

The Newsletter of The National Association of

ScienceWriters

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THE LIFE AND DEATH OF CALIFORNIA WILD

by Kathleen M. Wong

In March 2006, the California Academy of Sciences closed its venerable natural history magazine, *California Wild*. The magazine was just six months shy of its 60th birthday. Begun as a two-color paste-up called *Pacific Discovery*, which focused on academy expeditions, it had evolved into a full-color magazine with professional writers, world-class photography, advertising, and even newsstand sales. *California Wild* still followed academy scientists into exotic places like Madagascar and São Tome, but included discussions of advances such as DNA barcoding, the latest attacks on teaching evolution in public schools, and how climate change will affect California and the West.

As the magazine's last managing editor, I experienced firsthand the events culminating in *California Wild's* demise. Like so many other closures in the universe of publishing, the final decision to shutter the magazine came down to money. But in my estimation, a combination of ingredients led to the magazine's closure. Some factors were within our control, more had to do with the broader decisions of the academy's board of directors, but what ultimately sealed the publication's fate were the larger forces impacting membership magazines all over the country.

I saw the first hints of the magazine's future downfall soon after arriving as senior editor in November 2000. At the time, the California Academy of Sciences was just starting to gear up for the most historic transition in its nearly 150-year history.

San Francisco's primary center for natural history education and research, the academy had stood in Golden Gate Park since 1916. It consisted of a hodgepodge of buildings, each built in a different architectural era, constructed around a central quadrangle. Structurally speaking, the place was in pretty bad shape. Bird Hall, once filled with taxidermied specimens such as California condors, had been declared seismically unsafe in 1989, a victim of the Loma-Prieta earthquake. The Steinhart Aquarium, among the first and largest public aquariums built on the West Coast, was literally crumbling into dust after almost 80 years of accumulated saltwater corrosion. Safety inspectors had given the academy until October 2004 to upgrade the iconic Victorian aquarium building, or close it down for good.

For the academy's board of directors, the choice was clear. Either they could stay in the existing campus and make a series of expensive but feasible repairs, or seize the chance to build a completely new museum. These were

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SUBMISSION DEADLINES

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the boom years and San Francisco was at the virtual epicenter of the dot-com renaissance. Surely many fans of science and technology among the suddenly wealthy of Silicon Valley would pledge to support the new building effort. Plus, rebuilding was suddenly *the* trend amongst museums. Institutions from New York City's MOMA to the Whitney, in Boston, were taking advantage of economic good times to upgrade their galleries. The model was to hire a superstar architect, erect a spectacular new building, and draw a mixture of diehard natural history fans and architecture aficionados alike.

You might be able to guess what happened from here. The board opted for a complete rebuild. They tapped Renzo Piano, of Milan, for the job, and pledged to construct a platinum-level green building, with a green roof, super-efficient heating and cooling systems, and state-of-the-art aquarium facilities. And instead of closing the building, and halting all scientific research, they would rent a temporary space, move the more than 18 million specimens there, and build new exhibits to entertain the public until the Piano building was finished in 2008.

This is where things started to unravel. The boom economy went bust right around the time that the academy had committed to the rebuild. Profits from the endowment, which fund the year-to-year operations of the institution, shrank sharply. In any other year, a little belt-tightening would have sufficed to keep the academy running under near-normal conditions. But given the new demands of the rebuild, the cinch grew dangerously tight. The first rounds of layoffs came in 2004, essentially to pay for the cost of the movers, rent, remodeling, and new exhibits and tanks at the temporary quarters in downtown San Francisco.

Despite the gathering thunderclouds, we at the magazine remained relatively insulated from the squeeze. *California Wild* had already lost one of two senior editors when I joined, and another editor, who departed in 2003, was replaced by someone with far less experience. We didn't exactly have much fat to cut; of the four of us on staff, none of us worked full time on the magazine. And though *California Wild* had never really made money, it had long been seen as an expected benefit of museum membership. It had raised its share of money as well, drawing in a million-dollar donation in the 1980s. Our role might assume even greater importance, we hoped, when museum-goers were shoehorned into public space just a fraction of the size they were used to at the old Golden Gate Park site.

In hindsight, this complacency probably hastened the magazine's downfall. Though we on the magazine staff

saw our role as central to the mission of the academy—to educate the public about science and the natural world—we suffered from the classic neglect that many membership publications suffer. Our work, journalism, was completely different from the duties of the rest of the institution, which was primarily engaged in research and educational outreach. During these years, the administration was so perplexed about where we belonged in the organizational scheme of things that we were plunked into the business department. As you might guess, the accountants had no idea what to do with us. And unlike the research departments, where all of the scientific staff, from anthropology to entomology, could band together, our uniqueness left us with few natural allies or clout on staff. We enjoyed the favor of the old guard—a former executive director, a few longstanding members of the board of directors, virtually all of the volunteers, and many of the members—but simply didn't have sufficient support among the current crop of decision makers.

Meanwhile, the academy was taking one financial blow after another. Hurricane Katrina and the building frenzy in China sent the price of construction materials—such as steel—skyrocketing. Door receipts downtown lagged—people either didn't know the academy had moved, or were less than impressed with the few exhibits available. Every few months, another round of staff got laid off. The rank and file started to hear ugly rumors about the new building; that much-needed specimen storage space would be curtailed, that exhibit budgets had been scaled way back.

***The magazine was just shy
of its 60th birthday.***

And then, in 2005, it was the magazine's turn. Amid this atmosphere of chronic job-security fear and funding shortages, I wasn't completely shocked when, that summer, my supervisor, editor Keith Howell, announced that we had been ordered to lose two staff members. Having planned to retire soon himself, Keith graciously stepped down. Our associate editor simply didn't have the experience to run the magazine herself. That left only two of us—me as managing editor and veteran art director Susan Schneider.

The loss of half our staff was just the first crack in the foundation. Next, they shuffled us into the marketing department, a breach of the former firewall between promotions and journalism. We were ordered to cut the length of the book from 54 to 38 pages, redesign and fold



in the academy's newsletter and events calendar, and generally find every means to economize that we could. Susan and I scrambled to get the fall issue out on time, working late hours to manage the newsletter redesign and make up for the sudden lack of support staff.

But all this was to no avail. The curtain fell in December 2005. The board of directors had met to decide how to close a projected 2006 budget shortfall of hundreds of thousands of dollars. The choice presented to Executive Director Patrick Kociolek, I was told, was between saving positions in research or keeping the magazine. As a scientist who himself had risen through the ranks, Kociolek sided with research. *California Wild's* run was over.

To my satisfaction, the disappearance of the magazine has caused continuing furor among our faithful former readership. I hear that irate members still call up the academy demanding to know what happened to the magazine, some even threatening to withdraw their estate bequests. (Despite repeated prompting, no one at the academy sent out so much as a postcard to notify subscribers that the magazine was closing.)

To this day, I can't help but feel sad about *California Wild's* closure. My feelings aren't really for myself per se, but for the position it occupied in the realm of science journalism. Science magazines as a whole are pretty rare; those focused on the natural history of the West are vanishingly so. Of those that cover this beat, none specialize in the ecology of place that was *California Wild's* forte.

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So is there a lesson to be learned from all of this? To be fair, museums have been getting out of the magazine business for years now. Locally, the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and the Oakland Museum of California have both shuttered their traditional member publications. In 2001, the New York Academy of Sciences stopped publishing its own distinctive member magazine, *The Sciences*. Known for its use of fine-art images to illustrate stories of science in a cultural context, its niche has remained unfilled. *Natural History*, long produced by the American Museum of Natural History, is now published by a third party that offers the magazine to other museums as well. Both readers and publications have steadily been moving online, saving trees and eliminating the high cost of printing and mailing. In this respect, *California Wild*, despite its run of bad luck, was also a casualty of our times. ■

NASW SCIENCE IN SOCIETY MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

Editor's note: The annual Science in Society meeting of the National Association of Science Writers, held Oct. 27-28, in Baltimore, Md., drew more than 400 science writers. The following are excerpts of a few session reports filed by NASW conference travel fellows. Full text and additional session coverage found at www.nasw.org/meeting/2006/coverage.

NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES FOR SCIENCE WRITERS

by Melissa Lee Phillips

Starting a science Web log probably won't finance your retirement, but it could boost your career in other ways, said Chris Mooney, Washington correspondent for *Seed* magazine and senior correspondent for *The American Prospect*. Mooney's comments were part of the "Navigating the New Media" panel.

At first a money sink, Mooney's blog, called The Intersection (www.scienceblogs.com/intersection), now earns enough to cover overhead, but little else. However, Mooney told the audience that focusing ideas and getting feedback from blog readers helped him develop his best-selling book, *The Republican War on Science*. Testing subjects and refining ideas on a blog is "kind of like having a public first draft," Mooney said.

Carl Zimmer, a freelance science writer and author of the blog The Loom (www.scienceblogs.com/loom), agreed that starting a blog will likely not make much money—and could actually lose money if you find yourself spending more time blogging than working on paying jobs. But starting a science blog can help writers become known among potential editors or other employers. The material that goes into a blog doesn't have to come from scratch, Zimmer added. Many journalists blog on the same topics that they cover for commissioned articles, which means that extra time devoted only to the blog may be minimal.

Using Google AdSense (www.google.com/ad-sense)—which places advertising links next to a blog that are related to its topics of discussion—can help make a small amount of money, Zimmer said. However, it's important to consider the type of links that are likely to appear on your page. Zimmer rethought using AdSense when his discussions of evolutionary biology led to ads promoting creationism popping up on his page.

Alan Packet, senior editor at *Nature Genetics*, presented a different view on blogging, because his blog entries are associated with the journal and are not solely his own. The *Nature Genetics* blog, called Free

Association (blogs.nature.com/ng/freeassociation), was created to drive traffic to *Nature* Web sites, to reach a broader audience than the journals reach, and to offer unique perspectives from editors on topics such as editorial processes and peer review.

For those who suffer from a chronic lack of time for blogging or for more traditional job tasks, *Wired* magazine editor Nicholas Thompson pointed the way to technology tools that can save reporters time and effort. The most essential tool for Thompson is Google Alerts (www.google.com/alerts), which sends periodic e-mails alerting him to news stories that match certain keywords or phrases of interest.

Melissa Lee Phillips is a freelance science writer and correspondent for The Scientist. She is based in New York after moving from Seattle.

BETTER WRITING IS ONLY 50 STEPS AWAY

by Graeme Stemp-Morlock

Roy Peter Clark wants to fill the world with well-written prose. Drawing from lessons taught in his book *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*, an extensive knowledge of medieval literature, and "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," he mercilessly hunts happily smiling adverbs.

Science writers listening to Clark were quickly convinced to drop their wordy Latin. "I want you to embrace the value of one- and two-syllable words," he said.

Clark suggested guiding the reader through the story with "gold coins" or wonderful turns of phrase. "The reader is looking for a 'nasty parasitic infection,'" exclaimed Clark, referring to a nice word choice in a piece about sea slug sexual relations.

The Poynter Institute professor also described how to organize big projects such as features or books. "A book was too big for me to write, but I could write 1,000 words a week. After all, you may not be able to run a marathon, but over a year that's just only half a mile each week."

Clark also emphasized pace, suggesting that good writing should provide "less information at a more leisurely pace."

Check out Clark's blog at www.poynter.org/writingtools.

Graeme Stemp-Morlock writes freelance science news in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, whenever he's not busy making igloos, wrestling polar bears, or enjoying the benefits of free healthcare (doesn't everyone love reading waiting room magazines from the 1970s?).

CLINICAL TRIALS BOOT CAMP, PART I

by Mark Schrope

In this session, a Food and Drug Administration official and an academic explained the basic standards and issues involved in designing a clinical trial. Speakers pointed out some specific questions for reporters to ask, and information to request and scrutinize, to properly assess trial results.

As Robert Temple, an associate director for medical policy at FDA, explained, beginning in 1962 FDA treatment approval became dependent on favorable results in "adequate and well-controlled studies." Prior to that, and perhaps of interest to those around before 1962 and taking drugs, there was no such requirement. Meeting this standard requires a valid control group for comparison and minimization of bias, both of which may sound simple enough but pose substantial challenges depending on a given drug or other treatment and its target. "There are millions of ways that clinical trials can go wrong," said Temple, who explained the general classes into which these problems can be categorized.

Of particular interest to reporters was Temple's discussion of bias, and some ways it can intentionally or unintentionally be incorporated into studies. The discussion included the importance of proper randomization of participants and masking participant details for those who analyze experimental results. ("Masked" study, we learned, is now the politically correct replacement term for a "blind" study.)

A particularly illustrative, if extreme, case study comes from 1980 when a group of researchers presented favorable results from a study in which a few—just six—participants out of a large sample size had been disqualified and so not considered in final study analyses. Only after the research was published was the interesting tidbit discovered that the criterion for the disqualifications was that the patients had died, presumably due to the test drug. This topic led to a discussion of whether journalists were likely to gain access to full protocols. According to Temple, legislation is pending that would make this information more readily available.

A second speaker, Sheryl Kelsey, director of the University of Pittsburgh's Epidemiology Data Center, highlighted several potential difficulties in designing and reporting on clinical trials. She cautioned reporters to look closely at the raw statistics generated by a study to evaluate its significance. For instance, a study that can honestly claim a 50 percent reduction in mortality or other measure of success might have only generated a small absolute reduction, such as a five percent mor-

tality rate compared to a 10 percent mortality rate in a control group. Considering absolute change can at times be critical to understanding the true significance of results, she said.

Mark Schrope is a full-time freelance based in Melbourne, Florida. His articles have appeared in Nature, New Scientist, Popular Science, Outside, and others.

PODCASTING 101

by B. Christine Hoekenga

"Podcasting is about content," Ivan Semeniuk told the crowd of roughly a hundred assembled for the Podcasting 101 session at the 2006 NASW Conference. "But I want to add one more layer to that: it's about identity." Semeniuk, the host and producer of *New Scientist's* "Sci-Pod," and four other panelists returned repeatedly to the themes of creating identity and grappling with technology as they explained the fundamentals of podcasting—from getting good sound quality for phone-recorded interviews to marketing techniques for recruiting more listeners.

Moderator Robert Frederick, a freelancer and science journalist for KWMU-FM, kicked off the session with a demonstration of how quickly a podcast can be assembled from its constituent parts. In less than two minutes, he pulled together a sound file, introduction text, and an image to create a ready-to-upload episode. "There are a lot of people who want to do podcasting and are maybe a little intimidated by it," Frederick said. But scientific content, journalism skills, and the ability to write effectively for audio media are far more important than the technical aspects of podcasting, he assured the audience.

David Kesenbaum, a science correspondent for NPR, emphasized the importance of identity in audio media. "People have an intense personal relationship to radio, and that's something to keep in mind when you're podcasting," he said. "When people come to visit NPR, it's like they're going to church." Much of the skill set required to produce good radio stories transfers to podcasting, so Kesenbaum offered tips for recording engaging interviews. He instructed budding podhosts to create a visual for listeners by interviewing the scientist on-site where he or she conducts fieldwork or describing the memorable details of the lab or home where the interview is being conducted.

Chelsea Ward, the producer of AAAS' Science Update, injected a dose of sobering reality into the presentations with a discussion of whether podcasting is feasible for freelancers. The cost of audio equipment,

whether purchased or rented, and the amount of time and effort invested in producing a regular podcast generally make it a money sink. She cautioned freelancers to take on podcasting as a fun activity that can reach new audiences, but not as a way of making money. She also warned the participants to be aware of "pod fade," or burnout associated with the often-grueling schedule of producing a regular cast.

Christine Hoekenga is currently pursuing a master's in science writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She holds a dual bachelor's degree in environmental science and rhetoric and media studies from Willamette University. She looks forward to covering the environmental beat after graduation.

WRITING ISN'T THE ONLY HARD PART, THERE'S PUBLICITY, TOO

by Ciara Curtin

The sigh of relief you let loose after the last page of your book is finally done might be a bit premature. Once the writing is finished, much work remains to sell what you have spent so much time and energy on.

While publishers do promote books, new media like blogs and podcasts make publicity more varied and accessible to the authors themselves, said panelists. Authors are also changing their strategies to promote their books themselves and even discuss what they are writing before they finish the book. "It used to be writers wouldn't talk about their book until they could unveil it," said Carl Zimmer, the author of five books, who blogs at The Loom (www.corante.com/loom).

In the past, books were often publicized through tours and book signings. But these engagements are increasingly harder to come by, said Denise Graveline, president of the communications company *don't get caught*. Authors can, though, work with their busy publishers by suggesting publicity strategies. Still, she said, there is only so much the publisher can do for a particular author. "There are more of you than there are of them," Graveline said.

So, authors can take the helm and take advantage of blogs and podcasts. And this publicity machine can start grinding even before the book is finished, said Zimmer, who discusses his upcoming book on his blog in order to "build a buzz."

After the book is finished, copies can be sent to established bloggers for review, who Graveline suggested are keen for the opportunity. These blogs can link to a site that sells the book—even before the publication

date. Or, like Zimmer, authors can put a blurb about the new book on their own Web site or establish a blog or Web site solely to hawk the book.

Authors need not stop there. Audio or video can complement blogs and Web sites. Podcasts can be uploaded to these sites for visitors to listen to or even download. In these sound bites or video clips, the authors can discuss their work. "You don't need a lot of technology to do this," said Susan Matthews Apgood, president of News Generation, Inc., a public relations firm specializing in radio.

But book signings, appearances, and those traditional public relations tactics still work. "Keep the conventional stuff but look for new opportunities," advised Zimmer.

Currently a student in New York University's science, health, and environmental reporting program, Ciara Curtin is a self-proclaimed science dork—especially if it's biology. Curtin is an intern at Scientific American.

WHY GOOGLE'S FUTURE MAY DOOM BOOKS

by Sally James

Paul Aiken, attorney for the Author's Guild, claims that Google's digitization of copyrighted material could pave the way for the demise of writers and publishers. The Guild has sued Google, and the case is winding its way through a multiyear process. "Fair use doesn't mean free use," Aiken told a rapt audience at a presentation titled "Copyright in an Internet Age." Questioners after his talk challenged his reading of the tea leaves.

What's the difference, one woman asked, if libraries already have books free for patrons, to putting the same material on line so that it is more easily available?

Authors and publishers have the library as a client, Aiken said. Both parties understand the use. But once material is digitally available, there is no longer any market for libraries to own multiple copies of a book, and what he portrayed as a fragile publishing ecosystem begins to unravel.

In his presentation, Aiken began by picking apart a story written by Kevin Kelly entitled "Scan this book" (*New York Times Magazine*, May 2006). Aiken explained that the existing publishing industry has served reliably as a way to promote dialogue and new ideas in society by making sure that both authors and publishers make money.

"As with a forest, so it is with libraries. It is the vigor of the new growth that matters the most," Aiken

said. "We meddle with our environment at our peril."

Sally James is a freelance writer in Seattle specializing in medical topics. So far she has watched her own knee surgery, attended an autopsy and interviewed two Nobel laureates. She has written for Web sites, magazines, and nonprofit organizations.

THE LOW DOWN ON SELF-PUBLISHING —FEW MAKE MONEY

by Maury M. Breecher, Ph.D., MPH

Those interested in self-publishing have many options: launching their own small publishing company, contracting with an established small publisher or a large online operation, using single copy, print on demand (POD) technology, or simply publishing their work online as an e-book. Despite the choices, though, can self-publishing be satisfying and lucrative, a reasonable alternative for professional writers?

While panelists agreed that it can be satisfying, there is often little money in the venture. Still, the panelists noted, self-publishing can offer other rewards.

"The prospect that you will make money on your book when you publish it yourself is small," said Donald Wulfinghoff, founder of Energy Institute Press. "Most published books lose money, even books published by large publishers; however in small publishing, a vast statistical majority are losers." A successful self-published book is one that doesn't lose money, said Wulfinghoff, who started his company to sell his book, the *Energy Efficiency Manual*, which he priced at "a nickel short of \$200."

"There is a tremendous bias against self-published books in gaining publicity and distribution," he added. For example, some book review sections in leading newspapers don't review self-published books. For that reason, Wulfinghoff recommends aspiring self-publishers keep their identities as author and as publisher separate when seeking publicity and distribution for their books.

There was a palpable sense of gloom after Wulfinghoff spoke, but Tim Harper, author of *License to Steal* and the founding partner of Long Dash Books, a POD publisher, offered a more optimistic vision.

"The stigma of self-publishing is disappearing," he opined. "If you are a self-publisher who sells 800 copies of your own book out of the trunk of your car in one month and then bring that to the attention of a mainstream publisher, you're likely to get an offer for publication." The advantage of POD, he said, is that, "you don't have to spend tens of thousands of dollars printing

thousands of book. You can make a profit on each and every book."

Lynne Lamberg, freelance medical journalist, explained that the American Society of Journalists and Authors has a deal with IUniverse that allows ASJA members to get their out-of-print books republished with newly designed covers, all for free. IUniverse markets the books online and pays the author royalties. IUniverse offers a similar deal to nonASJA members for a fee of \$499. Lamberg admitted that she "didn't expect to make much money" from the re-publication of her formerly out-of-print books—and that she hasn't. But the convenience of having the books back in print and available online has continuing value to her reputation as an author.

Cynthia Frank, president of Cypress House, advised potential self-publishers to identify their top three markets and to ponder, "How are you going to reach those people? Who is going to sell the book for you and who will review or otherwise refer people to your book?"

The speakers offered to e-mail interested parties various self-publishing resources. For a self-assessment tool about your book and being a self-published author, e-mail Frank at cynthia@cypresshouse.com. For a self-publishing resource guide, e-mail Lamberg at LLamberg@nasw.org. For information on POD, contact Long Dash Books at Longdash@gmail.com and for information on establishing your own publishing business, e-mail Wulfinghoff at DW@energybooks.com. A list of other resources for self-publishing gathered especially for the NASW workshop by Dennis Meredith is also online (www.nasw.org/resource/freelancing/archives/000444.htm#more).

Since 1967, Maury Breecher has produced over a thousand published articles on consumer issues, health, medicine, and journalism for newspapers, magazines, and online media, as well as hundreds of news articles and CME materials for physicians.

HOW TO COVER A SCIENTIFIC MEETING

by Leslie Sabbagh

Four consummate professionals held forth, before a standing-room-only audience, on everything from the eminently practical ("Read the program" and "Eat breakfast") to pointers on schmoozing researchers to slick tips on how to capture elusive details to entice picky editors.

Tom Siegfried set the tone for the session with a

presentation full of solid advice on the basics of meeting coverage. Prepare, get good digital equipment, and wear comfortable shoes, he advised. He also warned about wasting time, suggesting that writers identify goals, be choosy, and milk receptions for the networking opportunities as well as the free food.

Dan Ferber offered tips on finding and writing magazine features, starting with defining goals based on the magazine and its style. An excellent pointer is calling the session chairs in advance or catching them before the session to ask them about new and exciting research that might or might not be part of the program. "Stay to the end," Ferber said. "Unlike us, scientists save their best for last." And don't underestimate the importance of schmoozing. "You always find things out you'd never learn from the program."

Lynne Lamberg gave us the skinny on beat reporting and how to get an edge. A good tip is searching for authors on PubMed, then e-mailing them before the meeting. Like the others, she stressed advance work and suggested writing the whole story, or at least the lede, ASAP. Exhibits can offer more than the free pens, she said. "There are good sources here and you can get a good sense of where the science is headed from industry."

Leslie Sabbagh is contributing editor for science for Popular Mechanics. A freelance journalist, she covers medicine, the military, and aerospace. ■

SCIENCE JOURNALISM IN LATIN AMERICA: A WORK IN PROGRESS

by Sofia Kalormakis de Kosmas

Science journalism in Latin America is still in its infancy but growing at an astounding rate. Every day, more articles about health breakthroughs, genetics and climate change make the front page of newspapers. The magazine business is booming throughout the world and Latin America is keeping up the pace, with mass publications about current issues, ranging from cosmetic surgery to cancer research and a new found need to protect the environment. This last point becomes important to developing economies that want to lure

Sofia Kalormakis de Kosmas is a science journalist and freelance writer in Panama, Republic of Panama. She was a fellow in the Third Annual Jack F. Ealy Workshop on Science Journalism (July 12-21, 2006), at the Institute of the Americas, UC San Diego.

visitors into their countries and promote the ecotourism and real estate industries. Still, many challenges remain for science journalists in Panama, which can be summarized into five points:

Science journalism in Latin America is in its infancy but growing at an astonishing rate.

Firstly, it's a place where the research culture is not viewed as a long-term business investment, but as a product that only the wealthy educated can understand and import from North America and Europe. The eminent lack of business ventures in scientific research makes it difficult to find out who the reliable investigators are. A few public institutions develop scientific studies, but the future of this research often depends on what figures the political party in power chooses, so there is no guarantee that what one administration develops will be continued by the next.

Over the years, The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute has produced valuable world-class research and information in the area of conservation. What is less known is that many Panamanian scientists have been trained and granted scholarships by the institution. At the same time, the National Institute for the Development of Science, Technology, and Innovation has handed out more scholarships for Panamanian scientists to further their professional careers than ever since the institute was created. But once these researchers come back home, there are few jobs waiting for them and society—including newspaper editors and directors—do not appear all that interested in reading about the investigators' struggles to put Panama on the scientific community's map.

Which brings us to our second point: From a general Panamanian perspective, everything that is foreign must be better, especially when it comes to science. If the investment and research is supported by a well known international organization, then everything becomes legitimized. Or if an international media organization has published something about a study, then the story idea is validated. I once wrote about new findings in ant research (studies done, in part, in Panama). Although no editor questioned the story, it didn't go to print for a month, until after the *New York Times* published a similar piece. Only then did my paper follow suit.

Probably one of the common struggles for any science journalist or writer in Latin America is that science and nature stories are viewed as "soft-news," always the good weekend read. Health breakthroughs

are interesting, catchy, and are often the stuff of news-wires. Few editors and news directors in Panama see a science story as breaking news, worthy of a cover page or a chance to investigate irregularities in the system, unless it's a natural disaster that impacts many. Or if the story ties a prominent businessman or politician to an act of corruption that promises to sell a lot of newspapers or get a lot of ratings.

Science stories are more than just a weekend read in Latin America. These stories help the have-nots of our region put their situation into perspective, and as clichéd as it sounds, it shines a little ray of light and hope on them, as if to say: "Don't worry, we advance and maybe one day soon your public health problems will improve."

Another phenomenon occurs in countries like Panama, where the scientific community is relatively small. Independent research projects are so few and far between that most scientific sources are medical doctors who own their own clinics and have clear financial interests when its time to give an interview. In some cases, an M.D. is referred to a journalist by the news director merely because they are friends and not because the physician is the most qualified source for an article.

From a general Panamanian perspective, everything that comes from somewhere else must be better, especially when it comes to science.

Lastly, it is difficult to keep journalistic objectivity in a small city or town. In a country of three million people, you are bound to step on some acquaintance's toes even when you write about science. This is especially true in Panama's booming real estate industry, where hundreds of urban developments have sprawled all over the coasts with local promoters offering to the highest bidder. Fifty-floor condominiums tower over a tropical city that still maintains some of its forests within, thus endangering its biodiversity and destroying the environment.

I believe that in the coming years more journalists in Latin America will focus on nature and science writing. In fact, there are several initiatives to create scientific news networks and newswire services. Among these is the Institute of the Americas's annual Jack F. Ealy Workshop on Science Journalism (www.iamericas.org). A goal of participants from the 2006 class is a publication that generates stories about science research in Latin America. And so far, things are looking up, as they should. ■

Stephen Jay Gould is My Name

Lyrics by Richard Milner © R. Milner, 2000

Based on "My Name is John Wellington Wells" from
"The Sorcerer" by W.S. Gilbert & Sir Arthur Sullivan

Oh! Stephen Jay Gould is my name
And fossils and shells are my game
Canadian shales
And Bahamian snails
Have brought me a measure of fame.

If Darwin is your cup of tea
But you don't have a lot of time free
You don't have to look
Through his wearisome book
You can learn evolution from me.

I can tell you a tale of a trial
Where Bryan and Darrow once tangled
A courtroom so laden with bile
That truth got distorted and mangled.
Fundamentalists shouted defiance,
"Darwinian textbooks must go,
The Bible contains all the science
A biology class needs to know!"

I write of cladistics
And baseball statistics
From dodos and mandrills
To friezes and spandrels
With answers provisional
Branches divisional
Watching them practically
Bifurcate fractally, bifurcate fractally;

I write
Essays thematical
Always grammatical
Asteroids, sesamoids,
Pestilence tragical
Ratites, stalactites
And home runs DiMaggical.

Oh!
If my essays anyone lacks
I've got the back issues in stacks
You can get them from me
For a nominal fee
Just drop me a line or a fax!

I can find
no cosmic mind behind
Life's eternal mystery
If an ape
replayed the tape
He'd see only contingent history
A plan
to make a man
Was not evolution's objective
To believe all the fuss
was all about us
Is an anthropocentric perspective!

I write of
Cranial capacity
Owen's mendacity
Huxley's audacity
Galton's urbanity
FitzRoy's insanity
How Ernst Haeckel, without an apology
Faked illustrations about embryology;

Marsh's collecting
Butler's objecting
Paley's theology
And teleology
Cope's osteology
And eschatology

But I admit to a preference
For Wallace's deference—
for Alfred Wallace's deference!

Yes!

My name is Stephen Jay Gould
In science I'm very well schooled
So beware adaptationists!
Look out, Creationists!
I am not easily fooled.

If my essays anyone lacks
I've got those back issues in stacks
You can get them from me
For a nominal fee
If you drop me a line or a fax!



Young Geeks. Childhood chums Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Milner were known as "Fossilface" and "Dino" when this snapshot was taken in 1956. Milner would later become senior editor at *Natural History* magazine where he was responsible for seeing Gould's column through to press every month. Gould returned the editorial favor by penning the foreword to Milner's book *The Encyclopedia of Evolution: Humanity's Search for Its Origins*.

ADVENTURES IN ALTERNATIVE SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

by Adam Hinterthuer

Friday night, as contented conference-goers munched on a vast array of cheeses of the world and cashed in their free-drink coupons, Robin Marantz Henig welcomed them to a new concept in this year's NASW sessions: the science cabaret.

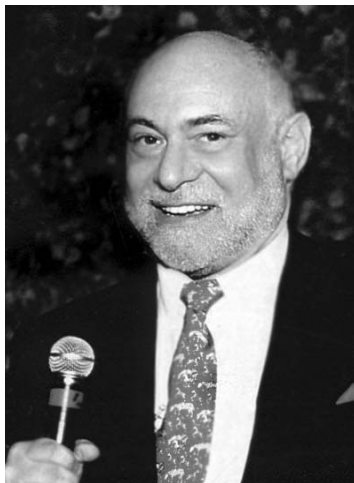
"This is evidence," she cautioned the overflow crowd, "of what happens when somebody has what you think is a good idea."

But any qualms about the event were soon replaced with laughter. Between Richard Milner's intelligently designed musical numbers, Brian Malow's hilarious science-based stand-up routine, and Jonathan Coulton's acoustic sci-fi revenge fantasies, the message was loud and clear: Science is anything but dry and stodgy.

Richard Milner kicked things off with a musical tribute to Stephen Jay Gould (see page 10 for lyrics). And he immediately garnered appreciative laughs from what was, perhaps, the perfect crowd. While singing multi-syllabic anthropological rhymes to the tune of Gilbert and Sullivan may cause one's musicality to suffer, Milner made up for it with his effusive wit. During a musical rendition of the Scopes Trial, Milner sang, "Do you believe in the Rock of Ages, or the age of rocks?"

Brian Malow then took the stage and launched into a rapid-fire routine of science-based stand-up. While

Adam Hinterthuer is a graduate student in science and environmental journalism, University of Wisconsin-Madison. This spring he will intern at the NPR science desk.



When not on stage, Richard Milner is an anthropologist with the American Museum of Natural History.

MILNER PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD MILNER

Brian Malow's brand of comedy springs from a life-long interest in science and science fiction.

Impresario Robin Marantz Henig and NASW president Lee Hotz enjoy the success of Science Cabaret.



Malow crossed over more into the mainstream, his jokes constantly borrowed from fields of higher learning. Even a standard-issue riff on his love life relied on a metaphor from particle physics. And, trusting that this was the perfect crowd for his material, Malow pulled out a pun on pasta and "antipasta" that got a roar of laughter.

...three talented performers managed to bring a room full of writers, editors, and scientists to a common ground.

The climax of the evening, however, was undoubtedly Jonathan Coulton coaxing the room to sing the phrase, "All we want to do is eat your brains." Although this was undoubtedly the first time those words have been sung in passable harmony by a group of science writers, it should not be the last. And Coulton's subject material, from a boy daydreaming of creating a loyal robot army to the neolithic grammar of his Internet hit "Code Monkey," proved to be both shocking and poignant.

All in all, the 2006 NASW Science Cabaret was a resounding success. Surrounded by the gilded splendor of the Corinthian Room, three talented performers managed to bring a roomful of writers, editors, and scientists to a common ground. To a place where they could laugh at and with one another. It's difficult to place value on the simple act of laughing along with a group of colleagues, but the Science Cabaret felt priceless.

And at the end of it all Marantz Henig summed it up best. "I think we need to do this again next year," she proclaimed. Judging from the vigorous peer review of the still-applauding audience, her hypothesis was supported. ■



Former software developer Jonathan Coulton quit his day job to pursue music...and the crowd went wild!

MALOW, HENIG/HOTZ AND COULTON PHOTOS BY LYNNIE FRIEDMANN

LIKE ART, WRITING REQUIRES THE RIGHT FRAME

by David Taylor

In our science-writing workshop, the importance of how to frame a subject—how close, finding the right angle—comes up again and again. The choice of frame applies not just to science writing but to all writing. (People who write about science may struggle with it more for two reasons: first, they're often closer to their topic, and second, they can't assume as much knowledge or interest from the general reader.) As writers, we want to lean into our subject, get close so we can convey the experience. But by occasionally backing up for a wider view, we gain a sense of its place in the world and in our own hearts. And then we can give a new sense of the surprise that makes good storytelling.

Recently, the Brazilian artist Vik Muniz described his favorite pastime. He likes to watch visitors at art galleries. He watches them mill around the rooms, noting where they stop, where they get bored. The sublime moment in art, he says, is where the viewer stops and sways back and forth, refocusing on the image. That's the point where the material *becomes* the image—where your eyes switch from seeing in brush strokes or texture to taking in the composition (or vice versa). The work pops into a different frame of reference, and gives the viewer a thrill of aha! That's the essential surprise of art.

***Asked about the wide range
of subjects he covers...
John McPhee says
he only writes about
one subject: people.***

To find the composition that suits that best, it helps to imagine your story from the viewpoint of a casual reader. In other words, someone who has no interest in your topic, or in science. Zip. "Huh? That's not my audience!" you might say. "Isn't that self-defeating? I want somebody who's curious and who will take action." Right, but if you succeed in engaging the indif-

David Taylor is the author of Ginseng, The Divine Root. He has written on history, science, culture, and travel. He has also written for the National Science Foundation and other agencies, and received a CINE Golden Eagle Award for his work on "Partners of the Heart," a documentary on heart surgery that appeared in the PBS series "American Experience."

ferent reader (those teeming hordes!), then you'll have a compelling story that will grab *everyone's* attention. Otherwise you're preaching to the choir, and even they can fall asleep in the pews.

As with any kind of writing, the way to pull people in is through stories—usually people's stories. (But not always, as shown by the crowds who thronged to "March of the Penguins.") Asked about the wide range of subjects he covers—from geology to marine life and land transport—John McPhee says he only writes about one subject: people.

Not only are people interesting, that lens helps me avoid a big pitfall. If we've devoted time to a problem over years we often assume readers will be concerned too once they simply hear about it. In that case, I can get impatient with rehash and want to move quickly to the meat of what's new. But this can make me zoom in too quickly and lose people. I can check this impulse by approaching the problem through the lens of the people most involved—who they are, how they see it and wrestle with it, or how they are part of the problem. Choosing the right person is key, obviously, but it's more important that that person think and talk vividly than that they be "right." Following them, readers get a grip on the story. You can make adjustments afterward.

If you want to write an advocacy piece, you probably want a bigger frame than you think. Not bigger in scale, necessarily, but in emotional volume. On global issues like climate change or tropical deforestation, readers still need to know why they should invest their interest (yes, even after "An Inconvenient Truth"). And one of the reasons has to be a good story—not statistics or the consequences if we don't take action. People, limited beings that we are, need an emotional stake for caring, and a modicum of hope, even if it's dim. Once we have a basis for investing our reading time, we can delve in.

An example: Darcy Frey's article in the January 6, 2002 issue of the *New York Times Magazine* is still the most engaging article on global climate change I've ever read. "George Divoky's Planet" tells about an unknown researcher in remote Arctic Alaska who discovered the effect of climate change on the breed of wild bird that he'd been studying for decades. He—and especially his guilt over not publishing his results earlier—gave the story great humanity and dimension, and made climate change intensely real for many readers.

I struggled with framing when I proposed a book on adventures in the ginseng trade. I originally thought of the book as a picaresque, with anecdotes ranging from people who grow the medicinal plant in the mountains to the others who steal it, buy it, and wholesale it. Only when I stepped back a bit did I see what connected them—the plant's epic journey from the forest to market—a much larger arc than I'd expected, and one that took me from Appalachia to China. A larger, surprising linkage.

So when you think you have a subject nailed, when you feel you understand what the nub of it is, step back. Sway back and forth, and look for the point where surprise hits you. ■

“From the Workshops: The Right Frame,” The Writer’s Corner, fall 2006. Copyright © 2006 by The Writer’s Center, Bethesda, Md.

SAVE TIME AND MONEY WITH A HOUSEHOLD INVENTORY LIST

by Julian Block

Did you know that the tax code allows you to claim tax deductions for household damage caused by thefts, vandalism, fires, floods, hurricanes, and others kinds of casualties? But the law imposes several restrictions.

Relief is available only for uninsured losses. They must be reduced by any settlements you receive, or expect to receive, from your home owner’s or renter’s insurance. Nor do you get any write-off for the first \$100 of each theft or casualty loss.

The major limitation is that total losses generally are allowable only to the extent they exceed 10 percent of adjusted gross income, the amount listed on the last line of the first page of the 1040 form. The general rule is subject to an exception: No reductions of \$100 or 10 percent for losses caused by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma that battered the Gulf Coast in 2005.

There are other problems for people with hefty deductions that surpass the 10-percent threshold. IRS sleuths learned long ago that most of them are unable to substantiate their losses because they neglected to keep adequate records and have to rely on what, at best, are estimates, assuming they are even able to recall, for instance, all those valuable and not-so-valuable belongings stored in their closets. So the ritual response of the feds is to throw out or trim unsupported estimates, a strict approach that has been sustained by the courts in countless decisions. Take, for example, a case in which an unsympathetic United States Tax Court emphasized

Julian Block, an attorney in Larchmont, N.Y., has been cited as “a leading tax professional” (New York Times) and “an accomplished writer on taxes” (Wall Street Journal). This article is excerpted from his The Home Seller’s Guide To Tax Savings: Simple Ways For Any Seller To Lower Taxes To The Legal Minimum. For information about his books and to read more articles, go to www.julianblocktaxexpert.com. Copyright 2006 Julian Block. All rights reserved.

that it “bears heavily” against taxpayers who base their estimates mostly on recollections, not records.

Nevertheless, an understanding IRS wants to ease the burden for people who fall victim to thefts, casualties, or disasters. The agency offers a free guide, Publication 2194, *Disaster Losses Kit For Individuals*, available at www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p2194.pdf. Or call a toll-free number, 800-TAX-FORM (829-3676). (As long as you are doing that, also get Publication 910, *Guide to Free Tax Services*. It supplies a complete list of IRS booklets, summarizes what they cover, identifies the many materials and services available, and explains how, when, and where to get them. To order current and prior year publications or forms, use the toll-free number.)

Publication 2194 includes a handy workbook with schedules for listing, among other things, clothing, jewelry and a residence’s contents on a room-by-room basis. Schedules for rooms and other areas have separate sheets for the entrance hall, living room, dining room, kitchen, bedrooms, garage, and other sections. Each sheet lists belongings generally found in a specific area.

As an example, the entrance-hall sheet lists chairs, clocks, draperies, lamps, mirrors, pictures, rugs, tables, umbrella stands, and wall fixtures, with plenty of space to enter additional items. Alongside each property item are seven columns in which to record the following details: the number of items, date acquired, cost, value before the loss, value after the loss, decrease in value, and amount deductible as a loss.

***...an understanding
IRS wants to ease
the burden for people
who fall victim to thefts,
casualties, or disasters.***

Yes, you might never need to calculate deductions for casualty or theft losses. But Publication 2194’s workbook will help you inventory household goods and personal property. That list can prove to be indispensable when, for instance, you want to reconsider the adequacy of your insurance coverage, file insurance claims, plan to move—or even create a household inventory for heirs.

To be sure, it is a disheartening project to list all your possessions, their cost, and other information. Still, creating a list in advance is incomparably easier than trying to remember all those details after property is stolen or destroyed. Whether the inventory is a first-time task or an update, it is prudent to keep a copy outside your home in a safe-deposit box or some other secure location. ■

WILL FLOURISHING SCIENTIFIC BIOGRAPHIES SOON FLOUNDER?

by Peter Dizikes

*"Twilight of the Idols," New York Times, Nov. 5, 2006.
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Peter Dizikes is a Boston-based science journalist.

INTERVIEW: PHYSICS GOES HOLLYWOOD

by Marcus Chown

If you enroll in a physics class at the University of Central Florida, you may be in for a big surprise. Instead of being sent to the campus bookshop to buy course books, you'll be directed to the local video store to rent a few DVDs. The directors of this class, Costas Efthimiou and Ralph Llewellyn, believe they have hit on a novel way of getting nonscience students not just to bury their hatred of physics, but to embrace the subject with enthusiasm. Marcus Chown talked with Efthimiou about the course that he says is designed to challenge the pseudo-scientific ideas propagated by the entertainment industry—and to show students some of the joys of physics.

How did you come up with the idea of teaching physics using movies?

In 2001, I was given the task of teaching physics to several hundred students at the University of Central Florida who were not majoring in the subject. The students simply did not get what I was teaching. In fact, I was taken aback by their aggression. The whole thing was such a miserable experience that when I was asked to teach the course again I said no—unless I was able to

Marcus Chown is an award-winning writer and broadcaster. He began his career as a radio astronomer at the California Institute of Technology. Now he is cosmology consultant for New Scientist.

try something new. For a while I'd had this idea in my head about using films to teach. I was also aware of Lawrence Krauss's best-seller *The Physics of Star Trek* [Flamingo, 1997], though I hadn't read it at the time. I talked to Ralph Llewellyn, who had been teaching physics to non-science students at the university for a number of years, and we decided to give it a go.

Are you trying to make scientists out of the students?

No. Our goal is to show the students, and the public, that science is fun and entertaining when expressed through popular activities. We also want to promote science literacy and attack pseudoscientific beliefs that have been gaining ground over the last two decades. Research indicates that the entertainment industry is partially responsible for this trend. Our course is a way of challenging ideas that the industry presents about the supernatural.

***One of the films we use
is "Armageddon," one of the
worst films ever made.***

What does the course involve?

Before each class, we ask the students to rent a video. They're perfectly happy to rent 10 videos at \$4.50 a time over the course, whereas before they were reluctant to buy a single book. At home they watch the video, pick three scenes where they think physics plays a role, and write a paper on whether they think it's realistic or not. It doesn't matter whether they are right or wrong. The point is to get them thinking rationally about what they are viewing. When they come to class, we replay the scenes and discuss them.

Can you give me an example of a scene from a film and how you use it?

One of the films we use is "Armageddon," one of the worst films ever made. An asteroid is on a collision course with the Earth, and NASA sends Bruce Willis to the rescue. He drills a hole in the asteroid and plants a nuclear bomb there that splits it into two fragments which miss the Earth. We get students to work out whether this is realistic, based on data presented in the movie. First they estimate the asteroid's mass. Then, using a reasonable assumption about the size of the explosion, they estimate the deflection speed of the fragments. Finally, they estimate the time it would take for the fragments to collide with the Earth and the distance they are deflected during this period. What they discover is that all Willis would really manage would be to create two asteroid fragments that would hit the Earth about two city blocks apart.

It's quite a sophisticated calculation that involves

applying two principles: the conservation of momentum in two directions—parallel to the trajectory of the asteroid and perpendicular to it—and the conservation of energy. We call it a Fermi problem, a back-of-the-envelope calculation characteristic of the physicist Enrico Fermi, who famously dropped a scrap of paper at the first atomic bomb test in 1945 and from its horizontal deflection estimated the blast at about 10 kilotons of TNT.

Are there other Fermi calculations you can do from movie scenes?

There's another scene in "Armageddon" where they generate artificial gravity by spinning the Mir spacecraft. The problem, as the students discover, is that this doesn't work because the amount of artificial gravity generated by centrifugal force varies widely from one part of the space station to another.

This doesn't happen in the pinwheel space station in "2001: a space odyssey" because everyone lives in the rim of the wheel, where the centrifugal force due to rotation is the same everywhere. You can estimate the size of the wheel—about 100 meters across—as you can see people in the windows. Combining this with the spin rate, which you can also estimate from the film, gives you the artificial gravity, which turns out to be close to 1 g. Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke were careful to get things absolutely right. Unfortunately, students find the film impossible to watch because of its lack of dialogue.

What other types of films do you use?

We've developed several different flavors of our course. One is science fiction. We also use action films such as "Eraser" or "Tango & Cash" or "Speed 2: Cruise Control." But we get far and away our best response from students when we use pseudoscientific films such as "The Sixth Sense" and "White Noise." There seems to be a deep-rooted belief in things like extrasensory perception, vampires and crop circles, which is difficult to shift. From the feedback we get from the students we know we are making them more skeptical, and the debate in class often gets so furious we have to step in and call a halt.

Does it matter that Hollywood gets it so wrong in modern science-fiction movies?

No, I don't think it does. What I do think is seriously dangerous, though, is when movies portray pseudoscience—everything from telepathy to remote viewing—as real. I tell the students that physics is stranger than pseudoscience, but they are attracted to pseudoscience and repelled by physics because the former requires no work and the latter does.

What do your students think of the course?

The response is very positive. Some say: "I would

watch movies anyway, but now I'm getting credits for it!" Others complain that they can't watch movies for enjoyment any more—they end up analyzing scenes for how realistic they are.

What are the best and worst movies as far as the physics is concerned?

"Contact," based on the Carl Sagan book and starring Jodie Foster, is pretty good. It gets all sorts of stuff spot on, including the physics of wormholes. The worst film is "The Core," in which a U.S. military project stops the outer core of the Earth rotating. It has to be restarted with nuclear bombs. There isn't a minute in that film where the writers haven't rewritten the laws of physics. ■

"Interview: Physics goes to Hollywood," New Scientist, Dec. 2, 2006.

LOOKING BACK: WRITERS AND EARLY PERSONAL COMPUTERS

[Editor's Note: The next time you curse the performance of your laptop, consider this 1979 ScienceWriters piece about the state-of-the-art in personal computing—a mere 28 years ago.]

by Earl Ubell

Fifteen years ago, Dr. Dan Horn, of cigarette-and-cancer fame but who is also a psychologist, tested science writers on their work habits. Result: All of us, with the possible exception of Isaac (200-Books) Asimov, suffer from what he called "high-starting inertia"—it takes us forever to put down that first word.

There is a miracle cure for our creative constipation: it is called a microcomputer, fully approved by the FDA. Used liberally and daily, a microcomputer hooked to a terminal typewriter and television screen eliminates 80 percent of the mechanical burden of getting down that first word or the next 50,000. No more writing blahs. As science writers, we can cash in on the technology we have so willingly promoted to the world.

Use a home computer system

This article was written at home on a television screen. If, 20 years ago, Asimov had possessed my home TV-typewriter-computer, which cost me what *Playboy*

Before retirement Earl Ubell was the health/science editor for WCBS-TV from 1966 to 1972 and 1978 to 1995. Ubell was a former NASW president (1959-60) and the first president of the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing (CASW).

pays for an article and a half, he might have written 200 books for each publisher. Up to now, to get access to such a system, you had to work for Associated Press, the *New York Times*, or some such. No more.

You are reading a facsimile of the article I wrote on a home unit I bought and hooked together myself. I didn't go so far as to assemble each piece. I didn't have to. Each element comes like an ingredient of a hi-fi system—you just plug one into the other.

This photo reproduction is copy as it came from my printer, a Diablo, manufactured by Xerox. It has remarkable properties (I wish it had a backhand). First, its keyboard is the terminal to my computer. The Diablo also accepts electronic instructions. Its daisy wheel print element pounds out 540 words a minute, occasionally outrunning my writing speed. The carriage sweeps the page first in one direction and then the other.

Boldface capability

The title of this article is in **boldface**, achieved not by changing daisy wheels but by instructing the printer to offset each letter a fraction of an inch and to type it twice. The Diablo automatically underlines selected words or divides your page into columns.

But the printer is not the most important part of the system. Other less expensive printers, like the IBM Selectric, are available which print more slowly and do not have many of the Diablo features. The critical part is the computer tied to the television screen.

Your writing is done directly on a TV screen. As you strike the terminal keys, letters appear on the screen. If you make a typing error, creating "gril," simply strike a DELETE key, remove "gril" and re-type "girl," or even "woman." More: the TV screen displays a white rectangle that moves ahead of the letters as you type. By striking certain keys, you move the white rectangle to any position on the screen to delete or insert words, sentences, even paragraphs at any specified location.

**A 75,000-word book
will come out in a little
under three hours.**

Delete or insert without mess

As you delete or insert, the words on the screen move to the left to fill in the gaps created by the deletion or run to your right to get out of the way of the insert. You are left with perfect copy on the screen. Imagine the torture of achieving the same effect on paper. You initiate the typing only when you like what is on the screen.

In the case of a long manuscript, Diablo will type out all the pages at 540 words a minute on paper fed from a long roll. A 75,000-word book will come out in a

little under three hours. And it will title and number each page just as above. You do not have to print your copy. You can store it on a magnetic tape or disc until you are ready to print. A single disc can hold 20,000 words and takes up less space than two file cards.

Justified Right Margin

I can also justify the right margin or not, as in the next paragraph.

Because changes are so simple to make, I have no problems about going back to cure sick sentences or words. How many times have you let stand a sentence you didn't like after you had typed your final draft because you hated the idea of one more retype?

And suppose an editor demands a major rewrite. Nothing is simpler. You merely recall to the TV the copy stored on the disc or tape and make all the changes needed. (Which is exactly what happened here: Mark Bloom, the %\$#@%, demanded some extensive fixes. OK. No sweat.) A job that might take days, takes only hours. And if the work is a book, rewrites need not send you into nervous collapse.

All of this has been made possible by the rapid development of microcomputers. My computer, Horizon/North Star, has 24,000 bits of memory, a 14-inch TV screen, a magnetic disc system, and the Diablo printer. The word-handling software, called Electric Pencil, gives you word processing available only on \$10,000 to \$20,000 machines.

***A single disc can hold
20,000 words and
takes up less space than
two file cards.***

All That and Chess, Too

And it is a powerful computer besides. You can purchase software that enables you to create your own programs in any of several languages, including Fortran and Basic. You can purchase software that shuffles financial figures, manages your library, mailing lists, and will engage you in a decent game of chess. (I beat my computer at Level Three but not at Level Four.)

Cost a fortune? No. My system is worth about \$5,000. But it has paid off for me. I recommend it for freelancers and book writers, especially those of you who, like me, have to do it outside of regular working hours.

If all this interests you, you may need a system different from mine. But keep the following points in mind:

- 1) Fast printing is better than slow, but fast costs three times as much as slow. Your choice.
- 2) Because of their speed of copy recall, discs are better

than tapes. Discs cost about as much as fast tapes, and about 20 times as much as slow tapes. I vote for discs.

3) Modular computers, which are put together in the computer store out of individual circuit boards, are better than special-design computers because modular ones can be quickly serviced by replacing a single module. Special-design computers need to be sent back to the factory if they stump the local technicians. You will be without a machine for a few weeks. Special-design computers may be cheaper than modular machines. I choose modules.

4) Check out the computer store by checking with others who have purchased equipment there to make sure they will service your system and provide some software support; i.e., that they can do the little special programming jobs that will extend the value of your system.

5) Shopping may help reduce costs, but the store check is more important and you can probably save more money by bargaining with the store people. Mark-ups are high and they have a lot of leeway. ■

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY DATABASE DEBUTS

The PCST (Public Communication of Science and Technology) has established a Web site for the publication of papers on science communication topics.

Operated under the auspices of the PCST Academy, headquartered in Barcelona, Spain, the creation of this document database is part of a larger effort to foster dialogue among science journalists, science museums, academic researchers, public information officers at scientific institutions, and others interested in science and technology communications.

A number of documents are already posted including proceedings from past PCST international conferences (www.upf.edu/cms/cms/pcstacademy).

Researchers are invited to submit papers on science communication topics to the PCST Academy at submit@pcstacademy.org. Submitted papers will be evaluated by peer review groups composed of members of the PCST scientific committee.

Much of the activities of PCST take place via PCST-L, an electronic mailing list devoted to public communication of science and technology. PCST-L provides an opportunity for discussion, exchange, and cooperation among practitioners, researchers, and scientists with a professional interest in science popularization and related topics. The list is intended to cross international, cultural, and professional boundaries.

To subscribe: listproc@cornell.edu

For additional information contact the list moderator, Matthew Nisbet, at nisbetmc@yahoo.com. ■

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

by Robert Lee Hotz

We are being transformed by that open-ended experiment in electronic publishing called the Internet. About twice as many people get news online than did four years ago, reflecting the growing availability of high-speed Internet service. Almost 41 percent of U.S. adults now have speedy broadband service at home; about four times as many as in 2002. With remarkable speed, it is turning everyone with a computer and an online account into a citizen journalist and anyone with a Web site into a publisher. In the process, the technology is blurring all the lines of traditional media and transforming the business arrangements upon which science writers depend for our livelihoods.

One telling measure of this expanding information universe is the number of blogs that people maintain. As of November, the blog search engine Technorati was tracking nearly 60 million of these regularly updated electronic journals, with 175,000 new ones being created every day. That's up from barely 100 in 1998. To be sure, truly reliable figures about Internet use are scarce, but the Pew Internet & American Life Project recently determined that 57 million Americans are engaged in the intense interactive conversation of the blogosphere. If true, that's more than a third of everyone who uses the Internet and about equal to the number of those who regularly read newspapers online.

Of those 60 million blogs, however, only 4,773 exclusively involve science topics. Such sites include Carl Zimmer's *The Loom*, Rebecca Skloot's *Culture Dish*, and John Brockman's *Edge*, to name three I read regularly. Among the 3,500 most popular blogs tracked by the Technorati blog search engine, however, just five are science sites. I was surprised to find so few because the Pew Internet & American Life Project, in collaboration with the Exploratorium, recently determined that people now rely so heavily on the Internet for science information.

In November, they released a provocative survey funded by the National Science Foundation called *The Internet as a Resource for News and Information about Science*. Let me share with you the highlights of that report:

- Fully 40 million Americans use the Internet as their primary source of news and information about science and 87 percent of online users have at one time used the Internet

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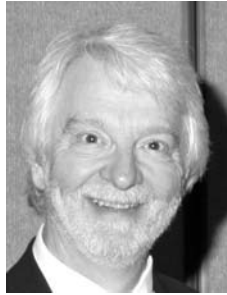


PHOTO COURTESY OF SIGMA XI

to carry out research on a scientific topic or concept.

- As a primary source for science information, the Internet is second only to television among the general population. For Americans with high-speed Internet connections at home, the Internet is as popular as TV for news and information about science. And for young adults with high-speed connections at home, the Internet is the most popular source for science news and information by a 44 percent to 32 percent margin over television.

- Nearly 9 in 10 (87 percent) online users have used the Internet to look up the meaning of a scientific concept, answer a specific science question, learn more about a scientific breakthrough, help complete a school assignment, check the accuracy of a scientific fact, download scientific data, or compare different or opposing scientific theories.

Most surveyed said they would turn to the Internet if they needed more information on specific scientific topics. Two-thirds of respondents asked about stem-cell research said they would first turn to the Internet, and 59 percent asked about climate change said they would first go to the Internet. Most of those searches would begin with search engines.

- Nearly three quarters (71 percent) of Internet users said they turn to the Internet for science news and information because it is convenient.

- Two-thirds (65 percent) said they have encountered news and information about science when they have gone online for a different reason in mind.

Users of the Internet for science information also reported more favorable attitudes about the role science plays in society and higher assessments of how well they understand science. Specifically:

- 78 percent of those who have gotten science information online described themselves as "very" or "some-what" informed about new scientific discoveries; 58 percent of remaining Internet users said this.

- 48 percent strongly agreed that to be a strong society, the United States needs to be competitive in science; 33 percent of remaining online users strongly agreed with this.

- 43 percent strongly agreed that scientific research is essential to improving the quality of human lives; 27 percent of remaining online users said this.

Half of all Internet users have been to a Web site that specializes in scientific content, the Pew researchers reported. Indeed, the Web certainly appears to beat print as a trusted source of science news, *Editor & Publisher* ruefully noted.

- 41 percent got most of their science news from television.
- 20 percent got most of their science news from the Internet

- 14 percent got most of their science news from magazines and newspapers.
- 4 percent got most of their science news from radio.

When asked whether they had ever gone to Web sites where the content is predominantly about science, half (49 percent) of Internet users said they had been to at least one of the following sites:

- 31 percent had visited Discovery.com.
- 28 percent had visited PBS.org.
- 23 percent had been to NationalGeographic.com.
- 23 percent had been to USGS.com, the main Web site of the U.S. Geological Survey, which is the main U.S. government site for Earth-science information.
- 19 percent had been to NASA.gov.
- 14 percent had visited the Smithsonian Institution Web site.
- 10 percent had been to Science.com.
- 9 percent had been to Nature.com.

Once people turn to the Internet for science news and information, they get hooked, especially young people. At NASW, we have worked hard to foster an online community through our Web site and listservs. And at our most recent annual Science In Society meeting, we offered seminars on blogs, podcasting, and electronic publishing.

As we contemplate the future of our craft, we all need to master the new modes of communication to keep pace with our readers and listeners, like the Red Queen running twice as fast to stay in one place. How much progress can we handle? It accelerates. Indeed, my colleagues are already suggesting that the NASW president ought to be blogging. ■

NASW FALL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES

by NASW Secretary Nancy Shute

The NASW membership met on Oct. 28, 2006 during the NASW workshop in Baltimore, Md. Lee Hotz called the meeting to order at 8:10 a.m. He noted that this would have been Laura Van Dam's last meeting as NASW president had she not died this spring. "It occurred to me last night during the Science Cabaret how much Laura would have appreciated the energy and



PHOTO BY CHARLES ARCHAMBAULT.
U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT

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

joy that was circulating." He asked for a moment of silence in her memory.

Treasurer's report: Mariette DiChristina reported that NASW received \$142,000 in Author's Coalition funds in 2006, up from the \$50,000 received in previous years. NASW funded 14 \$1,000 travel fellowships for members to attend the Baltimore meeting, and plans to do similar member-oriented projects with the additional funds.

Meeting report: Lee Hotz reported that 415 people were in attendance at the meeting, and added that this is really the activist core of NASW's membership, which is now 2,500 strong. Next year's NASW meeting will be held in Spokane, Wash.

Cybrarian's report: NASW Cybrarian Russ Clemings said that the prototype for NASW's new Web site was introduced at the meeting one year ago, and that the site was now up and running. One major task remains: to reprogram the members-only portion. NASW has contracted with NICAR to update the online member database, but they had personnel issues and are just now getting back on it full time. Russ anticipates that the database will be completed in a few months. When it is, members will be able to update their addresses and other contact information online.

For the first time, NASW members who received travel fellowships to attend the meeting are filing daily reports on the meeting to the Web site, so that people who weren't able to attend can participate remotely. They can be seen on the home page at www.nasw.org.

Freelance Committee: Co-chairman Dan Ferber reported on the long-awaited freelance markets database, which is designed to help freelancers make better business decisions by checking out other writers' experiences with clients. He anticipates that it will be on the NASW site within a few months and asks members to contribute to it once it's up and running.

AAAS Golden Fund awards: NASW was encouraged by Earl Lane and Ginger Pinholster of AAAS to apply for a Golden Fund award, designed to promote science writing at the undergraduate level. The executive board applied for the funding. John Travis's excellent work was responsible for acquiring the funds. The money will fund as many as 10 undergraduates with \$1,000 to travel to the AAAS meeting, Feb. 15-19, 2007, in San Francisco, where NASW runs its annual mentoring program and intern fair. Stay tuned for announcements on NASW-announce and the Web site on how to apply for a Golden Fund travel grant.

World Federation of Science Journalists: Lee Hotz noted that Laura Van Dam had been particularly keen on expanding NASW's outreach to science writers in other countries and had helped organize the WFSJ's meeting in Montreal in 2004. He introduced Niall Byrne, director of the 5th World Conference of Science

Journalists, who invited all to attend that meeting, April 16-20, 2007, in Melbourne, Australia. It's intended to showcase Australian science, to provide professional development opportunities, and to help build a global community of science journalists. NASW will award several \$2,500 travel grants for members to attend the WFSJ meeting. The award is named in honor of Laura Van Dam.

Awards Committee: Co-chairman Bob Finn said there were 141 entries for NASW's Science in Society Awards this year, with 25 volunteer judges, including the final judging committee of K.C. Cole of the University of Southern California; David Perlman of the *San Francisco Chronicle*; and E.O. Wilson of Harvard University. Next year there will be three prize categories: books, periodicals, and electronic media. For the past 20 years, the awards have been \$1,000 in each category. The NASW board voted on Oct. 27 to raise the awards to \$2,500. Entries for the calendar year 2006 awards are due Feb. 1, 2007.

Grievance Committee: Co-chairman Robin Marantz Henig reported that eight people have asked for help resolving grievances with clients through NASW's new Grievance Committee. Of those, three got paid as a result of the committee's intervention, four got advice on how to proceed, and in one case the committee decided there was no basis for a grievance. Robin asked that NASW members help get the word out that the committee exists and is ready to help with contract or payment problems.

Diane McGurgan Award: Lee Hotz noted that NASW is a volunteer-run organization, and that the \$500 Diane McGurgan Award was created to honor the volunteers that make it work. Ruth Winter has been writing the book column in *ScienceWriters* since 1980. Since then, Ruth has covered a dozen or so books in every quarterly issue. Lynne Friedmann, editor of *ScienceWriters*, said that Ruth is always on deadline; in fact, she's often ahead of deadline. Ruth has published 35 books herself, and is very interested in and concerned about authors. Ruth wasn't able to attend the Baltimore meeting, so Lynne called her to give her the good news.

FOIA Committee: Co-chairman Glenda Chui reported that there is so much going on with restrictions imposed on access to different government agencies, and different parts of the news, that people are discouraged, and they feel that NASW needs to do something to keep members informed and help advance the larger goal of free access to information. To that end, the committee has decided to create a FOIA Wiki or blog on the NASW Web site. The committee will meet and decide how to proceed. All volunteers are welcome.

New Business: Lee Hotz introduced Charlie Petit, a former NASW president and now author of *ScienceTracker*, a Web site that follows coverage of

science news and tips to hot stories in the making (ksjtracker.mit.edu). Charlie explained that Boyce Rensberger, head of the Knight Science Journalism program at MIT, lured him into the project. The site now has 600 regular return users a week. Charlie said if there's any downside to the project, it's that everyone's too nice, and invites suggestions on stories that need coverage, or weren't covered well, as well as how to improve the site in general. Charlie said there's a subversive element in the Tracker, because it publishes the press releases that news stories are based on. He said he wanted to recognize the good work of PIOs, and also make it easier to recognize how much journalism is cut and pasted from press releases. He encouraged PIOs to pass along press releases when they are responsible for a news break. He apologized for the fact that the Tracker is only following daily news coverage, not weeklies and monthlies, but hopes to expand the coverage in time.

Longtime freelance member Jay Holmes of Arlington, Va., said he's been working on a book on energy independence for 15 years, and has many leads for local angles that may be useful to other members. He invites members to send him an e-mail (jay.holmes@cox.net) if they'd like leads on stories in their areas.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 a.m. ■

RUTH WINTER RECEIVES 2006 DIANE MCGURGAN SERVICE AWARD

NASW volunteer par excellence Ruth Winter, who has written the members' book column in *ScienceWriters* for 26 years, is the recipient of the 2006 Diane McGurgan Service Award. She received a check for \$500, a certificate of appreciation, and a bouquet of flowers.



Ruth Winter

Winter's first column appeared in January 1980, but the idea for a book column surfaced nearly a year earlier when this item appeared in the February 1979 newsletter:

Books

Books, either by members or of interest to members, have been sorely neglected in the new newsletter. As a beginning, Ruth Winter, a columnist for the Los Angeles Times Syndicate and a free-lance, will write a column on news of books by members.

Alert your publishers.

If they are lazy, send Ruth news of your latest book without waiting for them to move.

This notice will be sent to book publisher PRs.

A search of the newsletter archives reveals, however, that the next several newsletters do not contain a book column.

Then, in November 1979, this item appeared:

Policy enunciated on books and the newsletter

President Ed Edelson and Editor Mark Bloom have decided that it would not be a good idea to review books by members in this newsletter. Such reviews, they said, either would be puffs, or if they were not puffs, would result in wounded feelings.

Consequently, the newsletter will merely list books with a one- or two- sentence description by NASW members.

Ruth Winter has volunteered to do this job, and Booklist will begin with the next issue.

In January 1980, Books by Members debuted and it was off to the races for Ruth.

When informed she had been selected for the McGurgan Award, Ruth wrote:

"I don't know what I did to deserve the award named for the heart and soul of NASW (Diane). The flowers NASW sent are really beautiful. My husband and I, who take art lessons once a week, are going to paint them in a still life.

"Please thank everyone involved in thinking of me for this award. I love science writers and I love books, so putting them together in a column is a joy, not a chore!"

Winter is the fifth recipient of the Diane McGurgan Service Award. Initial funding for the prize came from the late Louis Lerner (see In Memoriam, *SW*, fall 2006) who felt the need to show appreciation for the efforts of unsung NASW members whose efforts on behalf of the organization go above and beyond the call of duty. ■

NASW ELECTION RESULTS

A total of 564 ballots were cast in the recent NASW board election and the results are in.

Winners of the 2007-2008 board election: President Robert Lee Hotz, *Los Angeles Times*; Vice President Mariette DiChristina, *Scientific American*; Treasurer Nancy Shute, *U.S. News & World Report*; and Secretary

Peggy Girshman, National Public Radio.

Returning board members include Beryl Liefly Benderly, freelance; Kelli Whitlock Burton, freelance; Glenda Chui, *San Jose Mercury News*; Bob Finn, International Medical News Group; Jon Franklin, University of Maryland; Robin Marantz Henig, freelance; Tom Paulson, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*; Tabitha Powledge, freelance; Sally Squires, *Washington Post*; and Curt Suplee, National Science Foundation.

New to the board is Terry Devitt, University of Wisconsin-Madison/*The Why Files*.

Congratulations! ■

CYBERBEAT

by Russell Clemings

Behind the scenes in Baltimore, the NASW board made some important decisions on the future direction of our online endeavors.

By acclamation, the long-delayed market database has now been placed at the top of the priority list. The freelance committee has drawn up plans for a members-only resource that freelance writers can use to report their experiences with buyers of their work. The programming is underway and, if we can stay on schedule, we should be able to make the database available early in 2007.

Also underway after a lengthy delay caused by turnover at our Internet provider is the final phase of the NASW Web site redesign—a revamped member database. As of early December, the design was nearly done and we were ready for testing. It's a complex project so it's hard to predict a completion date. But when it's done, we will have an up-to-date membership directory available on the Web site, along with other tools such as do-it-yourself password recovery. Perhaps most important, the new database will streamline a lot of time-consuming work in maintaining the Web site and NASW's membership rolls.

Finally, we tried something new at this year's conference—near-live coverage of most sessions. Recipients of conference fellowships were pressed into duty as reporters, and they rose to the occasion, providing their short bulletins within hours of the sessions. You can read their work at www.nasw.org/meeting/2006/coverage.

Russell Clemings is NASW's cybrarian and a reporter for the Fresno Bee. Drop him a note at cybrarian@nasw.org or rclmings@gmail.com.



NASW-freelance

It was just one day after the big turkey feast, but Laura Newman's mind was on spam. The New York medical journalist wrote that she had been "getting a jillion spam e-mails in the past few weeks. At least 20 today read: 'Hi nasw-freelance...'"

Deputy Cybrarian A'ndrea Elyse Messer, science and research information officer at Penn State University, quickly clarified that the unwanted messages weren't coming from the list. Other subscribers proposed alternate theories, such as a virus afflicting someone who has address-book entries for both Laura and NASW-freelance. But the thread soon drifted from diagnosis to defense.

"So," asked Pennsylvania science writer Sandy Field, "is there a way I can post my e-mail address on my Web site to make it less accessible to spammers?"

The list offered several suggestions—show the address as a picture rather than as type; use a simple encoding tool like the one at http://htmlfixit.com/cgi-bin/tools/encoded_email_masking.cgi; or use the javascript-based tools at <http://automaticlabs.com/products/enkoder> or <http://www.jracademy.com/~jtucek/email/index.php>.

California writer Keith Eric Grant offered one more solution: "The option offered by a number of ISPs to reject mail from senders not specifically approved. A new sender receives a confirmation e-mail that they must respond to. If they do, the system then sends an approve/disapprove e-mail to the protected recipient."

Effective, but perhaps too effective, replied Massachusetts science and technology writer Jeff Hecht.

"I strongly advise against any freelance writer trying this approach. It really ticks off potential clients and sources who try to contact you by e-mail, only to be told they have to jump through hoops to do so."

NASW-talk

Even before Thanksgiving, birds were a topic of conversation around the NASW-talk cooler.

On Sept. 20, Tennessee writer Elise LeQuire wondered "whether there is anyone out there who knows why the Cooper's Hawk has been crying piteously for a week overhead. He hasn't killed the hen, but he seems to be looking for a mate or his or her offspring. Any clues?"

Readers with delicate sensibilities may wish to skip some of what followed.

"Look up gonadal recrudescence in birds," Jennie Dusheck offered from Santa Cruz, Calif. "Basically, the fall day length is enough like spring day length that their little private parts think it's spring."

Others piped up with their own stories of large birds at close range, recrudescence and otherwise, and pretty soon we had the makings of a trend story.

"When I last lived in the east (20-plus years ago), large wildlife was a rarity in the city, and bird watching

meant chickadees and cardinals. Now I live not terribly far from downtown Charlotte, yet large raptors and water birds (herons, geese, etc.) as well as deer, fox, raccoons, possums, etc., are plentiful. Apparently in my lifetime the large wildlife have made an adaptation and learned to live in the suburbs," wrote James Hathaway, a University of North Carolina-Charlotte science writer.

From New York, freelancer Edmund Blair Bolles offered an explanation: "The kind of behavior Jim is describing generally reflects two environmental factors: (1) a very strong familiarity with people and (2) a near complete absence of hunting.... Bird behavior is commonly described as purely instinctive and dodo extinction is generally explained (at least in my casual sources) as an evolutionary decline in their instinctive fear due to a long existence on islands without predators. But if herons can learn not to run away when people show up, why couldn't dodos learn the opposite?"

University of Florida student DeLene Beeland followed up on the dodo reference with something from a recent *Nature* issue: "An article by Henry Nicholls argues that it was the introduction of rats and rodents that likely did in the dodo."

And so it went, as the thread made a transition over five days from hawks to herons to wild turkeys and thence through the mammals—deer, bears, mountain lions, raccoons, foxes, coyotes, prairie dogs, squirrels. Apparently it's a jungle out there, not just an aviary. ■

THE FREE LANCE

by John Gever

Indemnity clauses: a manageable threat

The Contractor represents and warrants that any work submitted to Client is original and does not infringe upon any statutory or common law copyright, proprietary right, or any other right of any other person. The Contractor shall indemnify and hold Client harmless from any and all loss, damage, and/or expense that Client may suffer or incur by reason of any claim or the defense of any claim arising from the breach of any of these representations or warranties.

It's a lucky (or newbie) freelance who has never seen wording like this in a client's standard contract.

John Gever, a freelance in Wheeling, W.Va., warrants that this work is original and does not knowingly infringe the rights of any person in the known universe or elsewhere. Otherwise, caveat emptor.



Once upon a time, only book houses wanted such written promises from writers. But in recent years, magazine publishers, pharma companies and a host of other freelance clients have jumped on the bandwagon. Warranties and indemnity clauses are now common in even small-scale freelance contracts.

They're a concern to freelancers because if a broadly worded indemnity clause is ever invoked, all the writer's assets—house, car, retirement savings, children's college fund, the penny jar by the front door—could be sucked away to defend a frivolous nuisance suit.

The keys are "if" and "broadly worded."

Kraig Baker, a publishing-law attorney in Seattle who represents both writers and publishers, said "it's exceedingly rare" for indemnity clauses to be invoked against writers. None of his own clients had ever been involved in a situation like that, and he said he was unaware of any specific instances anywhere else, although he has heard rumors about them.

Publishers know that they're unlikely to recover much from a lawsuit against an ordinary middle-class freelance, Baker said. Moreover, for a publisher that depends on freelancers for its product, suing them is bad business. "A publisher is unlikely to go after a writer," Baker said, unless it appears the writer did something egregiously wrong, like burglary or blatant copyright theft.

Some clients do demand indemnification because they want to offload some of their legal liability onto someone else, Baker said. But this is seldom the main purpose.

Most clients have two other goals in mind, he explained. One is simply to get writers' attention to be careful about what they're doing. "You want the writer to know there's some commitment," he said. "They need to be in the game."

The other has to do with publishers' increasingly complex business arrangements. One reason that all-rights contracts are now so common is that publishers want the ability to make deals with their content. Such deals make their partners legally responsible for the content too—authored by freelancers they didn't hire and don't know. Thus, for such deals to work, the original client needs a paper trail that establishes free-and-clear ownership and also legal recourse if the content causes problems down the road.

This also helps explain why some clients are reluctant to alter contract terms, even when they seem better suited to the copier repair guy than to a freelance writer. Making partnership deals is easier when supplier contracts are all identical and hence don't have to be individually scrutinized.

Another factor may be media insurance company requirements. Lara Pullen is a Chicago-area freelance who recently started her own autism education Web site, www.healingthresholds.com. "I wanted media lia-

bility insurance," she wrote in an e-mail. "In part of [one] application, they wanted me to state that I have all my writers sign indemnification clauses and they wanted me to attach the language that I made every writer sign." As a freelance herself, she was unwilling to impose such clauses on her writers. "It took me a long time to find someone to insure me. There were possibly many reasons for the delay, but I wonder if partially it wasn't because of my stance on indemnification."

The unlikelihood of ever facing a suit notwithstanding, neither Baker nor anyone else suggests that writers turn a blind eye to indemnity language.

Take the paragraph at the beginning of this column. Some writers, including yours truly, can live with it. Erik Sherman, chair of the American Society of Journalists and Authors contracts committee, said "it's perfectly reasonable" for a publisher to expect that a work is not plagiarized, for example, and to have recourse if it is. "There's nothing unjustifiable or immoral about indemnification clauses," he said—in principle.

But add one single word—"alleged," as in "the alleged breach of any of these representations or warranties"—and it's a whole different ball game. Suppose some fruit-ball sues the publisher claiming my article caused his skin to break out. Sure, the suit will probably get thrown out, but I have now promised to pay all the attorney fees and other expenses needed to make that happen.

Sherman said he's seen contracts in which the writer indemnifies the publisher against any litigation whatsoever arising from a work—including his or her own suit against the publisher for nonpayment.

Participants in NASW's freelance listserv have shared their own horror stories over the years. They've reported contracts in which the writer promises the article will contain no mistakes of any kind, and *that leaves the writer responsible for errors introduced during the publisher's editing*.

The big question is, what can a freelance do when confronted with over-the-top indemnity language?

Dan Ferber, an Indianapolis-based writer who chairs NASW's freelance committee, said he's been able to get changes "most of the time." His approach is to insert phrases such as "knowingly" and "proven in court" to reduce his liability. "In the warranty, I try to make it that I'm responsible...to make a good faith effort," he said, adding that modifying the terms rather than striking out the whole clause is more realistic.

Kraig Baker, the attorney, echoes this philosophy. He advises writers to keep their alterations narrowly focused and as simple as possible. Demands for sweeping changes that would occupy the client's in-house counsel for hours are likely to be rejected out of hand. He also suggested that writers not turn a contract discussion into an issue of respect. For the client, it's just business.

Sometimes the publisher won't budge, in which

case the writer can either swallow it or walk away. Erik Sherman said the breaking point should be when the client insists on holding the writer responsible for things beyond his or her control. "Only warrant that which you know and is under your control," he said. And, "don't indemnify something you haven't explicitly warranted."

Ferber remembered reaching that point in one prospective assignment about four years ago. "The upshot was that I would be responsible if there was a nuisance suit. 'Alleged breaches or claims.' They wouldn't change it." He ended up turning down the job, which he described as "fairly substantial," because he thought the contract too onerous.

Jennie Dusheck, based in Santa Cruz, Calif., said she was given a textbook contract that was full of problems. She hired a lawyer and spent weeks trying to negotiate acceptable changes. "There was a lot of tension," she said, and they never did reach agreement.

Consulting an attorney for a book contract makes sense because of the high stakes, but what about for smaller jobs? Most writers say they don't bother. Michael Stillman, a Massachusetts freelance who mainly does corporate work, recently was sent a contract with worrisome indemnity language. "I thought about going to a lawyer, but feedback I got from professional medical writers [on the NASW and American Medical Writers Association listservs]...was very much in agreement." (Based on that, he said, "I lived with it.")

Sherman scoffs at the need for lawyers. "Ninety-five percent of a contract is just English," he said. "You're a writer, for God's sake, you're supposed to know the language. Read the flipping document!"

For some writers, the headaches and worries associated with indemnity clauses are just too much. Deborah Ausman, a freelance in Stillwater, Okla., said she essentially abandoned magazine writing several years ago because of the proliferation of indemnity language. "The trend has sort of driven me away from pursuing this kind of work," she said, adding that other factors were involved as well. She now has a part-time university job and her current freelance clients are mostly companies that don't want or need indemnification.

Ausman is particularly opposed to indemnifying clients who insist on all-rights contracts. Her philosophy is, "If you're going to own it, it's your responsibility." She said she is considering a return to magazine-type freelancing, and will agree to reasonable warranties. But she will not accept any kind of indemnity language if the publisher is buying all rights—"at all, period."

Incorporation is one practical way to make indemnity clauses more palatable, according to Kraig Baker. "It will definitely protect more assets" than operating as a sole proprietor if indemnity is successfully invoked, he said. The idea is that your personal assets are not at risk in a lawsuit related to your freelance business; only the

corporation's property can be taken. It's not full protection—if you use your home or your car in your freelance business, the portion allocated to the business may still be attached in a lawsuit. Baker also cautioned against bookkeeping maneuvers that list the corporation as having no assets: "A court is not going to let you get away with that." ■

DENNIS MEREDITH AND MARILEE LONG ELECTED AAAS FELLOWS

NASW members Dennis Meredith and Marilee Long have been elected Fellows of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). Both are members of Section Y (General Interest in Science and Engineering). They will receive formal recognition of this honor at a ceremony during the 2007 AAAS Annual Meeting, in San Francisco.

Dennis Meredith is recently retired from Duke University, where he was for many years director of the office of research communications. When he took the job, he didn't realize the acronym, which would cause him to be pegged the "DORC of Duke." He, thus, warns fellow PIOs to "always pay attention to the acronym before you take the job." Meredith's election as an AAAS fellow recognizes him "for exemplary leadership in university communications, and for important contributions to the theory and practice of research communication."

Indeed, Meredith had a long history in university research communications. From his first job as assistant director for public information at the University of Wisconsin Medical Center, he went on to science writing posts in the news services of the University of Rhode Island, and MIT. He then became managing editor for MIT's *Technology Review* magazine and subsequently news bureau director at Caltech. He then moved to Cornell as senior science editor in the news service, before going to Duke.

A former NASW board member, Meredith wrote the popular NASW handbook on media relations *Communicating Science News*, which he later developed into a Web version. On behalf of AAAS, Meredith is a founder and developer of the online science news service EurekaAlert! and has served for many years as a judge for the AAAS Science Journalism Awards. He has



Dennis Meredith

PHOTO BY JIM WALLACE, DUKE U. PHOTOGRAPHY

also worked with federal agencies and scientific journals, including NSF and the *Public Library of Science*, to help them develop policies for communicating research and working with PIOs.

Dennis holds a B.S. degree in chemistry from the University of Texas and an M.S. in biochemistry and science writing from the University of Wisconsin.

Marilee A. Long, Ph.D. is honored for her "distinguished contributions to the public understanding of science through research on media representations of science." An associate professor in the department of journalism and technical communication at Colorado State University, her research is focused on how media depictions may affect public support for science as well as children's and youths' interest in pursuing scientific careers.



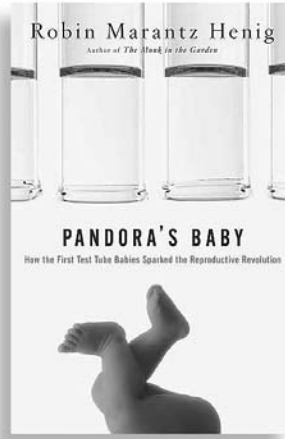
Marilee A. Long

In the mid-1990s, Long took part in a series of studies that analyzed the images of science and scientists on four children's science programs: "Mr. Wizard's World," "Bill Nye The Science Guy," "Beakman's World," and "Newton's Apple." Currently, she is collaborating on a study of the representation of scientists in the media by analyzing 14 TV programs including dramas ("CSI," "CSI-Miami," "CSI-New York," "The X Files," "Strange Days at Blake Holsey High"), comedies ("The Simpsons," "Friends"), cartoons ("The Adventures of Jimmy Neutron, Boy Genius," "Dexter's Laboratory," "Kim Possible," and "Danny Phantom"), and science programs ("MythBusters," "Dragonfly TV," "Bill Nye The Science Guy").

Another area of interest for Long is the news coverage of science. She's studied newspaper coverage of science, particularly the extent to which scientific explanation appears in stories and factors that affect its inclusion. In recent years, her work has focused on how local TV newscasts and daily newspapers cover health topics, such as tobacco use, alcohol use, illegal drug use, and cancer.

Long holds a Ph.D. in mass communication and a M.S. in agricultural journalism, both from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her undergraduate degree in technical journalism is from Colorado State University. ■

HISTORY OF SCIENCE SOCIETY HONORS AUTHOR ROBIN MARANTZ HENIG



The History of Science Society (www.hssonline.org) has honored Robin Marantz Henig with its Watson Davis and Helen Miles Davis Prize. The prize honors books on the history of science that are directed to wide public audiences or to undergraduate teaching.

In *Pandora's Baby: How the First Test Tube Babies Sparked the Reproductive Revolution*, published by Houghton Mifflin in 2004, Henig tells the compelling story of the first American and British attempts to achieve *in vitro* fertilization and the accompanying religious opposition, political maneuvering, and courtroom drama. She explores scientific fraud, lust for fame, greed, and laboratory achievement, as well as genuine care for the suffering of infertile couples. Closely linking the original controversy surrounding test-tube babies to current fears about cloning, Henig places her story within the personal, institutional, national, and cultural concerns that shape scientific and technological applications. ■

(Source: news release)

BETH GEIGER WINS AAAS SCIENCE JOURNALISM AWARD FOR CHILDREN'S SCIENCE NEWS

NASW member Beth Geiger, a Seattle, Wash. freelance writer, is the recipient of the 2006 AAAS Science Journalism Award for Children's Science News for her article "Fade to White," (*Current Science*, Jan. 6, 2006). Geiger won praise from the judges for explaining the basics of natural selection and evolution to children in a story about the changing color of lizards in the New Mexico desert.



PHOTO BY CARL GRONQUIST

"Kids who don't really give a flip about the debate over evolution that surrounds their classrooms relate to lizards," said award judge Jeff Nesmith of Cox Newspapers.

Laura Helmuth of *Smithsonian* magazine said Geiger used "clear, amusing, colorful language" in describing natural selection, speciation, and the geology

of sand dunes. "The explanation of the process of science was non-intimidating," Helmuth said, "and true to field biology's gritty, eye-squinting, seat-of-the-pants nature."

Geiger said the research on the quickly changing lizards was an accessible way to explain evolution to children. "I liked the fact that the study demonstrated the connection between landscape and evolution," she said, "and it was fun to write on research that has such a clear punch line."

The AAAS Science Journalism awards were established in 1945. The awards are currently sponsored by Johnson & Johnson Pharmaceutical Research & Development, L.L.C. The winners (in print, radio, television, and online categories) will each receive \$3,000 and a plaque at the 2007 AAAS Annual Meeting.

Information on all the 2006 AAAS Science Journalism Award recipients can be found at www.aaas.org/news/releases/2006/1113sja.shtml.

(Source: news release)

OUR GANG

by Jeff Grabmeier

Hit the Bull's Eye. **Richard Kerr**, senior writer at *Science*, has won the 2006 Geological Society of America Public Service Award for his contributions to public understanding of the earth sciences. Richard was cited "for both the breadth and depth of his knowledge, amassed by scouring the scholarly publications, listening to countless presentations at meetings and conferences, and interviewing those whose work is on the leading edge of their disciplines." Jim was elected a Geological Society of America Fellow in 1995. Congratulate Richard at rkerr@aaas.org.

Holy Cow! Another award-winning writer in the earth sciences is **Tom Gidwitz**, a freelance from Dartmouth, Mass. Tom recently received the 2006 Web site of the Year award from the Geoscience Information Society, an associated society of the Geological Society of America. Tom won for his site *The Hero of Vesuvius* (www.vesuvius.tomgidwitz.com), which tells the story of the early years of American volcanologist Frank Alvord Perret, from his days as an assistant to Thomas Edison to his role as an eyewitness to the 1906 eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. Learn more from Tom by contacting

Jeff Grabmeier is assistant director of research communications at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. Send news about your life to Jeff at Grabmeier@nasw.org.



PHOTO BY JO MCNULTY, OHIO STATE

him at tg@tomgidwitz.com.

One Cool Cat. Also honored recently was Baltimore-based freelancer **Lynne Lamberg**, who received a 2006 Excellence in Women's Health Research Journalism award from the Society for Women's Health Research. She received the award for her October 2005 *JAMA* report, "Risks and Benefits Key to Psychotropic Use During Pregnancy and Postpartum Period." According to the society, "Lamberg chronicles the difficult choices mothers and their physicians face regarding the complex risks and benefits of taking psychotropic medications, and the impact of that decision on mother and child from conception through breastfeeding." Lynne's e-mail is llamberg@nasw.org.

Had A Whale of A Time. Freelancer **Jenny Cutraro** of Somerville, Mass. was one of 20 journalists selected in a competitive application process to participate in the Environmental Journalism Boot Camp, held in Vermont in October. Jenny and her fellow participants received training in interviewing, writing, computer-assisted reporting, law, policy and other subjects. The boot camp is a Michigan State University Knight Center for Environmental Journalism event. It is supported by the Society of Environmental Journalists, Investigative Reporters and Editors, and the Union of Concerned Scientists. Contact Jenny at jenny@nasw.org.

Chomping At the Bit. After five years in the public affairs office at the Office of Naval Research (as a contractor with Jorge Scientific Corp.), **Jennifer Huergo** has moved up to Laurel, Md., to the communications and public affairs office at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory. Jennifer will be a science writer and public affairs specialist for the lab. Her new e-mail address is Jennifer.Huergo@jhuapl.edu.

Free As A Bird. **Sally Pobjewski** has written her last press release. After 17 years and six months covering science for various PR offices at the University of Michigan, she said it is time to move on. So effective Dec. 31, Sally will be leaving her job as senior science writer for the medical school's public relations office. She will continue working half-time as science editor and writer for the medical school's magazine, *Medicine at Michigan*. In the other half of her time, she is returning to freelance writing, which she gave up when she started working for the UM news service in 1989. She plans to focus on science, medicine and the environment, but hopes to explore other areas as well. After Dec. 31, Sally's contact e-mail for freelance work will be salpobo@sbcglobal.net.

Top Dog at Duke. In other news out of the University of Michigan, **Karl Leif Bates** is moving to Duke University to become manager of research communications in the office of news and communications. He takes over for the legendary **Dennis Meredith** as chief editor and reviewer for all science-related news

from the university, including its schools of arts and sciences, medicine, nursing, engineering and the environment. Karl will continue to write on a broad variety of science subjects and will oversee the launch of a forthcoming online research magazine. Karl won the AAAS/Westinghouse science writing prize for small papers in 1995 and has been director of life sciences communications at the University of Michigan since 2001.

Beeline to Success. The Association for Women in Science—San Diego has honored freelancer **Julie Kinyoun** with its Outstanding Volunteer Award “for being an active and enthusiastic member who continuously extends assistance with projects, promotes AWIS, offers creative ideas and serves on committees.” Since joining the San Diego chapter of AWIS, Julie served on the newsletter committee from 2003-2005; as associate editor of *AWIS Magazine* from 2004-2005; on the membership committee from 2004-2005; and became chair in 2005. She also chaired open houses in 2005 and 2006. Julie is at jkinyoun@nasw.org.

The Bird Has Flown (But Not Far). **Karen Hoffman** is leaving her position as science and engineering news representative in the University of Pittsburgh’s office of public affairs. But she won’t be going far—Karen has accepted a position in Pitt’s School of Arts and Sciences as communications manager for the division of natural sciences, where she will help with general communications efforts, including graduate student recruitment, faculty recognition, development, and alumni and media relations. Reach Karen at hoffmann@as.pitt.edu.

Taking the Bull by the Horns. Freelancer **Lara Pullen** of Oak Park, Ill. has led a small team of people to create www.HealingThresholds.com. It is a Web site dedicated to translating the science of autism therapies into language that parents can use. At this point, Lara says the site is a labor of love. Her son was born 2-1/2 years ago with Prader-Willi Syndrome, placing him at risk for autism (and many other things). She developed the site because she had spent a great deal of time researching therapies for autism and discovered that there was no place that summarized the actual science behind the therapies. You can learn more from Lara at lara@environmentalhealthconsulting.com.

The World is His Oyster. **Wilson da Silva**, editor of the Australian glossy science magazine *COSMOS*, has to be a very happy man. He won 2006 Editor of the Year honors at Australia’s Bell Magazine Awards, while his magazine won the coveted Magazine of the Year honor. This is the second consecutive year that da Silva was named Editor of the Year for what the judges have described as a “stylish, ambitious and erudite publication.” He also picked up Best Opinion Series for his editorials through the year. *COSMOS* also picked up five other awards at the ceremony. Congratulate Wilson

at wdas@nasw.org.

Two New Badgers. The University of Wisconsin-Madison has added two new science writers. **Jill Sakai** is a newly minted neuroscience Ph.D. from Wisconsin and spent the summer of 2006 at the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* as a AAAS Mass Media Fellow. Although she slaved for six years to obtain her doctorate, Jill claims she always wanted to be a science writer when she grew up. She gets her wish and will cover science across the board at Wisconsin. Jill is at jasakai@wisc.edu. **Madeline Fisher**, a veteran science writer and press officer, also joins as a science writer. With a graduate degree in botany (Ph.D., 1998) from Wisconsin and six years of experience as a science writer at the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation, the UW-Madison College of Engineering and, most recently, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Madeline brings a wealth of experience to her new position. She will cover all areas of science and replaces **Paroma Basu**, an NASW member who left UW-Madison for personal reasons and to be closer to her family in India. Madeline can be found at fisher.madeline@gmail.com.

The Cat’s Out of the Bag... **Pender M. McCarter**, IEEE-USA’s director of communications and public relations, retired from his full-time position at the end of 2006, and began consulting for IEEE-USA on engineering public awareness in January 2007. Pender has served the IEEE 25 years as IEEE PR manager (1981-1994) and as IEEE-USA associate director/director of communications and public relations (1994-2006). His career encompasses 38 years in association management, high-tech PR, journalism and education. Keep up with Pender at p.mccarter@ieee.org.

Got Their Ducks in a Row. One of our science-writing power couples, **John Travis** and **Kate Travis**, will soon be relocating from our nation’s capital to England. John, currently the deputy news editor for biology at the D.C. office of *Science*, will move to Cambridge, where he will head up the journal’s European news coverage and continue editing biology stories. Kate, currently freelancing and associate editor at *Science News*, will continue to edit and write as a freelancer. Send a hearty cheerio and good luck to John and Kate at jtravis@nasw.org and ktravis@nasw.org.

Proud as a Peacock. One NASW member is retiring from the American Geophysical Union, and another member is replacing him. **Peter Weiss**, a staff writer at *Science News* magazine, will become AGU’s next public information manager, succeeding **Harvey Leifert**, who will retire in late February after nine years at AGU. Peter will join AGU in mid-January. He will be responsible for media relations, including writing press releases and organizing press conferences at AGU meetings. After retirement, Harvey may be contacted at leifert@nasw.org. ■

NOTICES FROM DIANE

by Diane McGurgan

Dues, Roster, Database

Your dues are due. If dues are not received by March 15 you will NOT be listed in the 2007 Roster of Members and you will lose access to the member section of the Web site. This means no more Web benefits (member directory, jobline, fellowship information, newsletter archives, manage e-mail alias). So, please renew ASAP (nasw.org/NASW/renewals.htm). Reminder: If paying by VISA or Mastercard, the credit card number, expiration date, and 3 digit-security code are needed. If you choose the PayPal option, make sure to include your billing address.



PHOTO BY ANDREW SKOLNICK

Authors Coalition

To make life easier for you, the annual Authors Coalition survey has been made part of the annual dues renewal letter mailed out in December. A reminder that members must complete a survey annually in order for NASW to continue to share in reprographic-fee revenue collected by the Coalition from overseas markets. In the past, these checks have been significant (tens of thousands of dollars): money used to support travel fellowships to meetings, creation of a freelance markets database, and other services that benefit the NASW membership at large.

Award Deadlines

The NASW Science in Society Award deadline is Feb. 1, 2007. Please note that the prize money is being increased to \$2,500. Also review the submission criteria carefully as categories have been consolidated to three: books, periodicals, and electronic media. (For more information, see NASW Fall Membership Meeting Minutes, page 20.)

The CASW Victor Cohn Prize in Medical Science Reporting deadline is July 31.

Both awards will be presented at the NASW/CASW Banquet, Oct. 21, 2007, in Spokane, Wash.

Group Health Insurance

NASW members looking for health, long-term care, vision, and dental insurance may be eligible for group coverage through TEIGIT (The Entertainment Insurance Group Insurance Trust). TEIGIT offers both HMO and PPO plans, health-savings accounts, CIGNA

Dental insurance, international health insurance for travelers, and life insurance policies. For information on these plans (which vary by state), visit the TEIGIT's Web site (www.teigit.com) or call 800-866-8504. ■

REGIONAL GROUPS

by Suzanne Clancy

New York

Science Writers in New York (SWINY) celebrated Oktoberfest by drinking up knowledge about the science of beer-making at the Brooklyn Brewery. Along with touring the facilities, attendees were treated to the yeasty wisdom of one of the pioneers of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* genetics and molecular biology, Cold Spring Harbor's Jim Hicks. Lingering evidence of the event, and indeed, SWINY's foray "show, don't tell" on the Web appears at www.SWINY.org.



PHOTO BY MARC LIEBERMAN

In November, SWINY members saw first-hand that Carl Djerassi, inventor of The Pill and established playwright, has great stage presence as well. That occasion was a formal rehearsal of his newest play, *Phallacy*, followed by a Q&A with the author. The gathering at CUNY Graduate Center, was part of a larger CUNY-sponsored science and art event. *Phallacy* springs from Djerassi's involvements in science, in art history and collecting, and in observing—with wry insight—the politics and foibles of human interactions in these areas and beyond. The discussion that followed showed Djerassi to be a warm, outspoken and brilliant Renaissance man. The play, staged here by Redshift Productions, opens at the Cherry Lane Theater in New York City on May 15. Dr. Djerassi's Web site (www.djerassi.com) is well worth a visit.

And, finally, a few words about the newly modified SWINY Web site: Thanks to Webmaster Christopher Mims, we've moved to an open-source format that makes updating a snap. In this way, we're readily sharing information about science related activities and jobs. Currently the effort at www.swiny.org is on content; elegance of form will follow.

San Diego

In November, a group of SANDSWA members more at home writing about molecular biology than the great outdoors, tried their hand at nature writing. They were

Suzanne Clancy manages corporate communications for Nanogen, Inc., in San Diego, Calif. Send information about regional meetings and events to sclancyphd@yahoo.com.

led by Jan Daniels, a freelance environmental writer and creator of Eco Expressions (www.ecoexpressions.org), a workshop method focused on sensory perception, observations, and creative writing in a natural habitat. The hiking trails of Torrey Pines State Reserve served as the writers' classroom on the move. A 2,000-acre wilderness reserve located within San Diego city limits, Torrey Pines State Reserve is home to the rarest native pine in the United States—known to grow only here and on Santa Rosa Island off the coast near Santa Barbara. The reserve's high broken sandstone cliffs, deep ravines on headlands overlooking the Pacific, and rich plant and animal community provided the backdrop for a variety of writing exercises throughout the morning. At the workshop's conclusion, participants created a poem about the shared experience by compiling favorite lines written that morning.

Launched in San Diego, in 2004, Eco Expressions works with minority youth in Girl Scouts, Sierra Club's Inner City Youth Outings, San Diego Center for Children, as well as homeless youths and young women in recovery. The program encourages healthy lifestyles through outdoor explorations, in site learning, and creative writing. Students learn to respect all life, and develop critical thinking and self-reflection. An after-school version of Eco Expressions has been adopted by the Blaine County School District, in Hailey, Idaho. ■



ANDSWA members Amber Dance, Heather Henter, Lynne Friedmann, Andrew Porterfield, and Quinn Eastman soak up the sun and inspiration of Torrey Pines State Park during a workshop on nature writing.

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, fax 858-793-1144, or e-mail lfriedmann@nasw.org.

IN MEMORIAM

Jack Edgar Myers

Scientist and legendary *Highlights for Children* science editor



Longtime NASW member Jack Edgar Myers, 93, died of cancer on December 28, in Austin, Tex.

Myers, named to the National Academy of Sciences in 1975, earned numerous honors for contributing to the understanding of photosynthesis, phototrophic growth, and the physiology of algae. Myers called him-

self lucky for being able to "work as a scientist...there was always another challenge because there was always another question."

Jack Myers was born on July 10, 1913, in Boyd's Mills, Penn. He recalled having been a "mediocre student" until ninth grade, when he was "fired up" by his teachers of English, mathematics, and general science, the last having had, in Myers' words, "a remarkable ability to stimulate real interest in science among his students."

Myers attended Juniata College in Huntingdon, Penn., for his undergraduate work, which included a major in chemistry. He earned a master's degree in 1935 from Montana State University, and then chose the University of Minnesota for his doctoral work, concentrating on plant photosynthesis.

In 1939, Jack Myers was awarded a National Research Council postdoctoral fellowship and joined the staff of the Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, D.C., to concentrate on his studies in photosynthesis. The University of Texas recruited him, in 1941, as an assistant professor of zoology. He spent 58 years at UT, taking emeritus status in 1980 but continuing to occupy his lab and actively conduct research until 1999.

His duties as science editor for *Highlights for Children* began in 1958. To author articles, he sought out scientists "who have a great insight into their subjects. The limitation is that it is hard to find people who will write in the language that kids will find sufficiently easy to be interesting." In a typical reaction to a submitted piece, Myers once wrote: "I think the author was trying to teach about a tidal marsh—not tell a story and make it an exciting place...If we're going to have a 'muddy adventure,' something has to happen. And we really can't have an adventure if we must catalog all the kinds of things that can happen in a marsh."

Myers responded to as many as 400 letters a year from young readers who asked him virtually everything from the difference between frogs and toads to why human skin wrinkles in water. His answers often were

disarming. When a child asked why “every dog I know goes around and around in circles before lying down,” Myers answered, “I have heard the idea that the circling...is a behavior inherited from wild ancestors. That sounds reasonable enough though I cannot be sure it is the best explanation. If you find a better explanation, please let me know.”

For Myers, science was “the search for understanding of our world. All the fun and excitement is in the search. That’s where the action is.” He decried the teaching of science “as a collection of facts. ... When it becomes a bunch of facts, it is a sterile and rather unexciting subject. But the real fact is that science is an open-ended endeavor and never deals in certainty. Kids do not get much exposure to how we know. I think it makes science a lot more fun, and it does a lot more useful service for *Highlights* to treat the question: How do you find something out?”

In the 1990s Myers devoted considerable time to training, inspiring and mentoring young science and nature writers with an interest in writing for children. Much of that work was done at the annual conferences of the Highlights Foundation Writers Workshop, held in Chautauqua, NY.

(Source: Highlights for Children)

William Stevenson (Steve) Bacon

Thirty-year science communications career

Steve Bacon died on birthday (October 17, 2006). He was 72 and had been an NASW member since 1967.

Born in 1934 in Columbia, Mo., Bacon was a 1956 graduate of the University of Chicago. He served in the U.S. Army for two years, then held various jobs in technical writing and publishing until he was hired, in 1971, as a science writer for Tucson-based Research Corporation (RC)—a private operating foundation that aids basic research in the physical sciences at U.S. and Canadian colleges and universities. He spent the next 30 years of his career with RC as director of communications.

The post-Sputnik years were a great time in science offering much fodder for the science writer’s pen. Bacon proved well up to the task. In a recent issue of the *RC Newsletter* (spring 2006), he recalled an interview with Charles Townes, Nobel laureate in physics, for his seminal work on masers and lasers. This the last article he would do for the foundation showed his flair for creating interesting stories. His creative touch graced the annual reports of the foundation as the reports took on a less stodgy appearance in the late 1980s. As a result of the foundations new status as an operating foundation, Steve’s role expanded into a number of book projects. ■

(Source: Research Corporation Web site)

BOOKS BY AND FOR MEMBERS

By Ruth Winter

***A Place for Butterflies* by Melissa Stewart (NASW), published by Peachtree.**

Stewart has written more than 70 science books for young people. A Massachusetts freelance, she says this book, aimed at 5 to 8 year olds, was definitely a labor of love: “I was writing an article about butterflies for the Massachusetts Audubon Society’s *Sanctuary* magazine in 2001. While visiting Broad Meadow Brook, a 400-acre wildlife sanctuary in Worcester, Mass., I learned that it is home to 78 of the state’s 100 butterfly species. Sanctuary Director Deb Cary told me that her staff had recently worked with the local electric company to revise the mowing schedule for the vegetation under power lines adjacent to the sanctuary. Now the area is mowed later in the year, after caterpillars have transformed into winged adults. I wanted to bring this story of caring and cooperation to children.” She discovered other examples of efforts to save butterflies. “I have written many books for children, but I am most proud of this one,” Stewart says. “It is my hope that the book’s stunning illustrations and clear, simple language will inform young readers and inspire them to take action. Butterflies have lived on Earth for more than 140 million years. Sometimes we do things that make it hard for them to survive, but if we work together to help these special insects, there will always be a place for butterflies.” Stewart’s Web site is www.melissa-stewart.com. Mimi Schroeder is Peachtree’s publicity manager at schroeder@peachtree-online.com.

***Ruth Winter wins 2006
Diane McGurgan Service Award***
see page 21

***Kicking the Carbon Habit: Global Warming and the Case for Renewable and Nuclear Energy* by William Sweet (NASW), published by Columbia University Press.**

Sweet is senior news editor of *IEEE Spectrum*. From the mid-70s through the 80s, he worked as a journalist specializing in nuclear arms control and all related matters. “After being hired by *Spectrum* in the 90s to cover power and energy, my attention shifted to the climate issue, which of course is the most important single factor bearing on long-term electricity planning. My book tries to accomplish two things: first to get across, with a good deal of historical narrative, that climate science really is science; and second, turning to solutions, to distinguish sharply between technologies

that can substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions right now, and those that will or may pan out only in the longer run." *Publisher's Weekly* wrote of the book: "Polar icecaps are melting, ocean levels are rising, greenhouse gas emissions are accelerating—and, says Sweet, the villain of catastrophic climate change is coal, whose sooty carbon emissions make it the single worst energy source.... He's no fan of oil, but acknowledges that its use is too entrenched in our car-driven culture for consumption to be cut anytime soon. He's pessimistic about the time line for implementing fuel-cell technology and sees no fast fix through solar power. And while he agrees that natural gas is cleaner than oil or coal, transmission and storage costs, as well as Chinese and Indian competition for supplies, limit its usefulness for America. That leaves wind generation, among the cleanest energy sources, and nuclear plants, perhaps the most feared, as his chosen methods for powering America's future." Sweet can be reached at 212-419-7559 or w.sweet@ieee.org. Reach the publisher's press office via fax at 212-459-3677.

***The Rough Guide to Climate Change* by Robert Henson (NASW), published by Rough Guides.**

Henson, a writer for The National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR), has written a book about a subject we almost always mention in conversation—the weather. "When we hear about Arctic tundra melting or a devastating hurricane, we're now forced to consider the fingerprints of humanity—and that's going well beyond small talk," he writes. "Indeed, climate change is as much a divider as weather has traditionally been a unifier. Weather had always seemed to transcend politics, but human-induced climate change is wedded to politics: it's an outgrowth of countless decisions made by local, regional, and national governments, as well as individuals and corporations." Henson maintains weather has become a polarized subject and yet, he maintains, the basic science behind global climate change is rock-solid and accepted by virtually all parties. He notes: "A number of excellent books about global warming have hit the shelves in the last year or so. My hope with this one is to provide a one-stop shop for readers who want a good amount of fresh detail, but in accessible form, on climate change science, politics, and potential solutions.... When I began work [at NCAR] in 1989, the greenhouse effect was just becoming a household phrase. Since then I've had a ringside seat on the controversies and breakthroughs in climate science, and I've become increasingly concerned about the risk that global warming poses. Last year *Rough Guides* expressed interest about a book on climate change. I'd already written *The Rough Guide to Weather* and was eager to take on this topic.... The book's intended to be a road map to the evolving world we face, rather than a

set of directions. However, I do point out what I see as the strengths and weaknesses of some of the political and technological solutions being floated. I think it's noteworthy that a travel-oriented publisher like *Rough Guides* is willing to support a book like this. *Rough Guides* has actually teamed up with *Lonely Planet* to encourage people to reduce their airline travel and offset their carbon emissions. The slogan of their effort is "Fly less and stay longer." Henson can be reached at 303-497-8605 or bhenson@ucar.edu. The press representative is Katy Ball, 212-414-3712 or Katy.Ball@roughguides.com.

***The Demon Under the Microscope: From Battlefield Hospitals to Nazi Labs, One Doctor's Heroic Search for the World's First Miracle Drug* by Tom Hager (NASW), published by Harmony Books.**

Hager, an Oregon freelance, says he wrote the book to help readers understand modern medicine: "Much of the high-powered medical care we take for granted today is rooted in a single discovery made in a German industrial lab in 1932—the first 'miracle medicine'—which set off a worldwide craze in the years before World War II. As part of the research process for the book I spent weeks in the archives of the Bayer Corporation in Germany and the Pasteur Institute in France," Hager says. *Kirkus Reviews* wrote that *The Demon Under The Microscope* described "the fascinating story of the world's first antibiotic.... A rousing, valuable contribution to the history of medicine" and *Library Journal* recommends it highly. Hager can be contacted at www.thomashager.net. The press representative is Penny Simon, Psimon@randomhouse.com.

***Get the Trans Fat Out: 601 Simple Ways to Cut the Trans Fat Out of Any Diet* by Suzanne Havala Hobbs (NASW), published by Three Rivers Press.**

Hobbs is a licensed, registered dietitian with a doctorate in public health from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she is a clinical assistant professor, registered dietitian, and columnist. She has written a guidebook on how to create a healthier, trans fat-free diet while keeping taste and pleasure alive in the foods we eat. For the past century food companies have been slashing their budgets by using cheaply manufactured trans fat in cookies, cakes, salad dressings, frozen entrees, fast food, margarine, and more, making it difficult for consumers to avoid eating foods that may damage their health. Now that nutrition labels must expose the presence of harmful trans fat in food products, a new crop of trans fat-free products are fast appearing on grocery store aisles. Trans fat, however, is still a problem and little has been done to educate people on how to live a healthy trans fat-free life—until now. *Get The Trans Fat Out* includes a comprehensive explanation of what trans fat is, why it's detrimental to our health, where to

find it, and what the labels on foods really mean. It is also the first book to include a chart detailing the newly updated nutritional information since the law has taken effect. Hobbs offers 601 tricks and tips to choosing trans fat-free foods without spending hours reading food labels, practical cooking and shopping applications, many recipes, and simple, accurate advice and encouragement that readers can apply to their lives immediately. Hobbs can be reached at 919-843-4621 or suzanne@onthetable.net. The press representative is Dyana Messina, 212-572-2098 or dmessina@randomhouse.com.

***The Cure: How a Father Raised \$100 Million—and Bucked the Medical Establishment—in a Quest to Save His Children* by Geeta Anand (NASW), published by Regan Books.**

Anand, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, has written the story of one father's race against time to found a business that would cure his sick children. John and Aileen Crowley were on top of the world. With a brand-new Harvard Business School degree, three beautiful children, a new house, and a great job, they thought that they had just entered the best years of life. Then doctors diagnosed their two youngest children with Pompe disease, a degenerative disease so rare that no company had bothered spending the money needed to sponsor research. With no cure and no treatment, 15-month-old Megan and five-month-old Patrick were given only months to live. But John Crowley refused to accept this death sentence—and in the absence of other options, he made his own. Determined to find scientists who could develop a replacement enzyme that would keep the disease at bay and his children alive, Crowley quit his job as a financial consultant and invested himself and his life savings in a biotechnology start-up company. In just over a year, Novazyme Pharmaceuticals, Inc., went from an endowment of \$37,000 to \$27 million, and was sold to Genzyme Corp. soon thereafter for a news-breaking \$137.5 million. But the struggle wasn't over yet, and scientific setbacks, accusations of conflict of interest, business troubles, and the children's own worsening condition would test the limits of John and Aileen's minds and hearts as they fought toward a cure. Anand weaves together the disparate threads of this story of cutting-edge science, of business acumen and daring, and of the indomitable fighting spirit of a family that refuses to give in. Harrison Ford has optioned the film rights to the book. Anand can be reached at getta.anand@wsj.com or 212-416-2301. The press representative is Jennifer Brunn, 212-207-7411 or jennifer.brunn@harpercollins.com.

***Secrets of The Lean Plate Club* by Sally Squires, MS (NASW), published by St. Martin's Press.**

Squires, a health reporter and columnist for the

Washington Post, presents an eight-week program. Each week, readers find two new goals—one for food and one for activity. Weight Watchers International, Inc. says of the book "Sally Squires shows her stuff—expert knowledge about what it takes to lose weight successfully, understanding of the trials and tribulations that people struggling with weight issues face, and conviction that lasting weight loss is possible." Squires is also a great example to members for using the new media to promote the traditional media—the book. Squires write in the introduction: "On July 29, 2001, I started the Lean Plate Club column in the *Post* and began hosting a weekly Web chat by the same name at www.washingtonpost.com. In 2002, we launched a companion Lean Plate Club e-mail newsletter. The Lean Plate Club column is now nationally syndicated and read weekly by millions of people from coast to coast. Each Tuesday, the Lean Plate Club Web chat draws participants from as far away as Turkey and India. Nearly 250,000 people also subscribe to the weekly Lean Plate Club e-mail newsletter, and the number continues to grow." Squires can be reached at 202-334-5018 or squires@washpost.com. The press representative is Thomas Semosh, 646-307-5559 or thomas.Semosh@stmartins.com.

***The Medical Science of House, M.D.* by Andrew Holtz, MPH (NASW), published by The Berkley Publishing Group.**

Holtz, chief of the *HoltzReport* and former CNN medical correspondent, takes readers into the science behind the FOX TV drama, "House M.D.," starring Hugh Laurie as Dr. Gregory House, a diagnostician who unravels medical mysteries in each episode. Holtz dissects each case, providing answers to such questions as:

- How can a teenager adopted at birth nearly die because his biological mother didn't get a vaccine?
- How can a husband's faith in his wife's fidelity determine whether radical treatment will cure her or kill her?
- How can a missed eye-doctor appointment reveal a genetic disease?
- How can doctors choose the right course for a pregnant woman when one may kill her and the other would abort her fetus?

Holtz can be reached at 503-292-1699 or Holtzreport@juno.com. The press representative is Mary Ann Zissimos, 212-366-2737 or maryann.zissimos@us.penguingroup.com.

***The Complete Idiot's Guide to Microbiology* by Jeffrey J. Byrd, Ph.D., and Tabitha M. Powledge (NASW), published by Alpha (a trade division of Penguin).**

Like all the *Complete Idiot's Guides*, this paperback is a primer. It explains the basics on bacteria, viruses, and the lesser-known microbes (protozoa, algae, fungi, prions, and the brand-new archaea). *The Complete*

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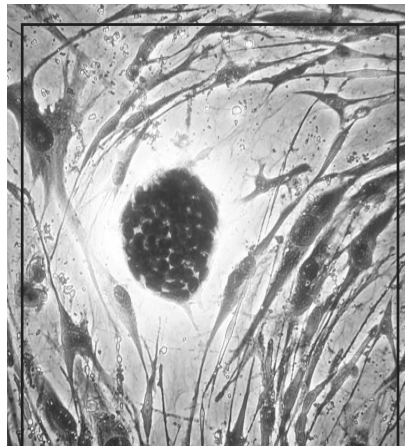
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Idiot's Guide to Microbiology concentrates on infectious diseases but also explains other features of the invisible world that governs all life on earth—microbial cells and cell structure, genomics, the basics of biochemistry, the human immune system, disease mechanisms, food poisoning, emerging diseases, microbes in the environment, genetic engineering, biotechnology, and bioweapons. Powledge, who wrote the *ScienceWriters* column "The Free Lance" for seven years, co-authored the book with microbiologist Jeffrey Byrd. She says, "For me, the most fascinating topic of all is the social life of microbes, the relatively new fields of research known as symbiosis and endosymbiosis. Microbes work by forming communities with each other and with their hosts. Without these communities—which sometimes consist of a microbe inside another microbe inside yet another microbe—there would be no other life on Earth." She says that through a spooky process called quorum sensing, microbes communicate their desires (and sometimes their aggression), influencing other microbes' behavior and even actions of the host. "The host: that's us, folks," she notes. Powledge can be reached at tam@nasw.org. Media inquiries and publicity opportunities should go to Alpha's Dawn Werk, 317-428-3326 or dawn.werk@pearsoned.com, or the Penguin Group's Vicki Skelton, vicki.skelton@us.penguin.com. ■

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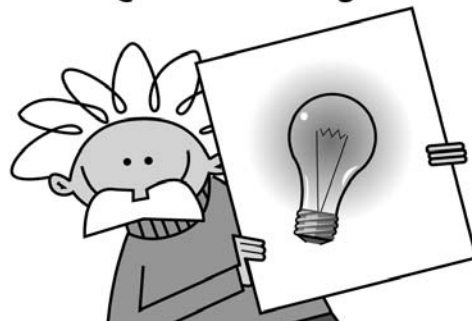
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