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Cope with covering immigration issues in Texas

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Pulitzer-winning political cartoonist sketches across decades

FREEDOM WRITERS
Foreign journalists take on totalitarian regimes

WRITING WITH AN ATTITUDE
Alternative weeklies go to new lengths to take on dailies
Publisher’s Note

In each issue of COVER magazine, our students explore the stories behind the news and the people who cover it. In the process, they not only learn more about journalism but also what it takes to make it in the news business.

This semester students shadowed reporters as they covered breaking news in the middle of the night; spent their Spring Break in Cactus, Texas, to report on how coverage of the immigration debate has affected both immigrants and the reporters who cover them; and talked with reporters juggling work and family.

We’ve also included profiles of a Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist, a reporter-turned-strip-club-manager and a Q&A with René Syler, former anchor of CBS’s The Early Show. One student wrote about international journalists working under oppressive governments.

The University of North Texas Frank W. Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism, the only nationally accredited professional master’s program in the state, stresses the core values of journalism rooted in ethical media practices. COVER magazine is not only a tangible learning tool for our students, but also contributes to the professional conversation of journalism. The program, which gives away $200,000 in scholarships each year, owes its existence to a generous gift from the Mayborn Advise and Consult Fund at Communities Foundation of Texas.

You can check out past issues of the magazine, as well as our annual literary nonfiction writers conference, at www.mayborninstitute.unt.edu. We invite you to provide feedback, story ideas and valuable insight to our students for future issues of COVER magazine.

Mitch Land, PhD
Mayborn Director
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The man at the top of Texas’ top magazine
It’s Not Just Fishwrap
By Sarah Whyman
Photos by Katherine Frye

It has always taken me twice as long to do anything that involves newspaper. In England, where I grew up, it is customary to put several layers under carpets, and lifting an old carpet is always a treasure trove. Taking up linoleum that had been down for 50 years had me on my knees for hours, reading snippets of old news.

With the decline of newspaper circulation, how will people replace the pile of useful old papers in the closet? Newspaper is part of our culture, from lining worn-through shoes during the Great Depression, to cutting out patterns for dressmaking. One use of day-old papers in England was to wrap fish and chips, traditional fast food in the UK. When the practice was banned in the 1980s, people complained that their food tasted different. The habit of eating straight out of the paper meant a chance to read stories, albeit somewhat greasy, that you may have missed the day before. The ban was because of traces of cyanide found in the ink, but news-wrapped chips were such a tradition that one fashionable fish fryer now uses paper printed with news, to replicate the old style.

Few people have cut out letters from newspapers to form anonymous notes, but it is certainly in our culture, as is the use of front pages in films to give viewers information about events. A single sheet from a newspaper, blowing along an empty street, often depicts a lonely rundown area. Some front-page headlines are remembered for years – take the Chicago Tribune’s erroneous “Dewey Defeats Truman” or, worth a bigger chuckle, The Sun’s (UK) headline from a 1957 expedition to the South Pole, “Sir Vivian Fuchs Off to Antarctic.”

We learn early on of the myriad uses of old news. I remember my mother explaining to me when I was five, how to roll, fold and twist the newspaper to start the fire, so it didn’t burn too quickly and go out.

Then there were the clothes we made from it; hats and jackets, skirts and cloaks. That all ended up on the fire, too. Another English tradition is the making of a “Guy” to burn atop a bonfire on Guy Fawkes Night. Old clothes are roughly sewn together and stuffed with newspaper to make a human-shaped object that will sit, if not stand, on the fire. The tradition celebrates the foiling of a plot by Guy Fawkes to blow up the Houses of Parliament, with the King present, in 1605. Fawkes was burned at the stake and every November 5 the English burn their leaves with the Guy on top. They set off fireworks to signify gunpowder. From high treason comes a reason to burn old newspaper.

More prosaic uses of old news include covering the floor when painting, removing muddy boots or polishing shoes. In an emergency it has even been used to wrap a new-born baby. We use it for protection, insulation and even comfort. It was a habit to spread several layers of paper over the bedspring, for padding under a thin mattress or to insulate against the cold. Gaps in walls were also filled with newspaper, sometimes mixed with paste to make papier-mâché. French for “chewed up paper,” papier-mâché objects made from this mix are too numerous to mention, but range from boats to masks to piñatas, from the beautiful to the bizarre.

The decline of newspaper circulation affects far more than the news. We can get news from television, radio or the Internet, but what about free services provided by the daily press?

Even our pets benefit from old news. How many puppies have been housetrained on The Dallas Morning News? How many hamsters have scuffled through shredded pages of The New York Times? How many rabbits have scratched at The Wall Street Journal? If newspaper circulation continues its downward spiral, what will we use instead?

After all, you can’t line a birdcage with a Web page.
When his plane landed, the tropical Asian heat was overbearing. Before he disembarked, Gregg Jones knew how dangerous his destination was.

It was 1984. He was 25. A small-town boy with a thirst for adventure, he packed two bags and his typewriter and hopped a plane to Manila to pursue a freelance career. This was his first time in a hot zone, and the start of Jones’ career as a fearless investigative reporter.

A year earlier, the country’s opposition leader, Benigno Aquino, returned from exile and was assassinated. Local resentment toward Western journalists was high. Jones persisted, reporting the protests and turmoil in the region.

“Journalism is the first draft of history, and that is really exciting to me,” he says. “It’s being curious about the world around you.”


In 1990, after a year freelancing in Mexico, Jones joined the Arkansas Democrat Gazette as a business writer, where he uncovered unsanitary living conditions in the rural healthcare system.

“After spending five to six years in third world countries, and to come back and see worse conditions in the U.S., was well, shocking,” Jones says. The series made him a Pulitzer Prize finalist.

In 1991, Jones began writing about the oil industry and international business for The Morning News. Six years later he returned to Asia to open the paper’s Bangkok bureau. From Thailand, he got more of the adventure he craved, covering political upheaval in Cambodia and unrest in China.

He returned to the U.S. with a finished book, “Red Revolution” about the guerilla movements in the Philippines.

Days after 9/11, Jones flew to Pakistan to cover the unfolding war on terror. He went to Afghanistan, staying away for months at a time.

“It was emotionally draining, and hard to be away for so long,” he says. “With a 5-year-old kid it was difficult.”

Jones returned again to the U.S. to finally settle down a bit for his family. After a stint on the government beat at the Los Angeles Times, Jones returned to The Morning News full-time in 2004.

Now a projects reporter, he sits at a desk surrounded by stacks of file folders. Thumbtacked notecards with scribbled names and phone numbers hang next to pictures of his 10-year-old son, Christopher.

“He is solid, very unflappable,” fellow projects reporter Holly Becka says. “He’s a fantastic writer.”

From years of reporting around the world, Jones has earned great admiration from his peers.

Becka, a Morning News reporter for 11 years, works alongside Jones on front-page stories about child abuse at the Texas Youth Commission. Becka says they jokingly call the laid-back Jones, “The Reverend,” because he doesn’t use salty language.

“He blushes very easily. He’s also one of the most genuinely nice people I’ve ever met,” Becka says.

Married for 21 years, Jones and his wife live in Plano, Texas, with Christopher, their two cats, one frog, one crawfish and one fish.

Ali says traveling with Gregg has always been an adventure: At 13 months, Christopher took his first few steps on the Great Wall of China.

Jones’ editor, Maud Beelman, knows the value of a serious professional who happens to be a good person. “He’s nice. He’s intelligent. He’s very thoughtful,” Beelman says. “Something a good journalist needs to be.”

“It is our job to help protect innocent people and help keep the government honest,” Jones says. “The most important function in a free society is giving people a voice.”

He’s methodical, precise. Investigative reporting has given him an exciting life. He smiles. “It’s the pinnacle of journalism.”

| Photo by mackenzie rollins

A Life Well-Traveled

By Sara Southerland

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Tools of Reporters

By Sarah Whyman
Photos by Katherine Frye and Susana C. Segovia

colleague frequently uses a favorite acronym when told of problems with gadgets. "RTFM," he says. Read the flaming manual! He doesn't word it quite like that but the meaning is the same. The manual is often the size of a paperback and sometimes in another tongue. So we grapple with controls and settings and hope that it works.

Unless you are a dedicated technophobe you probably use lots of gadgets in your everyday life. We love them and hate them but really cannot live without them once they are entrenched in our lives.

Journalism owes its existence to a constantly evolving array of gadgets. The printing press was the beginning of it all. Now we have digital cameras, cell phones and e-mail. Records make sure nothing is missed. E-mail hastens contact. With cell phones, we can always reach out or be reached. The Internet is our own reference library for background material and fact checking.

While useful and vital tools, our gadgets are also sources of great frustration. Christy George of Oregon Public Broadcasting takes a skeptical view of technology.

"As someone who's worked in radio, TV and print, all gadgets have failed me — from the old waxer to audio tape recorders of all sorts ... and cameras from 35mm still cameras to $75K video cameras and a host of crappy computers, printers and settings and hope that it works."

"We love them and hate them but really cannot live without them once they are entrenched in our lives."

"RTFM," he says. Read the flaming manual! He doesn't word it quite like that but the meaning is the same. The manual is often the size of a paperback and sometimes in another tongue. So we grapple with controls and settings and hope that it works.

"We love them and hate them but really cannot live without them once they are entrenched in our lives."

"My favorite gadget also mixes the old and the new. My handheld iPAQ allows me to write on the screen in longhand and puts my scrawl into a Word document. Over the last two years it has evolved to decipher my handwriting quite well but there are some glitches. Angry over an unjustified parking ticket, I used the iPAQ to write a note to the relevant authorities. I'm sure they would have been surprised at the reference to an "unmarked farting space." That one would have fooled Spell Check too."

"The hand held computer is also a favorite with Dale Willman, Executive Editor of Field Notes Productions."

"My technology savior has been my Palm Pilot ... because of its ability to handle contacts. Any time I bump into a name of someone I might find useful later, I put their contact info into my Outlook, along with keys that define their expertise. When I'm looking for someone on a topic, I search the key words, and up they all pop!"

"The laptop computer, precursor to the handheld, is a wonderful gadget for reporting, but the early models weren't so convenient," says Randy Loftis of The Dallas Morning News, recalling an incident in the early 1980s when he was sent by The Miami Herald to cover a meeting in the small town of Lantana, Fla., because it was rumored they were going to fire the fire chief."

"I picked up one of our early-generation computers, a Tandy Radio Shack TRS-80 Model 100, I think, and headed over to the town hall. I slipped into the back row of the tiny meeting room, drawing stares from everyone, including the town police officer sitting near the door. They weren't used to having strangers at their meetings, much less reporters. I smiled and nodded."

"Those computers ran on AA batteries and I thought I should check to make sure mine were fresh. So I slowly unzipped the computer case, trying to be quiet, but of course the zipper made a long and obnoxious noise in the tiny room. Everyone turned and scowled."

"He needed new batteries, but rather than create a scene by zipping the bag again, he left his computer and ducked out for a few minutes to purchase some nearby."

"Assuming they'd taken a break, he cheerfully walked back toward the building, but the police officer stopped and asked if he'd left something in the room."

"So he had done the only smart thing and ordered the entire town hall evacuated. Instead of disrupting the meeting with an annoying zipper on the computer bag, I disrupted it with a bomb scare."

Roger Witherspoon of Atlanta Journal-Constitution had trouble transmitting a story via satellite in the early days of portable computers.

"They neglected to tell me that the Austin paper's satellite facilities had limited capacity, and I would have to transmit each screen as a separate file, so the ten page file I sent never got there. So I sent it again, and waited."

"Half an hour later, they told me to try again. A short time later, my editor in Atlanta said they had gotten an angry call from the Department of Defense asking why some reporter named Roger Witherspoon was tying up one of their communications satellites with lengthy files about some dumb conference in Chicago."

"My editor told me to pick up the phone and dictate. Which is what I did."
What do you Think?

By Karina Ramirez
Photo by Mackenzie Rollins

“The audience is so smart. Sometimes I find myself amazed.”

— Krys Boyd, KERA

It is noon. North Texas public radio listeners are tuned into KERA's 90.1 FM's new program, Think. Today, host and managing editor Krys Boyd interviews Martha Raddatz, Chief White House correspondent for ABC News, about her book "The Long Road Home: A Story of War and Family."

Raddatz leans in to share details about the time she spent in Iraq, telling the story of a soldier who had never expressed emotion; no pain or loss over combat she saw in Sadr City in 2004. Even his wife never knew what happened to him. Then, Raddatz says, his wife watched him break down on Nightline as he described the battle. Although upset with how her husband revealed his emotions, she is hopeful they can reconnect again.

Twenty minutes into the conversation, Boyd opens the phone lines. Ken, a Vietnam veteran, is the first to call in and relate to Raddatz' story. Marianne Newton opens the phone lines. Ken, a Vietnam veteran, is the first to call in and relate to Raddatz' story. Marianne Newton knows what he lived through 34 years ago.

"Ken, can I ask you a question?" asks Boyd.
"Sure," Ken replies.

"Do you think no one would understand if you told them, or are you trying to protect them from what you experienced?"

"I say probably a combination of both because, because first off...yeah...um..." Ken's voice cracks on the radio, but he continues: "I used to get embarrassed about being emotional," he says. "I watch on Sunday news programs when they used to get embarrassed about being emotional, he says. Sometimes I watch on Sunday news programs when they used to get embarrassed about being emotional."

"How do you feel?" asks Boyd.
"I want to know why they think that way," Boyd asserts.

Unlike other talk shows that rely on argumentation to keep audiences, Boyd's style allows her listeners to become part of the show.

She has interviewed high-powered officials like former White House Chief Counter-terrorism Adviser Richard Clarke and the under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs Karen Hughes.

"People were upset that I did not drill her," Boyd says, "but this is not that type of show."

She also spoke to wine connoisseur Paul Botamper about the 23rd Dallas Morning News Wine Competition, and spent an hour enticing listeners to try a dessert with Chef Roland Mesnier, who served for 25 years as the White House pastry chef.

She's not above quirky interviewing "Melicious," the founding member of the Texas Roller girls, in a show devoted to the resurgence of roller derby. She continues to create expectation and the show's "who will she talk to next?" reputation because each topic is unique.

Her colleagues admire the extensive research and preparation Boyd brings to her work. She spends untold hours with producer Jeff Whittington reviewing e-mails and talking about ideas and guests they wish to bring to Think.

"I take many ideas to Krys and have her give me feedback," Whittington says, adding that an hour is a long time to engage one person on a topic. Boyd reads books and background material on every guest before airtime.

"It's tough to come up with one show in particular where I learned something I didn't know before, because honestly, that happens every time I prepare for a broadcast," Boyd says.

The show airs Monday through Thursday from noon to 2 p.m. and allows listeners to discuss diverse topics ranging from politics, history, science, the arts and trends. Think is also now a 30 minute TV show on KERA Channel 13 on Fridays at 7:30 p.m.

Before Think, Boyd was a guest interviewer on The Glenn Mitchell Show, before and after Mitchell's death in 2005. She also produced and co-hosted the Emmy Award-winning public affairs program On the Record. In 2003, she produced the award-winning documentary JFK: Breaking the News. She hosted a nightly radio talk show in 2001 and prior to that she worked at Broadcast.com and Yahoo.

Boyd, a single mom of 7-year-old Ben and 4-year-old Clara, says she is passionate about learning. Her drive came from her days as a student at Texas Christian University where she majored in television and radio after an internship in her hometown of El Paso.

"My very first day on the job, they sent me out with a reporter who was doing a story at a men's federal prison about 10 miles outside the city limits. The access we suddenly were granted thrilled me, and I was instantly and permanently hooked on the ability to experience something entirely outside the realm of my personal experience," Boyd says.

"Radio is more than a job, it satisfies her own curiosity – the need to learn and educate.

"Even now," she says, "it's hard to call my job work because it almost never feels that way to me."
Margaret Lake spent her college internship in South Africa, highlighted by the opportunity to photograph Nelson Mandela. She’s had photos published in major metropolitan newspapers and had every intention of working in “hard-hitting” news.

Today, Lake is an award-winning photographer – not for images of political unrest, but for capturing a moment in which bored flower girls pass time playing UNO.

So how does one go from working with embattled world leaders to photographing the weddings of well-to-do Texans? For Lake, it was a matter of needing income as well as wanting to flee the often tragic and depressing events newspaper journalists are required to cover.

“It was very high stress and I’m not one of those hard-stomached types of people,” says Lake. “I can’t handle photographing tragedy.”

But Lake still wanted to find a way to continue pursuing her passion.

“In the end, I loved the fact that I was being paid for my photography. I had to think, ‘How can I still be a photographer, get paid and utilize my degree?’”

The answer was “wedding photojournalism,” a trend that began with the photo of John F. Kennedy, Jr., kissing his bride’s hand outside the church. It has turned photojournalists into wedding photographers and wedding photographers into photojournalists.

Though free of accident scenes and war zones, wedding photography is not without peril.

Goin’ to the Chapel
Photojournalists say ‘I do!’ to weddings

By Chelsea Douglas and Erin Tritschler
Photos by Don Mooney and Katherine Frye
Weddings are once in a lifetime,” says photographer Janelle Lowrance. “There’s no room to screw-up.”

The growing popularity of wedding photojournalism provides new challenges for even the best photographers. They must strike a balance between maintaining journalistic integrity and giving customers what they want.

“I meet with the couple and try to get to know them. I try to get them comfortable with me so they can get used to the camera,” she says. “I have never had an unhappy client and I think that’s because we talk about it so much beforehand.”

Unlike traditional wedding photography, wedding photojournalism strives to tell a story by capturing the sometimes overlooked details and unplanned moments that weddings can provide.

Kelly Wright, 21, a senior at the University of North Texas, is in the process of planning her wedding. Like many brides today, she wants to avoid having posed pictures.

“You want to capture the whole day and not just [get] the stuffy pictures,” she says.

Lowrance, an award-winning member of the Wedding Photojournalist Association, understands this first hand. She is inspired by the disappointment she felt upon seeing photos from her own wedding.

A 2004 graduate of the University of North Texas, she now owns a wedding photography business with her husband, Jeff.

Founded in 2002, the WPJA brings together 1,000 wedding photographers to conventions, seminars and workshops for its members. The organization selects the best photos taken at weddings each year.

Huy Nguyen, a wedding photojournalist with Dallas-based F8 Studio and the WPJA “Photographer of the Year” for 2005, says there is a distinct difference between the two methods.

“Photojournalism attempts to tell the story through the photograph, focusing the lens on details that show a broader topic,” he says.

Nguyen’s background is in news photography, having worked for The Chicago Tribune, The Virginian-Pilot and The Dallas Morning News.

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Photographers move towards videography

Extending the moment

By Sarah Whyman and Don Mooney

Photo by Don Mooney

Since the first photograph appeared in a newspaper in 1880, technology has presented a particular challenge to photojournalists.

The digital video camera is the latest innovation to change how photojournalists tell stories through images.

David Leeson, Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist for The Dallas Morning News, says he feels he has resolved a conflict between the still photographer and the video photographer.

“We’re trying to get people to remember who you are, a photojournalist, you’re a still photographer. There’s only one difference, now your photographs move and speak.”

When called upon to record video in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina struck, Leeson experimented with his new video camera and found the resolution was sufficient to produce stills from the video. He also saw something else.

“What was photojournalism about in the first

“There’s only one difference, now your photographs move and speak.”

— David Leeson, The Dallas Morning News

place? Telling the story,” he says. “We do that by capturing moments. Amazing moments. The still camera does not provide a narrative, it only provides moments. Those moments are enough to change lives, to become an icon for an entire chapter of history.”

Leeson recalls the father of modern photojournalism, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and his famous “decisive moment.”

“But I call this the extended moment, so we seek

moments in time rather than space,” Leeson says.

On the difficulties of transitioning from 35mm to video, Leeson says the problems come in the editing.

“Probably the most significant difference between what we did before and what we’re doing now is that editing plays an enormous role. It is probably the most significant aspect of the story itself other than the shooting – and the reporting of it. Editing is a new skill set for shooters. Using Final Cut Pro is demanding – and I don’t make light of that.”

While some photographers feel they have lost the opportunity to produce iconic images like Nick Ut’s napalm girl, Leeson says they have only gained more flexibility.

“The difference is that you can pick up the emotion with sound and motion, and more often than not a good photojournalist can do it in a single fraction of a moment, but sometimes it cannot be done except with motion and sound.”

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Eloina Juarez dresses in a black leather coat and slacks. The 29-year-old is out on the town but tonight her dates are her two children—Axel, 8, and Angelica, 6. Leaving her job behind for the night, she and her kids head to Valley View Mall for ice cream and a movie. Juarez, an assignment editor at Univision’s KUVN, spent the day gathering details on a Grapevine High School baseball player killed by a line drive to the head during practice and talking to the boy’s father.

“‘There are things that just don’t go away,’” she says.

“Mom?” Axel asks, bringing her back to the moment. “Can we go to the movies now?”

Axel, pausing from his Haagen-Dazs, moves along the plan to see The Astronaut Farmer. This is how Juarez unwinds after work. She spends the majority of her days chasing one news lead after another, gathering enough information to decide whether to send a reporter to the scene. As a journalist and a mother, she says she feels connected to stories that deal with children. The murder trial last year of a 5-year-old beaten to death by her mother while her father stood by and did nothing, required Juarez to view graphic pictures while compiling information for a report.

“I remember it because Angelica was 5 last year,” she recalls. “It was awful.”

Juarez says she deals with the gory details of these types of stories, but it affects her behavior as a parent.

“You embrace your children, you nurture them, tell them that you love them,” she says. “You can’t imagine how someone else can hurt them.”

Although journalists deal with society’s vices on a daily basis, many do their jobs because they love the rush that comes with gathering the news, knowing things first and informing the public.

“You go in place of the audience so that [later] they can witness extraordinary events,” says 37-year-old Andrea Rega, who covered the devastating tsunami in Sri Lanka as evening anchor for KUVN Univision Channel 23 in Dallas.

“You have to separate yourself from the stories,” Juarez says. “You have to let it go otherwise you will need counseling.”

Though journalism is a male-dominated profession, women are the dominant gender in journalism schools, making up two-thirds of enrolled students, according to the Pew Center for Civic Journalism. Despite their numbers in schools, women hold only one-third of newsroom jobs, the Pew study showed.

FINDING FAMILY TIME

Miles from the movie theater, Gloria Campos sits at the anchor desk at WFAA Channel 8’s glistening new studio at Victory Plaza in Dallas. In this high-stakes and big-budget world, she is getting herself ready for taped teases—those snippets during programs that entice the viewer to watch the evening news. She prims her hair, looking into a small, foldable compact.

Once she is satisfied, she begins recording the teases.

“And last night’s winning Powerball numbers are…”

Later, after taping briefly, she grabs her cell phone and calls her kids.

Campos, like Juarez, is a mom. She has twin 13-year-old boys, Greg and Tony. Next week, Campos will take a week off from work and go on a cruise with her husband, Lance Brown, and the twins.

Campos’ days are always full and sometimes, she says, it can be a challenge to maintain that
Several months ago, television’s René Syler lost her breasts and her morning anchor job at CBS. But she survived, using the same strength and humor she devotes to raising her children. Now she shares all of those experiences in a new book, “Good Enough Mother, The Perfectly Imperfect Book of Parenting.”

The book is full of laughter and tears as she relays the juggling act and chaos of raising two children in the high-pressured life of a network journalist. But it’s also the kind of real-life stuff that most moms can relate to.

Added to the usual stress of a working mother was the fact that breast cancer runs in her family. Syler decided to do whatever it took to reduce her odds of getting the disease. So she took preventative measures and had a “prophylactic mastectomy.”

Losing her job on The Early Show has not kept the energetic and engaging Syler away from the squawk box. With her book, she’s made the rounds on the network morning shows, including her old set at CBS, and spent some quality time on The Oprah Show. Recently, Syler talked with COVER magazine’s Don Mooney about her book, family, health and the possibility of her return to television. Here are excerpts from that interview:

Q. Where did the initial idea for the book come from?
A. One day, back around late 2005, one of my colleagues was beating herself up about being close relationship with her sons.

“I don’t see them very much in a typical day,” Campos says. “I see them in the morning for breakfast, and they go to school, and then I don’t see them all day. We talk on the phone every night, and occasionally we will have dinner together.”

Campos enjoys any time she manages to spend with her family. When her contract comes up for renegotiation, she says, she wants more time for dinner with her family built into it.

One strategy journalist mothers use to spend more time with their families is to leave the weekends free just for that purpose. Campos says she rarely does any outside activities on the weekends and constantly turns down charity and gala invitations.

Univision’s Andrea Rega, uses that approach with her time. She is a reporter, anchor and mom to 5-year-old Salvatore and 3-year-old Sofia and reserves her weekends for her children.

On most Saturdays, Rega can be found far away from the station’s downtown Dallas high-rise. Today she is cheering on Salvatore at a soccer game. Her husband is armchair-coaching their son from the sidelines.

“Put your jacket on because it is cold,” she tells Sofia. She jumps up, turns and screams excitedly in her son’s direction, “Corre, Salvatore, corre!” Run, Salvatore, run!

During the week, Rega wakes up at 6:30 a.m. and makes breakfast for her two kids. She gets them ready for school and drops them off. After grocery shopping or running other errands, she returns home to catch up on household chores and prepare for work.

For many journalists the decision to raise a family is met with the demands of a high profile and high stress job. Rega waited until her early 30’s and Campos waited several years longer to have a family.

“I planned it that way,” Campos explains. “I have been married 30 years. Of my friends, I have been married the longest but my children are the youngest because I had all these career things I wanted to accomplish first. I did accomplish my career goals and at age 38, I said to my husband, ‘if we are going to have a family, we need to start.’”

Juarez is on the opposite side of the spectrum. The Dallas-native made that decision in her early 20’s. Now, the single mom balances her job’s demands with raising her children on her own.

“A child needs a mother’s care,” she says. “It is a sacrifice but I also have a job in a top market that I don’t want to let go of.”

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Q & A

René Syler talks about juggling work and family and avoiding breast cancer through drastic surgery

Story and photos by Don Mooney

Good Enough Mother

several months ago, television’s René Syler lost her breasts and her morning anchor job at CBS. But she survived, using the same strength and humor she devotes to raising her children.

Good Enough Mother


The book is full of laughter and tears as she relays the juggling act and chaos of raising two children in the high-pressured life of a network journalist. But it’s also the kind of real-life stuff that most moms can relate to.

Added to the usual stress of a working mother was the fact that breast cancer runs in her family. Syler decided to do whatever it took to reduce her odds of getting the disease. So she took preventative measures and had a “prophylactic mastectomy.”

Losing her job on The Early Show has not kept the energetic and engaging Syler away from the squawk box. With her book, she’s made the rounds on the network morning shows, including her old set at CBS, and spent some quality time on The Oprah Show. Recently, Syler talked with COVER magazine’s Don Mooney about her book, family, health and the possibility of her return to television. Here are excerpts from that interview:

Q. Where did the initial idea for the book come from?
A. One day, back around late 2005, one of my colleagues was beating herself up about be-
ing parent while holding me up as some sort of modern day poster mom. So I told her how things were always on the verge of chaos. From there, one thing led to another … I turned in my finished manuscript in October of 2006. In December I was notified I was being let go. I called my publisher and told her what was happening, and I said 'I know that we had really sort of hoped to be able to use the Early Show as a launching pad for this book,' but she said, 'You know, René, I think it's better this way, because now you can go and talk to whoever.' She also said, 'I think you should write more… write about what you’re going through.' At that time, after years of thinking about it, I had finally made the decision to have the ‘prophylactic mastectomy’ so I went home and I wrote about the experience of losing my breast – the surgery that was upcoming – and just all this stuff. And in one weekend I wrote the final chapter of the book, which is 'Double Whammy. How to Lose Your Breasts and Job in Five Weeks.'

Q. What kind of feedback have you gotten from those in your profession, especially women?
A. The concept that I write about is so universal to women. I mean any woman understands—you work outside the home, you come home and you have to start your second job. Women get that. And we put an undue amount of stress and pressure on ourselves to provide this sort of Norman Rockwell existence for our families, and it is not realistic. All I’m saying in the book is be real! To know that you can’t be all things to all people, including your family.

Q. This book provides relief to women in your profession. They realize it’s not as easy as it looks. How do you do it?
A. Like everybody else. When I worked in Dallas, I can’t tell you the number of times I worked the morning shift; I would run out the house wearing one black shoe and one blue shoe!

Q. In the book, you basically put yourself out there. You hold nothing back.
A. I feel like, by putting myself out there as you say, it sort of strips away the pretense, it breaks through that sort of false wall and people can say, 'She may be on T.V. but she’s just like me.'

Q. You relieve so much pressure for people because you add in the experience that, “Hey, your mom wasn’t perfect; my mom wasn’t perfect. They did so much with what little they had.” How do you transfer that same value system and balance?
A. The book has some really practical lessons that impact our everyday actions. For instance, tongue-in-cheek, I wrote that 'chicken nuggets' is a food group. Look: the fact of the matter is I know I’m not a good cook, and I’ve made peace with that. I don’t desire to become a great cook; I don’t even desire to become a passable cook! I’m OK with that. My kids are OK with that. They don’t question my love for them because I don’t have a home-cooked meal on the table every night.

Q. It would be funny if your daughter Casey, turns out to be a great cook.
A. Or even [my son] Cole! My husband is the cook in our family. One day he was traveling and was out of town for a couple of days. The kids were horrified! They thought, 'If dad leaves—Oh my God, we get nothing for two days' … At the outset in the book I say I am so not a parenting expert.

Q. After reading your book, readers feel like a part of the family.
A. You know, I feel that children, more than
She's cautious around anyone with a notepad now. She won't even say her name. Just inside the Cactus Grocery, this twenty-something illegal immigrant seems uncomfortable answering even broad questions. “Vemos a un reportero y corremos del otro lado,” she says. We see a reporter and we run away.

The tiny Texas hamlet of Cactus, thrust into the national spotlight by a three-part series published by The Dallas Morning News, has been shattered by the coverage. The stories exposed tension between the white police and the Hispanic population, tension between Mexicans and Guatemalans, ID theft, despicable working conditions, and even incest. The Morning News called Cactus, “an immigration haven on the high plains.”

On Dec. 12, 2006, Immigration and Customs Enforcement raided the Swift & Company meat packing plant and arrested 292 workers – about 10 percent of the population. The people of Cactus, who once gave journalists hospitable tours around town in their cars, felt betrayed. Some reporters were so torn by emotional attachments to their subjects, they pondered changing careers.
Cactus shows the thorny ethical and moral dilemmas Hispanic and Anglo reporters can face covering emotionally charged issues like immigration. The Cactus case was so complicated, and the potential for misunderstanding so great, even a veteran reporter like Dianne Solis felt on shaky ground.

Deborah Turner, a recent college graduate, was the first Morning News reporter on the scene. She realized quickly she might be in over her head. “I have never done anything with this type of depth and emotion,” she says.

Reporters have covered immigration since the Civil War. For more than 30 years media outlets in America have bombarded audiences with stories related to legal and illegal immigration from Mexico and Central America. Immigration coverage has triggered one of the most diverse debates in all public discourse, splitting neighborhoods, families and political parties across the country.

Armed citizens in Arizona and Texas positioned themselves along the border to discourage crossing, calling themselves the Minute Men. Millions of immigrants and supporters took to the streets of metropolitan areas from coast to coast, demanding a voice in the debate.

Journalists struggle over even the simplest attributions. Terms like “illegal immigrant” and “undocumented worker” are loaded with political and social connotations.

Dianne Solis, a seasoned immigration reporter, was sent in by editors to sort out the messy story in Cactus. She covered the border for 13 years with The Wall Street Journal and for 10 more with The Morning News.

But she found herself in a dilemma: exposing the illegal and unethical practices swirling around this hardscrabble Hispanic community would almost certainly provoke federal immigration authorities to act.

“I don't want to hurt anyone,” Solis says. “By reporting on some things, I knew I would put these people in danger.”

As a member of the Latino community, she was torn, knowing her reporting would result in possible deportation for the immigrants who had grown to trust her. “I put my whole self into my stories,” Solis says, who, months after the fact, still gets teary eyed when discussing the topic.

A P R I C K L Y S I T U AT I O N

Solis came to the story when editors thought a Latina might be able to find stories her younger, Anglo counterpart might overlook. Before arriving in Cactus, Solis thought it was just another story on immigration. Once she dug into Cactus, she found it a lot stickier than she realized.

Solis went to the local church to listen to immigrants play the marimba, drums and trumpet. She listened to them sing. People began opening up to Solis. They talked about their living conditions, about working at the meat-packing plant and paying back the “coyotes” who brought them to Cactus.

She had never been to the Panhandle. She soon realized the landscape would play a large role in any story she produced. She knew the enormous isolation of Cactus – an island in a sea of prairie – left the immigrants feeling safe, despite the heated debate in Washington, D.C.

Solis drove around, studying the cow pastures behind the Swift plant. She learned the Guatemalan immigrants were keeping alive the dying cowpoke culture, doing jobs American cow-punchers were doing more than a century before.

Solis didn’t expect to see the traditional dress of the Guatemalan women. She heard the distinct Chihuahua and Chiapas accents.

As the only Hispanic journalist on the project, she was the first to point out the divergent cultures in Cactus, nuances other reporters might have missed. She inculcated herself in both communities and, as an insider, saw first-hand the tension and conflict in town. They trusted her, and she eventually discovered a fake ID ring and cultural differences that included incest. Solis discovered most of the Guatemalans came from one remote mountain village.

“This was truly a culture clash,” Solis says. “Cactus turned into a much more complicated and richer story.”

She spent months investigating and probing the disparities and injustices. The Hispanic population in town was made up largely of Mexicans from Chihuahua, who often made it difficult for the Central Americans, charging them higher prices on goods and services.

“They were really two different communities,” Solis says. “It was Mexican vs. Guatemalan inside the city.”

Conflicted over the possible consequences of her work, she made calls to her former bureau chief from The Journal. She explained her struggles – caring for the people she had come to know, and wanting to let the public know about the things she saw. He reminded her of what he always told her, to tell the truth regardless of the consequences.

Solis spent many nights on the phone with Deborah Turner, a young reporter with Al Dia, The Morning News’ Spanish-language newspaper. Turner, a 24-year-old former photography major who pushed for this story, would sit at home after work, struggling over each sentence until emotions overwhelmed her. She would call Solis for a cry session. They knew people would be hurt.

Turner was the first person at the paper who wanted to write the Cactus story. It started when she saw CNN's Lou Dobbs commenting on the ratio of illegal immigrants to legal residents in a small town in the Texas Panhandle. She grew up 45 minutes from Cactus and was always interested in “homegrown stories.” When editors dispatched her, they expected a brief story to add to the immigration pile. She thought it would be a “quick, three-day trip.”

But it grew. The short article became a long series with frequent follow-ups. The quick trip
turned into almost a year of investigation by a team of The Morning News reporters.

Only working at The News for seven months, Turner had never worked on such a multi-faceted story.

“I was overwhelmed with so many stories,” Turner says. She rode with local police to get a feel for the community. They pointed out the town prostitute, the local bars where entire families – kids in tow – partied until early in the morning. The mayor invited her to his son’s birthday party.

Not everyone in town was so ingratiating. At a riotous Quinceañera party, Turner had beer bottles thrown at her while she took pictures.

“I don’t know who threw them, but it was clearly intentional,” Turner says.

The turbulent Cactus story reminded Solis of a story she worked on as a Journal reporter in 1989. She grew very close to four Central American immigrant boys she covered. They eventually asked her to adopt them. Personally and journalistically she couldn’t do this.

She knew immigrants in Cactus grieved over their lost homeland and families. The soccer field and bars were their only release from back-breaking work at the meat-packing plant and from the pain of missing their families. Solis would hang out near the water tower and chat with workers as they kicked a ball around and drank beer.

THE AFTERMATH

Keeping in touch with her sources, she learned most left town before the story ran. “There is always a concern that you will bring harm to someone who is vulnerable as you go out reporting,” Solis says. “One factor that alleviated those concerns was that I wanted to shed light on the harsh conditions and help others.”

The day of the raid, Turner and Solis felt responsible. “Living in their shadow, I wanted to be a voice for them,” she says.

A plant manager woke up to the thumping of helicopter blades. Thinking it was just an accident involving CareFlite, he drifted back to sleep. The second helicopter circling above woke him up.

“I heard about the raid before I even got to work,” the manager says. “It’s a good thing that I brought my passport that day.”

Throughout the day, law enforcement officers searched the plant with assault rifles, lining up employees to check identification. Hours later, immigrants emerged from freezers and trash compactors, hoping authorities were gone.


“Cactus used to be respected in the area, now the town is seen as a really bad place,” Jeff Jenkins, city manager, says. “It will take time, but we will recover.”

Turner left The Morning News to freelance for the Austin American-Statesman before the story was published. “I didn’t want the raid,” she says. “I just wanted to tell their story.”

Before Solis was hired to cover border issues at The Journal, her bureau chief asked her if she could be tough and fair on the Hispanic community. She told him that any story she reported on, she would be able to remain objective.

She’s always known how important the immigration topic is to the country. Working on stories like Cactus, however, she realizes the price of a beat that can mean lonely, sorrowful nights.

Today, Solis still hits the streets to cover immigration and immigrant rights. It seems every week a new chapter in the story unfolds – questions about apartment rental in a suburb, a grocery store catering to immigrants, a bank that announces checking accounts without proving citizenship.

She bites her lip and pushes her feelings aside. She does her best to toe the line between knowing her subjects well and getting so emotionally involved she’s crying into her phone. When her editors call, though, and it’s time to turn the spotlight to something new and conflicting, she’s ready.

Stories like these don’t have just two sides, and the public needs to see it all. “It is up to the journalist to reveal these sides,” she says. Sometimes it’s hard, but Solis knows her job as a journalist. She can’t control what happens when she’s done. “Our role is to serve as a watchdog for the public.”

Jaclyn Gonzales contributed to this article.
The peg-legged pirate creeps down the hallway with his knife clenched between his teeth. His sleazy pack of comrades follows close behind like a pack of hungry hyenas. The terrifying group lurches down the hallway towards the receptionist at the Texas State Lottery office. Unruffled, she picks up the phone, “Group of insiders to discuss ownership of the lottery, sir...”

The pirates sprang from the mind of Ben Sargent, the political cartoonist at the Austin American-Statesman while mocking Governor Rick Perry’s support of privatizing the Texas State Lottery.

Ben Sargent is an anachronism. He is a cowboy–straight from the pages of the penny papers–succeeding in the digitized world of handheld PDAs, blogs and computer animation. His sense of humor, like his work ethic and appearance, is classic yet never dated. And, despite all the modern tools at his disposal, he crafts his cartoons today the same way he has for the last four decades: with pen and paper.

Sargent, a Pulitzer Prize-winner, has made his living poking fun at politicians in both Austin and Washington. A self-taught artist, he doesn’t take the business of stirring the political pot lightly.

In his office, Sargent, balding, gray-whiskered and sleeves rolled up, leans over his modest drafting table. Tilting his head, he studies his half-finished art. He reaches for a black architecture pen and sits back on his stool. He moves in, crosshatching the shading of the pirate’s hat with a syncopated rhythm.

Sargent has his pen on the political pulse of the country, caught up in the daily pace of current events. He looks like he stepped off a steam engine from a century past. The gold pocket watch dangling from his black vest swings like a pendulum as he slides across his office in ebony cowboy boots and a fuchsia and turquoise bowtie.

Nick Anderson, Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist for the Houston Chronicle and president-elect of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists, sees Sargent and others at newspapers today as part of a transitional generation of journalists.

“We’ve got one foot in the print era and one in the digital era, and cartoonists are no different,” he says.

THE MAN BEHIND THE WATCH

Light seeps into Sargent’s second-story window overlooking the Spanish oak and cypress trees lining Town Lake. Blocks from the capital building, Sargent’s office provides a buffered perspective of the political core of the state.

“Texas is unique,” he says with a chuckle. “It has a surreal craziness in its politics, a great place...
Sargent’s Pulitzer-winning cartoons from 1982.

Ben Sargent-

ALL RIGHT, CLASS, THAT WAS MR. SHEMANADA WITH THE NEW CREATION THEORY - NOW, MR. I-YO-DA-U WILL TELL US HOW THE WORLD WAS CREATED BY WADIA, THE OLD MAN UNDER THE EARTH, AFTER HIS DAUGHTER MARRIED THE WIND - PAY ATTENTION, NOW YOU’LL BE TESTED ON ALL THIS.

Sargent’s Pulitzer winning cartoons from 1982.

to be a cartoonist.”

Sargent’s drafting table lines the wall, sandwiched between the old and new tools of his trade: A No. 0 sable brush, India ink, and technical pens sit on one side while a scanner nests on a cart opposite. Each of his five weekly cartoons is sketched out on 8.5 x 11-inch Bristol board with a blue-tipped pencil first. He outlines and cross-hatches with technical pens. The solid space is then painted with sable brushed ink. He once removed errant scribbles by hand with white paint, but now he edits them with Photoshop.

Over his workspace, amid family photos, hangs evidence of two passions: an etching of a turn-of-the-century steam engine and a poster of antique type fonts. He is on the Austin Steam Train Association’s board and helped launch vintage train rides through historic Central Austin and the Hill Country. When Sargent isn’t working or riding the rails, he tinkers with his press and collection of 244 type fonts in his shop behind his South Austin home.

Sargent is married to Diane Holloway, the television critic for the Statesman. They met at the paper, fell in love and married in 1984. She admires his sharp wit, matching her own sense of humor. “We laugh like hyenas several times a day … the key to a good marriage,” she says.

She describes her husband as thoughtful, subdued and gentle. “The biggest misconception is that he’s some kind of fire-breathing radical,” she says. Critics might be surprised to find Sargent a devout Episcopalian and a lay minister at his church.

Sargent makes no secret which way his political views sway. Left, very left. His cartoons document such events as the Iran Contra affair and American hostages taken in Iran.

One of the award-winning cartoons dealing with creationism remains timeless. In it, an Arkansas biology teacher introduces her guest speakers to fully cover the debated topic.

“Creationism is one issue that never goes away,” Sargent says. “We could run that one again today.”

Also a Pulitzer finalist in 2001 and 2002, he has strong feelings about fair writing and reporting. But as a cartoonist, he frolics as a free outspoken cynic. “Back here, we don’t need to be objective.”

THE FUTURE OF POLITICAL CARTOONS

The New York World published the first political cartoons in 1884. A hundred years later, the number of staff cartoonists at newspapers peaked at approximately 275. Today fewer than 90 publications have a full-time editorial artist.

“Political cartooning is a shrinking area of journalism,” Sargent says.

In the late 1990s, Sargent was syndicated in more than 75 papers, now that number is less than 40. Managing editors are erasing political cartoonists from their staffs, but Sargent keeps working. Sargent reassures himself with the thought that as long as politics exist, there will be a need for political cartoons.

Anderson, his counterpart at the Houston Chronicle, pioneered a method of creating and coloring cartoons on advanced computer programs. While he stresses that cartoonists must evolve within the next decade, he admires Sargent, whose work inspires him.

“In addition to the powerful ideas, his artwork is wonderfully paradoxical – highly controlled yet whimsically comical,” Anderson says. “That’s tough to pull off.”

Sargent began studying journalism at Amarillo College, but graduated from the University of Texas School of Journalism in 1970, just as the “underground press” came of age. This helped shape his satire and humor; emulating the style of The Village Voice and Mad Magazine. He started his career as a reporter, first with the Long News Service and later with the United Press International and the Statesman, where he covered politics.

With his knack for drawing, he filled the slot of the only graphic artist at the Statesman, drawing maps and images before computers did it all. By 1974, Sargent had his dream job, drawing political cartoons full-time for arguably one of the most politically influential papers in the state.

One of Sargent’s favorite cartoonists is Patrick Oliphant, who immigrated from Australia in the 1960s. Oliphant, along with Jeff McNelly, Robert Crumb and Jules Feiffer, created more comic-like political cartoons.

“This influence helped establish a looser, funnier, style that wasn’t as serious as the cartoons from the ‘40s and ‘50s,” Sargent says.

During his career, Sargent has drawn nearly 8,000 cartoons. Of the five he creates weekly, two focus on local issues, the others tackle national politics.

The daily process of cartooning is pretty informal for Sargent. “Sometimes ideas come to me...
In the Beat

They are the most aggressive journalists on some of the tightest deadlines in the business. Fearless and full of initiative, these reporters flock toward danger when others run away. And yet, they manage to bring us the breaking overnight news that shocks us at our breakfast tables.
Holly Yan steps out of her 2002 silver Nissan Altima; her black boots crunch the oil-stained blacktop. One hundred feet away, the body of an unidentified man lies in a stream of blood. He’s the reason she’s out at 8 p.m. at this South Dallas pawn shop; his death pulling her from her comfortable cubicle after dark.

Fifteen minutes earlier, while sitting in the newsroom, a voice came across her police scanner: “There’s been a shooting on Martin Luther King Boulevard.”

Yan turned up the volume. Within a few minutes, the situation escalated into a homicide—and her big story of the night.

Big stories like this come frequently for Yan. As the only night reporter for The Dallas Morning News – in a city with more than 200 homicides each year – she sees her share of action. And she wouldn’t know about some of the crime without the help of her police scanner.

Yan, like many journalists who work the night shift, is thrown into a variety of situations each night she works. On a slow night, her job might only require her to write stories from press releases. On a busier night, she may cover one or two murders and robberies – heading off on assignments her editor deems worthy.

Over the years, the development of technology has made finding news stories a lot easier for night reporters.

Crime reporter Mary Jane Farmer of Sherman-Denison The Herald Democrat considers her police scanner one of her most essential tools for her job.

“I can’t do this job without my scanner, my cell phone, a pen and paper and a half a tank of gas in my car,” she says.

A freelance photojournalist for KDFW Fox 4 in Dallas, Terry Van Sickle Sr. relies heavily on his 13 scanners for news tips and his custom designed black Ford SUV that he turned into a Journalism-mobile.

With black tinted windows and specially designed public safety console that holds all his scanners in place, he races after stories at high speeds.

In 1985, Van Sickle was the first videographer in Dallas. Since then, he has used the advanced technology to get to disaster scenes first, often beating the police. Van Sickle was the first to arrive at the blazing seven-alarm fire at the Harvey’s Racquet Club apartment complex near Love Field. With a video camera in his right hand and a tripod in his left, “Mr. TV” was on the heels of Dallas firefighters as they kicked in doors searching for survivors.

“IT do the hard news,” says 47-year-old Van Sickle. “I understand how things can go bad, and I understand how the police and firemen work.”

With or without the help of a scanner, most night reporters wouldn’t last long in the industry without a fearless approach to their jobs.

For Yan – like many broadcast and print night reporters – the job is as diverse as they come in journalism. When the day reporters leave their posts at 6 p.m., it’s her job to pick up seven counties in North Texas. Her editors rely on her to keep tabs on everything under the stars. Tonight is no exception.

As the 25-year-old reporter scouts out the crime scene, she calls her editor. He gives her a deadline of 9:30 p.m. to have the story written. She looks at her watch; that’s a little more than an hour away.

She must be quick to think and act. She must coax information from reluctant witnesses in less time than most reporters have to get less sensitive interviews. She looks around for anyone she can interview and spots a man talking with the police. She makes her way through the gathering crowds to interview the potential source.

A young woman comes running onto the crime scene. Still wearing the white-collared blouse and navy bowtie from her job, she tries to get a better look.

“I just have to see if it’s him. I have to make sure,” she yells at the top of her lungs. “That’s my baby’s daddy.”

A police officer grabs her elbow and tries to calm her down. His supervisor tells him to have her sit and wait in the nearby patrol car.

“Now, who is it that you’re looking for?” he asks.

“Al-ex … Hud-son,” she manages to get out between sobs.

Near downtown on Central Expressway, James Lenamon, a photojournalist for the NBC affiliate in Dallas, KXAS-TV Channel 5, cannot rely only on a Blackberry. All he can carry to the scene is his heavy camera. With a cautious eye looking down the freeway, he photographs an over-turned 18-wheeler from several angles set in front of the Dallas skyline. The big-rig careened around a curve heading...
northbound on U.S. Highway 75 at Commerce, throwing its cargo of tile forward onto the street.

Standing in the middle of the exit ramp, he sees the police flares flickering and smells the burning metal. He says this is a popular corner for downed 18-wheelers as he glances up the freeway for another off kilter load.

“At night you have no one to cover your back.”

No matter how much fear these reporters seem to repress covering a story, the way they approach their work often places them in dangerous situations.

Robert Flagg is fully aware of the dangers his job entails, but he knows someone has to document history. His documentations were the first high-definition footage for WFAA Channel 8 in Dallas.

“Legislation is made based on people seeing what really happens in the Metroplex while they’re sleeping,” he says.

With his windows rolled down, he drives through some of the highest crime areas in the region. He once had a gun held to his face. As the perpetrator was about to carjack him, he heard the police scanners and thought Flagg was an undercover officer. Flagg told him he was a cameraman and suggested he go out and make an honest living, too. After the gunman ran away, Flagg went about his routine that night.

On this night, he’s drawn to a homicide at the Fox Hollow Apartments, where a 39-year-old man was face down in a pool of his own blood.

Residents at the complex wandered out of their apartments every 15 minutes after learning someone was “whacked,” hoping to be filmed for the A&E cable show The First 48, rumored to be in the neighborhood. Police forced other photographers to take their shots from the back alley to avoid tainting the crime scene, but Flagg arrived first and managed to get close to the mourners.

Approaching the scene scientifically, he hypothesized, “If I turn on this light what will happen?” Shootings are different than fires. With fires, he says, he can generally approach witnesses and victims without worry that the camera will cause more trauma, but filming someone who has lost a loved one requires special care.

“A real journalist respects his subject and environment,” he says.

Van Sickle, too, has had a few close calls. Four years ago, he pulled his car off the road under a bridge to clean ice from the windows. A Crown Victoria full of “gangbangers” drove by shooting six 9 mm rounds at him. The photographer survived, taking one in the buttocks.

“If you’re going to get shot…” he says with a chuckle.

To most night reporters, concerns for family plays a major part in their lives. While night reporters at newspapers usually end their workday no later than 10 or 11 p.m. – when the paper is put to bed – many photojournalists are just beginning their shifts. The unusual work schedules take a toll on social lives.

Lenamon’s 6-year-old son, Jordan, knows the dangers his dad faces while he works. Every day before he leaves, he tells his father to “be safe.” But for Lenamon, the overnight career has helped him be there for his two sons, Jared and Jordan, before and after school.

Flagg also has become more careful since nearly losing his life on the job. Since having a gun held to his face, he now makes sure he doesn't let his guard down at any point. But it hasn’t affected how he does his job. On top of fires and shootings, he also covers dangerous weather. He’s out before commuters in the morning, driving on icy roads and through flooded streets.

He knows the people who benefit most from his work – the viewers – might never understand the pitfalls of his job or appreciate his work.

“When the Home Depot man helps with a lawn project, you know the Home Depot man taught you something,” he says. “Home Depot
man, I appreciate you. I love you."

An hour north of Dallas, Mary Jane Farmer has spent the night driving around Sherman and Denison. Her scanner, clipped to the visor above her steering wheel, glows orange in the darkness as dispatchers crackle across the airwaves. On the beat five years, the 66-year-old grandmother still finds excitement just hanging around her sources even on slow nights.

Walking with a slight limp, a result of a hip replacement surgery she had almost a year and a half ago, she enters Station 2 of the Sherman Fire Department. Four firefighters sit in blue recliners watching *Ugly Betty* and waiting for their alarm to sound.

She's been on the night beat longer than anyone before her and has beaten authorities to accident scenes and been on their heels during shootouts and car chases. She's rarely in her newsroom; tonight she's only made it back to the office once to type up a story.

The firefighters treat her like family, offering her iced tea as she sits to chat with them about the night's activities. Within a few minutes though, an alarm sounds and everyone in the room bolts.

"Just lock up when you leave," the captain tells Farmer.

The night is slow for the former entrepreneur. Then a dispatch about a car accident downtown comes across the scanner. Racing to the scene, Farmer sees a green compact car smashed against a telephone pole. The victim, a young girl, is being lifted into the ambulance as officials radio for helicopter transportation.

"It must be serious," the reporter says as she takes out her camera and starts shooting the scene. "They only call for head traumas because we don't have that here."

Soaring off an adrenaline rush from the accident scene, she heads back up to Denison to the T-Bone's Bar and Grill.

At the bar, she listens to the music of a local country singer as he plays a rendition of Johnny Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues." Her leftover chicken fried steak sits in a Styrofoam box on the table. She'll take the scraps home for her dog tonight.

She leans back in her chair and closes her eyes, blocking out everything around her but the music. This is her time to unwind.

Back in Dallas, Holly Yan doesn't have time to think about unwinding. After leaving the homicide scene, she stops off at the Dallas police station to check the database for any other possible incidents at the pawn shop. Although her search comes up dry, it does provide details that she could include in her story. She glances at her watch and realizes she is cutting it close; she only has 45 minutes to finish and write the story.

Leaving the station, she hurriedly walks back to her car. On the sidewalk in front of Amuse Lounge on Lamar Street, her phone rings. It's the homicide investigator from the crime scene calling with the information she must have for her story. Almost dropping her black shoulder bag on the sidewalk, she hurriedly searches for her notebook and pen as he relays details from the scene.

Buckling up in her car, she gets a third phone call from her editor. He tells her of a car accident in the area that may involve an on-duty cop.

She hangs up and calls her sources to check into the accident. After confirming it is not too serious, she concentrates fully on the homicide piece. Racing back to her office to beat the clock, she parks hurriedly and runs down the hall to her desk. The time is 9:20. Only 10 minutes left to meet her deadline.

She takes a deep breath before starting to type.

"This isn't a job," she says. "It's a lifestyle."

— Holly Yan

*The Dallas Morning News*
A sultry, porcelain-like creature with raven hair emerges center stage from a smoke-filled cave. She seduces the random assortment of men and women sitting in the dimly lit room. It’s Sunday evening at The Lodge gentlemen’s club in Dallas. Oversized-flat-panel television screens broadcast an NBA game. Hunting trophies – elk, cheetah and hippo – adorn the walls. Stalking the floor is The Lodge’s newest manager, a character more prankster than ladies man.

Michael Precker used to work in a room filled with clacking computer keyboards and cramped cubicles, with piles of papers and demanding deadlines. Now he goes to work amid a sea of naked breasts and whiskey high balls. As The Lodge’s floor manager and public relations guru, Precker, a reporter with The Dallas Morning News for more than 25 years, admits he is still adjusting to the change.

“I had never spent a dime in a place like this,” Precker laughs. “I wouldn’t admit it if I had, but I hadn’t.”

A lifelong journalist, Precker recently left the only line of work he’d known to pursue, as they say in goodbye notes, “other interests.” With the threat of a shrinking industry weighing on him, what began as a harmless joke evolved into reality.

“A GENTLEMAN’S JOURNEY: Michael Precker Uncovered

By Amanda N. Stockton and Shawn Edwards
Photos by Bo Joplin and Mackenzie Rollins

A Gentlemen’s Journey: Michael Precker Uncovered

employee letter, came as no surprise to the veteran journalist. He began noticing shifts in management philosophy at the paper as early as 2000.

“They took away a lot of the serendipity of the feature department and channeled it into specific areas,” Precker says with a concerned chortle. “At 51, it was clear I wasn’t going to make it to retirement.”

Yet Precker stresses that he has nothing negative to say about The Morning News and that working there for 25 years was “a privilege.”

A self-described “creature of inertia,” Precker says he is usually weary of venturing outside his comfort zone. The story of his life, however seems to contradict this self-assessment.

Precker was in the seventh grade when the idea of becoming a “newspaperman” first occurred to him. He found himself watching baseball games and thinking up appropriate leads for the newspaper the following day. After high school, Precker received a bachelor’s in journalism from Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, and went on to achieve a master’s degree from Columbia University. Soon he was on assignment in Israel, part of an internship with The Associated Press.

Precker spent 11 years in Israel. Through his job, he traveled across the Middle East, countries like Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. He always called Israel home and still cherishes his time there.

“It’s the best cottage cheese in the world, you can play tennis all year and the women are beautiful!” Precker exclaims with a mischievous grin.

It was through softball in Israel that Precker met his wife of over 20 years.
Ruthie, petite with a large sense of humor, was the Israeli woman who caught his eye. They married three years later and now have two children.

“I was sure I’d convince him to become an Israeli,” Mrs. Precker says.

Much to her chagrin, Precker packed up the family and headed back to the United States in 1988 in search of a change of atmosphere. He also wanted to cover something new. He grew weary of writing about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

“The story starts to get repetitive,” Precker says, as if still exhausted by talk of Intifada. “I came to Dallas to work in a newsroom.”

Bill Marvel, a former reporting colleague and long-time friend of Precker’s, fondly recalls their shared past.

“He can do certain kinds of features that nobody else could do,” Marvel says. “I thought The News really lost something when they lost Mike.”

Ruth Precker currently teaches Hebrew at the University of North Texas and says she does not feel threatened by her husband’s new work environment.

“When you’re married so many years, you have a loyalty to each other. If the dancers will ruin it, it would never work anyway,” she says.

His current job security is an accident. Precker covered and followed up on several stories concerning club owner Dawn Rizos. Initially, he was intrigued by her charitable spirit and ethical practices – a rarity in her line of work. The two remained in contact for 15 years.

“He’s so friendly and down to earth and non-pretentious. And he’s got a great sense of humor,” Rizos says with a tambour that speaks to her Northern Louisiana roots.

In July of 2006, Precker was invited to a dinner at The Lodge to promote Operation Kindness, a no-kill animal shelter. Precker made light of his current situation at the newsroom.

“I kind of said facetiously to her, ‘You know The Morning News is kinda going downhill, can you train me to be a bartender?’”

Rizos responded to his joke with a serious job offer. With plans for expansion in the near future, she was actively searching for new help. She viewed Precker as the perfect candidate.

“This is ridiculous!” Precker thought to himself. “I’m Tom Friedman! I’m Dave Barry! I can’t sink to this!”

With the buyout on his mind, Precker took the offer more seriously. He thought about the four-day workweek. He fantasized about the projects he could work on in his free time. He realized he could put his skills to good use at the club. Precker accepted the position he calls “writer in residence” in late July, but because of delays at The Morning News, he didn’t start until January.

“He’s worth waiting for,” Rizos says simply. “His conversation skills alone are worth it.”

Marvel too, thinks Precker is the perfect man for the job.

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Precker gazes out from behind the bar of a place he never imagined he’d work.

“It’s funny to go from a place that’s very P.C., like a newsroom, to a place that isn’t.”
A tall, lanky East African dressed in a crisply starched shirt and pants stands in front of a class of graduate journalism students. His enthusiasm for learning is childlike, yet he offers wisdom of a sage. His mind is a seemingly endless vault of books, maps, stories and images. Stabbing at the air for emphasis, he fights with his words, not his fists.

"Do justice to yourselves," he implores. "You are the only one holding yourself back."

Behind him, a projector displays the haunting image of a starving girl under the patient gaze of a nearby vulture. The tiny girl leans her head on the parched earth. Her bloated belly and apparent ribcage show the familiar signs of famine in the Sudan.

Ndirangu David Wachanga, an international information transfer and systems professor at the University of North Texas, explains the girl is from a country bordering his home of Kenya. He tells how in 1993, photographer Kevin Carter, hoping the vulture would spread its wings, waited 20 minutes to capture the perfect image. When it didn't, Carter took the shot and chased the bird away. Carter came under fire for not helping the girl and took his own life shortly after winning the Pulitzer Prize for the photo in 1994.

At one time, Wachanga and other African students raised their fists in protest against Kenyan officials' abuse of public monies. He saw friends die. Today he uses a pen as his sword to touch society's conscience, writing for several African newspapers.

In East African Standard, Kenya's oldest newspaper, Wachanga writes about corruption in Kenya and the journalist's role in exposing it. "It has been argued that journalists, like scientists, are not advocates, but seekers of truth. And such investigative prowess is emerging in the Kenyan media. We, arguably, owe a great gratitude to the media for exposing the socio-political stench punctuating our society."

David, as he's called in America, inspires and challenges future journalists by introducing them to a wider view of the world wherein they can stretch their minds. Critical thinkers, he says, make better journalists.

“Journalists aren’t safe. How many have died for asking too many questions?”

— Ana Veljkovic, Serbian reporter
“We need to understand terrorists,” he says. “What goes on in the psychology of a person who laces their body with explosives and then goes to the maternity ward? We have to understand the outsiders, stop compartmentalizing ourselves into ‘us vs. them.’”

He invites other foreign journalists to share with his students their stories from the frontline of new and struggling democracies.

The principles of democracy provide for certain ideals: free speech, religious freedom, a free press and the rights to assemble peaceably and petition the government for redress of grievances. Though not perfect, its ideals ensure many voices are heard, even those radically different from popular belief. An unhindered press gives voice to the voiceless and serves as a government watchdog.

For foreign journalists such as Ana Veljkovic of Serbia and Komla Hanson Mastro of Togo, the free press is a revered role – one they are committed to fighting through writing when they return to their home countries.

SERBIA

Ana Veljkovic pours hot Turkish coffee from a bubbling pan on her stovetop, making her visitor welcome. The petite young woman with chestnut hair and enormous brown eyes is warm, friendly and charming. Her sparkling eyes and dimpled smile don’t reveal the darkness she experienced living in Serbia. Ana has witnessed far more than her 26 years warrant. Her delicate frame belies the strength and power she possesses.

Ana was set to graduate high school in 1999, when the NATO bombing campaign began. She thought the blasts would only last for a day, but bombs rained down on Belgrade for 78 days in an effort to drive Milosevic from power.

Ana admits she has this “crazy strength. I’m going to live no matter what.” Perhaps it was her parents who showed her how to survive. Ana softly recalls the first day of bombings, “My family and I went to the underground shelter. It was really cold.” She was afraid and wanted to flee to her uncle’s home in Austria.

under four country names, including the Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

As a teenager, Ana joined Serbian students demonstrating against the brutal reign of dictator Slobodan Milosevic and the government-controlled media. She wore the resistance movement emblem – a fist raised in protest – on her jacket which could mean beatings and possibly even death if caught wearing. She was never safe.

Before long, the world learned of the ethnic cleansing against Muslims and other “non-Serbs” in Kosovo. Both the brutal reign of Milosevic and the economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations brought hardship to the Serbian people. Food was scarce.

Ana’s mother would go to the market in the early hours to purchase a bottle of milk or bunch of celery. She’d stand in line for hours to bring home a loaf of bread for her family. The country’s mood was one of profound sadness, she says. “You knew it was evil all around in our country,” Ana recalls. “Things were so bad for people under Milosevic.”

During Milosevic’s reign, the black market bloomed. Unemployment “officially” ran 30 percent although independent sources show it as high as 60 percent. Television and radio played pro-Milosevic propaganda.

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During the mid 1960s, a Lamar College student, overjoyed by her marriage to a young soldier, went to the local paper, *The Beaumont Enterprise*, with a wedding photo for the society page. After all, she was from a prominent family and that’s what all socialites did. But the bride was also black and, because this was at a time when the only space in the paper reserved for blacks was for crime stories, she was turned away.

At the time, Lamar students were becoming more politically aware and began speaking out about the war in the jungles of Vietnam and the Civil Rights Movement in the streets of southern cities like Selma and Birmingham, Alabama. "The students were seen as anti-war during a time when it was favorable to be for the war in the South, especially in Texas," Betty Brink says of the era.

While the students held campus protests, word of *The Enterprise’s* refusal to print the newlywed’s photo spread. The response was simple: In a student led boycott, both blacks and whites canceled their subscriptions and stopped patronizing businesses that advertised in the paper.

Although the paper was short lived, it had quite an impact," Brink reflects. College underground papers were the seeds from which alternative weeklies grew. Now, every Wednesday in Dallas, 100,000 copies of the *Dallas Observer* hit the stands, while in Fort Worth, 60,000 copies of the *Weekly* go out on Thursdays.

Gayle Reaves, a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer and *Weekly* editor, says in urban areas alternative newspapers are the biggest competition for the dailies. And the writers all agree on one thing: they get to write whatever they want. Reaves attributes this to the fact that there are no corporate advertisers to anger over content. "At a daily paper, if major ads are pulled, it’s a possibility reporters can be lost," she says. "In some ways, it’s easier for weeklies to be brave."

Dallas Mayor Laura Miller, a former journalist, says working for an alternative was the greatest job she ever had. "There were no sacred cows – none," says Mayor Miller. "That doesn’t happen at a daily, or at least not that I’ve seen, and I worked as a journalist for 25 years before becoming an elected official."

With more time and fewer encumbrances, writers are allowed more space and freedom to roam. "Alternatives can write with more authority and deliver more color and voice," says Reaves.

Reader surveys are not conducted at the *Weekly*, but letters to the editor and phone calls that Reaves receives let her know exactly who is reading. "The public has a direct connection to me," she says. "There isn’t a hierarchy they need to go through."

Readers vary from young people who want to know which local bands to see, to the movers and shakers and people who care about civic life at town hall and the courthouse. "But many read it because it’s entertaining," boasts Reaves. "We have funny columnists."

Weekly food column "Chow, Baby" delivers a sassy and humorous review of Fort Worth restaurants ranging from taco stands to steak houses. Written in third person in somewhat of a southern, urban tone (with many parenthetical references and afterthoughts), "Chow, Baby" uses vivid descriptions of atmosphere, aroma and flavor that readers can see, hear, smell and taste.
“One of the most important things a journalist can do for the public is to tell stories as honestly as possible. It can save people ten years of therapy.”

– Matt Pulle, Dallas Observer

The Observer's column "Girl on Top," a strategy by owners Village Voice to pull in more female readers, is Andrea Grimes' baby. Written in an observant and humorous manner that warrants many marriage proposals from readers, Grimes started the column in June 2006 in the months following the outrage from the Highland Park community over the feature "Rich Kids Behaving Badly."

After the story broke spotlighting the under-aged partying Highland Park teens, more hate mail than ever received in the Observer's history came pouring in. "I knew for sure that I'd be fired but my editor simply told me that I had just gotten to them," says Grimes, who wears a tiny stud in her nose and pink streaks in her hair.

Not all weeklies are liberal or slanted, says Reaves. "The impression of the general public has been that, but it's not true," she says. "Our stories will stand up anywhere. They are fair and accurate, and we have the awards to back it up."

Reaves' feature "Accounting for Anguish" not only won the paper an Association of Alternatives award for Business Reporting in 2003, it also helped open the doors to the investigation that lead to the Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing by MCI WorldCom.

Brink scoffs at the need to balance stories. "There are some stories that just don't have balance," she says. "There are bad people and there are bad institutions in this world. I am ... disappointed with the mainstream papers. They fail at questioning authority while they should be the watch dogs for the community."

The Dallas Morning News' Kent Fischer says, "We're different breeds and we serve different audiences under different business models. What's right for alternative weeklies is right for them."

Gene Zipperlen, a Fort Worth Star-Telegram copy editor who also teaches his craft to students at the University of North Texas says, "Dailies cover a lot of in-and-out stories like city hall and county commissioner meetings but neglect investigative reporting. Weeklies have a much narrower scope and write about things that matter to the readership. As a result, there's a lot of muckraking."

While he admires the alternative's conversational language, he thinks alternative writers are understaffed and underpaid and the best are not always hired to do the job. "The exception was Dan Malone," he says of the Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Reaves wooed away from The Morning News.

In Fort Worth, Reaves says Dan Malone's stories about accused pedophile Wirt Norris provided authorities with valuable information. For decades, allegations of child molestation against Norris, a real estate agent and former Olympic diving coach, had circulated around Fort Worth. It wasn't until a family of a lawyer was affected that law enforcement started investigating. Malone's series won a Katie for investigative reporting in 2005. "It was a huge public service," Reaves says.

After working a few years as a journalist for alternative weeklies in Nashville, Tennessee, Matt Pulle joined the Dallas Observer.

In his feature "Split Decision," Pulle wrote in great detail about the Preston Hollow Elementary school principal who allowed black and Hispanic students to be placed in English as a Second Language classes unnecessarily while white children were kept together in general education classes, creating a modern-day segregated school where President George W. Bush used to live. Pulle felt that The Dallas Morning News didn't give it the coverage it deserved.

"If it weren't for the Observer, tons of important stories would not be told," Pulle says. His first feature for the Observer, "We Hate your Guts," exposed conditions in a local jail and led to a U.S. Justice Department investigation, which determined that conditions at the jail violated inmates' constitutional rights.

Families of inmates thanked him for listening when no one else would. "One of the most important things a journalist can do for the public is to tell stories as honestly as possible," Pulle says. "It can save people 10 years of therapy."

Writing for an alternative also means writing with an attitude of irreverence. "If someone says the F-word, I write the F-word," says Brink. Fort
Worth socialites can't stand that attitude. “They have a philosophy that says not to speak badly of the city and feel that we are putting a black mark on Fort Worth,” says Brink. “The greatest thing about democracy is speaking out.”

On the other hand, writing for alternatives also has its downside, Brink says. “There’s a short budget string and we have a hard time getting raises,” she says.

Pulle’s wallet was also affected by working for an alternative paper in his first years as a journalist. When he worked for the Nashville in Review, staff would be told not to cash the checks received on Friday until Monday. He also said that publications were infrequent and they weren’t always taken seriously. And sometimes they carried things too far.

The relationship between the advertising department and editorial department at the Weekly is tense, at best.

“Traditionally there has always been tension between editorial and advertising because our goals are so different. We expose the truth in the community while the advertising department acts as cheerleaders promoting the community,” says Brink. “We’ll take ads from anybody,” says Grimes. “The whole business of acquiring ads is shady anyway. We might as well go all the way with it.”

Not only do alternative papers deliver the news with a splash of added flavor and variety, they also offer to those who choose to live an “alternative lifestyle” a way to do so through the personal ads that appear in the back of the paper.

“Living in a large, metropolitan city means a wide range of lifestyle choices,” says Dallas Observer advertising director Amy Jones. “Adults in America have choices – we provide an outlet for them to make those choices.”

Reaves’ decision to leave The Dallas Morning News to join the Weekly, wasn’t difficult. She didn’t like how management treated the staff and was tired of sacred cows. “I didn’t want to become bitter,” says Reaves, whose international series at The Dallas Morning News about violence against women earned her a Pulitzer Prize for international reporting in 1994. “It was a great ride, and I am very proud of the work done by the great journalists there.”

But those racy ads in the Weekly were something that she had to reconcile before accepting the job. As a feminist, Reaves has a bigger problem with ads depicting women suggestively to sell tires but deciding which ads run, she says, is not up to her. “Working for a paper that takes ads from companies like Exxon is just as morally reprehensible,” Reaves says. “Where else could I write what I wanted?” Decision made.
Dear Editor,

By Sara Southerland and Jaclyn Gonzales

For years journalists have been called the watchdogs of society. They seek to keep governments accountable and the public informed. When, in today’s media, Anna Nicole Smith’s death gets more coverage than a possible nuclear crisis in the East, many are left wondering who can keep the media accountable. Some say that’s the role of bloggers, but letter writers have been doing the job for years. We find out what makes readers want to have their say.

**THE SOCIAL REFORMER**

“Mainstream media is very institutionalized and biased,” says Tammy Swofford, letter writer to The Dallas Morning News. “The future is getting to be in your better blogs; they are going to keep mainstream media honest in the end.”

In addition to routinely writing letters, Swofford has kept a daily blog for over two years.

“I appreciate that my opinion may be wrong,” Swofford says, “but at least I have the opportunity to express it.”

A recovery room nurse at Baylor Medical Center at Irving, Swofford first responded to a column on abortion.

“It really gave me a buzz to see my name in print,” Swofford says. “Some people are interested in politics, others in religion.”

“I’m more interested in social issues,” she says. “Women’s health, women’s issues, social decay, moral issues, or the lack thereof.”

One letter to The Morning News was in response to an article on stem cell research. Swofford’s children, both adopted, were born of a mother who had originally planned on an abortion. “I wrote about how a 225 pound stem cell was living in my home,” Swofford says. “The stem cell became a baby and then a boy, soon a teenager and then a 225 pound man.”

Swofford says The Morning News has a pool of regular letter writers.

“We’re concise, we stay within the boundaries of good taste, and have good reasoning skills,” Swofford says. “We also have restraint in our freedom of speech. Too many people try to evoke an emotional response instead of presenting the facts and letting people decide for themselves.”

Through the dozens of letters she’s written, Swofford is most grateful for the newly developed friendships.

**THE GOOD SAMARITAN**

At age 77, Stephen Love sits in front of the computer more often than his wife likes. He is learning how to blog. With a desire to communicate with others about politics, Love frequently writes letters to The Dallas Morning News.

Love took to letter writing in 2000, the year he ran for the U.S. House of Representatives. Campaign funds were hard to come by, so Love turned to the letters page to state his position on issues and acquire visibility.

“It is a natural fear to put your work on a public scale,” Love says. “Love hopes his writing may alleviate anxieties for others who want to speak up.

Though Love went to seminary at Southern Methodist University and spent 25 years in the ministry, he believes that his higher calling is to serve the public. “We have the responsibility to say something,” says Love.

Journalists are the fourth branch of government, according to Love. “If journalists aren’t doing their job, then the other branches do not work,” Love says.

He feels that journalists have the need to tell both sides, but sometimes in attempts at unbiased news, flaws remain. “It drives me nuts when these people go off half-baked!” exclaims Love in regards to columnists and reporters that exhibit a lack of diligence.

“I take the battle to the enemy,” Love says. “You can’t do that in your backyard.”

**THE RETIRED JOURNALIST**

Chuck Bloom, who has written over 2,000 columns in his career, recently clarified on his blog that he is not the father of Anna Nicole Smith’s baby. Whew.

“The neat thing about newspapers is that they allow such an open public forum,” letter writer Chuck Bloom says. “You don’t get that chance on television or radio because they are highly censored media outlets and have such little time to devote to news anyway.”


Since then, Bloom has hopped around Texas on a hard journalism spree, performing tasks from sweeping newsroom floors and delivering papers to editing and publishing.

Now, he primarily responds to articles in The Dallas Morning News. Bloom says the key to writing a letter is to write short and to make a point in less than 250 words.

“It has to be something you’re passionate about,” Bloom says. “You have to address the subject in depth. People who bitch are a dime-a-dozen, but people who complain and can make a very good point go to the head of the class.”

Bloom says he writes about all sorts of things: the birth and death of his granddaughter, politics, baseball, Plano and stupid, funny stuff.

“It lets others know that you have an opinion,” Bloom says. “Letters to the editor are the most read part of newspapers; people are dying to know what other people are saying and thinking.”

Now retired, Bloom calls himself the “house husband.” He does the cooking, shopping and is even writing a cookbook. When he’s not playing Mr. Mom, he does part-time editing for a newspaper in Aledo, Texas.

“If something I wrote changed somebody’s mind then there is nothing greater that can be accomplished,” Bloom says. “I have an opinion and I’ve gotten you to agree with me. That’s the power of ideas.”

I appreciate that my opinion may be wrong, but at least I have the opportunity to express it.”

— Tammy Swofford, frequent letter writer
The dry, windy air skims across a sea of wheat fields, the entering and exiting views of Booker, a small Texas Panhandle town about seven miles from the Oklahoma border. The residents of this community are farmers, ranchers and oil field workers. All 1,300 are spread out on homesteads, working the land, just as they have for generations.

Serving the area is a hub of information: The Booker News. This weekly eight-page newspaper has a circulation of 1,100, including newsstand copies. The husband and wife team covers school events, community news and issues about surrounding cities. Since buying the paper 10 years ago, Kayla Parvin writes most of the stories and Jerry Parvin heads up production. Insulated from big city life and ensuing technology, Jerry and Kayla Parvin are not accustomed to fast changes.

“I don’t like change, and I’m not that good with computers,” Jerry Parvin says.

Until last April, the Parvins produced the paper the old-fashioned way: literally cutting and pasting with an Exacto knife and rubber cement. They changed to computerized pagination not by choice, but by necessity. Paste-up, a dinosaur production by modern technology standards, involves cutting out sections of printed copy and pasting them together on light boards, similar to working a puzzle. After gluing their mock-up of the paper, the Parvins took the pasted pages to the nearest printing press, 15 miles away in Perryton, Texas, at The Perryton Herald.

During one of their trips to the printer early last year, Kayla Parvin received the shock of her life. She found the printing press was shutting down and could no longer print The Booker News. “The Perryton Herald only gave us a two-week notice,” Kayla Parvin says. “That was pretty hard to take.”

Kayla Parvin says that The Perryton Herald used to print about 14 different papers from surrounding areas, including Spearman, Canadian, Fritch, Booker and one in Liberal, Kan. “But they didn’t keep their press updated,” Kay-

“I don’t like change, and I’m not that good with computers.”

— Jerry Parvin, The Booker News

Toby Brooks, a business associate who worked for Community Printers, helped them make the transition from paste-up to pagination. “I found out that pagination was amazingly easy, and it only took us about two weeks to really get the hang of it,” Jerry Parvin says.

But with the ease of updated production, technology comes with a price. Jerry Parvin says printing costs have increased from $850 a month to $1,300 a month. “It’s taken its toll,” Kayla Parvin says. “We’re just trying to compensate by increasing the advertising sales.”

Despite the monetary burden of going digital, the Parvins are now saving time. Before the transition, the paper would come out each Thursday with a 1 p.m. deadline on each Wednesday because they had to drive the paper to the printer. Now, their deadline is at 7 p.m. Wednesday, as they have to upload their electronic layout to a server. They have delivery service back to their newspaper office early Thursday mornings giving them time to get the papers out on the stands and into the community earlier. The look and size of the paper is also different. While the length is still the same, each page is 2.5 inches narrower, providing a more contemporary newspaper style.

“It is now the same size as The New York Times and other major papers, so it gives us a more professional look,” Kayla Parvin says.

With all this change, the Parvins say they are motivated to keep the newspaper up-to-date and make even more changes as the need arises. “An online paper might be the next technological step for us,” Kayla mentions with a smile.
Going to the Chapel

Continued from page 9

news business in 2004 and currently does wedding photography full-time.

"The real pictures are alive," he says.

Taking wedding pictures may sound like a fairly stress-free job, but as photographer Lake explains, it's a serious business that requires skill and training.

"There's a wrong way to do it," she says. "Some photographers go in there and use their camera like it's a machine gun. They just shoot and shoot and shoot and hope that they get something good … There's a lot of thought that goes into anticipating the moment. That's what separates the okay photographers from the really great ones."

Lake credits much of her success to her news background.

"If I didn't have my degree and experience with photojournalism, I wouldn't be able to handle the stress that there is with weddings," says Lake, a graduate of the University of Texas with a bachelor's degree in journalism.

Having a unique, personalized photo album that documents the story of your wedding from beginning to end is another bonus of hiring a photojournalist. Many photographers even have the flexibility to offer their clients different styles of photo albums that look more like a magazine than traditional styles.

"When you look at your parents' and my parents' wedding albums, they would probably look the same," says Lowrance.

Unfortunately, your very own personal paparazzi for the big day doesn't come cheap. Wedding photojournalists provide their services starting around $1,000 and up.

"It's overpriced," says Wright. "The minimum I've seen is $1,000 and some start at $2,000."

Nguyen says photojournalists dedicate more time to each event – thus the higher price tag.

"It will take a lot less time to line people up and take their picture – you need more time for photojournalism," he says. "That's why we are so expensive."

Although some in the industry write off wedding photojournalism as a trend that will become less popular with time, Lake thinks differently.

"Wedding photojournalism is like rock-n-roll or blue jeans," she says.

"It might be a trend, but it's here to stay." C

Q&A with Evan Smith

Continued from page 36

and like everybody else. I think there are still smart, committed readers out there who, if you respect their intelligence, will give you a big portion of their day. You can count the number of magazines who do the sort of stuff we do on two hands, with fingers left over.

Q: Why aren't other publications following this model then, do you think?
A: I think newspapers have a real problem understanding what they are in an environment in which you have cable news and the crawl and the internet. When I pick up the Statesman or The Morning News and I see what's on the front page, it's not anything I didn't already know.

The cost structure of magazines is more problematic. They have to do more of what they do best. I believe magazines have the opportunity as journals of opinion to have strong points of view about people and issues. It is incumbent upon everybody who expresses an opinion in a journalistic context to be accurate and fair and thorough, but having a strong point of view is not a problem for me. The most successful media institutions are not going "we can't have a point of view."

Most publications play within a few yards of midfield. Nobody wants to throw the ball into the endzone because they're afraid of being intercepted. I just think of Doug Flutie.

Q: What is Texas Monthly's point of view?
A: Politically, all over the map. If you ask liberals, we're too conservative. If you ask conservatives, we're too liberal. That sounds good to me. Institutionally, it's a menu of voices. We confuse people. We surprise people. We're willing to punch sacred cows. Since the magazine started in 1973, that's always been the Texas Monthly style.

Q: What are some of the magazines you admire personally?
A: I'm crazy about Runner's World. David Willey does a super job of exploiting the material available to him and pushing the boundaries in order to make the most of every issue.

I'm a really big fan of Wired. The digital world is something where I'm an amateur, observing. When you look at that magazine, you understand so much about the world. Their knowledge is just poring off every page and the packaging is so fabulous. They spend as much time thinking about a little thing as a big thing. Most magazines don't have the guts to traffic in ideas.

Q: Where does your magazine fit in the Texas literary and journalistic tradition?
A: We have a paid readership of 300,000 in a state of 23 million plus. We're not for everybody. I think we're publishing literary nonfiction. Storytelling ought to be literary. So I imagine not everyone agrees, but I hope we're in a leadership position.

Q: People must ask you for jobs constantly. How do you deal with that?
A: Always. First I tell them something that happens to be true – we don't have a lot of turnover. But good people always find jobs. Good people find jobs in bad times. There are not enough smart, self-motivated, ambitious, talented people with a great facility for language and great ideas. If you find those set of qualities in somebody, you find a way to hire them.

Q: What kind of mistakes have you made in your time as editor?
A: I regret things everyday, but I'm a tomorrow person. This is a business where you can only control the outcome so much. I can't make people go buy a magazine. All I can do is make a great magazine and hope they buy it. You're going to guess wrong. You're going to educated-guess wrong. The trick is: be right more often than you're wrong. C
HAVING IT ALL, WITH HELP

“I am here by myself with my husband,” says Rega, who came from Venezuela with her husband five years ago. She does not have any immediate family members here so her husband takes care of the children while she is at work.

Rega's husband works a 9-to-5 job as an engineer so she tries to leave things ready for him before she goes to work. She says he is very supportive of her and her demanding position with strange working hours.

“I doubt I would have been able to do this alone, marriage is a two-person commitment,” she says.

Lance Brown, Campos’ husband, works part time as a sports announcer for Irving Community Television.

“He is kind of like a Mr. Mom,” Campos says, adding that for the last seven years, her husband has been the primary care-giver for their sons, complete with all the driving duties that entails.

Brown scaled back his work load so that he could spend time with their sons to allow Campos time to further her career.

“It was an easy decision to make,” says Brown. “I am married to the anchor for the 5 and 10 p.m. newscasts. We are exceedingly fortunate for her to be where she is and she deserves everything she has accomplished.

“She is not a diva and has worked very hard to get what she has.”

As proud as he is, he and the boys don't often watch Campos on television.

“The news is so depressing to watch,” says Brown. “If a story comes on that is depressing, I will quickly change the channel to something like The Simpsons so I can laugh.”

Campos and Rega share different aspirations when it comes to how they want to finish their careers. Rega said she would love to take a network job, if the opportunity were to present itself.

“It is my dream to be at the network,” she says. “We all want that.”

Campos, on the other hand, is happy to be right where she has been since 1984, when she joined WFAA Channel 8, ABC affiliate. She once had the opportunity to leave Dallas and join the network, but decided to stay because she knew she wanted a family and a life here.

Like most high-powered jobs, these journalist mothers hear from others that they sacrifice too much for either their careers or their families. “Sacrifice” is a word Campos does not like to throw around.

“I don't believe in that word. I don't like using 'sacrifice,' I think it is negative. 'Choices,' I have made choices, and they have been difficult.

“I always knew I wanted to do the 10 o'clock news but I knew that when I started doing it, it would come at a time when I really wouldn't want to do it and that is basically true. I started doing it when my kids were six and they are 13 now so it has been seven years. That has been the most difficult thing, not being there at night to tuck them in.”

For all three journalists, home life will continue to compete with work life for precious time. Whatever career aspirations these moms may have, they all agree motherhood will continue to be the greatest source of joy in their lives.

“It is still a balance, a juggling act,” Campos says. “I won't kid anyone that wants to be a mother. I like to tell young women especially that yes you can have it all; you just can’t have it all at once.”

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The Art of Being Ben Sargent

Continued from page 17

fully blown, and they pop," he says. "Other times I sweat it out." As part of the editorial team, he meets frequently with editors to discuss ideas. "Talking about the issues helps me to see how I feel about them and then it's easier to translate the idea on paper," Sargent says.

Sargent claims he doesn't have a "favorite" character to draw. "The people I'm doing the most are my favorites," he says. "The more I do them, the more I'm able to develop the caricatures, whether it's the president or the governor."

When Governor Bush became President Bush, Sargent was well ahead of the rest, with six years of practice drawing him in Texas. "Most cartoonists thought that Bush Senior and George W. looked alike, but really they look very different," Sargent calls the president "monkey boy," portraying him as a chimp in his cartoons.

Sargent may anger some and tickle others, but either way he's making people think about the world around them. Sargent says, "If you're going to dish it out, you've got to be able to take it."

Bruce Hight, an editorial writer, has worked with Sargent for 30 years. "Regardless of the issues or their political standing," Hight says, "good cartoons are most effective when they are puncturing the pomposity, self-pity or hypocrisy of their target." He says you can find both these qualities just about anywhere you look in public life.

"I know that people constantly want to buy copies of what he does, and others would like to punch his lights out. His criticism would be surprised at just how nice of a man he is," Hight says.

A LEGACY

Sargent grew up in a newspaper family. He read cartoons from the New Yorker as a child. Both of his parents worked for the Amarillo Globe-News in the Texas Panhandle. Beginning at age 14, he worked summers as a dispatch runner and later as a proofreader.

A passion for type and the written word lies within his childhood memories. Sargent and his younger brother Ed, deputy copy chief at The Dallas Morning News, began printing when they were kids.

"This is how we both got interested in journalism," he says.

Sargent's ink-stained fingers are leaving an imprint on the pages of history.

Public figures, controversies, national crises, wars, scandals and political cover-ups are as sure to be news as the sun is to set each evening over the capital. Whether readers are gritting their teeth or snickering, this trusty throwback keeps tradition tugged close to his heart—behind his pocket watch.

A Gentleman's Journey:
Michael Precker Uncovered

Continued from page 23

"It requires diplomacy, tact and a good deal of common sense," Marvel says. "Mike has all those qualities. He's solidly grounded in realism."

The job has also proved beneficial for Precker. "My goal was to find a PR job or something involving writing and creativity but also focus on the qualities just about anywhere you look in public life."

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He is fond of his new co-workers, who say the feeling is mutual. Paige Reed, a platinum blonde, bright-eyed Lodge dancer and bartender, notices Precker's eagerness to learn. She is confident he will come to the girls' aid if a situation calls for it. People here seem to know he will do the right thing. "We've had some really good and not so good managers," Reed says. "He's one of the most respectful."

Precker splits his days between downstairs and upstairs. Downstairs, he's busy manning the floor, making sure everything runs smoothly. He has also begun learning the ins and outs of tending bar.

Upstairs, Precker busies himself with press releases, letters to the editor from Rizos and plans for a new menu design.

"I've only changed one word," says Rizos, in reference to Precker's work.

Precker recalls his previous boss breaking the news of downsizing by saying "everyone should be ready for dynamic change."

"For better or for worse," Precker says, "this is a dynamic change."

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MEMBER: CIN,REED, CDC
But on the second day, her parents made Turkish coffee and meat-filled squash by lighting alcohol-soaked cotton in a makeshift Bunsen burner. She knew she would be OK. They left their windows wide open to keep glass from shattering. Ana read books, met with friends and went to parties, in an attempt to continue a normal life.

She completed her final school paper by candlelight, writing in longhand. When bomb sirens warned of possible attack, Ana would leave the public library and perch on a bench outside the building, which was just as dangerous. After the sirens subsided she’d return to her studies. Ana wondered, “Why should one five-year-old die to get Milosevic?” Fear of being killed by a bomb didn’t deter her.

And fear does not deter her today as she carries out her journalistic mission to be a watchdog of the Serbian government.

While the Serbian people voted Milosevic out of power in 2000, change has happened slowly in Serbia. Journalists still face threats from the new government, and Ana admits not much is different with democracy.

At a 2005 press conference, Ana asked Petar Lazarevic, press secretary for Serbian Investment Minister Velimir Ilic, why charges against Milosevic’s son were dropped. Lazarevic got in Ana’s face, shouting expletives and threats.

“He said he’d kill B92’s editor. We had him on tape,” Ana says.

Ilic wasn’t present when his press secretary threatened her, but Ana pressed him when he appeared.

“I will always ask the question,” she says. “I’m not rude, but I stay with the line of questioning.”

Ilic’s response was to tell her she was “sick” and “in need of psychiatric help,” warning her not to get “in our way,” she says. His remarks then turned sexist, saying she’d never find a husband if she acted that way.

“Journalists aren’t safe. How many have died for asking too many questions?” Ana says.

Her American experience has toughened her. She says she now knows there is no question she cannot ask. “I will go for it,” she says, “with more fight.”

TOGO

Komla Hanson Masro, Hans to American colleagues, is a radio broadcaster from Togo, a West African country sandwiched between Ghana on the west and Benin on the east. It sits on the Slave Coast, infamous for European traders selling people into slavery during the 17th century.

Though 30, Hans looks more like a preppy college student than a seasoned broadcaster. In class, he’s quiet, but once a gesture of communication is made, his dark-chocolate brown eyes light up and a bright white smile emerges.

He speaks English with a thick French accent and easily switches from English to French to Spanish. Hans is fluent in four African dialects.

As a young boy growing up in Lomé, Togo, Hans played radio sportscaster with his friends. Radio, like a young romance, will always remain his first love. It provides the ability to transport news via cell phone from remote places.

Togo became officially independent from France in 1960, but democracy has been illusive for the Togolese. Grabs for power, fraudulent voting practices, military attacks on peaceful protesters, colonialism and tyrannical government leaders have kept the country far from peace.

“You’re never alone,” Hans says. Despite the deep roots of community, living conditions are tough in Togo. The average life expectancy is only 51 years for men and 55 years for women. Hans has struggled with harsh weather, floods and an entirely different economic, political and educational system, yet he possesses a strength he calls his “warrior mentality,” the power to press on.

When he returns home, Hans will use his graduate degree and American experience to build a stronger community for his ancestors, family and one-year-old son.

“I have a sacred mission to enlighten the public, to inform the community of their rights,” Hans says. As a journalist he will seek the truth because his people have a democratic right to know.

“Democracy is key for all African crises. When there is democracy, a real parliament representing the whole community, then the government becomes answerable and accountable to the people,” Hans says.

The press, he believes, is key for health care education, teaching people how to protect themselves from HIV transmission and other life-threatening diseases. Hans admits that Togo still has remote villages where injustice and old ways of thinking prevail.

His mission won’t be easy.
Allen Rich – editor, writer, photographer and advertising sales manager for the North Texas E-News – has not had a day off in about a year. In Fannin County near Sherman, Texas, there’s always a Little League game, library display or water quality issue to cover. When the 100-year-old Bonham Daily Favorite folded in 2002, the E-News became the source of daily news in Bonham, Texas.

His one-man online newspaper has him posting basketball scores until 3 a.m. and then waking up before 10 a.m. to start reporting again – seven days a week. In the same place where Sam Rayburn, the longest-serving Speaker of the House in U.S. history died with only $15,000 in savings, Allen Rich sold his cattle to survive as a journalist.

Reporting and editing has become his life, but it didn’t start that way. After quitting his job as an air traffic controller in 1990, he moved back to his hometown where he worked as a bank teller and a part-time cattleman for five years. In 1995, he saw an ad for a job that excited him – a part-time sports writer for the Favorite. But it didn’t last long – after being promoted to editor, he quit over disputes with management.

Then in 2002, he received the call to edit the E-News. It was a chance to create a digital version of the hometown newspaper he missed. The call was from a wealthy entrepreneur who saw the future of online journalism and wanted to try it in Bonham. He gave the project two years to be self-supportive.

The E-News opened bureaus in Sherman and Bonham with administrative, editorial and advertising staffs, but couldn’t meet the deadline. When the money ran out, Rich decided to keep up the Web site on his own.

“There was a time when we pored over the stats of every article,” Rich says. “It was all very interesting, but I think we fixated on the information this format allows instead of just bringing in as much local news as possible.”

But running the Web site by himself is a struggle, Rich says. Luckily, he works out of a 100-year-old house his grandparents lived in and where he was brought home from the hospital 50 years ago. Overhead is low.

“It is a gritty, desperate attempt to do what I love, give the people what they want and still pay the bills,” Rich says. “I am still shocked that a strictly online news source worked at all in rural Texas.”

It worked so well, in fact, that in September of 2002, the editor of the Favorite asked if he had any interest in buying the paper “because the 100-year-old business was on its last legs,” Rich says. “I was brought home from the hospital 50 years ago. Overhead is low.

“News is rarely more relevant than what happens in my front yard,” Kelley says. “Local information, particularly sports results of children’s games that offer lots of photo opportunities will grow an audience for a local community Web site like this.”

But John Carroll, a former Los Angeles Times editor, wonders what will be covered if most newspapers shrink staffs and eventually switch to an online format.

“You’re too late, Uncle Allen. We discussed journalism last week, and the professor told us it was the perfect career for anyone that wants to make half as much money as everyone else and work twice as many hours.”

To fill remaining news holes, he posts press releases about things he loves like homemade ice cream and NASA. “I want kids to know about Mars and where a star is born,” Rich says.

But in one way the online experience in his hometown is bittersweet. “Nobody will ever grow up to be the editor of their daily hometown paper here again.”

Behind the high school, at Finley-Oaks Elementary, teacher Jenny Trout organizes the children in a jump-roping event. A woman poses behind her grandchild and tells Rich, “Make sure you get this one.”

“His everywhere,” Trout says, adding that her daughter reads the E-News from Pepperdine University in California to follow hometown events.

Chris Kelley, former online editor-turned-media consultant with the Dallas Morning News says what Rich does is critical.

“News is rarely more relevant than what happens in my front yard,” Kelley says. “Local information, particularly sports results of children’s games that offer lots of photo opportunities will grow an audience for a local community Web site like this.”

With seven days a week of news and events, Rich cannot fill the E-News by himself. He has a few unpaid contributors and an occasional intern, but when he wished to speak at his nephew’s class at Austin College to recruit volunteers, it was pointless.

Rich says his nephew told him, “You’re too late, Uncle Allen. We discussed journalism last week, and the professor told us it was the perfect career for anyone that wants to make half as much money as everyone else and work twice as many hours.”

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By Reyna Gobel
Photos by Don Mooney
When he comes out of his corner office on the 16th floor of the Omni Hotel in downtown Austin in good spirits, with a relaxed smile, nobody mentions they could hear him barking commands into his phone seconds earlier.

Everything at Texas Monthly, where Evan Smith is the editor and executive vice president, reflects his fast-talking, hard-hitting, erudite style. He edits several stories a month and, most months, writes one too. He sets a tone for the entire magazine. “The vision has to come from this office,” he says.

His vision has paid off: In the seven years Smith’s been in charge, Texas Monthly has received six National Magazine Award nominations in the most coveted “General Excellence” category. When the magazine won in 2003, Smith gave an acceptance speech that preached storytelling and fine writing.

He believes the keys to success are knowing when to step aside and having a harmonious staff of intelligent, trustworthy people. “He might yell,” says articles editor and long-time number two at the magazine, Brian Sweany. “But I’ve never seen him yell at an employee. He makes sure this is a great place to work for everyone on the staff, from some of the country’s best writers to the summer interns.”

For Smith, a native of Queens, N.Y., his relentless work is a constant effort to make everything associated with his publication — from his weekly television show, Texas Monthly Talks, to blurbs in the listing of best things about Texas — top quality.

He never turns off his Blackberry and struggles during the rare times he has to put it in a different room. On a vacation in Mexico with his family, he had no e-mail. “I was pacing around the beach in little black socks like Richard Nixon in San Clemente, looking for a cell phone connection.”

Despite his rigorous schedule, Smith found a few minutes to prop his feet up on a table in his office, covered with Diet Cokes and Esquire magazines from the 1980s, to answer a few questions for COVER’s Michael J. Mooney about magazines and life.

**Q:** How do you keep up the standards of Texas Monthly every month?

**A:** The stock answer is: “Every issue needs to be better than the one before and every year’s worth of issues needs to be better than the previous year’s.” But that means nothing if you really boil it down. I want everybody here to think, “Every opportunity I get, I’m going to do the very best job I can. The most ambitious journalism. The most creative. The most entrepreneurial.”

So much of life can be looked at this way: there are a million wrong answers and no one right answer. As long as you end up with a right answer, it doesn’t have to be your right answer. I don’t need to be “the decider.”

**Q:** Where does your philosophy on management come from?

**A:** The very best text on leadership is the script of the first Godfather movie. It has three of the most important ideas for management. One is: “Keep your friends close and keep your enemies closer.” The best way to deal with an unruly bunch of people — some of whom may be completely against you — is to co-opt, in ways that you can, the people against you by bringing them into your inner circle.

The second is: “Tell Michael it wasn’t personal, it was business.” You can’t allow your personal relationships to infect your ability to do the right thing for the job. You check those things at the door. The people I have long personal relationships with are treated the same way as people I just hired off the street.

The third is: “Sometimes you have to put Fredo in the boat.” Sometimes you have to put a bullet in the head of somebody you’re close to who has betrayed you. Betrayal needs to be responded to, but beyond that, you have to send a message to people who might betray you in the future.

The script of the first Godfather is Harvard Business School-worthy.

**Q:** With so many circulations going down, yours isn’t. Why do you think that is?

**A:** I’ve said a few times that one of the reasons we’ve been successful is because we recognize that long form journalism is not the disease, but the cure. Most places think the way to respond to so much competition in the press and people not having enough time is to make everything shorter and less serious.
Arresting youth correctional facility corruption.

Doug Swanson, Investigative Reporter
Helping You Live Better Here.

When reports from the Texas Youth Commission spoke of guards bribing, molesting, and abusing youths, Doug Swanson sensed that the situation was even more depraved and inhuman. And Doug was right. So right, in fact, that his investigation is beginning to bring multiple cases to justice here and across the state.

Journalism is Doug’s passion. And showing us exactly how our misguided youths are really being punished — and what your outrage can do to stop the violence — is his own personal way of helping you Live Better Here.

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