

The old man in his wheelchair repeated the address, tears beginning to well.

“I don't have to sell my house. It's paid for.”

But his house is for sale. It and all his possessions are part of an estate valued at \$140,000. . . .

As a result of the story, the county attorney launched an investigation.

Wilson then looked at probate, the handling of wills and estates by the courts. She learned that the county probate court had appointed a management firm to handle the estates of various people and that the firm had sold their homes for well under the market price to the same buyer, who within six months resold the houses for 50 to 100 percent more than the purchase price.

A Tip and an Exposé

“The message on my answering machine was straightforward: ‘I have a story that may be of interest to you.’

“Although reporters often get calls like this, many of which lead nowhere, I was intrigued, given the source, someone I had interviewed from time to time during the three years I covered the health, hospital and AIDS beat for the New York *Daily News* . . . someone who had never called me before . . . someone who sounded troubled.”

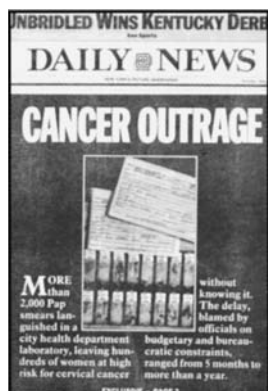
Heidi Evans returned the call. The caller told her that the city health department had quietly stopped giving Pap smear tests to thousands of low-income women who depended on its clinics for free gynecological care.

“Since many of the clients of these clinics fit the profile of women most at risk of developing cervical cancer—sexually active women who have had several partners and little access to medical care—I knew I had the start of an important story,” she said.

She dug into the records, interviewed people and found an even bigger story—the health department had endangered the lives of many women.

Here is how Evans began her story:

More than 2,000 Pap smears languished in a city health department laboratory for as long as a year, leaving hundreds of women at high risk of developing cervical cancer without knowing it.



She continued to dig and learned that 93 of the test smears indicated health problems, women who needed to be told to seek immediate medical attention. Evans found that instead of being informed quickly, the women received notices nine and ten months after their tests. When these women were finally notified and took further tests, some were fortunate. Some were not:

When Mary Pollack got the Mailgram it was Friday evening, too late to call the Health Department to have someone explain the message that read, “Urgent!! Concerning Your Health! Medical Emergency!”

On Monday morning, as Pollack held the Mailgram in her shaking hands, the doctor at the city’s Jamaica, Queens, clinic gave her the scare of her life.

“You have cancer,” he told her.



Heidi Evans

Gang Rape

Loretta Tofani went face-to-face with her editors at *The Washington Post* about a discovery she had made while covering the Prince George’s County Courts. During a sentencing, a lawyer told the judge, “Your honor, my client was gang raped in the county jail.” The assertion shook Tofani. “I asked the judge how often he heard about the rapes. ‘Oh, it happens all the time,’ he said.”

Tofani decided to check. She continued to cover her beat, but on her days off and when she finished work, she went to see jail guards at their homes, and she interviewed rape victims. After six weeks, she went to her editor. About a dozen men a week were being raped, most of them held in jail because they lacked bail money.

“They were gang raped because the jail failed to enforce its rules and permitted prisoners to block the view of guards with black trash bags,” she told her editor. “Jail policies actually promoted the gang rapes because the jail failed to separate the weak from the strong, to separate those charged with drunk driving, shoplifting and trespassing, who became rape victims, from convicted murderers and armed robbers, the typical rapists.”

Her editor replied: “Let’s put it on the back burner.” She went over his head to another editor. He turned her down. “Spend your time on daily stories,” he told her. Her third try was successful, and the metropolitan editor ordered her immediate editor to give Tofani time to do the story.

The stories about gang rapes in the county jail won a Pulitzer Prize.

Using the Internet

Reporters use the vast resources of the Internet to gather information for their stories. In Cleveland, *The Plain Dealer* used the tools of computer-assisted reporting to find that a widening racial health gap exists across the country.

Two Tracks

The staff checked the records of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to discover racial health disparities in such areas as Essex County, N.J., where thousands of HIV-infected drug addicts live on the streets of Newark. In Bacon County, Ga., black families “are being destroyed by an epidemic of heart disease and diabetes—diseases that are usually discovered and treated in white residents,” Dave Davis wrote.

The series described individual stories of pain and heartbreak. John Holley, a 47-year-old, Lima, Ohio, resident, tried to have a doctor treat him for chest pain. The doctor refused to see him. Days later, Holley died.

Davis wrote that Holley’s wife was certain the couple’s lack of health insurance was the reason for the doctor’s action. She told Davis: “When we got there, the doctor said, ‘I don’t understand why they sent you here. I’m not going to touch you.’ I was so shocked, I just said, ‘Thank you.’”

Davis’s conclusions: Poverty, lack of health insurance and a racial factor are involved. “African Americans admitted to hospitals receive less medical care than whites who are the same age, same gender and about as sick,” he wrote.

Foster Care

It took reporters for *The Denver Post* seven months to answer the question they asked themselves: Was the death of a 2-year-old an isolated instance of anger, or did it reveal a deeper pattern?

The reporters had a hunch that the foster child system was at fault, that some, perhaps many, of the foster parents were unfit for the task, that some had criminal records. To verify their hunch, they crunched 1.8 million computer records, created computer tables to track inspection reports and looked over a database of Colorado criminals and matched it with a database of foster parents.

They found matches: A foster father had spent more than half his adult life in prison, a foster mother had pleaded guilty to solicitation for prostitution, a woman who operated a daycare center had been charged with selling drugs out of the center. The state legislature took action.

It’s a short hop from Denver to Las Vegas, Nev., where Brendan Riley of the Associated Press has been working on a story about crime in the fastest-growing city in the United States. Riley is especially interested in the effectiveness of the Las Vegas Metro Police Department in solving crimes.

At the Bottom

By digging into the FBI’s database, www.fbi.gov, Riley has discovered that the Las Vegas police force solves only a fifth of the violent crimes committed in the city. This is the worst record in the country.

Riley runs the data by the police and asks for comments. The response he gets sends him scurrying back to his figures. The police say their data shows Las Vegas has problems solving crimes, but it definitely isn’t the lowest-ranking city in the

country in this category. Miami, San Francisco and several others are worse, they tell him. In fact, a department spokesman says, Las Vegas is seventh or eighth worst.

Riley checks his data and compares it with the material the Las Vegas police have made available to him.

He spots the reason for the difference. “Either accidentally or deliberately, Metro failed to count one of the lesser crime categories,” Riley says. “That has the effect of skewing the numbers so Las Vegas doesn’t look so bad.” Riley stands by his numbers. But he will need comments from the police about the reasons for the low ranking.

He will also need comments from an outside authority, someone at the University of Nevada who is an expert on criminal justice. And he wants human interest. After all, a numbers story is not the most interesting reading.

Human Interest The logical person to try to reach is a crime victim, someone involved in an unsolved crime. Riley locates Joyce McKay in Fresno, Calif. Her son and his girlfriend were shot to death in Las Vegas, their murders unsolved. Riley puts this human interest as high in the story as he can. He quotes McKay: “There’s no closure. It’s an ugly thing and an ugly feeling to be left with.”

Expert’s Comment For an interpretation of the figures from outside the police department, Riley turns to Grant Stitt, chairman of the Criminal Justice Department at the University of Nevada, Reno, who is quoted as saying, “To a certain extent, it shows what the police are up against. You can have a very effective police force, but also have a community full of criminals. The police may be as effective as possible, but that’s all they can do.”

Riley quotes the police as saying the force has 1.54 officers per 1,000 Las Vegas residents, well below the national average. Add tourists to the population figure, and the ratio is even lower. Also, Riley quotes Stitt as saying, the voters refused to approve a bond issue that would have expanded the jail. “We live in a democratic society,” Stitt says, “and the police are an agency of government. We pay for government, and we get what we pay for.” With this quotation, Riley ends his story.

We will look more deeply at how journalists use the Internet in Chapter 4.

Online Journalism

Corpus Christi, Texas, is home to many Navy families, and when the USS *Inchon*, an aircraft carrier, and four sister ships were making their way to home port, the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* provided readers with stories on the newspaper’s Web site. The stories were filed by the newspaper’s on-board reporter, Stephanie Jordan.

“My kids rush to the computer every night to see where Daddy is,” a Navy wife told the newspaper. “I would like to thank the *Caller-Times* for this wonderful Web page.”

When Hurricane Bret threatened the Gulf Coast, the newspaper put its staff to work filing frequent stories on the site, www.caller.com. One story quoted Omar Garza, “I wasn’t scared. The wind was only 120 mph.”

Web Versions

Many newspapers provide an online version of the printed newspaper. At a few newspapers, the online staff may initiate coverage.

“We try to avoid looking like the newspaper on the Web,” says Andrea Panciera, the online editor at www.projo.com, the Web site of *The Providence Journal*. Her staff produces three set reports a day and covers breaking stories as well.

The site carries stories that the newspaper’s reporters write—but most are rewritten to suit the site’s style, “radio/TV style,” Panciera says.

At the *Times-Record News* in Wichita Falls, Texas, Carroll Wilson advises writers for www.tronline.com: Write short. Keep as close to one computer screen as possible. People scan and surf the Web, Wilson says. “This is different from reading a newspaper. When you go to the Web for information you go for quick bites, quick hits.”

The Characteristics of the Reporter

Different as these journalists may appear at first glance, they share certain characteristics, and there are many similarities in the way they handle their assignments.

One characteristic we notice is the reporter’s attitude. He or she is curious. The reporter wants to know what is happening—firsthand. This curiosity is not born of nosiness. Journalists learn early that seeing and hearing for themselves is better than secondhand accounts. The firsthand account rings with authenticity.

Tenacious

“Let me tell you the secret that has led me to my goal,” said Louis Pasteur, the French chemist whose studies of bacteria led to the pasteurization process. “My only strength lies in tenacity.”

Persistent

The journalist knows how important persistence is in getting to the truth. Persistence allowed Lisa Newman to tell the story of how a Chicago police officer was transferred as punishment for giving the daughter of the police superintendent a traffic ticket. Newman heard about the incident from an officer, but when she talked to the officer who issued the ticket he refused to confirm her tip.

Newman, a reporter for *The Daily Calumet and Pointer*, gradually lessened the police officer’s resistance, and he finally gave her the details. She also learned that the ticket was dismissed in traffic court.

With the information, Newman wrote several stories that led to an investigation.

Asking Questions Persistence also means asking question after question until the issue is clarified, the situation made understandable for the reader or viewer. The columnist Dave Barry says, “I was a pretty good writer and I thought that was all that mattered. But journalism isn’t about writing. You learned that what it’s really about is asking hard questions, being persistent.”

Dangerous Drug David Willman of *The Los Angeles Times* Washington bureau learned that a drug to treat diabetes had been removed from the market in Great

GOYA/KOD

When *The Washington Post* was digging up exclusives in its Watergate coverage, the national editor of *The Los Angeles Times* was disturbed by the failure of the *Times*' Washington bureau to match the coverage. The *Times*' reporters were trying to cover the scandal by telephone, the editor learned.

"Tell them to get off their asses and knock on doors," the editor shouted to the Washington news editor. The advice went out with increasing frequency and ferocity, until the Washington editor decided to post a sign in the office:

GOYA/KOD
Get Off Your Asses
and
Knock On Doors

Britain but was still being sold in the United States. A year's investigation led to his two-part series on the deaths the drug Rezulin had caused. But the Federal Drug Administration took no action. For the next 14 months he wrote about the mounting death toll and the growing concern of physicians in 25 follow-up stories. The FDA finally removed the drug from the market. An editor described Willman as "the most tenacious guy I ever met as far as grabbing something and never letting it go." Willman won a Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting for his stories.

Confronting Editors Sometimes, a reporter has to move beyond persistence. "You must be a little pushy, a little bit abrasive, a little bit obnoxious," says Bill Kovach, former executive editor of the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. "To get important subjects into the newspaper, you have to be up-front, confronting editors face-to-face."

Fair

In journalism's younger days there was a newsroom saying, "Never check out a good story." Today's journalist always looks for the rejoinder, the defense, the reply, the other side of the story. A survey of working journalists found near unanimous agreement on two reporting necessities—getting the facts right and getting both sides of the story. Later in this chapter we will watch a reporter as he tries to steer a middle course in a conflict over school reading material.

Knowledgeable

Stanley Walker, one of the great city editors, was once asked, "What makes a good reporter?"

"The answer is easy," he replied, with a show of a smile around his eyes. "He knows everything. He is aware not only of what goes on in the world today, but

his brain is a repository of the accumulated wisdom of the ages.” Walker, who helped make *The New York Herald Tribune* admired for its fine writing, continued: “He hates lies and meanness and sham, but keeps his temper. He is loyal to his paper and to what he looks upon as his profession; whether it is a profession, or merely a craft, he resents attempts to debase it.”

The wider the reporter’s knowledge base, the quicker the reporter can bring the story into focus. As soon as the reporter heard the speaker say that the country’s politics had gone wrong with Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, he knew his story was about a conservative’s approach to politics. Reporters always try to get a jump on their stories, given the short time they have to do their reporting and writing. The more they know, the faster they can find the theme of the event.

Number One

At *USA Today* an editor set as the First Commandment for his staff: “Break stories. Investigate. Spot the trends.”

Enterprising

News conferences, interviews and ball games present few problems. But for every easily accessible situation there is a tougher assignment, a less accessible source. The lore of journalism includes tales of enterprising reporters such as the one about the Chicago reporter who was blocked from a crime scene. He noticed doctors being waved into the building. He sprinted down the street to a pawn shop, pointed to a small suitcase, handed over a few dollars and raced back. Holding the case in his most professional manner, the reporter was allowed to pass.

Finding the Casualties When Chinese troops shot down hundreds of students demonstrating in Tiananmen Square for democratic reforms, reporters were prevented from entering the area. Officials denied that any of the young men and women were killed. Jan Wong realized she could learn about casualties by going to local hospitals. She found the front doors were barred to outsiders.

“But no one guards the back door,” and she went in. “Dozens of corpses, mostly unrefrigerated, decompose on the fifth day after Chinese troops slaughtered unarmed demonstrators near Tiananmen Square,” she wrote for her newspaper, *The Globe and Mail* of Toronto.

A week later, the authorities decided Wong was finding out too much. As she was walking down a street, a car with no license plate cut her off, secret servicemen grabbed her and tried to shove her in the car. She kicked and screamed, attracting passersby who protested. The police released her.

Naming the Coach In the days of intense competition between the United Press International and the Associated Press, reporters knew that a beat would result in a major play in newspapers and on stations. Sources did not want to show preference, so they would hold news conferences which allowed all the media an even shot. The trick was to break down the wall of silence before the scheduled conference, and the UPI did just that when a new football coach was to be announced at Rice University.

The Houston UPI bureau called around the country to the coaches who had been mentioned as candidates. No luck. The only one left was the assistant coach at Rice, and a call went out to his home. The maid answered. No, the coach wasn’t in. Nor his wife.

“Is she going to go to the news conference this afternoon?” the UPI reporter asked.

“Yes, sir. She wouldn’t miss that for the world,” the maid answered.

In seconds, the bureau put out a story about the assistant coach’s new job.

You might say that was risky. But would the assistant coach’s wife be going to a news conference to hear someone else named coach?

Courageous

For Ian Stewart of the Associated Press, the question was simple: Rely on people to tell him what was happening, or see for himself? Should he and an AP cameraman and an AP television cameraman venture to Freetown in Sierra Leone, which was being threatened by rebel gunmen? For 10 months, the rebels had rampaged across the countryside, earning a fearsome reputation by hacking off the hands and feet of villagers in a campaign of intimidation.

“The choice was simple,” Stewart said. “We had to go to give the people of Sierra Leone a voice and to tell their story.”

They went and they met with disaster. Myles Tierney, the TV cameraman, was killed, and Stewart suffered a bullet to his brain that left an arm and hand useless.

Given the disastrous outcome, was his choice wise? “I could not in clear conscience ignore the plight of an innocent people,” Stewart said. Not go? “That is not why I entered journalism, nor is that what I was trained to do.”

Courage of another sort motivated Ellen Whitford of *The Norfolk Virginian-Pilot* to go into an abortion clinic and allow herself to be examined and prepared for an abortion. Whitford wanted to prove what she had learned secondhand, that abortions were being performed on women who were not pregnant.

At the Square One of the standard stories from China is the visit to Tiananmen Square on the anniversary of the massacre. Although protests are banned by the authorities, some Chinese manage to register their desire for democracy. This is dangerous for the protesters and for journalists. It proved a disaster for Todd Carrel, an ABC news correspondent who was interviewing a lone protester as he unfurled a banner of complaint.

“Undercover Chinese policemen attacked me,” Carrel says. “And that beating changed my life.” The Chinese police beat him so severely that Carrel is disabled. The protester, Carrel learned, had his life changed as well. He was confined to a mental institution.

Reporters and photographers have died covering wars and disasters. Mark Kellogg, a correspondent for the *Bismarck (Dakota Territory) Tribune*, fell while riding with Custer and the 7th Cavalry at Little Big Horn in 1876. Ernie Pyle, the legendary war correspondent, was shot by a sniper in the closing days of World War II. More than 40 journalists were killed covering the war in Iraq, and since 2000 more than 300 have been killed worldwide.

Compassionate

James Fallows, national correspondent for *The Atlantic Monthly*, describes as “the highest achievement” of journalism making “people care about and understand events or subjects they had not previously been interested in.”

Martyred

In 1837, Elijah Lovejoy, an anti-slavery editor, was slain by a mob in Alton, Ill., as he tried to defend his press. Lovejoy is considered the first martyr to freedom of the press in the United States.

Murdered

Daniel Pearl, the South Asia bureau chief for *The Wall Street Journal*, wanted to find out what motivated the hatred of Islamic militants for the United States. He arranged to meet several of them in a restaurant in Karachi, Pakistan.

Shortly after he arrived, the militants kidnapped Pearl and took him to a hiding place where they put him in chains and photographed him with a gun to his head. His captors accused him of being a CIA and an Israeli agent.

Four weeks later, a videocassette was delivered to Pakistani authorities. It showed Pearl had been “brutally slaughtered,” his throat cut.

Journalists: Some Vintage Versions

Reporters are “a cross between a bootlegger and a whore . . . a lot of lousy, daffy buttinskis, swelling around with holes in their pants, borrowing nickels from office boys. And for what? So a million hired girls and motormen’s wives’ll know what’s going on.”

—Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, “Front Page”

“. . . reporters tend to be dilettantes who know a little bit about a lot of things and not very much about any one thing. And the nature of the game,

the dailiness of it, never gives them very much opportunity to learn very much about any one thing.”

—Victor Navsky, *editor of The Nation*

“. . . I see a pale-skinned man in his early forties . . . at two in the morning. He’s divorced, his wife has taken his children to another town and when he goes home in the morning there’s nothing in the ice box.”

—Thomas Powers,
former United Press International reporter

Pressure

The Vietnam War followed what the United States charged was an attack on an American warship in the Gulf of Tonkin, an allegation some journalists found dubious. When the CBS news show “60 Minutes” alleged the attack was fabricated to justify U.S. intervention, President Lyndon Johnson called the president of CBS in the middle of the night to tell him, “Your boys shat on the American flag.”

Increasingly, journalists have turned their attention to the defenseless, the poor, those without a voice.

Children Eric Newhouse found that growing numbers of children in Montana were suffering from depression, bipolar disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity. Teen-age suicides had increased seven-fold since the 1950s. He wondered why and he set out to find the answers for his series in the *Great Falls Tribune*. He not only spoke to experts, he also talked to many troubled teen-agers.

Let’s follow a reporter who exhibits some of these characteristics as he tries to background a press release that challenged his values and assumptions.

A Press Release That Needs Backgrounding

In the newsroom of a daily newspaper in Maryland, the editor calls the education reporter over to his desk. “Dick, here’s something pretty important. Overnight took these notes from a fellow who said he is the publicity chairman of an organization called the Black Parents Association. See if the outfit amounts to anything and, if it does, let’s have some comments. Write it down the middle. It’s a touchy issue.”

The notes read as follows:

The association has just sent a complaint to the state board of education. We are disturbed by the use of certain books our children are being given in the city’s schools and school libraries.

Some of this reading gives the children—black or white—a stereotyped view of minority people. At a time when we are in danger of becoming two societies, every effort must be made to understand each other. Some of the books our children are being asked to read do not accomplish this. They portray black people as ignorant, lacking in culture, childlike, sexually loose, etc.

We are asking that certain books be removed from the library and the classroom—Huck Finn, Manchild in the Promised Land and Down These Mean Streets. We intend to add to the list.

“The picture of Jim in the Twain book is that of the stereotyped black man of slave days,” says James Alberts, association president. “Impressionable children are led to think of black people as senseless, head-scratching, comic figures. We object to that portrayal of Nigger Jim.”

Alberts said that in 1957 the Finn book was banned from elementary and junior high schools in New York City by the city board at the request of the NAACP. Later, he said, black students at Brandeis University picketed a school near the university that used the book. In recent years, some cities have removed the book from reading lists. In Waukegan, Ill., it was removed on the ground that it was offensive to blacks. Dr. John H. Wallace, an educator on the Chicago School Board, calls it “the most grotesque example of racist trash ever written.”

“If it is to be read, it should be read at home under the direction of their parents,” Alberts said.

The group met in Freedom Hall of the Mt. Zion Baptist Church tonight.

Background Check

Dick checks his newspaper’s files to see if there are any stories about the association. He finds a 1990 story that says that the association was formed in 1955, one year after the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on school desegregation, and that it has been active in local school affairs.

He telephones the president of the association to ask if any particular incident provoked the action. The president tells him a parent brought up the issue at a meeting last month. Dick asks for the name of the parent, but the president has forgotten it.

For reaction from the schools, he looks up the telephone numbers of the city school superintendent, some high school principals and the head of the board of education. He asks for their comments. If he has time, he thinks he will try to go over to a high school. He would like to interview black students, he decides. But that may have to wait for a folo (follow-up story).

He rereads the release. Many readers will know *Huckleberry Finn*, but what about the other books? He will have to find out something about them.

Balance He remembers that, when he took a course in American literature, one of his textbooks described *Huckleberry Finn* as the greatest of all American novels. Maybe he will work that in to give the story some balance. He read the book for the course and remembers Jim as a man of dignity. But his reactions certainly are not those a black high school student might have, he concedes. Yes, he will have to talk to students and to their parents as well. He also will have to guard against putting his opinions into the story.

Dick looks under *Twain* in the encyclopedia and, to his surprise, he finds that the book is properly titled, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. He had better check the other titles.

Censored Books

"Cumulative findings since 1982 show that the most frequently attacked books are American classics. The top three targets since we began our monitoring have been John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*."

—People for the American Way, a constitutional liberties group



Censored Writers

Dick admits to himself he does not like what the association is doing. It is too close to censorship, he thinks. After all, Mark Twain is a great writer. And people are always objecting that some authors are dangerous reading for the young—Hemingway, Salinger, Vonnegut, Steinbeck. But Mark Twain?

Can a great writer be prejudiced? There's a running debate about Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. He recalls reading a wire story about some parents asking that *The Merchant of Venice* be restricted to high school seniors on the ground that younger students are vulnerable to the anti-Semitic stereotypes in the play.

He also recalls reading that when Twain was a young reporter in San Francisco, he wrote an account of an attack by a gang of young whites on a Chinese man. Several policemen stood by and watched, Twain had written. Twain's story, a straightforward account of the incident, never ran in the newspaper. Even so, it's possible Twain could have been a racist by today's definition.

Dick has a vague recollection of reading a story about Twain helping a black student at Yale. Better look into that, too. He will need time to check out all these recollections, he decides. He will not trust his memory.

Also, he will need to look into the whole issue of book censorship, which, he knows, has been in the news for some time. He knows that battles are being waged across the country over appropriate material for the school curriculum. He will have to use the Internet to obtain a lot of background material for his story, and he will have to interview parents, school officials and teachers—and students.

To follow Dick as he gathers information for his story, see **Huckleberry Finn** in *NRW Plus*.

Summing Up

Journalists live in a world of confusion and complexity. Nevertheless, they manage through enterprise, wit, energy and intelligence to move close to the truth of the event and to shape their understanding into language and a form that can be understood by all. The task ahead of us in this book is to help you develop the journalist's craft and to find a personal credo to work by. A reporter who worked her way from small newspapers in New Mexico, Pennsylvania and New Jersey to the AP and then to *The New York Times* says her motto is "Keep cool but care." This philosophy seems to describe the reporters we will be following in the rest of this book.

Journalists make mistakes. It is important to learn from mistakes and not to be discouraged. Although mistakes can be embarrassing and humiliating, they are unavoidable. Look at the Corrections box on page two of any issue of *The New York Times*, which is staffed by some of the best journalists in the business. Day

after day, two to five admissions of error are published—wrong names, wrong addresses, wrong figures. Don't live in fear of making a mistake; that will cut down your range. Do the best you can. That's all anyone can ask of you.

Further Reading

At the end of each chapter, suggested supplementary reading is listed. The listed books have been recommended by journalists and by authorities in the fields discussed in the chapter.

This list includes, for example, the autobiography of a major figure in American journalism, Lincoln Steffens. It also includes Vincent Sheean's recollections of his life as a foreign correspondent, a book that persuaded many young men and women that journalism is for them. Also listed is a biography of Edward R. Murrow, the eminent broadcast journalist. One book describes the women journalists who broke through barriers at *The New York Times*. Finally, no journalism bibliography would be complete without the book that describes how two young reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, toppled a president.

Frankel, Max. *The Times of My Life and My Life with The Times*. New York: Random House, 1999.

Kendrick, Alexander. *Prime Time: The Life of Edward Murrow*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1969.

Kroeger, Brooke. *Nellie Bly: Daredevil, Reporter, Feminist*. New York: Times Books, 1994.

Robertson, Nan. *The Girls in the Balcony: Women, Men, and The New York Times*. New York: Random House, 1992.

Serrin, Judith and William. *Muckraking: The Journalism That Changed America*. New York: The New Press, 2003.

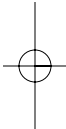
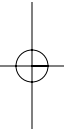
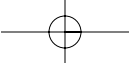
The 121 articles from colonial days to the present display the work of crusading and investigative reporters. The great names are all here—Steffens, Tarbell, Riis, Wells, Woodward and Bernstein—along with the worthy work of lesser-known journalists of conscience.

Sheean, Vincent. *Personal History*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969.

Steffens, Lincoln. *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1931.

Waldron, Ann. *Hodding Carter: The Reconstruction of a Racist*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1993.

Woodward, Bob, and Carl Bernstein. *All the President's Men*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974.



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