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National Association  
of Science Writers, Inc.

Spring  
2010

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SCIENTISTS GO  
HOLLYWOOD  
TO GET THE WORD OUT

**Editor**

Lynne Friedmann

**Editorial Board**

Robert Lee Hotz  
Paul Raeburn  
Deborah Blum

**Proofreader**

Judith Schwartz

**Design**

Carol Kerr Graphic Design  
www.carolkerr.com

**Advertising**

Tinsley Davis  
510-647-9500  
director@nasw.org

**NASW Policy**

Mariette DiChristina  
mdichristina@sciam.com

**Editorial Submissions**

Lynne Friedmann  
P.O. Box 1725  
Solana Beach, CA 92075  
editor@nasw.org

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P.O. Box 7905  
Berkeley, CA 94707  
Phone 510-647-9500  
www.nasw.org

**Executive Director**

Tinsley Davis  
director@nasw.org

**President**

Mariette DiChristina  
*Scientific American*

**Vice President**

Nancy Shute  
Freelance

**Treasurer**

Peggy Girshman  
*Kaiser Health News*

**Secretary**

Ron Winslow  
*Wall Street Journal*

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## FROM THE EDITOR

*In recent issues the role of social media as a news-gathering and networking tool—and how to keep from being overwhelmed by it—has been explored. This issue, we look at social media in the marketing of recently released books by science writers Deborah Blum and Rebecca Skloot. It's a game changer.*

*An article on fact checking is a reminder that the time saved in gathering information from the web is negated without careful vetting and, ultimately, the extra effort required to track down original, primary sources.*

*A report from this year's AAAS annual meeting describes a new collaboration between researchers and Hollywood in an effort to convey science information to the public.*

*A three-part series is launched that reflects on science milestones during NASW's 75-year history.*

*And, NASW member Laura Katers, receives bragging rights for this issue's cover photo. A freelance writer and photographer, she took this eye-catching image of jellyfish at the Monterey Bay Aquarium while on a field trip during the 2008 NASW/CASW meeting. If you have an image you'd like considered for a future *ScienceWriters*, send it to [editor@nasw.org](mailto:editor@nasw.org). ■*



Lynne Friedmann

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# The Alchemy of Book Marketing

BY DEBORAH BLUM

**W**as I this obsessive about the last book?" I asked my husband the other day, after trotting into the living room to report on my morning Amazon check for *The Poisoner's Handbook*. (Wow! In the 100s! After six weeks!)

"Yes," he said, in that patient but-I-can-live-with-it tone that he's perfected over the years. "But you were more frustrated."

Ugh. I hate it when he's right about these things. But I do get consumed, every time.

I've written four previous books—*The Monkey Wars*, *Sex on the Brain*, *Love at Goon Park* and *Ghost Hunters*—and they've all been critically well received and had respectable sales or better. But none of the others took off in the way *The Poisoner's Handbook* has: Picked up by Costco as a mass-market best seller, chosen as a non-fiction selection of the Mystery Guild Book Club, and Lily Tomlin's production manager offered me free tickets to her performance in my hometown of Madison if I'd come down to the theater and sign some copies of the book.

Of course, it helped that I had a seductive subject: murder, poison, forensics, and the jazzy backdrop of 1920s New York City. But I've had catchy subjects before—sex differences, ghost hunters. So what is it about *The Poisoner's Handbook*? I've often wondered about the alchemy of good book sales. This time, though, I spent less time musing on alchemy and more time trying to make it happen.

And, obsessive as I am, I drew up a list, which you'll find ranges from some standard advice—website, blog, social media—to my experimental venture in running a national sweepstakes.

■ Be obsessive. People buy books they've heard of more than books they haven't. In case you wondered.

■ Encourage your publisher to propose excerpts to magazines, newspapers, and any publication in your area of interest. Mine sold an excerpt to the *Wall Street Journal* Weekend Edition about three weeks before my Feb. 18 publication date, and I'm still hearing from readers (<http://bit.ly/887p30>). If your publisher or agent isn't promoting excerpt ideas, do it yourself.

■ Remind yourself that you may not have a big publicity budget

but that you have some great stories to tell. I pitched a piece to *Slate* shortly before my book came out on my favorite investigative story from my book: The U.S. government poisoning of American citizens as part of Prohibition control. That article, "The Chemist's War," was the third most e-mailed story on *Slate* that week (<http://bit.ly/bZuQsH>).

■ Focus your website on the current book. I gave mine a vintage look to go with the 1920s time period of my story, and I kept *The Poisoner's Handbook* the center piece of the home page (<http://deborahblum.com>).

■ Create a Facebook fan page. I got this advice from some friends who work in marketing. I use it to post good news about the book—reviews, links to radio interviews, events—and I linked it to Twitter so that my fan page news automatically becomes a tweet as well (<http://bit.ly/dp5IHN>).

■ Embrace Twitter. It took me a while to learn this, but I've come to really enjoy the Twitter community (@deborahblum). There's a lot of generosity there and a lot of good information. I've set up a number of events and interviews via Twitter direct messaging. And, yes, it's an excellent way to pass along news about your book and your blog.

■ Your personal blog. I let the book serve as inspiration for a blog about culture and chemistry. Again, I started the blog before the book came out as a way of building up anticipation. But I quickly realized that after spending three years working on a book about poisons, I'd developed a fair amount of expertise, some excellent stories that I couldn't fit in the book, and that I'd revived an old affection for chemistry. So the blog has taken on a life of its own—I'm running more than 10,000 visitors a month. That's good for the book—and sometimes I use it to raise the book's profile—but it's also become something that I really enjoy ([blog.deborahblum.com](http://blog.deborahblum.com)).

■ Other blogs. I was invited to do a guest blog for a really terrific true crime blog, Women in Crime Ink. And I was really thrilled because I thought my book, which is about a pair of pioneering forensic scientists, had some cross-over potential to mystery lovers and true crime readers. Plus, writing for Women In Crime pushed me to think about my work in new ways (<http://bit.ly/aozVJw>).

■ Sweepstakes and contests: During National Poison Prevention Week in mid-March, I ran an audio book giveaway on my blog. Readers were invited to send in suggestions for future blogs. The first five

got an audio book of *The Poisoner's Handbook*. It was a little extra work for me in terms of mailing but minimal cost since my publisher had sent me extra copies of the audio book. And I got some great tips on everything from the copper poisoning of poet William Blake to the toxin in puffer fish.

I also helped set up a national sweepstakes for the book, the Name Your Poison Weekend. This was the brainchild of some very good friends of mine in Chicago at Flair Communications, an advertising and promotions company, and they put together the prize package—two nights at a Gold Coast hotel, Rolls Royce transportation, a jazzy cocktail party, and more—and set up the website



Deborah Blum finds a new social-media world in marketing her fifth book.

DEBORAH BLUM IS A FREELANCE WRITER AND PROFESSOR OF JOURNALISM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN. BLUM WAS 2003-04 NASW PRESIDENT.

for the sweepstakes. It's gotten thousands of entries and helped raise the profile of the book. It helps that it's a good prize but I also like the way it picks up the theme of the book. [www.poisonershandbook.com](http://www.poisonershandbook.com).

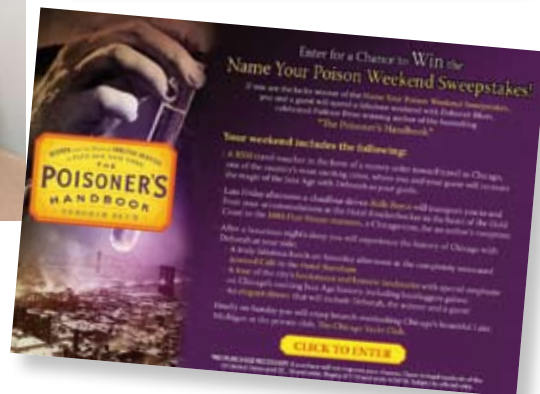
■ Work with your publisher. Every author I know (including me) wishes their publisher could do more. I'm still waiting, for instance, for those full-page ads in major newspapers. But Penguin Press did give me a six-city book tour this time and I added another six stops myself, making a very respectable round of talks. And they assigned me a terrific publicist, who has sent out countless review copies and helped set up a host of really good radio interviews. I make a point of being grateful and I say yes to every request, which has led to some fascinating and unexpected interviews.

■ Be grateful for your friends. I've felt blessed in this book because it has reminded me over and over again how lucky I am to be friends with so many terrific people. Friends put me up at their homes while I was traveling on book tour, hosted book parties, set up book events, and helped with interviews and news coverage. The kindness of colleagues, the enthusiasm of friends all the way back to my high school days, has made this a wonderful experience.

■ Have fun with it. Every time I talk about the book, I'm reminded that I wrote it because I really do find poisons and poison detection fascinating. I've talked about it to large groups and small in the course of this book tour, done events ranging from a Barnes & Noble in New York City and at



Deborah Blum, wearing a poison ring, combines traditional book-signing events with new-media marketing in the promotion of *The Poisoner's Handbook* including a Facebook fan page and a "Name Your Poison" sweepstakes offering a travel, accommodations, and (one assumes) a taste-tested dinner prize package.



# The Immortal

BY REBECCA SKLOOT

**A** month ago, I'd have thought the idea of organizing my own book tour with the help of my brain-damaged father was nuts. My father, Floyd Skloot, has written several books about the neurologic damage he suffered from a virus in the '80s—it affected his memory, his abstract reasoning, and his ability to think about multiple things at once. Exactly the abilities a person needs to envision and organize a book tour. And I'm no better. Somewhere between writing a book, taking a teaching job, freelancing, and becoming my own publicist, things got a bit *out of control*. My office floor is piled with papers, my inbox

has thousands of unanswered e-mails, and I scramble to keep up.

My publisher has been hugely supportive of my book, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, so I figured my tour was a given. I fantasized about driving cross country with the boyfriend, our dogs, and a herd of our closest friends in a big tour bus with bright colored cells painted all over it (yes, cells, the things in your body).

Then I went to my first publicity meeting.

The people at Crown, my publishing house, said, "We don't really do book tours anymore," and "They're just not the best investment of publicity funds." My agent agreed. They explained cost-benefit ratios and said their money was better spent on banner ads, buzz campaigns, and bookstore placement. Instead of talking about a tour bus covered with cells, they talked of blogs and satellite radio tours, of Twittering and Facebooking to interact with readers. I listened and agreed; it all made perfect sense. Then I went home and thought, *but I*

REBECCA SKLOOT IS AN AWARD-WINNING WRITER AND A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR AT *POPULAR SCIENCE* MAGAZINE.

"*The Immortal Book Tour*," *Publishers Weekly* (cover story), Nov. 9, 2009. Reprinted with permission of Publishers Weekly.

*A national sweepstakes was part of Deborah Blum's book promotion.*

Dog Ear Books in Madison, Ga. The only thing I've promised myself is that I'll have a good time and so will people at my events. It's helped make it a terrific experience.

And, finally, remind yourself every once in a while that the whole point of this is the book itself. It's easy to get absorbed with marketing and forget that this all started because you had a story worth telling. Give yourself some time to remember that. And, allow yourself to obsess about the vacation you'll take when all of this is done. You'll need it. And so will that ever-patient significant other of yours. ■

Deborah Skloot capitalized on a social network, developed years in advance of book publication, in setting up an online calendar and interactive Google Map of her four-month book tour.



So I set up an online Immortal Book Tour calendar and interactive Google Map, with little people and question mark icons on any city where we knew someone who might help. I called my father, who required nearly a decade of persuasion before he tried e-mail for the first time, and taught him to use the map. Our first session went like this:

**Me:** “Okay, click the map and drag it to your left to find New York.”

**Dad:** “Uh oh. I just clicked something and a light flashed in my room, now I’m in Japan.”

**Me:** “Click the ‘back’ button to get back to the U.S.”

**Dad:** “Are there supposed to be a lot of little green people everywhere?”

**Me:** “Yes, those are our friends.”

Soon, we did a test run with our friend Dinty W. Moore at Ohio University. I sent him a link to the map and a note explaining what we were doing. He e-mailed professors in the medical school, pointing them to my website and asking if they’d like to co-host an event. A few days later, I

had an expense-paid trip with four events at the school and a plan to organize a local bookstore reading. My dad handled the calendar and map, calculating the

perfect date for the visit based on where I had to be before and after—a job he’s uniquely qualified for, since the damaged

# Book Tour

*still want to go on a book tour.*

Everyone I know in publishing says book tours are dead. One friend, a bestselling novelist, e-mailed me the other day, saying she’d just finished what would be her last tour ever. She had just one word for it: “heartbreaker.”

But I don’t believe all tours are dead, just the old-fashioned kind, where publishers organize events and writers simply show up hoping for a room full of people. I agree that social networking and online campaigns are the most important tools in book publicity. But I don’t see book tours and the online world as separate entities. Rather than replacing tours, I believe the new virtual world of book publicity can help keep them alive.

When I found out my publishing house wasn’t sending me on tour, I thought about hiring a freelance publicist to organize one for me. Then I heard estimates in the \$20,000 range, and I did something many authors probably wouldn’t do: I freaked out and called my dad.

I knew I could get speaking invitations with help from my many Facebook and Twitter friends, and I was pretty sure I could get my expenses covered by speaking at universities. But who has the time to set all that up while working and publishing a book?

“No problem,” my dad said. “I’ll be your publicist.”

“I can see the headlines now,” I told him. “Brain-Damaged Man Organizes Daughter’s Book Tour—Daughter Ends Up in Two Places at Once.”

“I’m serious,” he said. “If any book in our family deserves a tour, it’s yours.” (Some relevant background: my father has published 15 books, but never gone on tour—his publishers, all independent and university presses, couldn’t help with publicity.)

“We can do this,” my father said.

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*Few people go into writing thinking they’ll have to become publicists.*

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part of his brain has nothing on the protective-father part that knows I'll schedule myself to death. It worked perfectly. So the next day, we went public: I posted a link to the map on Twitter and Facebook, and we started e-mailing people we knew, asking for help.

Now, I'm not suggesting that posting a request for help on Facebook will miraculously result in a successful book tour. Far from it. A plan like this requires an established social network, something writers should start developing years before publishing a book. It also helps to have a book that fits well with the general public and academia, which mine does: there's science, ethics, race, history. But more than anything, it requires an active network,

online and off, and a willingness to do anything necessary to promote your book.

Few people go into writing thinking they'll have to become publicists. My students often imagine their future as something akin to the famous picture of E.B. White working in his Maine cottage: a pristine room, a lovely view, art flowing forth into the world where the masses read and love it, while the author creates more art. The reality is, in today's market, writers have no choice but to embrace their inner PR person.

When I posted our crazy interactive Immortal Book Tour Map with a note saying, "Help bring *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* to your town," the response was astonishing. Within minutes I had invitations to give expense-paid talks at two different universities, one in a medical school and another in an African-American studies program.

I got more than a hundred responses that first day, and they weren't all invitations. Many writers sent warnings about how terrible book tours can be: endless nights in bad hotels, readings where only two people show up. But I'm a science person, and that's all anecdotal evidence. I want a cost-benefit study, hard data showing the book tour's demise. But how do you calculate investment return on a bookseller who hears your reading, falls in love with your book, then recommends it to customers for years? Or the lone professor in the audience who starts assigning your book to hundreds of students? Or the blogger who goes home and posts about it?

Readers and writers crave personal connections with each other. The online world allows that in wonderful ways, but it doesn't replace face time. Perhaps this is especially true for writers like me. Many readers are convinced that all science writing is boring. When they hear about my book, their eyes glaze (*great, a book about cells*). But when I start telling the story of those cells—one of the most important tools in medicine, taken from a poor black woman without her knowledge, bought and sold by the millions while her family struggled to afford health insurance—that gets their attention. And their attention means more than book sales: I spent a decade digging this story out from dusty basements, archives, and memories, because I believe it's an important one that needs to get out to the world.

In the days after launching the Immortal Book Tour map, I got e-mails from friends virtual and otherwise, from Indiana, Connecticut, Texas, California, Pennsylvania, Alaska, Switzerland, Canada, Germany, and many places between. They volunteered to organize and publicize bookstore events; they invited me to speak at high schools, scientific research organizations, and book groups. One of Henrietta Lacks's relatives read about the tour on my blog and sent me an e-mail saying, "My goal is to see that it is widely purchased as a way to honor my cousin Henrietta... and her family." She also wanted to organize book-related events to encourage science education in low-income schools across the country. With each request, my father planned my route, figured out dates, and added them to the map; for \$1 per event, booktour.com added each one to my book tour page there, which helps spread the word and generate more events. ■

*Skloot's book tour started on Feb. 2, the book's publication date, and debuted at No. 5 on the New York Times bestseller list on Feb. 21.*

## Social Media and the Book Proposal

**When evaluating a book proposal, publishers look at an author's platform and part of a platform these days is how connected they are.**

"It's not a deal breaker if they don't do social media already...but having it helps," said Lissa Warren, vice president/senior director of publicity and acquiring editor at De Capo Press (part of the Perseus Books Group).

Publishers perform social-media due diligence by looking on the web. The bottom line: Does the writer have a way to connect via social media to a core constituency for the book?

"This is not to say that if an author doesn't have social media as part of a platform that we wouldn't sign the book," said Warren. "But they would have to have an even better book idea, be an even better writer, and perhaps have other vehicles for getting the word out."

Other ways to reach book buyers include solid traditional media contacts, having a lecture agent, giving lots of talks around the country, writing a regular column, or hosting a radio or TV show.

While social media is important in any author's publicity campaign it won't completely replace traditional book publicity avenues.

"It's still important to get books reviewed in major papers and magazines," said Warren. "Get as much radio and television exposure as you can."

Social media to augment a promotional campaign for a book is a necessary component.

"This is not something I would have said five years ago," said Warren.

Certainly Facebook and Twitter are two things for authors to have in place.

"We do help our authors to become more active in social media by walking them through the process," said Warren. "How to set up a Facebook page for the book and how to start tweeting about your book."

And don't forget (what is now thought of as) "old" new media: websites, blogs, and podcasts.

— Lynne Friedmann

# Thinking Like a Fact Checker

BY SARAH ZIELINSKI

Mistakes happen in any profession, but when one is made in journalism, thousands—sometimes millions—of people see it. At best, this is embarrassing. At worst, there are lawyers involved.

Getting it right is important, but factors sometimes seem to conspire against writers. There may be short deadlines, editors that misinterpret what's been written, or sources that can't translate their area of expertise into understandable language. And then there's that desire to make the words simply sound good, which can compete with the desire for accuracy.

Even if a writer knows her work will be fact checked, this is not an excuse to be any less careful. And there are lessons that a journalist can take from the fact-checking process and apply when she doesn't have a fact checker backing her up.

Fact checking is a time consuming and expensive process, but many publications still believe it is a necessary investment. "Fact checking ensures that what [we] publish is accurate, and [that] is the most important service a journalist or a news outlet provides," says Tom O'Neill, an editor at the *Columbia Journalism Review*. "Without it, there is no credibility."

To a writer, though, this process can be annoying, requiring more work for an already overextended reporter. And there is at least a little more work involved. Generally, a publication that fact checks its articles requires an annotation of some sort in which the writer will have to provide a source for every piece of

information, even the minor ones, as well as contact information for everyone interviewed, copies of articles and other documents cited, names of books (complete with edition used and the numbers for pages with relevant information), and possibly even notes from or audio files of interviews.

In return, a fact checker will investigate each and every detail, becoming an expert in that topic in as little as a couple of days. She'll re-interview sources, read papers and books, and even visit sites mentioned in an article. "There's quite a lot of reporting involved," says Barbara Wyckoff, a research editor at *National Geographic* who has been fact checking for nearly three decades.

All of this relies on proper sourcing. "Finding and evaluating sources is probably the most important work that fact checkers and writers can do," Sarah Harrison Smith writes in *The Fact Checker's Bible*, "because the quality of the source material used in writing and checking a piece determines the accuracy and breadth of the published work."

And when a writer is lazy in her sourcing, relying on websites such as Wikipedia, for example, or personal knowledge of the subject, there are consequences. Inexperienced or overworked fact checkers may miss mistakes and allow errors to creep in. Nuance may be lost, or new research overlooked. Too many problems and editors begin to notice. "Our magazine is renowned for its factual accuracy," says Wyckoff. "If a writer is consistently bad, they won't be hired again."

But fact checking can be an opportunity

for the writer, fact checker, and editor to make the article better, says Jessica Gorman, a deputy editor at *CR Magazine*. She recommends that writers think like fact checkers. "Learning about the fact checking process made me a much better and careful reporter and editor," Gorman says. "Things that I might have [overlooked] before, I'm now more careful about."

Wikipedia, for instance, may be a good place to start the research process, but facts and numbers should come from original, primary sources whenever possible. Newspaper articles can have errors, as can books. Consulting multiple sources may be necessary. "Not all printed sources are created equal and not all websites are created equal," Gorman cautions.

A good reporter will be as careful with her sources when she is writing for a local newspaper as when she is writing for a national magazine. "I try to treat fact checking as a luxury, as a sort of second safety check for me," says freelance writer Michelle Nijhuis, whose work has appeared in publications ranging from *High Country News* to *Smithsonian*. "After all, my name's on the article."

*FACT CHECKER continued to page 28*

Fact checking ensures that what [we] publish is accurate... without it, there is no credibility.

## Use at Your Own Risk: Unreliable Sources

- Wikipedia or any other "wikis"
- Yahoo! Answers
- common knowledge
- "history"
- Google
- yourself and your own writing
- your family and friends

SARAH ZIELINSKI IS AN ASSISTANT EDITOR, FACT CHECKER, AND BLOGGER AT *SMITHSONIAN* MAGAZINE.

# Lights, camera, science!

## Scientists look to Hollywood and websites for a new voice

BY GREGORY M. LAMB

**K**eeping the public looped in on what scientists are discovering has never been easy. For one thing, the traditional explainers—journalists—can distort, hype, or oversimplify the latest breakthroughs. But the need to communicate science broadly and clearly has never been more urgent.

Understanding science helps people know “where the truth speakers are on an issue” such as climate change, says Robert Semper, the executive associate director of the Exploratorium, in San Francisco.

“The more educated and knowledgeable the public is about science...the more responsible they can be when it comes time for voting or expressing opinions about public policy,” adds Leslie Fink, a public affairs specialist at the National Science Foundation.

The importance of getting the word out has science organizations scrambling to explore new channels, from souped up websites to asking Hollywood for help.

The current climate-change furor has become the poster child for what happens when there’s a communications gap between scientists and the public. The vast majority of

scientists see compelling evidence that the world’s climate is about to change significantly, and that the change is largely driven by human activity. Yet polls show public opinion becoming more skeptical about climate change.

Contributing to that swing have been efforts by skeptics to point out flaws in specific portions of the landmark 2007 report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and question whether other findings might have been manipulated. An unusually snowy winter in parts of the United States has also brought scorn from critics, who ask, “Where is the global warming?” (Data tell another story: Worldwide, last January was one of the warmest on record, and the decade 2000-2009 was the hottest on record, according to the World Meteorological Organization.)

The result has been a “corrosion” of public confidence in climate science, says Ralph Cicerone, president of the National Academy of Sciences. That “damage,” he says, “has spilled over into other fields of science.”

At the same time, traditional news  
*HOLLYWOOD continued on page 29*

GREGORY M. LAMB IS A STAFF WRITER FOR *THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR*.



**Press Week** at  
The Jackson Laboratory

**July 21-28, 2010**

Travel fellowships are available: contact [news@jax.org](mailto:news@jax.org)  
Information about Press Week,  
cohosted by The Johns Hopkins University:  
[www.jax.org/news](http://www.jax.org/news)

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# How to Prevent Grievances

BY DAN FERBER

**T**he relationship between a freelance writer and a publisher thrives on mutual respect, clear expectations, and professional behavior on both sides. That's the ideal. But it doesn't always work out that way, and writers sometimes end up getting what they consider to be unfair treatment.

On the NASW grievance committee, we do our best to resolve writers' legitimate grievances with publishers. But it's far better to prevent a grievance in the first place. Here are some suggestions:

## REMEMBER, IT'S A BUSINESS

To prevent misunderstandings—the biggest cause of grievances—be sure you and the client are on the same page. As soon as the client expresses interest, let them know you're interested, too, but you have a few questions. What's the word count? The pay rate? When's the deadline? What rights do they want? Be cordial but straightforward about what you want. Don't hesitate to negotiate.

## GET IT IN WRITING

As the old joke goes, verbal agreements aren't worth the paper they're written on. A casual e-mail exchange confirming the basics—pay rate, deadline, rights—is better. Put it in writing no matter how well you know and like an editor or client—editors can leave, priorities can shift, and you need to be protected.

If a contract isn't forthcoming, send a friendly e-mail outlining the terms you agreed to, and ask for confirmation. Be casual about it—but do it. Such e-mails could go a long way toward protecting you should a disagreement arise.

## READ YOUR CONTRACTS CAREFULLY, AND NEGOTIATE

If a clause is vague or confusing, ask for clarification from the client or from savvy colleagues. Pay attention to rights granted, provisions by which the publisher shares revenue from resales and reprints, exclusivity clauses (for example: "writer shall not write about any related subject for one year"), and kill-fee terms. Try to

narrow a kill-fee clause so it can be invoked only after one revision and only if the piece is not of publishable quality. Try to raise the percentage to 50 percent. It's often far too low, considering the amount of work the writer has invested.

If you negotiate and can't make much headway, don't feel bad. Some publishers and other clients are just not particularly flexible.

## WALK IF YOU HAVE TO

Some potential clients will negotiate numerous clauses in good faith. Others may tell you to take it or leave it. Most will fall in between. We encourage you to do what's best for your business and career. Depending on your circumstances, the terms and the tone of the negotiation, you may wish to accept the terms, keep negotiating, or walk.

## KEEP A PAPER OR E-MAIL TRAIL

Your paper trail can document that you delivered an acceptable piece of work on deadline. It can document that you have tried in good faith to inquire about the fate of an article sitting in limbo, or a promised paycheck that has mysteriously been lost in the mail. If you smell trouble, document phone conversations and send e-mails to confirm them. Your communications can be firm and professional, yet cordial.

## STAY ON TOP OF YOUR BUSINESS

Check in about that article that's sitting in limbo. Invoice promptly. Expect payment within 30 days. Inquire if it's more than a week or two late. Put your query in writing. Assume good will at first, but don't be naive. If you're getting only silence or obfuscation, try contacting accounts payable directly, or (if you're willing to risk burning a bridge) going over your editor's head to the editor in chief. If your paycheck still fails to arrive, contact the grievance committee. In many cases, we can help.

■ ■ ■



*...the NASW grievance committee [does its] best... but it's far better to prevent a grievance in the first place.*

## MORE CONTRACT TIPS

- *Rights 101: What Writers Should Know About All-Rights and Work-Made-For-Hire Contracts.* What various rights clauses mean for writers, including first North American rights, exclusive and non-exclusive rights, all rights, and work for hire. ASJA's Free Resources for Writers page (<http://bit.ly/2MrlUo>).
- *How to Deal: Negotiating a Better Contract* (transcript of workshop at 2004 NASW meeting). Available on the NASW All About Freelancing page (<http://bit.ly/9878Hf>).
- *Liability: How to Limit Yours*, by Kendall Powell / Part I: Know your risks, and avoid them; Part II: A business entity protects mainly against breach of contract disagreements; Part III: Professional liability insurance: not cheap, not bullet-proof. Available on the NASW All About Freelancing page (<http://bit.ly/8nPonx>). ■

DAN FERBER IS A FREELANCE SCIENCE WRITER IN INDIANAPOLIS, A CONTRIBUTING CORRESPONDENT FOR *SCIENCE*, AND CHAIR OF NASW'S GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE.

# Dear Prospective Student,

Thanks very much for your interest in our graduate program in science writing. You're off to a good start by sending a professional message with some well-composed details about your background and your desire to enter our field. We'll talk soon over the phone, and I welcome you to visit us here in the redwoods. In the meantime, you've asked what I look for in our applicants—the signs that you might be a good fit for us, and vice versa. I'm happy to oblige.

First, it's terrific that you've tried science writing on your own. I don't care as much about the venue as I do about your initiative. Too many students write to us with idealized visions of working in this profession. They're attracted to the concept because they're tired of research (or teaching, or working at job X), and they've always liked to write. But they haven't actually done it, and that's worrisome. These days, you can easily write about science for your college paper, your university news office, a local weekly that craves fresh new voices, a science advocacy website, or a blog you've created on a subject you care about. You've sought out a writing internship; that's great. Others haven't even dipped

their toes into any of these waters, and I have to wonder, why not?

Second, I'm impressed that you've taken the time to compare and contrast your options among the fine graduate programs. The courses, internships, online writing, multimedia training, and major projects all differ, as do the backgrounds of the students. Find out who'll teach you and what they've done in their careers. These instructors love what they do, and they become your mentors. Look for writers with whom

## Applying to a Graduate Program? Here's Some Friendly Advice

BY ROBERT IRION

you think you can forge a connection. Often, those ties will last throughout your career.

You've done much of that research, and that tells me you've got the gumption to be a reporter. We want to see a certain fearlessness to ask questions, to dig. We're seeking young journalists, not desk jockeys.

Applicants often ask whether their previous degrees matter. If they have a bachelor's in science, should they continue toward a master's? Or a Ph.D.? Sure, but only if you love it and want to see where it might lead you. If you're still passionate about research, your writing down the road will be all the richer for it.

Frankly, there are successful science writers of all stripes, including those from the liberal arts. Your academic pedigree is a factor, but we're not looking for a neatly completed curriculum with perfect 4.0s at every step. Rather, program directors care far more about the interesting things you've done. We want each cohort of students to be as dynamic as possible, with varied perspectives on the world. If you've edited a publication, organized community debates, worked in the field with animals, or served in the Peace Corps, great. If you've gone places and challenged yourself, you'll be a better journalist.

Your letters of reference are important, too. Try to recruit recommenders who can go beyond your coursework or your time in the lab. If you've taught, ask someone to write about that. It's relevant for communicating science to the public. If you've written for publication, ask your editor to describe how your first drafts are perfectly constructed, delightfully stylish, and error-free. (Sorry, a director can dream.)

Then there are those admissions essays. Spend time on them. Be original with your approach and your voice. Tell me a story. It is remarkable how many essays I receive that begin with some variant of this: "I'm applying to the UCSC science writing program because I want to be a professional science writer." After I wake up from my short nap, I move on to the next file.

### KEY POINTS

Take initiative

Research graduate programs before you apply

Take the standardized exams

Get recommendations

Write an original admission essay

Be prompt and formal in your communications

Don't miss your appointment

Make a positive impression

Be engaged and informed

ROBERT IRION IS CO-CHAIR OF THE NASW EDUCATION COMMITTEE AND DIRECTOR OF THE SCIENCE COMMUNICATION PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ. REACH HIM AT IRION@NASW.ORG.



Gauging whether an applicant has an innate gift for writing, an ear for the language, is the dark art in this whole process. I really can't put it into words. But when I come across such essays, it's as if the screen glows. I can't stop smiling.

Over the years, I've also noticed a few things that I've mentally filed under "kids these days." For instance, more than one applicant has written an essay stating how much they want to study at [competing program's name here]. Oops, they forgot to switch every institution name to UC Santa Cruz! That's a rather big oops.

Missing an appointment is even worse. When I set up a phone interview, I ask the candidate to call me. Most of them hit that time on the button. If I get a panicked e-mail a day later, that tells me something about the student's organizational skills.

Please use the proper salutation in your messages. Starting an e-mail with "Hi," followed by no name, just doesn't cut it. I do chuckle a bit when students write "Dear Dr. Irion," because that degree and I missed each other by quite a few years. But it's a far sight better than "Hi." And, review each message for typos before you send it. You're contacting a journalism program, and you're applying to enter one of the most detail-oriented professions around.

You'd think no one would write to a grad program director in all lower case, or use a few texting abbreviations, or toss in an emoticon, or emphasize excitement with exclamation points. But yes, some students do. omg, one glorious message featured all four!! I have no idea where that applicant is now.

Speaking of e-mail etiquette, please do respond—especially when I take the time to explain how you might make yourself a stronger candidate in the next year or two. We've had many students over the years who took this constructive advice, explored writing on their own for a while, and then returned with a new perspective and some great clips. They didn't give up, and they kept in touch. When applicants just vanish after getting a long, personalized letter of denial, they slam the door on their future chances here.

I realize that you probably don't like taking standardized exams to get into a writing program. And yes, the grading of that analytical writing GRE is mysterious to me, too. However, we need some initial screen, some quantitative measure in this otherwise very qualitative review. There's a correlation, albeit a broad one, between certain scores and the writing we see in our coursework and beyond. Sending a 4,000-word anti-GRE manifesto, as one applicant did a couple of years ago, probably won't help your cause.

Finally, keep in mind that each time we interact—by e-mail, by phone, or in person—you are making an impression. So much of this business hinges upon the first impressions you make as a reporter with a source, as a freelance contributor to a new editor, and as a professional colleague with fellow writers. Science writers love their networks, and we help each other. If you're prompt, engaged, informed, and fun in good measure, we'll remember all of those things.

Here's the bottom line: If I can't wait to work with you and make this new career possible, then you've filed a darned good application.

*With best regards,  
Robert Irion*

# Call for Entries

## AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Awards



The AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Awards honor distinguished reporting on the sciences, engineering and mathematics. Panels of journalists select the winners.

### U.S. CATEGORIES

Awards will be presented for U.S. submissions in the following categories: **Large Newspaper, Small Newspaper, Magazine, Television (Spot News/ Feature Reporting, In-Depth Reporting), Radio, Online.**

### INTERNATIONAL CATEGORY

Open to journalists worldwide, across all news media.

### Children's Science News

**DEADLINE: 1 August 2010**

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# Scholarly Pursuits

Academic research relevant to the workaday world of science writing

BY RICK BORCHELT

**What do PIOs use** as a measure of the effectiveness of media placements? Counting clips and calculating simple media equivalency don't cut the mustard, research shows.



**Jeffrey, Angela et al. (2009). A New Paradigm for Media Analysis: Weighted Media Cost. Downloaded 7 March 2010 from the Commission on Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation, Institute for Public Relations (<http://bit.ly/8AbEoW>).**

So you're a PIO and you get called in to the chancellor's office and she asks, "How do you justify spending the university's money on getting articles in the media? How do you contribute to the bottom line?"

For years, PIOs have been making the calculus that media stories about their institutions or organizations should be evaluated based on what the equivalent column inches or air time of the stories they place would cost if you had to buy it as advertising: so-called advertising value equivalency (AVE). According to the most recent data available, about half of PR people use AVE or media equivalency as their measure of preference for the value of the work they do—even as debate continues in the PR community about whether AVE tells you anything meaningful.

Within public affairs, it's been clear for some time that AVE really isn't a true measure of the value of media placements: It overstates the value of a given placement, which often contains a lot of material that isn't about your organization; ignores what

isn't said or reported about you; and usually fails to consider what else is being said in which media about the issues on which you want to be visible.

Jeffrey et al., in an analysis commissioned by the Institute for Public Relations, observe that "media cost data may be a very good metric with a very bad name and a history of misuse as an 'equivalency' between advertising and editorial in terms of business impact. The public relations industry has also refused to fully let go of AVE suggesting practitioners know there is value in the data, but have no idea how to utilize it well." They posit that a much more realistic measure of the value of media placements is a measure called "weighted

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*...(advertising value equivalency) isn't a true measure of the value of media placements.*

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media cost"—the cost of media to the broadcast time or print/internet space occupied by a client as an objective market proxy number for comparative analysis against historical performance, against objectives, or against competitors. "The number [of clips or hits] itself has no meaning or value beyond that of any index used for comparisons of any kind," the authors write. A better measure of the value of a media placement would involve calculation of the share your organization captures of any particular media discussion, they say, as well as the tone of the articles and how prominently (or how little!) your organization was mentioned in them. Only then could you actually figure out the bottom line value of stories in the media.

To prove their point, the authors went

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"SCHOLARLY PURSUITS" FEATURES ARTICLES FROM JOURNALS PRODUCED IN THE UNITED STATES AND ABROAD. IF YOU READ AN ARTICLE YOU THINK WOULD MAKE A GOOD CANDIDATE FOR THIS COLUMN, SEND IT ALONG TO RICKB@NASW.ORG.



RICK BORCHELT IS DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS IN THE USDA OFFICE OF RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMICS.



back to four public relations campaigns with known outcomes and retrospectively compared how well the old AVE standards using audience impressions or numbers of clips correlated with the outcome, and how well the use of weighted media cost analysis tracked eventual campaign success.

In all four case studies—a charity, an industrial manufacturer, a college, and a hospital—use of the more precise weighted media cost did a significantly better job of predicting eventual campaign outcomes and, thus, would likely be a better measure of the value of media placements to the organizations. “The improvements are startling in some of the cases, and in their consistency across case studies in different industries,” the authors write; “It appears that correlations are improved because [additional] information is imbedded within the price of media time and space” using weighted media cost including the size of the audience, the credibility of the outlet and its ability to deliver an outcome, and the prominence of the placement in the outlet. The authors caution, however, that weighted media cost analysis needs to be calculated based on objective, market-driven data and not simply ad rate sheets.

“It is the hope of these authors that the research and insights shared in this paper help put to rest the Ad Value Equivalency wars,” they write, “and lead PR practitioners toward clearer correlations of their hard work to real business results.”

■ ■ ■

**Williams, Andy and Sadie Clifford (2009). “Mapping the Field: Specialist science news journalism in the U.K. national media.” The Risk, Science and the Media Research Group at Cardiff University School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, November 2009 (<http://bit.ly/5N8UyA>).**

So how bad is it out there really for science journalists? If you’re a British science journalist, turns out it’s not as bad as commonly believed.

Based on 42 internet survey responses from U.K. national science, health, environment, and technology news; 47 interviews with current and former U.K. national science, health, and environment news journalists; and five interviews with senior editors at BBC News, ITN, and *The Times* (London) newspaper, the author concludes that, while “there has been much debate about

the quality of U.K. science news in recent years” and “despite the gloomy picture painted by many,” most [science journalist] specialists do not believe their beat is under serious long-term threat. Most do not think that science news has been hit any harder than other specialist patches. Fifty-six percent of survey respondents disagreed that science specialists are a dying breed in U.K. journalism.

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*Most do not think that science news has been hit any harder than other specialist patches.*

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The period between 1989 and 2005 saw an unprecedented rise in the numbers of science, health, and environment journalists in the U.K. national news media (numbers almost doubled from 43 to 82.5). However, most of this historic increase occurred in the '90s, and since 2005 there has been a period of slight decline on the broad science beat, the authors write, but not nearly what you might expect given the gloom and doom pronouncements from pundits. In fact, they say, “Long-term increases in the human resources devoted to covering science have developed alongside an increasing respect for science specialists within newsrooms: many report the appetite for science news is high, and that they are often asked to contribute specialist editorial advice.”

On the other hand, the work of jobbing science journalists in the U.K. has changed dramatically. Workloads have increased tremendously, and almost half (46 percent) of the survey respondents report they now have less time to research and fact-check stories than previously, while one fifth (22 percent) say they no longer have enough time to sufficiently fact-check the stories they put their names to. “Pack journalism” is on the rise, as is use of PR resources. Only 23 percent of respondents said most of their stories originated with their own active journalistic investigation; 46 percent said they are more usually the passive recipients of news story ideas from sources. Twenty-three percent believe science specialists rely on PR too much, and 25 percent of respondents said they now use more PR resources than previously.

Whether the situation is worse in the U.S. than the U.K., some things ring true on both sides of the Atlantic: “Many interviewees complain that a lot of their time is spent trying to convince news desks not to run poor-quality ‘bad science’ stories they have seen on the news wires and/or in eye-catching press releases,” the Cardiff team says.

■ ■ ■

**Project for Excellence in Journalism (2009). “Tracking and Analyzing Community News Models” in *The State of the News Media 2009* (<http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org/>).**

Many observers of the news media have predicted that citizen journalism sites and blogs will “democratize” the journalistic enterprise, creating new opportunities for contributing news stories and leapfrogging traditional, or “legacy,” media in the use of technology to reach the public. As part of a project for the Pew Project on Excellence in Journalism, researchers from the University of Missouri and the University of North Carolina analyzed citizen news sites in 47 towns and cities across the United States to see if these sites were fulfilling these promises. Two-thirds of the sites were blogs, and the other sites contained news content.

“One of the biggest surprises we found was that mainstream media websites were almost as welcoming to citizen participation as citizen journalism sites, and they were far more welcoming than blogs,” Esther Thorson, associate dean for graduate

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*...mainstream media websites were almost as welcoming to citizen participation as citizen journalism sites...*

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# THE CDC FIGHT SONG

NASW member David Holzman's talent extends beyond science writing to catchy song lyrics. Childhood exposure to Tom Lehrer and Gilbert & Sullivan no doubt influenced his writing of "The Centers for Disease Control Fight Song."

Holzman took the stage at the 2000 Ig Noble Awards ceremony and belted out a memorable performance now available for viewing on YouTube (<http://bit.ly/aYD60a>).



*The Centers for Disease Control  
is working hard, we're on a roll  
Protecting you from noxious bugs  
with ugly protoplasmic mugs.*

*Morbidity, mortality  
'tis the essence of reality  
Oh, morbidity, mortality  
'tis the essence of reality.*

*We're monit'ring the nation's health  
statistically and with stealth  
to find what makes the people sick  
and ails the body politic.*

*Morbidity, mortality  
'tis the essence of reality  
Oh, morbidity, mortality  
'tis the essence of reality.*

studies at Mizzou, wrote in the university's news release about the project. "Many industry professionals hope that citizen sites will democratize news media, but that hope has yet to be realized."

In fact, the researchers found, legacy sites offered almost double the percent of news (89 percent) in comparison with citizen news sites (56 percent) and three times that of blogs (27 percent). "The topic coverage on blogs and citizen news sites is generally narrow and the sourcing is light," notes Margaret Duffy, faculty chair in strategic communication in the Missouri Journalism School. And despite ongoing reports of financial troubles and cutbacks, legacy media were more comprehensive and more technologically advanced than citizen media and bloggers.

Blogs and news sites were more likely than legacy media to post links within stories to outside sources, the study found. Citizen sites linked to legacy news sites twice as often as legacy sites linked to citizen sites. Rather than reaching out and reporting news ignored or passed up by legacy sites, citizen sites frequently use legacy sites themselves as news sources. ■

# EurekaAlert!'s

## Science Sources available online

Science Sources is an easily searchable database of Public Information Officers from universities, medical centers, and other research organizations around the world. The up-to-date contact information resource is a valuable tool, providing journalists with the information needed to prepare timely, accurate news stories.

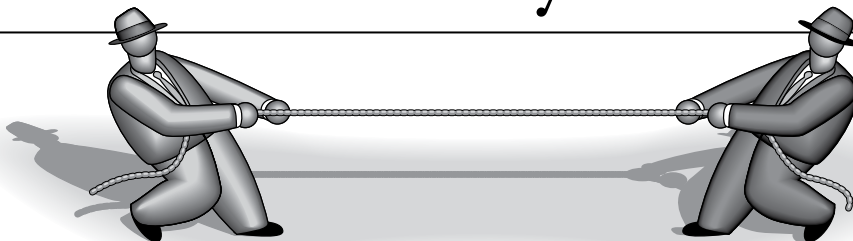
**ScienceSources.EurekaAlert.org**

If you have questions call 202-326-6716 or email [webmaster@eurekaalert.org](mailto:webmaster@eurekaalert.org)



# IRS Rules on Lost Records Stretch Only So Far

BY JULIAN BLOCK



**A**s a general rule, the Internal Revenue Service requires NASW members and other freelance writers to substantiate their deductions for business expenses like travel and entertainment with “adequate records”—diaries, for instance. But the IRS does make some exceptions.

Among other things, it will waive the record-keeping requirements and accept “reasonable reconstructions” when, according to the agency’s administrative regulations, records were lost “due to circumstances beyond the taxpayer’s control, such as destruction by fire, flood, earthquake, or other casualty.” Those regulations include a cautionary reminder that whether an event was beyond a person’s control depends on the particular circumstances.

Consider, for instance, what happened in a dispute over write-offs for travel and entertainment that pitted the IRS against Joe Gizzi, who acted as his own attorney before the United States Tax Court. According to Joe, the government acted unreasonably when the examining agent refused to excuse him from the usual substantiation requirements. It seems that Joe had stored records of entertainment expenditures in his home and they somehow vanished after he voluntarily moved out because of marital problems.

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*Unfortunately for Joe, that explanation got exactly nowhere with the court...*

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Unfortunately for Joe, that explanation got exactly nowhere with the court, which refused to treat the loss as caused by a casualty beyond his control. “Marital difficulties and their consequences, no matter how seemingly independent of the taxpayer’s will, do not sufficiently resemble floods or fire to be considered a casualty,” the ruling stated. Moreover, noted the court, even if marital problems provided a good excuse, Joe failed to furnish an adequate reconstruction of his records.

Subsequently, however, the court had some second thoughts. It ruled in 1980 that marital problems caused the loss to be beyond the control of Matthew Canfield, who also represented himself before the court, but did so with more success than Joe Gizzi. Here, the circumstances differed considerably. Unlike Joe, Matthew did not voluntarily move out of his home and leave his records; he

departed because his wife obtained a court order requiring him to stay away from their dwelling. The wife either destroyed or burned his records during the time the couple was separated, and Matthew was unable to enter his home because of the court order.

Note, though, that the court had no second thoughts where the records “disappeared” while a person was moving his or her belongings to a new residence. It flatly refused in 1972 to allow William Silver to reconstruct his records.

Still, sometimes the tax takers try to push things too far. To the surprise of no one but the IRS, a 1975 decision relieved Raymond W. Jackson of the need to produce records that disappeared after he handed them over to a revenue agent during an audit. Result: Raymond was allowed to reconstruct what he spent on entertainment and managed to convince the judge that the disputed deductions were backed up by the lost records.

When records are not “adequate,” the IRS can “reconstruct” income. The law permits it to do so using any reasonable method,

as the following case illustrates. The Tax Court approved reconstruction of the income of a junk peddler who collected old auto batteries and resold them for their lead. He reported \$4,200 in income. But the IRS checked nearby service stations and auto-parts stores and reckoned he should

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*The court sided with the IRS, mainly because there was an utter lack of records.*

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have reported \$78,000. The court sided with the IRS, mainly because there was an utter lack of records. It noted that a taxpayer who defaulted in his task of supplying adequate records “isn’t in a position to be hypercritical of” IRS calculations.

Detailed information on what records to keep and for how long is in Publications 552, *Recordkeeping for Individuals*, and 583, *Starting a Business and Keeping Records*, available at the agency’s website, <http://irs.gov>, or call 800-TAX-FORM (829-3676). ■

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JULIAN BLOCK, AN ATTORNEY IN LARCHMONT, N.Y., HAS BEEN CITED AS “AN ACCOMPLISHED WRITER ON TAXES” (*WALL STREET JOURNAL*). HIS BOOKS INCLUDE *TAX TIPS FOR WRITERS, PHOTOGRAPHERS, ARTISTS*, AVAILABLE AT [WWW.JULIANBLOCKTAXEXPERT.COM](http://WWW.JULIANBLOCKTAXEXPERT.COM). COPYRIGHT 2010 JULIAN BLOCK. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

# BOOKS

BY AND FOR MEMBERS



Ruth Winter  
44 Holly Drive, Short Hills, NJ 07078  
or e-mail [ruthwrite@aol.com](mailto:ruthwrite@aol.com)

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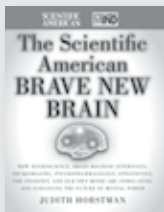
Include the name of the publicist and appropriate contact information, as well as how you prefer members get in touch with you.

***The Poisoner's Handbook: Murder and the Birth of Forensic Medicine in Jazz Age New York* by Deborah Blum (NASW), published by The Penguin Press**



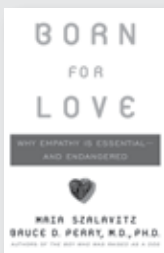
Pulitzer Prize-winning science writer Deborah Blum has written a book about ladies who spiked cocoa with thallium, cooks who dosed huckleberry pies with arsenic, and kindly grannies who poisoned figs. Blum notes incompetent medical examiners ensured that these murderers all too often got away with their crimes until a new generation of forensic scientists emerged who recognized the signs of poison. "I always wanted to write a book about poisons, which would read both like an early 20th century murder mystery and be a guide to the toxic substances in the world around us," Blum says. *The Poisoner's Handbook* is the story of two forgotten scientists—Charles Norris, the first medical examiner of New York City; and Alexander Gettler, the brilliant chemist that Norris hired—and their crusade to make forensics a legitimate science. Blum divides her narrative by poisons, providing not only a puzzling case for each noxious substance but the ingenious methods devised by the medical examiner's office to detect it. ■ *Blum can be reached at [dblum@wisc.edu](mailto:dblum@wisc.edu) or 608-263-3395. The book's publicist is Lauren Hodapp at [Lauren.hodapp@us.penguin.com](mailto:Lauren.hodapp@us.penguin.com) or 212-366-2814.*

***The Scientific American Brave New Brain* by Judith Horstman (NASW) and *Scientific American*, published by Jossey-Bass**



Written and edited by Horstman, a Sacramento, Calif. freelance, the book is based upon the newest research and articles from *Scientific American* and *Scientific American Mind* magazines. It describes the how advances in neuroscience are bringing amazing treatments and startling predictions of what we can expect to both better and boost our brains. The book reveals what lies ahead over the next few decades and what exists now in brain treatments with biochemistry, drugs, computers, electrical treatments, stem cells, brain chips, and gene manipulation—and the legal, ethical, and moral fallout of all this change and progress. Horstman, who also wrote the first book in the series, *The Scientific American Day in the Life of Your Brain*, explains in *Brave New Brain* how our brains make new neurons and what we have to do to keep them. She writes about how thoughts and feelings can change our brains and our genes, and how the brain's pacemakers control tremors and seizures. In the future, advances in biochemistry and bioengineering could make Alzheimer's brain damage, and perhaps even mental retardation, preventable, curable, and reversible. Microchips in the brain could enhance memory, restore mental functions, store data, and even control our cell phones. ■ *Horstman can be reached at 916-362-2140. Erin Lane Beam is the book's publicist at [ebeam@wiley.com](mailto:ebeam@wiley.com) or 415-782-3213.*

***Born for Love: Why Empathy is Essential—and Endangered* by Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D., and Maia Szalavitz (NASW), published by Morrow**



Perry, a child psychiatrist and Szalavitz, a New York freelance, argue in their book that empathy is a crucial human quality that underlies much more than love, friendship, and parenting. The authors explore how empathy affects everything from emotional depression to the Great Recession, from physical health to mental health, from our ability to love to criminal behavior, and even the rise and fall of societies. The authors explain how empathy develops, or fails to develop, and how in the last 50 years changes in technology, child-rearing practices, education, and lifestyles have robbed many children of necessary human contact and deep relationships—the essential foundation for empathy. They show how compassion underlies the qualities that make society work—trust, altruism, collaboration, love, charity—and how failure to empathize is a key factor in social problems like violence, racism, and inequality. Perry and Szalavitz reveal that a quarter of Americans say they have no one to confide in, not close friends or relatives. They also write that sometimes autism may involve too much empathy—not too little—and high levels of computer use and TV watching can stunt social development because children don't get the face-to-face human interaction that is critical to developing empathy. ■ *Szalavitz can be reached at [maiasz@gmail.com](mailto:maiasz@gmail.com) or 212-879-2305. Jennifer Slattery is senior publicity manager at [jennifer.slattery@harpercollins.com](mailto:jennifer.slattery@harpercollins.com) or 212-207-7591.*

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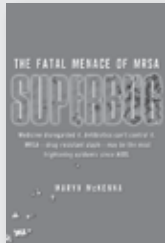
***Inside the Outbreaks: The Elite Medical Detectives of the Epidemic Intelligence Service* by Mark Pendergrast (NASW), published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt**



Pendergrast, a Vermont freelance, has written the history of the CDC's Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS), a two-year program for idealistic young doctors, nurses, statisticians, sociologists, Ph.D.s in public health, anthropologists, and lawyers. During postings they can face Ebola in Africa, bird flu in Asia, clusters of salmonella food poisoning in America, or a seemingly endless array of other threats to health. When EIS was founded in 1951, it was a haven for docs seeking to avoid the Korean War draft, and EIS recruits were envisioned as first responders in the case of biowarfare. The early EIS decades were largely devoted to infectious outbreaks—i.e., bat rabies, Asian flu, oyster-borne hepatitis. EIS sleuthing then and now looks at patient histories and environmental clues, often conducting case-control studies. "It is indeed the most important (and effective) government agency of which you have never heard," said Pendergrast. The author celebrates EIS's successes but does not gloss over the moral shortcomings of the early years—such as vaccines tested on prisoners or institutionalized children—nor does he ignore bureaucratic in-fighting and politics. ■ *Pendergrast can be reached at [markp@nasw.org](mailto:markp@nasw.org) or through his website: [www.markpendergrast.com](http://www.markpendergrast.com). Book publicist is Joanna Pinsker at [joanna.pinsker@hmhpub.com](mailto:joanna.pinsker@hmhpub.com).*

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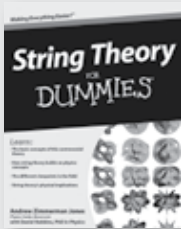
***SUPERBUG: The Fatal Menace of MRSA* by Maryn McKenna (NASW), published by Free Press (Simon & Shuster).**



McKenna draws on more than 200 interviews and more than 1,100 scientific papers in writing the first book to tell the story of MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*), a pathogen that lurks in our homes, hospitals, schools, and farms, and is evolving at a rate faster than the medical community can track it or drug developers can create antibiotics to quell it. McKenna takes readers into the medical centers where frustrated physicians must discard drug after drug as they struggle to keep patients alive. She discloses an explosion of cases that demonstrate how MRSA is growing more virulent while evolving resistance to antibiotics with astonishing speed. MRSA may infect us at any time, no matter how healthy we are. It is carried by a stunning number of our household pets, and it has been detected in food animals from cows to chickens to pigs. *Kirkus Book Reviews* calls *SUPERBUG* "a gripping account of one of the most devastating infectious agents on the planet... A meticulously researched, frightening report on a deadly pathogen." *Atlanta Magazine* praises McKenna's "scalpel-sharp investigative skills" and calls *SUPERBUG* "a scary and important book." ■ *Visit <http://www.Superbugthebook.com> or write McKenna at [mmckenna@mindspring.com](mailto:mmckenna@mindspring.com).*

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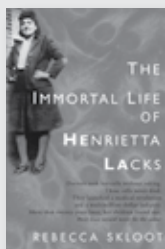
***String Theory for Dummies* by Andrew Zimmerman Jones with Daniel Robbins, Ph.D., published by Wiley and Sons**



Jones presents a plain-language guide to one of science's most controversial and challenging modern topics: string theory. Written in a style accessible to all readers regardless of scientific (or math) background, *String Theory for Dummies* explores the established physics concepts and mysteries that call out for new explanations, the development of string theory, the possibilities presented by the theory, and the criticisms of the theory, as well as some theoretical physics conjectures that may prove useful to solve some of the universe's mysteries should string theory fail to. Jones has appeared on Indiana Public Radio and Michio Kaku's nationally-syndicated Science Fantastic radio program. ■ *Jones, an Anderson, Ind. freelance, writes about physics for [About.com](http://About.com); he can be reached at [azjauthor@gmail.com](mailto:azjauthor@gmail.com). The book publicist is Adrienne Fontaine, who can be reached at [afontaine@wiley.com](mailto:afontaine@wiley.com) or 201-748-5626.*

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***The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot, published by Crown**



From a single, abbreviated life grew a seemingly immortal line of cells that made some of the most crucial innovations in modern science possible. And from that same life, and those cells, Rebecca Skloot has fashioned a fascinating and moving story of medicine and family, of how life is sustained in laboratories and in memory. Henrietta Lacks was a mother of five in Baltimore, a poor African American migrant from the tobacco farms of Virginia, who died from a cruelly aggressive cancer at the age of 30, in 1951. A sample of her cancerous tissue, taken without her knowledge or consent, as was the custom then, gave rise to the stunning potency of HeLa cells. The cells, in turn, became the building block for countless breakthroughs, beginning with the cure for polio. Meanwhile, Henrietta's family lives in poverty and frequently poor health, and their discovery decades later of her unknowing contribution—and her cells' strange survival—left them full of pride, anger, and suspicion. In addition to the story of Henrietta's life, Skloot tells a rich and haunting story that asks the questions: Who owns our bodies? And who carries our memories? ■ *Skloot can be reached at [rebecca@rebeccaskloot.com](mailto:rebecca@rebeccaskloot.com). Courtney Greenhalgh is the press representative at [cgreenhalgh@randomhouse.com](mailto:cgreenhalgh@randomhouse.com).*





**NASW President**  
**Mariette DiChristina**  
*Scientific American* and  
*Scientific American Mind*  
 MDICHRISTINA@SCIAM.COM

## President's Letter

### *New Bylaws and More*

THE VOTES FOR THE NEW BYLAWS ARE IN AND COUNTED. MEMBERS APPROVED THE CHANGES, EXCEPT FOR ONE PASSAGE. (MORE ON THAT IN A MOMENT.) HERE'S WHAT HAPPENED—AND WHAT COMES NEXT.

As I explained in my last letter, we needed to update NASW's bylaws to comply with the laws of New York State, where the organization was incorporated as a 501(c)(6) nonprofit corporation way back in 1954. Many of the legal changes were small, but some were of greater consequence. (A full set of the changes, in tracking, ran in the last *ScienceWriters*, and is also available online.) Examples:

- NASW's mail-voting process is not allowable. For decisions that require a vote of the membership, we need to meet in person. Absent members can cast votes by a proxy that works much like an absentee ballot you use to vote in U.S. elections.
- The end of NASW's fiscal year needs to fall within six months of the annual meeting, now held in the fall. (The change has the happy benefit of providing for more real-time reporting of finances at the annual meeting, and occurs when accountants are generally more available.)
- We had to correct a disconnect between our 1954 certificate of incorporation, which specifies a maximum of eight board members, and the bylaws, which stipulated 15. We will now begin the administrative process of amending our certificate of incorporation to reflect the larger number.
- We needed to address a potential liability problem of having mandated public termination procedures that didn't allow for due process or any measure of privacy.

That last bullet point, which was addressed in Article VIII of the revised bylaws, is the section that will come up for a separate vote at the annual meeting in November at Yale University, in New Haven, Conn.

Why the separate vote? Article VIII proposed a new procedure in the event a membership had to be terminated—an event that, fortunately, has never, to our knowledge, occurred in our

organization's history. In listserv discussions, some members expressed concern about the proposed system. As member John Gever put it:

...the revisions would permit a member to be kicked out of NASW by the board without any vote or appeal to the membership at large. The intention [of the revised passage] was to provide due process and a measure of privacy for members accused of high crimes and misdemeanors—not afforded under the current bylaws. But jailhouse lawyers among us have pointed out that the new process is essentially a secret proceeding in front of the board, with no recourse. Many of us believe that an appeal option would be a good idea.

John is co-chair—together with NASW board member at large Dan Ferber—of an ad-hoc committee that is hard at work revising Article VIII to reflect both the concerns of members and the legal needs of the organization. Other members of the committee are David Lawrence, David Levine, Jennie Dusheck, Melissa Blouin, and Norman Bauman. We will provide the revised wording in plenty of time so that members can review it before the vote.

While I'm talking about the November vote, let me put in yet another plug for people to attend the annual meeting. We'll be marking NASW's 75th anniversary—and CASW's 50th—with a gala event as well as the usual sparkling line up of career-enhancing NASW workshops and CASW New Horizons in Science briefings about the latest research. Don't miss it! Watch for announcements of fellowship opportunities to attend. ■



**Beryl Benderly**  
 Freelance  
 BLBINK@AOL.COM

## NASW Meeting Report

### *Minutes from the February 20 Meeting*

A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCIENCE WRITERS WAS HELD ON SATURDAY, FEB. 20, 2010, IN ROOM 8 OF THE SAN DIEGO CONVENTION CENTER, SAN DIEGO, CALIF.

President Mariette DiChristina called the meeting to order at 4:10 p.m. and established that a quorum existed. She explained that the purpose of the meeting was to vote on the proposed

# Dispatches

## FROM THE Director

amendments to the constitution and bylaws and reviewed the resolution and three voting options. She said that documents from the NASW archives reflected the growth and evolution of the organization and that the update of the constitution was part of moving toward a larger and more professional organization.

Asked what the board recommended about the proposed constitutional amendments, she stated that the recommendation was to vote "Yes" on all the proposed amendments.

In answer to a question from the floor as to whether any member of NASW had ever been expelled from the organization, she said that she knew of no such case. In answer to a question, she explained the option of voting for all the amendments except the ones related to expulsions.

The members present voted by paper ballot.

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*...the purpose of the meeting was to vote on the proposed amendments to the constitution and bylaws...*

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DiChristina then opened the floor for questions and discussions of a general nature.

In answer to a question by Harvey Leifert, a discussion ensued on whether NASW membership should be permanent or whether members should have to periodically prove their eligibility. DiChristina stated that the current policy of NASW has been not to spend its resources on the time-consuming task of re-credentialing members and invited those familiar with the practices of other organizations to report.

Steve Tally asked whether NASW had a declared policy regarding the Google book settlement. DiChristina stated that NASW's policy has been to provide information on the issue. Tally was appointed chair of an ad hoc committee to study what NASW's policy on the Google settlement should be. NASW members are invited to join the committee.

Rick Borchelt asked about board thinking on the issue of who is a journalist for purposes of running to be an NASW officer. Steve Miller stated that, as



Tinsley Davis  
Executive Director  
DIRECTOR@NASW.ORG

### Looking Forward

*(Someone Had to Use this Cliché in Our Anniversary Year)*

As NASW celebrates its 75th anniversary, there will be much looking back and well-deserved pats on the back for an organization that has grown from a small group of like-minded friends into the world's largest professional science-writing organization. In the process, we have increased membership and member services, founded our own science writing awards, and established multiple ongoing fellowships. Keeping the organization focused on the future, however, is an important aspect of my role as executive director.

The day-to-day activities of NASW are enough to keep me, as NASW's executive director and sole full-time employee, more than busy. Organizations like ours, that is nonprofit professional societies in the IRS 501(c)(6) category, have a multitude of governance and compliance issues that must be addressed, no matter how small we are staff wise. Governance duties never disappear, but the current increased attention to develop policies and systems is part of a nonprofit's lifecycle, and this too shall pass. Amidst it all, the board and committees are still putting forth new programs like the career grants.

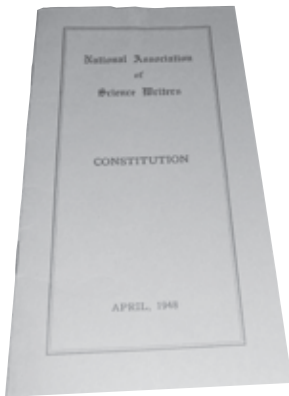
The effort that President Mariette DiChristina has put into some of these critical but thankless tasks will enable the next president to engage in a multi-year planning process. Thinking strategically will help us figure out how NASW can stay relevant to you and the field while remaining viable. This includes creating an operating reserve fund and remaining as agile as we were in our early days when a tight group of friends founded NASW.

Strategic planning forms a sound platform

Looking forward presents a time to examine challenges and opportunities for the organization. What challenges do you see for NASW in the next five years? What opportunities do you see? This summer, you will be electing a new board that will address these questions. The board is an important part of NASW, legally responsible for the organization's health and care. As is common in the nonprofit sector where passion and volunteer energy get things done, not many come to the table with a degree in nonprofits, but it is eminently doable and—since I started with a cliché, I will end with one—rewarding.

*Next Issue: What it means to be an NASW board member. ■*

Governance and the Future



President Mariette DiChristina describes the need to update NASW's 1948 governance document (left)



Members met on Feb. 20, in San Diego, to consider bylaws amendments and cast their vote

the number of staff reporters declines among the membership, the journalist requirement may overly narrow the pool of people eligible to run. A discussion ensued. Paul Raeburn stated that the nominating committee determines eligibility for being an officer. DiChristina stated that the nominating committee is currently at work and encouraged members interested in running for the board or to be an officer to contact a committee member.

Executive Director Tinsley Davis reminded members of the March 10 deadline for workshop proposals. She also encouraged people to suggest ways of spending Authors Coalition funds, restricted broadly in that in that they must benefit science writers, by e-mailing program ideas to [director@nasw.org](mailto:director@nasw.org).

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m. ■

*Bylaws*  
**VOTES COUNTED**

Votes .....	<b>182 total votes</b>
<b>Accept All Changes</b> .....	<b>70 votes (38.3%)</b>
<b>Accept all but VIII*</b> .....	<b>109 votes (59.6%)</b>
<b>Accept None</b> .....	<b>3 votes (1.6%)</b>

*\*"Accept all amendments, except changes to Article VIII which will be rewritten by an ad-hoc committee and re-presented for a vote at the annual meeting in November 2010"*



**Cybrarian**  
**Russell Clemings**  
*Fresno Bee*  
[CYBRARIAN@NASW.ORG](mailto:CYBRARIAN@NASW.ORG)

## Cyberbeat

**NO BIG NEWS THIS QUARTER, BUT HERE ARE A FEW RECENT NUGGETS FROM THE WORLD OF NASW.ORG:**

- The redesign of the website is proceeding with the usual fits and spurts toward what we expect will be a grand unveiling before summer starts. We're completely overhauling the underlying software, adding lots of new features, and freshening the design.
- We plan a major focus this year on adding new content to the site as well as calling more attention to the content we already

have. One early addition you might have missed—a weekly roundup of science blogs by NASW board member Tabitha Powledge. Look for it Friday mornings.

■ Membership renewal season is almost over, and it's a bit earlier this year than in the past, thanks to the membership's approval of an NASW bylaws overhaul in February. Now, the final deadline for annual dues is Feb. 28 instead of May 15. We gave everybody a few weeks' grace to March 24 this time, but in the future, members whose dues are unpaid when March arrives will find their website access revoked and their e-mail aliases canceled. Fair warning.

Now, from the lists (which will become "the forums" after the redesign):

### NASW-FREELANCE

The mysterious process (or processes) of book editing got a thorough examination in early December.

Rochester, Minn., web content producer Jennifer Gangloff posed a question raised by her freelance work on a medical book:

"Is there a general average/guideline, whatever, on how many times a book would be copy edited and by how many different



people before publication?" she asked.

"I'm trying to get a general sense if other published books have more than one copy editor and/or editor and how many passes they take through a book to make sure it's all done perfectly... This book has had a lot of various kinds of errors. I just hope I'm catching them all!"

Orleans, Mass., freelancer Barbara Ravage replied, "Two passes and a really thorough style sheet ought to do it," but then raised a larger issue. Gangloff had described her work as "copy editing/editing" but Ravage said they're two different things.

"Publishers often try to get a single person to do both, at copy editing prices, but I believe that's something to fight against," she said. "An editor's skill set is different from a copy editor's. And the person who did the editing is not the best candidate for copy editing, which is best done by someone coming to the manuscript with a fresh eye and new perspective."

Amen, said Lorraine Hopping Egan, a writer, editor and game inventor based in Ann Arbor, Mich.

"I've been an editor and an author and I'm married to a copy editor—which is a whole different skill set," she said.

"Once the mss is acceptable and accepted, that's when it goes to copy editing... If there are substantial changes or wholesale additions at that point, the process has broken down."

In fact, she said, if the manuscript was really that bad and Gangloff did a lot of rewriting, she ought to consider asking for a credit in addition to her fee.

For more, including guidance on the step-by-step process of book production, search the NASW-Freelance archives for "General book editing question."

## NASW-TALK

The list took a cul-de-sac from science into comparative linguistics for a few days in early February as its subscribers contemplated the many ways to say something's wrong.

New York freelancer Blair Bolles posed the question that got it started: "For all (of) you readers who know a language beyond English, I'd like to know how other languages say 'uh-oh.' In my part of the world, it's an interjection expressing dismay or foreboding. What do they say in Italy and Germany? For that matter, what do English speakers in India and South Africa?"

Here are some of the responses he got.

From Germany, writer Sarah Everts said: "Here in Berlin, I've heard people say 'uh-oh' (like in English) and 'oje' (pronounced like OH-yay, with the same intonation as 'uh-oh')."

Boulder, Colo., writer Henry Lansford: "It may not be exactly equivalent in intensity, but some Brits are likely to exclaim 'bloody hell' on occasions when an American would say 'uh-oh.'"

Tuscaloosa, Ala., writer Mike Wofsey: "For twenty-something Australian women, 'uh-oh' translates as 'um-ah' and might translate similarly for other Australians, I never paid that much attention to it. But the 'um-ah' did surprise me once I discovered it wasn't just a personality quirk ... I work with a lot of Mandarin-speakers, and their 'uh-oh' sounds something like 'ah-yay' but with far more drama than our 'uh-oh.'"

Bethesda, Md., freelancer Harvey Leifert: "My Swiss-born wife used to say, 'ai-ai' or, in extreme cases, 'ai-ai-ai.' She was raised bilingually in French and Swiss German, and I don't know which language contributed this interjection. It's pretty close to the Yiddish 'oy oy,' so it's likely Germanic in origin."

Summit, N.J., freelancer Don Monroe provided comic relief: "My mother used to say 'oops' in the same generic way that I use 'uh-oh': 'Oh, that's not good.' When she was training to be a surgeon, she was advised that it wasn't a good expression to be using during an operation."

For reasons that are far too strange to fully discuss here (it involves a neighbor's pet finch), the expression of choice in your humble cybrarian's family is "neah," not to be confused with "ni" of Monty Python coinage. Whatever. You can read the rest of the thread by searching the NASW-talk archives for "Uh-Oh." ■

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*...major focus this year on adding new content to the site...calling more attention to the content we already have.*

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**Pam Frost Gorder**  
Assistant Director  
of Research Communications  
Ohio State University  
GORDER.1@OSU.EDU

## Our Gang

**Staci West's career is flowering.** She has taken a new position at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) as the communications manager for the Environmental Molecular Sciences Laboratory, a Department of Energy scientific user facility. She was PNNL's manager of media relations for the past three years. Send her a virtual bouquet at [staci.west@pnl.gov](mailto:staci.west@pnl.gov).

**Ed Ricciuti is a hardy perennial.** At age 71, he has earned his second dan (second-degree black belt) in the martial art of combat hapkido. He earned his first-degree black belt a year ago. He plans to write a book on self defense and martial arts for seniors. Write to him at [ed.ricciuti@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ed.ricciuti@sbcglobal.net) to ask if he'd mind escorting you to your car the next time you have to work after hours.

**Eric Bender is tending his career.** Formerly the associate director of communications and public affairs at Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research, he is now senior communications associate at Joslin Diabetes Center. Ask him for sugar-free recipes at [Eric.Bender@joslin.harvard.edu](mailto:Eric.Bender@joslin.harvard.edu).

**Annual event. Joely Johnson Mork** just completed the first year of her return to full-time freelancing. As an editor and writer, she specializes in vascular issues, nursing, consumer health, and related topics. She's also a certified yoga instructor (<http://www.troy-yoga.com>). Breathe deeply, have a good stretch, and write to her at [jaycubed@earthlink.net](mailto:jaycubed@earthlink.net).

**Mary Miller, how does your garden grow?** Miller, a long-time science writer and multimedia producer at the

Exploratorium, is now director for a science education partnership between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the science museum. She'll coordinate new websites, media-enhanced exhibits, communication training for scientists, citizen science, and other public programs around the environmental sciences. She says that, lucky for her, the new job means "visiting a lot of NOAA labs and research stations, going on their ships and planes, and hanging out with scientists on the forefront of ocean, atmosphere, and climate sciences." Write to her at marym@exploratorium.edu to ask where she's headed next.

**He's putting down new roots.** If you caught **Lucas Laursen** at AAAS in San Diego, you know that he was en route to Madrid, Spain, from Cambridge, U.K. (quite the round trip, no?). In Madrid, he plans to continue covering science research and policy for clients such as *Nature*, *Science*, and *Science Careers*, but aims to focus some of his reporting on Spanish science. Write to him at email@lucaslaursen.com and say, "Olé!"

**Mary Crowley is back in season.** She just rejoined NASW after a brief hiatus, and wrote to tell us what she's been up to. A longtime science and medical writer who got interested in bioethics via reporting on it, Crowley brushed up on bioethics in a philosophy graduate program. In the midst of her degree, she had an opportunity, in 2007, to knit her interests together and join The Hastings Center, the world's first bioethics research institute, as its first director of public affairs and communications. Since then, she's been connecting journalists and policymakers on topics such as mental health and children, end-of-life care, synthetic biology, genetic privacy, and health reform. She also produced *The Hastings Center Bioethics Briefing Book for Journalists and Policymakers*. She asks members to take a look at it at <http://www.thehastingscenter.org/briefingbook> or drop a line at crowleym@thehastingscenter.org to talk about story ideas.

**Sandra Swanson is getting plenty of sunshine:** She's won a silver Eddie—a national magazine award presented by FOLIO—for her profile of a robotic surgery specialist. The article, "The Beethoven of Surgery," appeared in the July/August 2008 *Illinois Alumni Magazine*. Congratulate her at swanson@nasw.org.

**Like seeds carried on the wind.** **Gina Hagler** has a new contract with Springer Verlag for a trade book tentatively titled *Modeling Ships and Space Craft: The Science and Art of Mastering the Oceans and Sky*. She says the book focuses on the history of hydrodynamic thought and its progression—with some very accessible science examples covering the field's seminal theories and practical designs. The book starts with Aristotle's concepts, finds its way onto Froude's and Taylor's works, followed by computer modeling, and ends with the creation of impressive modern-day spacecrafts such as SpaceShip One. Ask her who folded the first paper airplane at gwrite@comcast.net.

**Steve Benowitz has left the temperate zone.** He's departed the Moores Cancer Center at University of California, San Diego, where he was director of communications. He's now assistant director of communications and science writer at the American Society of Clinical Oncology in Alexandria, Va. He's telecommuting until the summer, when he'll relocate to the Washington, D.C. area. ("No, I'm not crazy," he says. "Well, maybe a little.") His new e-mail is steven.benowitz@asco.org.

**K.C. Cole's career is bearing fruit:** The science writer, author, and professor at the University of Southern California's

Annenberg School of Journalism has been elected a fellow of The Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (CSI), publisher of *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine. The CSI cited her for her "distinguished achievement in science and skepticism." Cole joins the ranks of Carl Sagan, Isaac Asimov, Neil de Grasse Tyson, E.O. Wilson, and other fellows, all of whom have "made contributions to science and reason, critical inquiry, and public education." Congratulate her at kccole@usc.edu.

**She's cultivating success.** **Marita Graube**, principal of Seattle-based Pixel Theory, Inc., reports that one of her company's projects snagged "Best of Show" in the Society for Technical Communication's annual competition. The entry, a 2009 brochure explaining the capabilities of Merck's Gene Expression Laboratory, took the Art & Design category for its "clear visual and written communication." Write her at marita.graube@pixeltheoryinc.com.

**Michael Balter**, Paris-based contributing correspondent for *Science*, **will teach budding science writers** this fall in New York University's Science, Health, and Environmental Reporting Program. He last taught in 2008, in Boston University's science and medical journalism program. Write to him at michael.balter@gmail.com to ask what kind of permission slip you need to audit his class.

**Pamela S. Turner's books have garnered a bumper crop of awards**, among them the Golden Kite Award, the ASPCA Henry Bergh Award, the Flora Steiglitz Straus Nonfiction Award, and the ALA Notable Book recognition. The latest: an AAAS/Subaru Prize for children's science writing. Her 2009 volume, *The Frog Scientist*, swept the Middle Grades Science Book category. Send a congratulatory "ribbit" to pstrst@pacbell.net. ■



Suzanne Clancy  
Editor  
*Clinical Lab Products*  
SCLANCYPHD@YAHOO.COM

## Regional Groups

### CHICAGO

Groundbreaking research on cancer, a look at the obesity epidemic, and the holidays brought the Chicago Science Writers together for a Dec. 3 meeting hosted by Loyola University Health System. Speakers included Kathy Albain, M.D., professor in the department of medicine, division of hematology/oncology, at the Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine. Albain, whose research is focused on chemotherapy, gave science writers a preview of a paper (released the following week) that showed that although chemotherapy generally improves survival in postmenopausal breast cancer patients, a multi-gene test on a breast tumor identifies a subset of women who may not benefit from chemotherapy. Albain also talked about her work on health disparity. She found that survival gaps for breast, prostate, and ovarian cancer could be due to a complex interaction of biologic

factors in tumors and inherited variations in common genes that control metabolism of drugs and hormones.

Amy Luke, Ph.D., associate professor in the department of preventive medicine and epidemiology at Loyola, talked about her research on obesity. Contrary to popular belief, Luke has found the number of calories burned in physical activity is not a key factor in rising rates of obesity. She looked at two groups of women: African-Americans in the Chicago area and a group of women in rural Nigeria. Although the women had the same amount of physical activity, the American women weighed on average 184 pounds compared with 127 for the Nigerians. The difference may come from diet, as the Nigerian diet is lower in animal fat and protein and higher in fiber than the American diet, which leans toward processed foods. The Chicago writers group then repaired to a nearby hotel, to enjoy a little food of their own, along with drinks and cheerful holiday conversations.

## NEW YORK

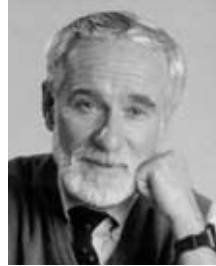
SWINY kicked off its 2010 programming season with the annual SWINY winter party, its biggest social event of the year. Kudos to hard-working board members Sheila Haas, David Levine, Laura Newman, Peggy Crane, and others for a smashing time at swanky venue 24 Prince where the group honored legendary paleontologist Mary Leakey (1913 to 1996) with “Mary-garita” rum punch and “Leakey Fossil” chocolate martinis. Long-time SWINY member Edmund Blair Bolles regaled guests with a story of how he met with Leakey in Africa back in the '70s. Blair included in his book *Fodor's Animal Parks of Africa* (New York: David McKay and Co., 1978) a piece that Leakey wrote at his request, entitled “The Serengeti in the Days of Zinjanthropus.” The group also gave out door prizes, including autographed copies of a new book on the life of Mary Leakey donated by SWINY board member Ann Marie Cunningham of the Science Friday Initiative, and fossils donated by the shop Evolution. A full list of other generous door prize donations can be found on <http://www.swiny.org/events/>.

## WASHINGTON, D.C.

The D.C. Science Writers Association ended 2009 with a bang in early December with its annual Holiday Party. More than 100 DCSWAns gathered at Left Bank, in Adams Morgan, to celebrate with an open bar, door prizes, and the DCSWA “Year in Review.” Announced at the event was the inauguration of the DCSWA Science Newsbrief Award for short-form science writing. (The winner to be announced at the upcoming DCSWA Professional Development Day, on April 17.)

In January, about 30 DCSWA members were treated to a behind-the-scenes tour of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History's Vertebrate Paleontology Laboratory and FossilLab (a fishbowl-like room in which volunteers prepare fossils under the watchful eyes of museum goers). With the guidance of Smithsonian paleontologists Tom Jorstad, Steve Jabo, and Pete Kroehler, DCSWAns got a taste of the many steps required in fossil preparation: how scientists painstakingly extract fragile fossils from stubborn rocks, make replicas of

fossils for display or loan to other museums, and the proper storage of the fossils (in custom-made foam jackets) so they don't eventually crumble under their own weight. In February, DCSWAns and attendees at the American Physical Society's annual meeting raised a glass at the Marriot Wardman Park Hotel in Adams Morgan, to honor the winners of the 2009 AIP Science Writing Awards. ■



**James Cornell**  
International Science  
Writers Association  
ICORNELLJC@EARTHLINK.NET

## News from Afar

I REALIZED THAT THE TRANSMUTATION OF THE AAAS ANNUAL MEETING WAS COMPLETE WHEN AN ELDERLY ATTENDEE, THE OBVIOUS VETERAN OF MANY MEETINGS PAST, TURNED TO ME IN THE HOTEL ELEVATOR AND REMARKED: “MAYBE WE SHOULD START CALLING THIS THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE.”

She probably had responded to the “Think Canada” button pinned to my lapel—a giveaway at the lavish reception sponsored by the Canadian government. (In fact, so many attendees sported the big, red, round buttons that one might have thought San Diego was holding a convention of Target check-out clerks.)

The globalization of this once All-American gathering was even more obvious to press attendees. Nearly a third of the press room registrants were foreign—and, by contrast with an U.S. contingent heavy on PIOs and academics—most of those were working press. Indeed, the front row at most press briefings was filled with Fleet Street's finest—representatives of the BBC, *London Independent*, and *The Irish Times*, just to name a few. Even the briefing moderator—the inestimable Tim Radford, formerly of the *Manchester Guardian*—

gave sessions a distinctly British style and accent.

After what has now become the “traditional” Thursday night party for foreign reporters thrown by the AAAS, most other social events were hosted by foreign entities. In addition to their evening reception, the Canadians also sponsored a press breakfast, as did the European Commission and Germany's Helmholtz Foundation. The science agencies of Japan, Korea, and China held special invitation-only parties for reporters. The international reception, once limited to visiting dignitaries from other national associations of science (and gate-crashing journalists), was thrown open to all attendees.

One might argue that even the AAAS Science Journalism Awards ceremony and reception had an international connection now that the Norwegian-born entrepreneur and philanthropist Fred Kavli has promised support for the prizes—in perpetuity.

NEWS FROM AFAR continued on page 23



## In Memoriam



**Alan C. Davis**  
Illustrious editorial and  
public affairs career

**Alan C. Davis of Walpole, Maine, died on Jan. 14 from complications of open-heart surgery. He was 80 and had been a member of NASW since 1958.**

Davis's career was focused on health and medical science communications. Following positions at the University of Michigan, University of Pennsylvania, and other academic institutions, he joined the American Cancer Society in 1967 as a science editor and retired in 1993 as vice president for public affairs.

During summers on Maine's Mount Desert Island, Davis and his wife, Jeanne, became supporters of The Jackson Laboratory; a relationship that lasted four decades. In a tradition that continues to this day, Davis organized the Jackson Lab Press Week, a meeting that draws national science and medical reporters to Bar Harbor each year during the historic Short Course on Medical and Experimental Mammalian Genetics. Science writers who spent time at Press Week will recall Davis's dedication to "real" lobster bakes, made with seawater he personally schlepped to the great steaming cook pots on his camp sites in the Acadia National Park each summer.

Davis was born in Danville, Penn., in 1929, and grew up in nearby Lewisburg. His parents were educators at Bucknell University. During World War II he enlisted, at age 17, and served with the Army of Occupation in Japan. [His military career spanned several services, including the Army, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, Utah Air National Guard, New York Air National Guard, and USAF Reserve (Lt. Col.). He retired as a Colonel from the NY Air National Guard.]

Upon returning from military service in Japan, Davis entered Bucknell University and graduated in 1951 with a BA in political science, and later received a Master's in Public Administration from the University of Michigan.

Davis worked for 26 years for the American Cancer Society, during which time he served as science editor, director of governmental relations, vice president for governmental relations, and vice president for public affairs. Davis played a pivotal role urging members of Congress to pass legislation regarding tobacco regulation, cancer prevention, and issues directly affecting cancer patients. Those efforts were rewarded when President Nixon signed the National Cancer Act in 1971. Davis's role in publicizing the dangers of smoking made him a significant and longtime activist in the fight against the tobacco industry.

Following his retirement from the nonprofit world, Davis and his wife moved to Maine and opened the Flying Cloud B & B. Davis was the chef; a role he continued to relish long after the couple sold the business in 1998. In addition to volunteer work with the Jackson Lab, Davis helped to establish a nursing school in a combined effort with Central Maine Community College.

Davis married his college sweetheart, Rachel Jean Heim, in

1951. She died in 1985 after 33 years of marriage. He is survived by his second wife, the former Jeanne Cahill, and four sons from his first marriage. ■

(Source: *The Jackson Lab and the Davis family*)

## Letters to the Editor

**It is odd to see a colleague argue that the**

public should have less information, not more. For how else can we interpret Earle Holland's rather overheated tirade against Futurity ("Why Futurity Fails," *SW*, winter 2009-2010)? What Futurity has done is harness the intellectual resources of more than 50 of the world's top research universities, and aggregate the thoroughly-sourced stories that are published by these institutions every day, many of them written by NASW members. To restate the obvious, everyone involved in Futurity values the traditional news media, and the emerging social media, for their scrutiny and validation of the work produced by university researchers. But it is also clear to us that communicating directly with the public is both desirable and essential—otherwise, why should we invest in institutional websites, magazines, and the like. Where we disagree with Mr. Holland is over whether public is smart enough to understand science and research news unless it has been filtered through the media lens. He says no, we say yes, and have confidence that the information produced by our public information officers, working in close collaboration with scholars, can be both rigorously accurate and informative. And as Mr. Holland (grudgingly) acknowledges, so do our readers.

**Lisa Lapin**

*Assistant Vice President for Communications  
Stanford University*

**Bill Murphy**

*Vice President for Communications  
University of Rochester*

**Mike Schoenfeld**

*Vice President for Public Affairs and Government Relations  
Duke University*

*The authors are the co-founders of Futurity.org*

■ ■ ■

## ScienceWriters Welcomes Letters to the Editor

A letter must include a daytime telephone number and e-mail address. Letters may be edited. Letters submitted may be used in print or digital form by NASW. Send to Editor, *ScienceWriters*, P.O. Box 1725 Solana Beach, CA 92075 or e-mail editor@nasw.org. ■

# News from Afar

continued from page 21

His foundation also sponsored a press luncheon to announce establishment of the Kavli Prize Science Forum—a biennial event to be held in Oslo and intended, according to the press release, “to facilitate high-level, global discussion of major topics on science and science policy.”

And, in a gesture that would have been almost unimaginable years ago, the press office allowed two non-AAAS groups—the World Federation of Science Journalists (WFSJ) and its rising rival in the global market, the Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF)—to hold their own press briefings on AAAS turf.

Even beyond the hermetic world of press operations, it was hard to miss the new internationalism. The general program included scores of sessions on global themes—from S&T priorities in the Arab world, to the “uncertain future of international science journalism,” to the contrast between European and U.S. gender policies in science, to the communication of science in China, Japan, and Korea. (The official Chinese effort in this area employs 1.7 million people at a cost of approximately \$1 billion!)

The exhibit area was also very international, perhaps made more evident this year by the noticeable decline in the overall number of the usual, largely American, exhibitors. The EC offered food and drink at its oversized booth; the Japanese Science and Technology Agency and the Riken Corporation combined to woo visitors with high-quality gifts; and a consortium of universities from Germany’s Baden-Wurtemberg region offered fancy chocolates and flew a banner as big as a city block at the entrance to the convention center.

One young German reporter, attending as a Bosch Fellow, digging into the economics of the AAAS meeting, found that there had been something akin to a “bidding war” among foreign research organizations for the right to host press breakfasts.

If the internationalization of the AAAS is now complete—to cite my academic friend—it is understandable, given the global nature of many scientific issues, such as climate change, pandemic diseases, nuclear proliferation, and food safety, and the increasing multi-national nature of large scientific enterprises in astronomy, space science, high energy physics, and nano-technology.

■ ■ ■

With the prospect of reaching a big international audience, World Federation of Science Journalists (WFSJ) President Nadia el-Awady used the opportunity of the AAAS venue to announce that the federation had received 1.9



WFSJ President Nadia el-Awady announcing details of the forthcoming 7th World Conference of Science Journalism in Cairo, Egypt.

July 2-7, 2010 • 4th EuroScience Open Forum (ESOF2010), Torino, Italy. [www.esof2010.org](http://www.esof2010.org)

Dec. 6-10, 2010 • 11th International Conference on the Public Communication of Science and Technology (PCST2010), New Delhi, India. [www.pcst-2010.org](http://www.pcst-2010.org)

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

June 27-29, 2011 • 7th World Conference of Science Journalists, Cairo, Egypt. [www.wcsj2011.org](http://www.wcsj2011.org)

million pounds sterling from the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) and \$360 000 (CAD) from Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC), or the equivalent of US\$3.2 million, to continue and expand its flagship project SjCOOP.

The first phase of SjCOOP, a mentoring program for aspiring science journalists in the developing world, was launched three years ago, and, according to el-Awady, has “had a positive influence on science journalism in Africa and the Arab world.”

The program utilizes distance learning techniques, matching experienced journalists in the developed world with their counterparts in emerging societies via the Internet and Skype, bolstered by an online course in science journalism and an annual face-to-face meeting between mentors and mentees.

The second phase, beginning almost immediately, will again be multilingual, offering training in Arabic, English, and French. The training will continue to address issues common to both Africa and the Middle East: the shortage of competent science journalists, the lack of interest in science and technology subjects by editors, and the wariness of scientists and policy makers about the media.

The new effort will organize three teams of five mentors and 20 journalists-in-training; one each for Francophone and Anglophone Africa, and the third for the Middle East and North Africa. A new Africa-based organization, the

Development Communications Network (DEVCOMS), will partner with the WFSJ to implement the program.

As in the first phase, SjCOOP will help establish and sustain national and regional associations of science journalists which can support the trainees and their mentors.

U.S. science writers who would like to participate as mentors should contact Olfa Labassi, project manager, at 819-770-0776 or [olfa.labassie@wfsj.org](mailto:olfa.labassie@wfsj.org). ■

# Reflecting on Science Milestones in NASW's History

*In its first twenty-five years, NASW saw changes in medicine, technology, and the beginning of space exploration. Thermonuclear bombs exploded, the double-helix was revealed, and computers were invented. ■ In this issue, ScienceWriters flashbacks to NASW's inaugural year of 1934 and the twenty-five years that followed. The next 50 years will be featured in the summer and fall issues, concluding in 2009 when NASW reached its 75th year. ■ This fall's ScienceWriters 2010 conference will mark the occasion with celebrations for NASW's 75th and CASW's 50th.*

## 1934

The National Association of Science Writers is founded

Arnold Beckman develops the pH meter

Enrico Fermi suggests slow, or thermal, neutrons can be used to split atoms

Vitamin C synthesized

## 1935

DuPont with Wallace Carothers creates nylon, the first completely synthetic fabric

Aircraft-detecting radar is pioneered

## 1936

The first successful helicopter flight



First artificial heart developed: the Lindbergh-Carrel Perfusion Pump



## 1937

Prototype antihistamine produced to treat allergies

Hans Krebs postulates his "cycle" of oxidative phosphorylation

## 1938

DuPont and Roy J. Plunkett develop Teflon

Ballpoint pen is invented

Shock therapy for the treatment of mental illness introduced

## 1939

DDT developed



## 1940

Freeze drying used for food preservation

Plasma discovered to be a substitute for whole blood in transfusions

Rh factor discovered in blood



## 1941

Simplified electron microscope magnifies up to 100,000 times

Plutonium isolated as a reactor fuel



## 1942

Manhattan Project established to design and build the atomic bomb



First self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction

Napalm developed

## 1943

Streptomycin discovered; the word "antibiotic" is coined

Doctors begin to use the Pap test to detect cervical cancer

## 1944

The V-2 developed; first true missile

First automatic, general-purpose digital computer constructed

DNA isolated by Oswald Avery



## 1945

First atomic bomb is detonated at Alamogordo, NM

Oral penicillin developed

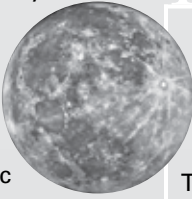
Grand Rapids, MI becomes first community to fluoridate its water supply





## 1946

The US Army bounces first radar beam off the moon



US Atomic Energy Commission formed

## 1947

Carbon-14 method of radiocarbon dating developed

Chuck Yeager breaks the sound barrier in a X-1 rocket-powered research plane



Thor Heyerdahl crosses the Pacific in the Kon-Tiki

The transistor is developed



## 1948

Big Bang theory put forth to explain the origin of the universe

Theoretical basis for holography put forth

Theory of quantum electrodynamics developed

## 1949

First military around-the-world nonstop flight

The antibiotics oxytetracycline and neomycin developed

First Xerox machine produced

The Soviet Union begins testing atomic weapons

## 1950

First self-service elevator installed by Otis Elevator

First successful kidney transplant

## 1951

First oral contraceptive developed

First nuclear power plant is built by the US Atomic Energy Commission

The first business computer to handle both numeric and alphabetic data is introduced: UNIVAC (Universal Automatic Computer)



## 1952

First issue of *ScienceWriters* published

First breeder reactor built by the US Atomic Energy Commission

Sony develops the pocket-sized transistor radio

US explodes first thermonuclear bomb at Eniwetok Island



## 1953

First successful open-heart surgery is performed

Watson and Crick describe the double-helix structure of DNA



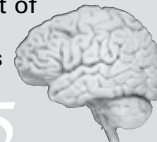
## 1954

First polio vaccines administered

Humans determined to have 46 chromosomes

Invention of the solar cell

Thorazine introduced for the treatment of mental disorders



## 1955

NASW is formally incorporated

Velcro is patented

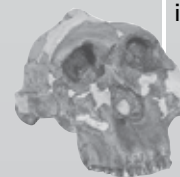
Optic fiber invented

## 1956

The Mid-Atlantic ridge discovered

First computer program beats a human in a game of chess

First neutrinos observed at Los Alamos Lab



## 1957

Sputnik I launched by the Soviet Union

Soviets launch its second satellite; this one contains a live dog

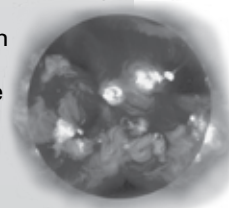


## 1958

The existence of the Van Allen Belt, surrounding the Earth, is confirmed by the Explorer I satellite.

Solar winds from the Sun detected for the first time

The modem and laser are invented



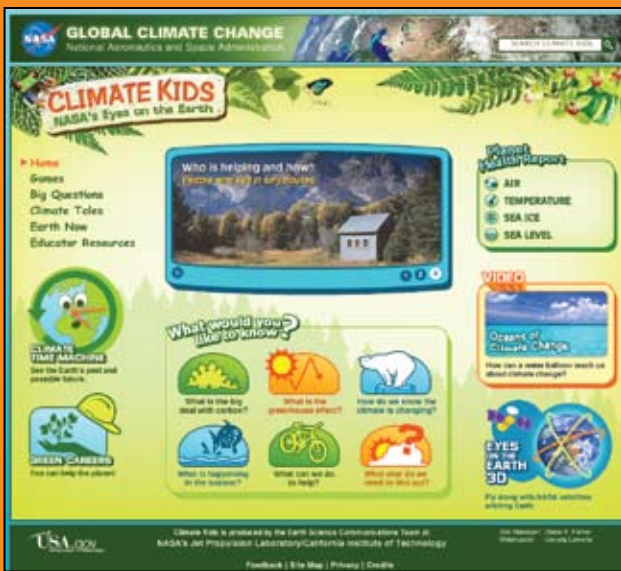
## 1959

Jack Kilby and Robert Noyce patent the integrated circuit

Internal pacemaker invented

The Leakeys find fossil remains of Australopithecus

Entries compiled by Julie Kinyoun



## NASA Debuts Kid's Website

NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory has launched Climate Kids (<http://climate.nasa.gov/kids/>). Basic topics about global climate change are addressed using simple illustrations, humor, interactive exercises, and language appropriate for fourth-through sixth-grade students. ■

## USC Offers Specialized Journalism Program

In response to a rapidly evolving industry, USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism offers a nine-and-a-half month M.A. program in Specialized Journalism.

The M.A. in Specialized Journalism is designed to allow students to pursue a highly customized course of study that meets their individual interests. Students can take courses that build subject matter expertise or develop advanced journalistic skills, and they have wide latitude in finding the mix that suits their goals. As such, more than half of the units required for graduation are earned through electives or through projects designed by the student.

The program is designed for experienced journalists and aspiring reporters with proven skills. Individuals working in all forms of media and journalistic platforms are invited to apply. Top applicants are eligible for the USC Annenberg Graduate Fellowship program which provides full tuition support and a stipend for living expenses.

The program begins with a two-week intensive summer course focused on the changing role of journalism in society and some of the newest methods of reporting and multimedia storytelling. During the regular school year students take advanced journalism courses that develop the skills and knowledge to carry out specialty reporting and analysis. In addition to the coursework, both programs feature a variety of group activities including field trips and a speaker series with leading journalists, scholars, and policy makers. Students will work closely with faculty mentors on a year-long master's project, an extended work of journalism ready for dissemination.

The required curriculum is designed to be completed in one academic year plus the summer seminar for students who are attending full time. Students can also attend part time and extend the course of study over one-and-a-half or two academic years. More information at <http://bit.ly/9bivvZ>. ■

(Source: USC Annenberg website)

## The Winners of the AAAS Blogging Contest Are...

BY DAVID GRIMM

In February, *Science* reporters traveled to San Diego, California, to cover the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (which publishes *ScienceNOW*). To help us out, we recruited meeting attendees to share their insights and experiences on our guest blog, *ScienceBloggers*.

We had 27 bloggers sign up for the contest. Fifteen ended up writing one or more blog posts, for a total of 30 blog posts by the end of the meeting. We were impressed with many of the entries, but in the end we could only choose three winners.

First place, and \$250, goes to **Jennifer Leslie**, a biologist at MIT, for her superb description of a session about using neuroscience in the courtroom (<http://bit.ly/c6ePy3>). Our staff felt that this post best encapsulated what we wanted to see in our guest blog coverage: a well-written, insightful analysis of the science being discussed at the meeting. The story gives readers a vivid sense of the excitement of the session.

Second place goes to **Ben Landis**, a science-writing fellow at the North Carolina Sea Grant, for his colorful views of the meeting (see "Hey—That's Ira Flatow!" and "Bridging the Bridge Metaphors"), frequent use of multimedia, and regular posting throughout the conference. You can also check out Ben's full coverage at <http://bit.ly/boL6AQ>. He received a year's subscription to *Science*.

Third place goes to **Daniel Stolte**, a science writer at the University of Arizona, for interesting write-ups of research presented at two ocean science sessions—"Blinded by the Noise" (<http://bit.ly/93a2TG>) and "Oases of Life in Perpetual Darkness" (<http://bit.ly/9Y1Zjv>). His prize was a t-shirt.

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*...we recruited meeting attendees  
to share their insights and experiences  
on our guest blog, ScienceBloggers.*

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Finally, honorable mention goes to **Haley Bridger**, a science writer at the Broad Institute, for a record number of substantive posts on genetics and molecular biology sessions. You can see all of Haley's stories at (<http://bit.ly/ct7LM3>).

Once again, thanks to all of our guest bloggers! To see everything they did, check out *ScienceBloggers* (<http://bit.ly/c6ePy3>). And while you're at it, see the coverage by *Science* reporters, as well (<http://news.sciencemag.org/aaas10/>). ■

"And the Winners of Our Blogging Contest Are..." *ScienceNOW*, March 8, 2010.

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DAVID GRIMM IS EDITOR OF *SCIENCENOW*, *SCIENCE* MAGAZINE'S DAILY ONLINE NEWS SITE.

# PIOs on the go

BY MELISSA LUTZ BLOUIN

*The poll was the first step towards an nasw.org section devoted to the needs of public information officers*

the PIO committee or to work in some other way include Bob Nellis, Mari Jensen, Kandice Carter, Joyce Peterson, Czerne Reid, Deborah Magaldi, Rick Bogren, Peter Weiss, Carl Marziali, Jeff Grabmeier, Rick Borchelt,

Lynne Friedmann, Emily Carlson, Andrea Messer, Avice Meehan, Jim Scott, Barbara Jaquish, Denise Graveline, Sue Nichols, Nicole Stricker, Pam Frost

Gorder, Russ Campbell, Steve Tally, Chris Barncard, Mario Aguilera, and Karen Kreeger. Any PIO who would like to see their name added to the list of volunteers, should contact Melissa Lutz Blouin at blouin@uark.edu or Earle Holland at holland.8@osu.edu. ■

A group of 22 public information officers gathered at the NASW meeting in Austin, Tex., to kick off the formation of a PIO committee. Earle Holland of Ohio State University and Melissa Lutz Blouin of the University of Arkansas volunteered to co-chair. A lively NASW-PIO discussion ensued on workshops of interests to PIOs.

In the fall the committee sent the PIO listserv a link to a short survey to help identify whom the PIO members work for and what they do. The survey had 62 completed responses, which gives the committee a starting point to work from. Among the findings:

NASW PIO members have a wide range of experience, ranging from those with only 1-2 years of experience (15 percent) to those with 6-10 years of experience (23 percent). Other categories included 3-5 years (19 percent), 11-20 years (19 percent), and 21-30 years (21 percent). Taken together, almost two-thirds of the respondents had at least 6 years experience working in science communications.

Nearly three-fifths (58 percent) of those responding said they worked for universities, while 3 percent reported working for a business or a corporation. Government agencies netted 10 percent of the respondents and foundations were represented by 5 percent. Nearly a quarter of those responding (24 percent) picked "other" to define their employers. Among these were academic medical centers and hospitals, national labs and professional societies.

Nearly all (94 percent) of those responding reported that they wrote news releases. Nearly three-fifths (58 percent) also said that

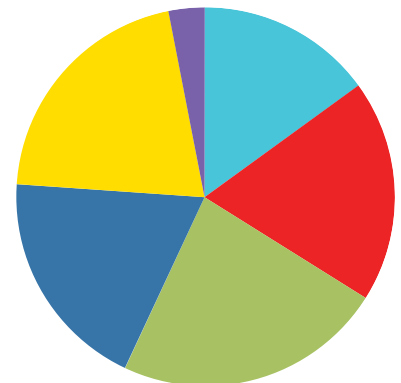
they wrote for research magazines. Together, these strongly suggest that the one unifying activity among these NASW PIO members is the writing, or editorial, process.

It is worth noting that 82 percent of respondents reported that "pitching stories to news media" was part of their regular duties. More than half (53 percent) produce video or audio, nearly three-fourths (71 percent) write brochures or other communications pieces, and nearly half (47 percent) say that they manage special events. Lastly, 56 percent state that crisis communications is part of their regular duties.

The next steps for the PIO committee will involve polling the PIO members on what kinds of resources they need from NASW and creating a corner of the NASW website devoted to the specific needs of public information officers.

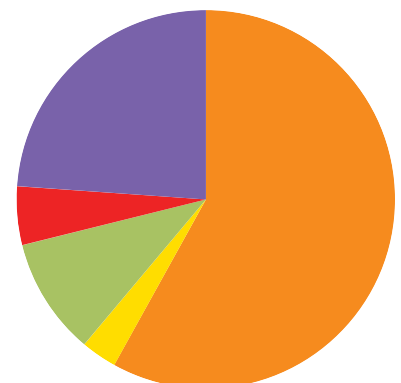
All of this activity requires volunteers, and many people have stepped forward to do the work. Terry Devitt of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, got the ball rolling. Others who have volunteered to serve on

MELISSA LUTZ BLOUIN IS THE DIRECTOR OF SCIENCE AND RESEARCH COMMUNICATIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS.



**Our Experience**

- 1-2 years (15%)
- 3-5 years (19%)
- 6-10 years (23%)
- 11-20 years (19%)
- 21-30 years (21%)
- 31+ years (3%)



**Where We Work**

- University (58%)
  - Business/Corporation (3%)
  - Government Agency (10%)
  - Foundations (5%)
  - Other (24%)
- Academic Medical Centers and Hospitals, Professional Societies, and National Labs

**What We Do**

- News Releases (94%)
- Write for Research Magazines (58%)
- Write Brochures/Communications Pieces (71%)
- Pitch Stories to News Media (82%)
- Produce Video or Audio (53%)
- Manage Special Events (47%)
- Do Crisis Communications (56%)





# NASW CONTACTS

National Association of Science Writers, Inc.  
P.O. Box 7905  
Berkeley, CA 94707  
Phone 510-647-9500  
www.nasw.org

## STAFF

### Executive Director

Tinsley Davis, director@nasw.org

### NASW Cybrarian

Russell Clemings, cybrarian@nasw.org

### Workshops Coordinator

Tinsley Davis, workshops@nasw.org

### ScienceWriters Editor

Lynne Friedmann, editor@nasw.org

## OFFICERS

### President

Mariette DiChristina, mdichristina@sciam.com  
*Scientific American*

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Nancy Shute, nancy@nancyshute.com  
Freelance

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## BOARD MEMBERS AT LARGE

Beryl Lief Benderly, blbink@aol.com  
Freelance

Kelli Whitlock Burton, kelli\_whitlock@nasw.org  
Freelance

Glennnda Chui, glennnda.chui@slac.stanford.edu  
*symmetry*

Terry Devitt, trdevitt@wisc.edu  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Dan Ferber, ferber@nasw.org  
Freelance

Bob Finn, finn@nasw.org  
Int'l Medical News Group

Robin Marantz Henig, robinhenig@nasw.org  
Freelance

Tom Paulson, tom.a.paulson@gmail.com  
Freelance

Tabitha M. Powledge, tam@nasw.org  
Freelance

Vikki Valentine, valentinevikki@gmail.com  
*NPR Online*

Mitch Waldrop, m.waldrop@naturedc.com  
*Nature*

## COMMITTEES

Awards, Authors Coalition Liaison, Journalism Organizations, World Federation of Science Journalists, Education, FOIA, Freelance, Grievance, Internet, Membership, Workshop Committee

Complete contact information available at  
www.nasw.org

# NEW MEMBERS

**ARIZONA:** Stephanie Doster, Institute of the Environment, Univ. of Arizona, Tucson.

**CALIFORNIA:** Miki Kelley\* UC San Diego; Leo Kretzner, freelance, Claremont; Madeline, McCurry-Schmidt\*, UC Davis; John Johnson, freelance, Long Beach; John Long, The Nat'l Hist. Museum of Los Angeles County; Jessica McNally\*, Stanford Univ.; Michael Torrice, freelance, Pasadena; Julie Van Fleet, Van Fleet & Associates, San Diego; Kristen Bole, freelance, San Francisco; Jascha Hoffman, freelance, San Francisco; Matt Kaplan, freelance, Sherman Oaks; Jennifer Lee, freelance, Sherman Oaks; Erica Myers-Russo\*, Green Mountain Coll., Temecula; Jane Liaw, freelance Walnut Creek; Aaron Rowe\*, UC Santa Barbara. **COLORADO:** Kylee Perez\*, Univ. of Colorado at Boulder; Marie Allen\*, Colorado State Univ., Fort Collins; Elizabeth Wood\* Colorado State Univ., Fort Collins; Carrie Visintainer, freelance, Laporte; Tianna Hicklin, Brookhaven Nat'l Lab, Littleton; Jennifer Walton, Nat'l Ecological Observatory Network (NEON), Inc., Longmont.

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**NEBRASKA:** Wern Tan\*, Univ. of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln. **NEW JERSEY:** Danielle Colas-Zelin\*, Rutgers Univ., Bloomfield; Sally Church, freelance, Jersey City; Tara Yates, Amer. Assoc. for Cancer Res., Wenonah. **NEW YORK:** Lee Billings, *Seed* magazine, Astoria; Mary

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\*Student member

# FACT CHECKER

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Details matter—readers notice even the little things, like the difference between a sherd and a shard—and Nijhuis says she'll work on nailing down each of them when she nears the end of the writing process. "I footnote everything within an inch of its life," she says. And when she is unsure of something from a human source, Nijhuis will go back for another conversation. "Sources are always happy to spend extra time with you to make sure you get things right," she says.

With such information on hand, a writer won't need to spend hours searching for where she found a certain piece of information when having to put together an annotation or when an editor asks for more details.

All this work pays off in the end. Readers get accurate information. Publications keep their readers' trust. And writers gain the respect of both readers and editors.

"It seems like any legitimate writer shouldn't have to be told to get their facts straight," says Wyckoff.

But a reminder won't hurt. ■

# HOLLYWOOD

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media outlets have been cutting back on science writers. In 2008, CNN dismantled its entire science reporting staff. While few newsroom cuts have targeted science coverage so directly, countless examples of thinning ranks—including ABC News announcing in February that it will shed about 25 percent of its news division—have displaced many specialist reporters.

“Professional journalism has been cut to the bone. And the first people to go are science journalists,” says Bora Zivkovic, who writes the science blog “A Blog Around the Clock” from Chapel Hill, N.C., and serves as online community manager for *PLoS One*, a peer-reviewed science journal. With fewer authorities in the media, “scientists have to take that over,” he says. Zivkovic spoke as part of a panel on how to better communicate science at the annual convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in San Diego.

One effort, announced at the meeting, will recruit Hollywood to help scientists tell their stories. NAS and the University of Southern California will team up to draw on USC’s expertise in film, TV, websites, and video games. The partnership will be the first between a federal agency and a film school.

“Entertainment media has been pretty much untapped as far as science literacy goes,” Fink says. A huge portion of the public doesn’t go to science museums or watch science programming on TV, she says. “Those are the eyeballs we’re trying to capture.”

Feature films such as “Apollo 13” and “Contact” show that movies can be both box-office successes and inspire careers in science, says Elizabeth Daley, dean of USC’s School of Cinematic Arts, whose graduates are used to winning Oscars, not Nobel Prizes. She hopes the program will provide screenwriters, producers, and directors with knowledgeable science sources to advise them.

The short cartoon within the 1993 film “Jurassic Park” that showed how one might clone dinosaurs provides a terrific example of what could be produced, Daley says. “It’s a very clear, simple explanation of DNA that people can understand.”

As news outlets scale back science coverage, the Exploratorium’s Semper says that “nonprofits are actually becoming the intermediary between science and the public more than in the past.”

Semper’s center has reached out directly to scientists to help them tell their stories online. For example, the Exploratorium’s online feature “Ice Stories” was the result of giving polar scientists cameras and blogs to report back on what they learned in the field. Young scientists in particular are “very excited about talking about their work to the public,” he says.

Some might look for today’s Carl Sagan, the scientist who popularized astronomy through books and TV shows decades ago. Sagan had a way of engaging people by explaining the wonder of space—a very positive message, Semper says.

Today’s climate story is often framed as a sober warning, not as an exciting adventure. Some of that is by necessity. “It’s important for the public to know that scientists are coming across this evidence [of climate change]—it’s real evidence—that there may be some disagreements among the details but that doesn’t negate the entire picture,” Semper says. But the effort to better understanding earth’s climate is also exciting, a message that has been lost, he says. “The scientific questions are

absolutely fascinating.”

Universities have stepped up their communication efforts as well. At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Mass., the paper-and-ink campus newspaper is long gone. But in September, the MIT News Office unveiled a new website aimed not just at the college community but at readers around the world, says Nathaniel Nickerson, editorial director of the news office. Five full-time science writers don’t try to “hype” the work of MIT scientists, he says. Instead, as journalists would do, they seek sources outside MIT to critique the research. The new website is attracting 350,000 to 400,000 unique visitors per month, Nickerson says, more than expected and accomplished “without any marketing whatsoever.”

Even the U.S. government has joined in with a new site called [climate.gov](http://climate.gov), aimed at being a reliable source of data and facts on climate change.

“It’s clear that there’s been an insufficient job of communicating climate information to the public,” says Jane Lubchenco, the administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which runs the website. “I think much more needs to be done to communicate to policymakers and citizens everywhere how important this issue is, what’s at stake, and what the opportunities are for addressing climate change.”

Scientists must learn that in the online era, sharing with the public is now a two-way conversation, not a one-way broadcast, blogger Zivkovic says. “Talking ‘one to many’ is now seen as talking down,” he says. Scientists today also need to know how to produce compelling videos and still images that explain their work. “We don’t need one Sagan,” Zivkovic says. “We need several hundred of them, each in a different place.” ■

*“As Climate Change debate wages on, scientists turn to Hollywood for help,”* The Christian Science Monitor, March 15, 2010.

## MILESTONES

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