Dateline Iraq
Journalists report for duty

Disaster Fatigue
Tsunami coverage challenged journalists

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The devastating tsunami disaster, the never-ending Iraq conflict, murders, kidnappings, crime – this has been a challenging year for journalists. How do they do it? How do they stay sane in the throes of these heart-wrenching stories? This issue of COVER tackles these questions and more, allowing aspiring journalists to contemplate this magnificent profession with eyes wide open. The issue also includes less somber fare – the upcoming Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference, tips on succeeding in the field, what it’s like to cover celebrities, the impact of blogs on the media and much, much more.

Indeed, the Frank W. Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism proudly offers this third issue of COVER magazine to celebrate the outstanding work of journalism professionals who hail from and work in the Southwest. In this issue, we also offer an interview with TIME magazine’s Matthew Cooper, who faces jail time for protecting a source, because his case could affect how journalists do their jobs.

The Mayborn Institute, the only nationally accredited professional master’s program in Texas, stresses the core values of print journalism – accuracy, fairness and truth – rooted in ethical media practices. COVER magazine, which is an integral component of the Mayborn Institute’s new publishing emphasis, complements our goal of preparing tomorrow’s premier journalists and best-selling authors today. We believe this tangible learning outcome – COVER magazine – also contributes to the professional conversation of journalism in the Southwest. The journalism graduate program was named the Frank W. Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism in 1999 thanks to a generous gift from the Frank W. and Sue Mayborn Foundation Advise and Consult Fund at Communities Foundation of Texas, Inc. Through this gift, we are able to offer $200,000 in scholarships every year. The Mayborn Institute is located at the University of North Texas in Denton, about 30 miles northwest of Dallas.

We invite journalists throughout the Southwest to give us feedback and story ideas and to provide valuable insight to our students who continue working on future issues.

Mitch Land, Ph.D.
Director
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In March, 1,490 pairs of combat boots honoring soldiers who’ve died in Iraq were part of an exhibit called “Eyes Wide Open” in front of Dallas City Hall.

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Photo by Melissa Ferro

cover photo
MELISSA FERRO

cover concept
KELLEY SCHMIDT & MELISSA FERRO
The Line Between Fact and Fiction

Journalists Live and Die On

BY KEVIN POSIVAL

In a bookstore, the line between fact and fiction is an 8-foot-wide stretch of carpet obstructed by shoppers jumping from one monthly promotional table to the next. The rows of dust-covered shelves on either side remain fixed like the sandy shores alongside a parted Red Sea.

As journalists, this black-and-white distinction is just one aspect of our job. We’re supposed to be flies on walls, faceless bylines accountable to the people, whomever they are. We’re supposed to get the latest facts and accurate quotes before our stories go to press.

But the newspaper is always yesterday’s news at best. Even “breaking news” is dated – the premature announcement that Al Gore won the 2000 election is a good example. Despite the time-lag, people depend on us to give them the latest, most relevant information. They expect – and have every right to expect – that the news is true. The daily news is more than national headlines; it’s the pathway the world takes forward. It’s our culture’s recorded history. It’s our mark on the wall.

How can it be anything less than true?

Inverted pyramid stories are only partially read and quickly forgotten. Investigative reporting, feature writing and editorial opinions define individual communities daily.

The key to drawing readers into long stories is an attention-grabbing introduction, not unlike the opening paragraphs of a novel or short story. Sentence structure changes from short to long; just satisfying five “Ws” and an “H” won’t do. The story must be shown, not told.

Structure, length and format aside, the story is still a news story. An op-ed piece should be the writer’s opinion, not a government press release. A feature source should not be an imaginary character.

But what if you forget the color of your source’s T-shirt or don’t know the color because you talked on the phone? Can details be compromised so long as the theme of the story is true? What about quotes? If you summarize an entire conversation into a single fabricated quote, is that acceptable?

No – emphatically – no.

We don’t sign on dotted lines. We don’t recite centuries-old oaths before a panel of judges. We’re overly critical when the president of the United States, Mr. America himself, says the sky is blue; we find someone to confirm his statement and someone to dispute it.

We’re like scientists focusing on fact, and children on a scavenger hunt looking for the single truth that’s hidden behind bureaucratic walls and sugar-coated spin.

When England didn’t hear the American whispers of discontent, colonists went to the printing shops by the hoards and yelled across the Atlantic. Businessmen and laborers became mediums for their families and neighbors. They became journalists.

It’s a noble profession, a tradition of which we have chosen to be a part.

So, no, it’s not okay to improvise details, plagiarize others, accept bribes, fabricate quotes or create sources. What would your family and neighbors say if you did?

Rules weaken and standards drop every time journalists compromise their ethics. After a newspaper reported a rape victim’s name for the first time, other papers considered doing the same. Now, no universal standard exists. Doctoring quotes for grammatical errors opened the door for quote fabrication. Everything is easier after the first time.

In journalism, rules cannot be bent or broken. The public depends on us to remain constant.

When journalists get caught and their indiscretions uncovered, their achievements and reputations are forever soiled. Each time, journalists see their “watchdog” reputations neutered. I’m tired of the way people scoff and roll their eyes when I say I’m a journalist. I’m not Janet Cooke, Jayson Blair, or Stephen Glass. But their acts of plagiarism and fabrication have reminded me of one solid truth: the public will not stand being lied to and misled.

“As a society, we don’t want people making a career out of something that’s simply immoral,” the infamous Stephen Glass of the New Republic reported Julie Farthwork saying in his story “Hack Heaven.” But, Farthwork was just one of Glass’s many fabricated sources.

Ironic, isn’t it? Glass was a master storyteller but a lousy journalist. Luckily, “Hack Heaven” became his undoing.

Mark Twain said “truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; truth isn’t.”

It’s not surprising that the most influential American journalists – Twain, Ernest Hemingway and Hunter S. Thompson – have books on both sides of the bookstore aisle. When readers want fiction, they turn down that aisle. When they want the news, they pick up our stories and turn on our broadcasts.

The best novelists create memorable characters. The best journalists immortalize everyday people.

Kevin Posival is a senior journalism and creative writing major at UNT. He graduates in May.
A Picture’s Worth a Thousand Words — If it’s Real

BY SHANNON TEBBE

In March, *Newsweek* magazine altered a photo of Martha Stewart, putting her head atop the shoulders of a model’s body and ran it on its cover, rekindling the debate over where to draw the line with digital images.

*Newsweek* called it a “photo illustration” meant to show Stewart’s soon-to-be triumphant homecoming from prison, where she was incarcerated for insider trading when the photo ran. How many times have heads been cut and pasted onto bodies for a better picture without our knowledge?

Ethical questions like that have been hot-button issues since the beginning of photojournalism. During the Civil War, photographers posed corpses to make a better picture. Since then – and especially today – technology has become more advanced. Images can be easily manipulated in the computer to say what photographers and editors want them to say.

One of the first notable offenses using computers to manipulate is the infamous 1982 *National Geographic* incident. Magazine editors digitally moved two Egyptian pyramids closer together so they could both fit on the cover. The magazine called it “retroactive repositioning of the photographer.” In other words, the photographer was in the wrong spot and didn’t get the photo they needed. The editors went to the computer and just created what they wanted.

*New York Times* photographer Edward Keating was accused of setting up a photo and had to leave the paper because of it. The picture showed a child holding a toy gun next to a sign that read “Arabian Foods” and accompanied a story about some Arab Americans who may have had links to terrorism.

Actions such as Keating’s make readers question the validity of every image, making us all less credible. What Keating did was an obvious ethical violation. Other cases are a little harder to call.

Numerous photojournalists have lost their jobs and reputations because they did something unethical like staging photographs, relocating immovable objects or putting someone’s head on someone else’s body.

*TIME* magazine’s 1994 cover featured a digitally manipulated mug shot of O.J. Simpson – arrested for murdering his wife – that made him look darker and more sinister. *Newsweek* ran the same picture that week but without the alteration. Had *Newsweek* not run the same photo, *TIME*’s manipulation might never have been discovered.

Did *TIME* cross an ethical boundary? Was it wrong of editors to “subtly smooth” the harsh lighting? These are questions we face more and more as technology evolves.

Some suggest an icon should accompany an altered image to indicate exactly what was done to the photo.

To me, it’s black and white: Images should never be manipulated. Period.

If we alter images in the computer; if we tell our subjects to do something they wouldn’t ordinarily do, then our photographs lie. It is the same as a reporter fabricating quotes or describing scenes that never existed.

Unfortunately, this is not just something done by inexperienced journalists who might not know better, but by photographers at reputable publications.

It’s all about context. Imagine a picture of a giant lizard on top of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. If you see it on the cover of the Weekly World News you can safely assume the picture is a fake. Would the same be assumed if the photo ran on the front cover of *TIME* or *National Geographic*?

Of course not.

Photojournalism ethics is a gray area with different interpretations of where to draw the line. As a photojournalist I think photographers should be a fly on the wall and nothing more. When we manipulate images not only do we rob our readers of the facts but we also rob ourselves of credibility.

The thrill of photojournalism is not creating a flawless image, it’s finding that perfect picture, making it your own, and then sharing it with the world.

Shannon Tebbe is a senior photojournalism student at UNT. She graduates in May.
Most journalists can’t imagine doing anything else, but some find themselves wondering what lies beyond the world of news.

Despite the excitement of working in a newsroom, some journalists grow weary of long hours, low wages and a nagging feeling that they merely observe life rather than live it.

Others become such experts on their beats they think they could do the job as well, if not better, than the people they cover.

Whatever the reason, some journalists leave the profession and reinvent themselves in other fields. A Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter heads to the classroom. A funny reporter tries stand-up comedy. A former political columnist becomes a big-city mayor.

Can’t Beat ‘em? Join ‘em

For 18 years, Laura Miller covered Dallas City Hall and politics, writing for almost every news outlet in the city. She finally became so frustrated that she couldn’t change things through her column that she decided to do something about it.

“I would always see the councilmen crouching under the horseshoe reading my latest story and snickering or giggling, or fuming, but then they’d throw it in the trash and that would be it,” Miller said. “Nothing would ever change.”

Miller stepped out from behind her reporter’s notebook and landed in the spotlight of politics, something she knew a little bit about. Not only had she covered it for years, she’s married to Steven Wolens, who was a legislator for almost 24 years.

“When you become a politician you see things in gray, and the word ‘compromise’ is in the air all the time. It’s a very different job,” she said. “The other big challenge is you go from being the hunter, going after the politicians, to being the hunted and having reporters come after you.”

She must regularly interact with the media, but instead of cowering away from the tough questions, Miller faces journalists with familiar understanding. She feels that she has been the most accessible mayor in Dallas history, responding to reporters’ e-mails at midnight, helping them get documents when they need them and even corresponding with them during council meetings on her Blackberry e-mail system.

“My big advantage with the media is that because I used to be one of them I’m very relaxed with them,” Miller said. “So when I go out and there are 20 reporters that are standing there and they’re all tense because they are doing the big story of the day, I come out and make fun of their hairstyles and take their mike and imitate them.”

Miller understands, though, that relations between politicians and the media can’t always be smiles and handshakes. Having been on both sides, Miller knows the game with the media can get tense.

“The bad thing is that the sense of familiarity evaporates in a second if they think I’ve done something wrong and then they come after me. And I know that too,” Miller said. “It’s not like they’re going to do me any favors. They’re journalists and that’s their job, but luckily I haven’t done anything horrible in the last three years as mayor so I haven’t been in that situation.”

With no desire to go further in politics or to be a reporter again, Miller can see herself writing a book, or even hosting a TV program when her term as mayor is finished.

“I’d want to maybe do a television show, a public affairs kind of show talking to people, pulling information out of people,” she said.
Back to School

In Melanie Magee’s cramped office in the Carrollton-Farmers Branch school district, right above the bookcase filled with children’s books and policy folders, hangs the framed announcement of her 1994 Pulitzer Prize. It is a daily reminder of her days as a journalist, when Magee joined a team from the Dallas Morning News sent around the world to write a series about violence against women that won the coveted prize.

Soon after winning, Magee, an education writer, decided she wanted to do something completely different with her life. She toyed with the idea of running off to Paris or taking a job at People magazine. In the end, she chose to teach.

“What I saw when I went into schools was really good teachers and teachers who were touching children’s lives, so I wanted to do the same thing,” she said.

After getting certified, she was thrown into a fourth grade classroom in Dallas. At first, she was disappointed because she wanted to teach younger kids “because that’s where the nurturing is.”

“But when I got into it and saw how hard it was I couldn’t believe what it would have been like with 4- and 5-year-olds,” she said.

She now works as a parent educator and discipline hearing officer using her reporting skills to get the facts and help parents resolve issues. Despite some nostalgic feelings, she has no desire to return to journalism.

“Education was the right course for me,” she said. “It gives

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Priest Finds His Calling in Writing

While a newspaper can wear some down, it can be a place where others find their salvation.

Jon O’Guinn, a former Roman Catholic priest, spent eight years in two small parishes in South-Central Illinois, where he ministered to the sick, elderly and incarcerated. But it left him drained, so he embarked on a sabbatical at a monastery in South Carolina where monks ran a poultry farm. In three months there, he handled more than 1.3 million eggs.

“My sabbatical helped me realize that I was experiencing a crisis of soul,” said O’Guinn.

Upon returning to his parish, O’Guinn felt he was simply going through the motions.

In addition, the encumbrance of such a public position also began to wear thin.

“The relentless public scrutiny, criticism and judgment that are the necessary consequences of living such a public life, had taken an unanticipated personal toll,” he said.

As a priest, he wrote a weekly column for the parish bulletin along with his Sunday sermons so he thought journalism might allow him to serve the public without being so public.

However, he said, “the transition from a life of public ministry to a life of private citizenship was difficult. I had to support myself and become more self-reliant.”

He moved to Dallas in January 2001 and worked for a Catholic publishing company. Then he entered the graduate journalism program at the University of North Texas. Since graduating in 2003, O’Guinn has worked for The Dallas Morning News, where he is an advertising copy editor who now writes a weekly feature about senior citizens.

“I write about people who are quirky, funny and surprisingly touching,” O’Guinn said. “They are unforgettable yet ordinary people who happen to share a philosophy about staying active as an anecdote to growing old.”

He loves his new life — the deadline pressure and interacting with interesting colleagues. But most of all, O’Guinn said he loves serving people in a different way.

— Sloan White
Journalists who ever took the First Amendment for granted should be alarmed by a case winding its way through the appellate courts. TIME magazine’s White House correspondent Matthew Cooper and New York Times reporter Judith Miller were held in contempt last year for refusing to reveal information about a confidential source within the Bush administration who leaked the name of a CIA operative.

On appeal, a federal court sided with the lower court saying that Cooper and Miller weren’t covered by the First Amendment since exposing a CIA operative can be a crime. Yet, syndicated columnist Robert Novak – the first to use Valerie Plame’s name – has not been charged and won’t say if he was subpoenaed. Miller has protected her sources although she never even wrote about the case. Cooper’s story, “A War on Wilson,” asked whether the leak was meant to get back at Plame’s husband, former ambassador Joseph Wilson, who wrote a column disputing the Bush administration’s claim that Iraq tried to buy uranium for nuclear weapons from Niger.

The news organizations involved are now appealing to the Supreme Court. But if they lose and refuse to betray their sources, Cooper and Miller could face up to 18 months in jail. While waiting for a resolution, Cooper spoke to COVER’s Jeff Andrews about the case and its ramifications for the future of investigative reporting.

Q. Why not reveal the source?

A. I think it’s important for reporters to be able to offer protection to certain confidential sources. If we’re going to have a free flow of information in society, people have to feel free to speak with reporters and do so with the confidence that they can be afforded a degree of anonymity. Some of the most important stories in American history have been forged by anonymous sources.

Q. Did you ever consider revealing the source to authorities for leaking Plame’s name?

A. Yeah, I considered but I rejected it because I think it’s important to protect sources. I afforded a degree of confidentiality to certain people when I wrote my articles and I intend to honor that.

Q. What impact do you think this case will have on investigative journalism?

A. Not a good one. I think people who are willing to talk to reporters will think twice because they’ll wonder if the reporter they’re talking to is willing to go to jail [to protect them]. So I think the sources will tend to clam up and I think that’ll be bad for a society that wants to know about things like government ways and the corporate world. So I think it’ll be harmful to the free flow of information and I think, today, prosecutors have been sort of reluctant to try to force journalists to reveal their sources.

I think it would have an emboldening effect on prosecutors to go down that road.

Q. Why are journalists protected from grand juries in civil cases and not federal cases?

A. It’s sort of a patchwork of different laws that govern this question of being able to honor confidences and offer confidentiality. Thirty-one states have shield laws for journalists in which they’re afforded some degree of being able to protect sources. Then another 18 states have judicial rulings that afford a degree of protection. But it happens that the case I’m involved with is in federal court where it’s not so clear. It’s in the criminal context that the courts have shown less interest in protection.

It’s kind of a crazy quilt of different laws which makes it very hard for a journalist because you have no idea when you’re talking to somebody if you’re necessarily hearing anything incendiary or that might end up in a court case. Then you don’t know if the case will end up in a civil court or in a particular state. It’s really a complicated

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That’s Entertainment

The love-hate relationship between the media and celebrities is forged on need.

BY JENNIFER MANIS

It’s a match made in movie heaven. The Hollywood marketing machine relies on the media to promote multimillion-dollar investments in films. Reporters depend on access to celebrities to satisfy the public’s hunger for features about favored stars.

So when it comes to celebrity news, where does publicity end and journalism begin?

“The lines got blurred because it made money and became popular,” said Gary Cogill, film critic at WFAA-TV (Channel 8) in Dallas. “If we wouldn’t watch it, they wouldn’t do it.”

Yet people do watch, and they spend billions of dollars a year star gazing. How much is too much? That’s a question many raised about the rise and fall of mega-couple Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez. Was their widely chronicled romance all just a ploy to promote “Gigli,” which turned out to be a major box-office flop? Or was it genuine love that just happened to wither under the flashing lights of paparazzi camera crews?

Affleck’s close friend, director Kevin Smith, told Rolling Stone magazine that he believed the media played a “big, big [expletive] part” in the breakup last year of Ben and Jen.

Even as magazines, television shows and Internet sites devoted to news about celebrities have soared in popularity in recent years, the quality of much of their information has declined.

These days, even the most poorly sourced detail from a supermarket scandal rag can find its way into the mainstream media, where competition is fierce to get noticed by audiences.

“We are now quoting the National Enquirer as a major news source,” said a mystified Cogill. “We reported it on our news, and I thought, ‘When did we start doing that?’ It’s a tabloid.” When we’re quoting the US Tattler and the National Star, we’re in trouble.”

Even more respected outlets such as People, US Weekly and InTouch often walk the line between fact and fiction.

On many breaking stories, these magazines have been known to rely so heavily on anonymous sources that they become little more than a trough full of hearsay.

“An anonymous source could be a celebrity’s publicist or a person who works at the club,” said Tom Maurstad, a reporter for The Dallas Morning News who writes about popular culture.

In the March 21 issue of People magazine, a story titled “Is it Over?” was written about the untimely breakup between actors Charlie Sheen and Denise Richards.

“What went wrong?” the article said. “Sources close to the situation say that Richards made the swift, bold move out of concern that Sheen – a once-notorious Hollywood bad boy who cleaned up his act in 1998 – had reverted to his old ways.”

Who are those sources “close to the situation?” Perhaps the land of celebrity reporting is different from the trenches of hard news and contains more people willing to talk but fewer people willing to go on record.

For the most part, the corporate players in Hollywood and the media are big businesses. Not surprisingly, both enterprises are operating to maximize profits and to boost the interests of their shareholders.

Aside from the media and studio honchos, every celebrity – along with an entourage of managers, agents, publicists, lawyers and assistants – works as a business. Even the most famous of the famous knows he must promote himself in order to retain that multimillion dollar paycheck.

“Their business is publicity,” Maurstad said of the celebrities, adding that access to celebrities is very controlled. “It’s an industrial complex designed to control access to those on the outside,” he said.

Some celebrities do manage to retain both their popularity and their privacy. Unlike his best friend Affleck, actor Matt Damon has managed to keep most of his personal life private, noted Victoria Snee, film reviewer and celebrity reporter on the WB News Team in Dallas.

Snee said she once asked Damon his secret. “If you really want to stay hidden in this town, you can,” he told her. “Those who complain the most about the media are those who want and get the attention.”

With Affleck and Lopez, many made the argument (including Affleck) that the two were expected to promote a film, so they could not avoid the onslaught of media attention.

Further complicating matters is the trend toward “reality” TV with celebrities sharing intimate moments of their lives. Every week millions of viewers tune in to shows like “The Newlyweds” which features Nick Lachey and Jessica Simpson’s wacky “real life” antics. Now the two complain about a lack of privacy.

“There is a private sanctuary,” Snee said. “Once you allow cameras into your life that changes things.”

Even though celebrities should be able to enjoy private moments, it’s difficult to expect the media to draw the line of

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By the time *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* photographer Khampha Bouaphanh reached Banda Aceh, the remote corner of Indonesia that was one of the worst hit by the recent tsunami, it had been two weeks since the wall of water crashed into the city.

As he traveled on a bus toward what was left of the Indonesian capital, he was struck by an overpowering smell – the stench of death. And it was everywhere. They had come across a mass grave with more than 2,000 bodies buried in it. There were so many the villagers couldn’t even identify them, Bouaphanh said.

Having already heard about the smell, he brought a painter’s mask with him, but it didn’t help much.

“The overwhelming smell goes right through the masks,” Bouaphanh said. “It’s in your head, the imagery – more psychological than anything. It takes a bit of getting used to.”

Throughout the region, the scene played out again and again. Bodies lay in piles along the side of the road until bulldozed into mass graves. It’s an image that will stay with Bouaphanh and the other journalists who covered the deadliest disaster in memory.

On Dec. 26 one of the strongest earthquakes ever recorded rocked the Indian Ocean, sending a massive tidal wave to the coasts of 11 countries including Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Somalia and Malaysia. There was no warning as it headed stealthily toward land. At times, it amounted to a 40-foot-high wall of water coming ashore, leaving nearly 300,000 people dead or missing and millions homeless, swallowing entire villages and changing coastlines.

Bouaphanh was one of several journalists from the Dallas/Fort Worth area whose photos or words brought the tragedy home for North Texans.

Despite the difficult conditions natural disasters present, they are coveted assignments in newsrooms. From hurricanes and tornadoes to floods and earthquakes, if the story’s big enough, reporters and photographers want a part of it. They want to witness it, document it and tell others what happened.

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Lennox Samuels, Mexico bureau chief for *The Dallas Morning News*, was en route to Bali, Bangkok and Singapore for vacation when he learned of the tsunami and changed his plans.

“The vacation was abandoned almost immediately,” he said. “It’s inconceivable that a serious journalist would want to spend time frolicking on holiday when one of the biggest stories in decades is unfolding nearby.”

**Disaster Fatigue:**

*BY CASSIE BERNET*

In Banda Aceh, Indonesia, a worker waits while bodies are pulled out from a river in January.

Lennox Samuels, Mexico bureau chief for *The Dallas Morning News*, was en route to Bali, Bangkok and Singapore for vacation when he learned of the tsunami and changed his plans.

“The vacation was abandoned almost immediately,” he said. “It’s inconceivable that a serious journalist would want to spend time frolicking on holiday when one of the biggest stories in decades is unfolding nearby.”
Getting Involved

Most of the time, journalists do their jobs without getting involved. But some reporters who covered the tsunami found it so overwhelming that they put down their notebooks or microphones and helped survivors in more immediate ways.

KTVT/CBS 11’s Mona Khanna – a physician and Channel 11’s medical correspondent – was one of those. She put her medical expertise to use by helping about 250 villagers in a rice field in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, where, in addition to producing stories with CBS 11 chief photographer Billy Sexton, she dispensed medicine, treated asthma sufferers, bandaged victims and assessed conditions, helping determine whether survivors needed to get more help.

Providing medical care was rewarding, she said, because it gave her the chance to make a difference in the lives of some of those most affected by the tsunami.

“What makes me happy is using my skill set to help others. I’ve prepared my whole life for helping people out,” Khanna said.

When packing for covering a natural disaster, reporters have to prepare for things they might need – food and water, which become scarce, but also things like candy and trinkets to give away.

Khanna not only helped the people of Batticaloa, but also gave them money, pens, candy and $200 in $1 bills.

“I didn’t know what to expect,” she said. “I gave all the clothes I had brought with me, I gave them my shoes, my [medical expertise],” Khanna said. “They’ll always remember the Indian doctor from America.”

Sometimes in the rush to get to the story, other important things get left behind.

Difficult Working Conditions

While reporting the story, reporters faced many obstacles in simply trying to do their jobs. Sending stories was difficult, except in some locations where wireless networks had been set up for that purpose.

Water and food were in short supply and roads had been wiped out.

Samuels said that poor infrastructure presented a huge problem. Places only a short distance away took a long time to get to.

“In the U.S., most of these places would be reachable in two to four hours. But given terrible roads and bridges that had been washed away by the tsunami, many of these trips took like six to 13 hours – in a rickety van and sometimes inclement weather.”

Bouaphanh was shooting a Dallas Cowboys game for the Star-Telegram on the Sunday the tsunami occurred.

By Thursday he was in Sri Lanka to photograph the disaster.

He had his cameras with him, but the rest of his equipment, including the satellite modem that allows him to send images without an Internet connection, would take another five days to reach him.

Bouaphanh is no stranger to death and destruction. He’s twice covered...continued on page 25
A Tough Day at the Office
Reporters who cover tragedy find solace where they can

BY VERONICA ACOSTA

Terri Langford of the Houston Chronicle will never forget how evil and hateful the Andrea Yates drama felt as it unfolded in the courtroom or how catatonic the woman seemed, but she especially can’t shake the image of the bathtub in which Yates drowned her five children.

“It gets in your mind, hearing a pathologist explain how she drowned the kids one by one,” Langford said.

Testimony detailed how Yates’ older children realized what was going on and ran. But she chased them down and drowned all of them in the same bathtub, where the others had thrown up or lost control of their bowels as they died. Because of that, they all had traces of vomit or feces in their systems.

“That was a stunning picture of the bathtub, that cloudy bathtub, and that last child being face down in the tub,” remembers Langford.

“That’s a strong image I’ll never forget, but do they keep me up all night? No.”

For many reporters, images like that stay with them forever, piling up in the mind like a stack of old snapshots.

Though reporters covering devastating events such as the Indian Ocean tsunami, the World Trade Center collapse or war are more likely to receive support dealing with what they’ve seen, those who routinely cover the violence in their city are often left to sort through the memories themselves.

A study for the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, an organization dedicated to aiding journalists with the challenges of dealing with traumatic stories, found that the longer reporters cover violent events, the more likely they are to show signs of stress – including sleep problems and difficulty in relationships - especially if they don’t talk about it.

“What hasn’t been recognized until recently is that routine city desk news coverage has a cumulative effect if not acknowledged,” said Roger Simpson, executive director of the Dart Center. “Violent events – school shootings and murders and deaths by plane or car crashes – have always occurred in our country. Editors and managers are finally recognizing that training can help. Reporters not only need good support in the field, but also in the newsroom.”

Langford, who deals with the stress through exercise, has covered other stories ranging from the Jasper dragging murder to the aftermath of Sept. 11 and heartbreaking stories of child abuse. She finds the evil in the world fascinating and feels that in order to understand evil, you have to write about it.

“A lot of people ask me, ‘Isn’t it horrible? How can you stand to do it?’” she said. “How can you stand not to do it? To ignore it is worse than trying to relate the facts of the case or create opposition or dialogue to help prevent these things from happening again. They don’t upset me, they get me angry, and they get me angry enough to write about them.”

Covering the Unimaginable

Jennifer Emily of The Dallas Morning News vividly remembers covering the story of a little girl who was locked in a lice-infested closet for most of four years, and how she handled the memories of the abuse. When authorities found the girl, she was 8 years old but only 3 feet tall and 25 pounds, about the size of a 2-year-old. She didn’t know what the sun was and hadn’t seen grass or a tree.

“That was pretty difficult,” Emily said. “That was a story that took more than a year to really end as far as my covering it goes, and it was one of those times where I didn’t really think of it and I pushed it to the back of my mind.”

The day the girl’s mother’s trial ended, Emily went home and sat on the couch, not wanting to talk or think about the case.

“I just tell myself, especially when covering horrible things, that it’s not about me, it’s never about me.”

Terri Langford, Houston Chronicle

“I realized I let it all build up,” she recalled. On the day the girl was adopted into a new family, Emily got a chance to play with her.

The little girl sang songs, Emily pushed her around in a toy car and they talked.

“I watched her play and I saw how happy she was; it was very therapeutic,” Emily said. “Everything that happened since then, it helps to remember that moment and see that sometimes good does come out of tragedy.”

Donna Fielder of the Denton Record-Chronicle, who has covered cops for more years than she cares to remember, said it’s not the images of the dead that stay with her, but their grieving families.

At one accident scene, she saw the decapitated head of a man in the backseat of his car. At another, three generations of women and a newborn baby died on their way to church on Father’s Day. The baby’s mother was still in the hospital recovering.

“I’ve got a strong stomach. Nothing bothers me much,” she said. “But that Father’s Day was very emotional. A father lost his newborn baby on Father’s Day. That’s what stays with you.”

Fielder says reporters often use dark humor to deal with awful scenes. “It sounds calloused to joke about it, but it’s
a shield against having to absorb it all. And there’s a little bravado too – you know you can’t go back to the newsroom, put your head on the desk and sob.”

**Dramatic Beginnings**

Emily began covering traumatic events in college when a disgruntled student shot a counselor and resident assistant, then committed suicide. Most recently, she has covered the aftermath of Sept. 11 and the Plano mother who cut the arms off her infant.

“I probably don’t deal with things the healthiest way I could,” Emily said. “I’ve never been to therapy or seen a psychiatrist, but that is available if I wanted to. Probably if I hadn’t gotten to play with that little girl, I might have needed therapy, but it really sustained me and got my spirit up.”

Instead of therapy, Emily copes with traumatic stories by talking with her husband, who is also a reporter, other reporters and friends. Sometimes, it helps her to escape into books or movies.

Despite all that she covers, Emily often reads books or watches movies that deal with violence. She knows police officers and attorneys who don’t read violent books, but she says it doesn’t really bother her. In a way it’s another escape because it is too far-fetched to be real.

Both Langford and Emily have covered enough stories about crime and evil in the world that they’ve lost track of how many.

Holly Becka, a reporter for The Morning News, has spent a good deal of her career watching criminal trials unfold in the Dallas County Criminal Courts.

“I think at the beginning I was taken aback by the sheer volume of crimes on the indictment list and the brutal nature of a lot of things,” Becka said. “I was seeing and dealing with the emotions of interviewing people who were emotional because a loved one had been killed or they had a child who was molested or felt that a loved one was wrongfully accused.”

One of the first trials Becka attended involved a high school girl who was gang raped. The girl had been walking her small dog and when she was abducted, the dog began barking, trying to protect her. The gang shot her dog and raped her.

“It was so sad, and the only people in the courtroom were the jury, the prosecutor, defense attorney, the person on trial and the girl’s mother,” Becka recalled.

The victim’s mother cried throughout the trial, and Becka found herself wiping away her own tears.

“After the trial, I went to the office and cried because it was so awful – she was gang raped, lying there, and her dog was dying,” Becka said. “As you get exposed to that, I don’t want to say you get calloused to it because certainly I never felt calloused to it, but it stops being as shocking to you.”

While covering her first couple of trials, Becka cried, taking notes. After that, she told herself that she would hear some horrible things but that she could handle it. Reporters don’t sob through trials, she reminded herself. After that, Becka was better prepared mentally, realizing that she’d have to have a stiff upper lip to cover courts.

**Taking Comfort in the Job**

To decompress, Becka listens to calming music on her commute and talks to her husband, who is also a journalist.

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Deciding which road to take can make all the difference in war.

Gretel C. Kovach, a *Dallas Morning News* reporter who has covered the Iraq war two times, remembers the day her convoy of journalists had to make that decision. The first road was quicker but led through a village where they would likely be targets. The second was longer and unpaved, yet safer. Their destination was near a nest of terrorists in some hills where the U.S. military kept sending Tomahawk missiles. Kovach nervously rode down the shorter road – not her choice. Twenty minutes after they passed through the village, a car bomb killed an Australian journalist there.

The Australian had made the same decision on the same road, but had not been so lucky.

“When you are in a war and people are dying around you, you don’t want to think that an Iraqi life is worth less than an American life,” she said. “But when a western journalist dies, you have more in common with that person and you can relate better to them. It is easier to imagine that it could have been me, and that was difficult for me.”

Afterward, Kovach spoke to the Australian reporter’s cameraman who told her that they had decided not to take risks – just to do their jobs and leave. Despite that, he died.

“War reporting is dangerous and you have to decide with every story, is this worth dying for?” she said.

War correspondents work alongside soldiers, but with the task of bringing a war back to their readers. They deal with the difficulties of communicating back home with editors and loved ones and of filing stories while on patrol or away from bases with Internet. They must endure long periods of sleepless nights and keep up with their units while running down the street. They not only need to know when to duck or run, but how to deal with their memories.

Embedded journalists receive training courses before departing. Kovach, who was embedded twice, describes it as a “mini-boot camp” where she learned combat first aid and basic security measures such as checking underneath her car for bombs. She also took a survival course and learned to fire a machine gun.

Ed Timms, a *Morning News* reporter who has reported from Somalia, covered the first Gulf War and has gone twice to Iraq, experienced different training conditions while with a unit from Fort Hood, Texas.

“I went through some of the same training as [the soldiers],” Timms said. “We went through chemical training and had to put on the chemical suit. When we were done, I went back to my hotel room and could watch TV or read a book.”

But living with troops overseas is different. Timms recalls setting up a secure area with soldiers and sleeping on the side of a road. At times he unrolled a sleeping bag and slept on top of a Humvee.

Both Kovach and Timms say embedded reporters must gain the trust of their units, otherwise they can’t do their jobs well.

That’s not difficult if the soldiers perceive that you are fair and will not spin the truth one way or another, Kovach said.

The military is initially wary of the media, said Timms, who addressed this issue during one of the first conversations he had with the soldiers he traveled with from Fort Hood.

“I said, ‘I want you to understand that my job here is to report on you and what you do. A lot of times that will be good, but understand that if something bad happens, it is also my job to report on that, and I want you to be aware of that. I’m not your friend, I’m not a soldier. I am here as a professional to report accurately on what I see and what y’all do.’”

By the time they left for Iraq, he said, there were no issues.

In a war, Timms said, it’s important that reporters know how the military works. He has met reporters who covered the military but knew nothing about rank.

“They think that is cute and funny, but it is not,” Timms said.

“You are not going to get a good interview if that is how you begin the relationship. It doesn’t mean that you love the military or are being sucked in by them, but it is common courtesy.”

Reporters should also know basic military equipment names, such as the difference between a Humvee and a tank, if they don’t want soldiers writing them off as an idiot.

Kovach, who also covered the war on her own in northern Iraq, said reporters need to understand the culture so they do not
shut themselves out of stories by offending people. “As a foreign woman in the Middle East, you have a sort of get out of jail free card,” Kovach said. “The rules don’t always apply to you, and they look at you as someone different who is not part of their society.”

Reporters agreed that the perspective from reporters who aren’t embedded effectively balances out the narrow view of the war that reporting only the military’s side provides. “You do get to talk to people, but it is in a limited capacity,” Kovach said. “You are standing right next to a soldier with a big gun and people are not going to treat you the same way as if you were walking on the street alone.”

That’s the downside to embedded reporting, Timms says. “It doesn’t mean that you can’t do legitimate journalism, it just means that you have to do a different type of journalism,” Timms said.

Embedded journalists have the opportunity to focus on the human interest story – to tell what happens to young men and women as they risk their lives and deal with their friends getting wounded or killed.

“What makes it harder is that as an embedded journalist, you get to know them, so when someone dies, it is not just so-and-so from Kansas or so-and-so from Montana,” Timms said. “It is someone that you have eaten with, driven around with in the same Humvee, and you’ve talked to them about their hopes and what they want to do when they get out of the military.”

Morning News photographer David Leeson, who along with colleague Cheryl Diaz Meyer won the Pulitzer Prize for their photos from the war, has said that two soldiers in his unit, one only 19, died during a particularly intense firefight. “It hurts because you identify with these men when you’re embedded ...,” Leeson told The Digital Journalist, an online magazine for photojournalists, in March. “... I mean, a 19-year-old kid dies, how do you deal with that? I’d almost rather say, ‘Take me, God. I’m 46. I’ve lived already. I’ve had great experiences.’ But a 19-year-old kid who doesn’t make it home – it was really hard.”

Going beyond the limited view from the military also involves dangers – some not found in reporting with a unit. Mona Reeder, a Morning News photographer went to Baghdad and Afghanistan, but not as “an embed.” She wore an Abaya – a long, Muslim dress – and was mistaken for an Iraqi-American until she spoke. She carried her gear underneath her Abaya in 120-degree heat.

Walking alone in Iraq was scary, she said, yet she was welcomed in more places and had interaction with civilians that embedded journalists lack. Reeder kept a low profile and said she feared for her life continued on page 24
So you think you want to freelance?

The idea of going out on your own may sound glamorous, but it involves a lot of hard work. And, usually, there’s less pay. But freelancers say being on their own gives them something they couldn’t get in a full-time job – freedom. Freedom to work on things that matter most to them. Freedom to set their own schedules. And the freedom to say ‘no’ to lame assignments.

A magazine feature writer, a retired sportswriter and a young freelance photographer talk to COVER about the benefits of going solo and offer some advice to those who may want to give it a try.

First, they say, decide what kind of career you want. Second, network with others in the same field. And third, never give up.

When Kathryn Jones, current contributing editor for Texas Monthly, first submitted story ideas to the magazine in 1994, she was rejected. But she didn’t give up. Instead, she carefully studied the magazine from cover to cover and sent in more story ideas. That time, she sold some. For Jones, Texas Monthly led to other things, like being a stringer for TIME and LIFE magazines.

Jason Kindig, UNT photojournalism student, currently freelances for The Dallas Morning News, where he started working as an intern in high school. After Kindig graduated from Duncanville High School, Rick Choate, a photo editor at The Morning News, offered him the chance to freelance for the paper because he had worked hard and learned a lot during the internship.

Sam Blair, now a retired Morning News sportswriter, also started young. By the time he was in high school, he had already networked with people in the industry. While at Woodrow Wilson High School, Blair contacted Bill Sansing, the University of Texas sports information director, also a Wilson alumnus. The two had a lot in common and their fathers were friends, but they had never met.

By the time Blair graduated, Sansing had left UT but recommended Blair to his successor, Wilbur Evans, a former sports editor for The Morning News and the Austin American-Statesman. “Wilbur was kind enough to offer me a job as a student assistant in his office,” said Blair.

Blair points out that right from the start, he made connections with people who could help his career right then or later.

These three journalists had no problem getting noticed. But, it’s not as easy as it looks.

“You have to have an entry point,” said Kindig. “From having the experience and references it is easier to make connections.”

Jones had her fair share of experience in the field. While a student at Trinity University with a double major in English...
and journalism, she worked for the school paper, took a magazine class and worked on a cover story for San Antonio’s magazine.

Once you get a foothold in the industry, opportunities arise and you don’t have to really look anymore for good story ideas – they find you, they say.

“Freelancing combines your abilities as a writer, having good instincts, knowing what angles to sell to a market,” Blair said. “All this develops through osmosis, the more you do and the more stories you see.”

In November 1998, Blair discovered a story that became one of the most memorable of his career just by traveling to Normandy for the “Saving Private Ryan” Tour.

“I wrote two [stories] based on D-Day and World War II battles in Normandy,” he said.

One told about Texas A&M grad Earl Rudder and how he became a hero in France by leading his men up the 100-foot cliff to win the first battle of D-Day.

“The other described the beauty of the American Cemetery at Omaha Beach, the site of one of the fiercest battles of the Normandy invasion where more than 10,000 U.S. service men and women later were buried,” said Blair.

When developing a great story, you also want to make sure that what you’ll be paid for it is worth the time you’ll spend on it. There are specific implications involving freelancers and their contracts, from how much they will get paid to who gets rights after publication.

Contracts are a controversial issue for freelancers. Most do not want stories or photos archived without getting paid.

Jones is the opposite. Once she’s finished with the story, if someone wants to archive it, that’s fine with her. She figures the more people who see her article, the better.

In the case of Kindig’s photos, The Morning News owns his images for six to eight weeks.

“They have exclusive rights for that period of time,” he said. “You retain the copyrights to that image.”

After that, he can do as he pleases with the images, but to keep money flowing in, because steady work is not always a sure thing. It’s also a good way to network with people.

When he’s not busy being a full-time student, Kindig works as a photographer with Bella Pictures.


All three of these journalists have worked full time at newspapers or magazines. But, they all agree that the freedom of freelancing outweighs the benefits of a staff position.

After a 41-year career at The Morning News, Blair retired in 1995, and formed Blair Productions, where he and his wife Karen work on freelance projects together – from their home.

They produce work for magazines, radio, television, speaking engagements, public relations and promotions. Blair said he doesn’t miss the daily newsroom routine.

“It’s nice to know every bit of the day is mine,” he said.

Freedom of the job is great for these journalists, but the best thing about their jobs, they say, is working on stories they are passionate about.

“Freelancing has given me the opportunity to write for publications I’ve admired all my life. I would have never been able to write for all of them if I had taken the staff writer route.”

Freelancer Kathryn Jones

has to share rights with the paper.

When freelancing for The Morning News, Kindig said he gets $110 for the first assignment, then $85 for the next assignments in the same day.

“Some days you do anything between one and four assignments,” Kindig says.

The normal pay range for writers is broad – Jones says that it typically ranges from 50 cents to $3.50 a word.

Many freelancers juggle many projects at a time as a way to keep money flowing in, because steady work is not always a sure thing. It’s also a good way to network with people.

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Emily Hughes and Melissa Ferro are senior journalism students at UNT.
Giving a Voice to the Voiceless
Focus group lets students express views on the news

BY SLOAN WHITE & CHREE CARR

For a lot of people over 30, their daily newspaper fix is like a cup of coffee in the morning — just the jolt they need to get the day going. Not so for college students, who find little time for newspapers in their daily lives.

A focus group of students conducted by graduate students in the University of North Texas’ Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism in connection with COVER magazine, showed that young people rely far more heavily on the Internet than more traditional outlets for news. Fortunately, for the traditional news media, they often visit newspaper and broadcast Web sites to get the latest information.

In addition, 34 students – mostly public relations majors – surveyed after the focus group said they also get information from print versions of newspapers depending on their specific interests.

However, young people find that availability of the World Wide Web in coffee shops, restaurants, hotels and cyber cafes, makes it the most convenient way to get news, by simply using a cell phone, laptop or hand held device to scan headlines almost anywhere they happen to be.

“When you want the news, you want it then and you want it now, especially our generation,” said Jamie Hilliard, a senior and one of 10 UNT students in the focus group.

Gone are the days of reading full-length news stories and watching longer broadcast segments, at least for those surveyed. Now young adults want their news brief and television entertaining. They use the Internet as a filter to view only the news they find important.

Not wanting to become obsolete as young people age, newspapers persist in trying to find ways to appeal to the next generation. Some, like The Washington Post, Chicago Tribune and The Dallas Morning News, now offer abbreviated versions of their newspapers free of charge.

Steve Kenny, managing editor of The News‘ tabloid-sized Quick, says he is well aware of the influence of the Internet and wanted to capture its vivacity during the development of Quick.

 “[Young people] like to be able to cherry-pick stories and decipher the way the stories are written,” Kenny said. “They like the energy of the page design because there is a certain ‘pop’ quality.”

For a fast-paced generation with admittedly short attention spans, students using the Internet rely on, like the North Texas Daily and Quick, when they cannot access the Web and still enjoy the entertainment aspect of broadcast news.

“Emotionally and intellectually you’re honing for more information and rely on TV for emotional and visual aspects for a different perspective,” said Kwesi Robertson, a senior.

Quick, appropriately titled, also seeks input from younger employees, as well as readers.

“When you have these people who are 40-plus writing what they think is important, it makes the media boring and doesn’t connect very well with its readers,” Quick’s Kenny said.

Broadcasting has also adapted to the changing environment from news to entertainment. The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, which presents a satirical and humorous perspective on politics, celebrities and international headlines, is a huge hit with the younger generation. In addition, Web sites such as TheSmokingGun.com and DrudgeReport.com offer a dose of reality with a blend of humor.

“Everything has become more sensationalized, because of our need to be entertained,” said Jillian Jordan, a senior.

“Broadcasting has become entertainment.”

The survey revealed that students tend to read entertainment news, investigative stories, political coverage and information about technology the most.

Students expressed varying opinions about the credibility of the press. Some members of the focus group agreed that it seems lines are drawn in a battle for liberal and conservative power over the media as politics, religion and money dictate a medium’s direction.

“I think the majority of people know that the news they’re getting is in some way distorted,” Hilliard said.

Others said they think the media only reflects the biases in society and adapts to the trends of the public’s beliefs and values. In the end, they said, it comes down to the media giving audiences what they want.

“The media is a business anyway, so whichever stories or news trends provoke people to watch, listen or buy a paper, then that’s what they’re going to do,” Robertson said.

Sloan White and Chree Carr are senior journalism majors at UNT. Carr graduates in May.
Not long ago, few people even knew what a “blog” was. Now, these regularly updated Internet postings attract millions of readers and are the subject of contentious debate in newsrooms across the country.

Are bloggers irresponsible gossips operating outside the ethical boundaries of journalism, or are they using the Internet to re-invent the “marketplace of ideas”?

“Blogs sometimes push the mainstream media to probe further into events that might otherwise go unnoticed,” says Mike Hashimoto, assistant editorial page editor for The Dallas Morning News and regular contributor to the paper’s editorial blog. “They provide a valuable service by changing the direction of the media cruise ship, which is otherwise hard to steer.”

Recently, bloggers have gained national attention by exposing a Dan Rather report based on unverified documents, scooping the mainstream global media on the Indian Ocean tsunami and posting non-stop commentary during the 2004 presidential election. Bloggers point to those achievements as evidence that they are the “new journalists.”

Those in the mainstream media don’t like the fact that anyone – from the guy in his pajamas down the street to high-powered executives – can assume the title of “journalist.”

However, the increasing popularity of blogs – most published statistics say they’ve grown from a few hundred thousand to several million in just a few years – has forced even the mainstream media to create their own blogs as a way to attract more readers.

In mainstream media, reporters are grilled by editors before stories go to print, ensuring bylines are associated with integrity by looking for holes, suspect sources and shaky facts. But bloggers operate on their own; no editors to provide those checks and balances in their Internet posts.

“Blogs are not as reliable as other newspaper mediums because they are not subjected to same vigorous rules and high standards of truth and accuracy,” cautions Brian Sweany of D Magazine, which also has created its own blog. "Hence the average reader needs to be careful.”

Sweany says its blog, FrontBurner, started as an effort to get people interested in the magazine. Indeed, since its launch two years ago, FrontBurner has increased traffic on the magazine’s Web site. He views it as an opportunity to do something new for a captive audience.

“It is exciting because it gives [me] a chance to cover breaking news,” says Sweany, describing that as a rare opportunity for monthly magazine writers.

Although visitors to the D Magazine blog are restricted from posting their views on the blog directly, Sweany and his colleagues post most of the coherent feedback from readers. Sweaney prefers to post more feedback that disagrees with him, rather than the supportive messages to make the site more democratic and cover all angles of a debate.

Josh Benton, education reporter for The Dallas Morning News, started his own blog, crabwalk.com. He says he’s careful not to reveal much about himself, mindful that such information might lead readers to question his objectivity.

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BY KEVIN POSIVAL and AAKRITI TANDON
Average Joe: Columnist Specializes in the Everyday Athlete

BY GABRIEL D. BROOKS

In an age of flashy showmanship and marketing gimmickry in sports journalism, a Dallas columnist has made a name for himself without even trying as a storyteller who prefers finding the unsung heroes in sports.

Kevin Sherrington of The Dallas Morning News says he would rather write about “average Joes,” people nobody has heard of, than to cover the same superstar athletes who get more than their share of ink.

“People have told me before that ‘You make your living off these guys, too, these athletes, and if you didn’t have them you’d be out of a job.’” Sherrington said. “I tell them, ‘I wouldn’t be out of a job. I’d still work for a newspaper – I’d just tell stories about somebody else.’

Rather than focus on the intricacies of the triangle offense or who is going to win the American League Championship Series, Sherrington, 48, has an eye for real-life issues, particularly in his weekly column, called “Sunday Brunch.”

Recently he’s written about a 90-year-old African-American golfer who helped integrate Dallas’ municipal courses, a basketball coach who more than 50 years ago led San Angelo Junior College to a national championship, and a 90-year-old African-American golfer who helped integrate Dallas’ municipal courses, a basketball coach who more than 50 years ago led San Angelo Junior College to a national championship.

Sherrington discovered sports journalism during his junior college days at San Jacinto College in Pasadena, Texas.

The fourth of five children and the third of four boys, Sherrington discovered sports journalism during his junior college days at San Jacinto College in Pasadena, Texas.

He came to the craft knowing he hated anything to do with math. Then his younger brother’s pursuit of sports broadcasting steered him toward sports writing.

“He went to San Jac because I was having to pay my own way, and I felt like ... I need to figure out what I’m going to do before I go to a university,” Sherrington said. “I was always a good writer. I had always done well in school in writing, so I could be a sportswriter. The funny thing is, 30 years later, I’m a sportswriter and he’s an accountant.”

He covered the Cougars for three years, including the basketball juggernaut of “Phi Slamma Jamma” in its last two Final Four runs.

In 1985, he came to The News where he wrote about the Southwest Conference, helped with Texas Rangers coverage and began writing baseball feature stories. And in 2000, he became a columnist for The News.

Sherrington said one of the biggest differences between beat writing and being a columnist is wider latitude.

“As a columnist, my favorite thing is having the freedom to write what I want, the freedom of style,” Sherrington said.

“Sherrington was only 22 years old when his father died of a heart attack. He said he was fortunate to be working at a newspaper at that time because it gave him the opportunity to write about his father, painting a picture of the man who had a great influence on him.

Sherrington went on to the University of Houston, and during the summer, he compiled Little League results for The Pasadena Citizen, where he took his first full-time journalism job.

It was then he knew he’d found the right career.

“The hours flew by,” Sherrington said. “I didn’t look at the clock. I didn’t care what time it was. I just loved it.”

After The Pasadena Citizen, Sherrington made brief stops at papers in Galveston and Beaumont before landing at The Houston Chronicle. There, Sherrington first covered small colleges, then Rice University for a year before getting the assignment to cover his alma mater, the University of Houston.

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“As a columnist, my favorite thing is having the freedom to write what I want, the freedom of style,”

Sherrington said.

“As a columnist, I’d say [my style] is conversational, understated. I’ve changed my style since I’ve become a columnist because I believe it’s important for a columnist to be more conversational than a feature writer, or especially a beat writer.”

Sherrington said he was never totally comfortable as a beat writer because it’s just a matter of time before someone gets mad, thus jeopardizing the ability to work the beat well.

One of his favorite types of stories is obituaries. The ability to look at someone’s life and examine what stood out is one of the greatest tools of journalism, he said.

Sherrington was only 22 years old when his father died of a heart attack. He said he was fortunate to be working at a newspaper at that time because it gave him the opportunity to write about his father, painting a picture of the man who had a great influence on him.

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A NOVEL APPROACH
UNT’s Mayborn Institute offers literary nonfiction conference in July

BY MARIE WATTS

Before Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner wrote novels that became required reading in high schools everywhere, they were journalists working in the world of nonfiction.

This summer, writers can learn to weave literary storytelling into their nonfiction work and turn their stories into books at the first Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference of the Southwest, sponsored by UNT’s Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism.

Literary journalism combines characteristics of fiction writing, such as scene setting and character dialogue, with traditional journalism, such as reporting and interviewing. George Getschow, UNT journalism professor and formerly with The Wall Street Journal, said this technique brings the story alive by using all the senses.

“At many newspapers we are not writing stories, we are writing reports,” Getschow said. “Some newspapers such as The Wall Street Journal and The Dallas Morning News care about storytelling and give writers time.”

The idea for the conference evolved over time. At a meeting between Mayborn Director Mitch Land and UNT regents Burle Pettit, Gayle Strange and Frances B. Vick, founding director of the UNT Press, the topic of addressing book publishing through curriculum came up. Dr. Land was inspired to create a publishing track in the Mayborn’s graduate program as part of a three-part initiative, which includes a literary nonfiction course and sponsoring this conference.

Since then, Getschow, along with Land and Carolyn Gilbert of the International Association of Obituaries, have worked to attract authors known both locally and nationally, as well as writers and editors all practicing literary journalism.

About 250 writers – from college students to working journalists and aspiring authors – are expected to attend the weekend conference in July, Getschow said.

Jayne Suhler, a senior lecturer of journalism at Southern Methodist University, who teaches reporting as well as a literary journalism class, plans to be there.

“I’m interested in the writers’ conference because it will give me a chance to hear from literary nonfiction writers about their craft and research,” Suhler said. “I hope to bring what I learn back to my students.”

Unlike some conferences, attendees will have the opportunity to hear every speaker as well as attend writing workshops, Getschow said.

The university also will hold a three-week literary nonfiction course this summer in Archer City and students will attend the conference as part of the course.

Getschow said he hopes the conference will inspire the storytellers of tomorrow.

Writers speaking at the conference include Susan Orlean, author of “My Kind of Place;” Norman Pearlstine, editor in chief of TIME Inc.; Alex Kotlowitz, author of “There Are No Children Here;” Marilyn Chase, who wrote “The Barbary Plague;” and Bill Marvel, a Dallas Morning News feature writer.

Before he started writing for The News 18 years ago, Marvel worked for the now-defunct National Observer as well as the Dallas Times Herald.

Always an avid reader and writer, Marvel, like many young journalists at that time, became interested in literary nonfiction while still in college.

“In the 1960s, we were reading Tom Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson and others who consistently wrote remarkable works. Esquire magazine also published very good literary nonfiction,” Marvel said.

The writing inspired Marvel, who said that at the time he did not consider this genre separate from literature, just good writing.

“It is terrible to bore the reader and waste his or her time,” Marvel said. “The reader deserves the best writing you can possibly produce.”

Despite his years of experience, Marvel still feels he can always improve his writing.

“When you set a goal for yourself, you always fall short of what you want your writing to do, but you keep trying,” Marvel said.

Marvel fills his writing with narration, details and humor, as well as presenting surprising twists and turns for the reader. Ultimately, he said, he feels a good story engages a reader’s heart and mind.

The top three submissions in the article/essay workshop, as judged by a panel, will be awarded cash prizes at a reception. Writers also will have the opportunity to submit manuscripts for possible publication. The winner, as determined by a panel of judges, will receive a provisional contract with UNT Press to publish a book.

Land said he’s looking for the conference to become an annual event and a source of revenue to support the academic program and attract sponsors for student scholarships. Additionally, he wants UNT’s journalism department to become known for the best training for journalists working in the world of nonfiction.
Veronica Acosta and Melissa Ferro are seniors at UNT. Acosta and Ferro have this sort of reunion.

These journalists clump together and talk about their experiences when they return home to the everyday grind.

As she waited, the father’s brothers began questioning her about her ethnicity. The translator did all the talking and by the end, the brothers were convinced that she was not Muslim. The translator indicated that they needed to run, just seconds before the brothers began chasing after them. She had never been so scared in her life, she said.

So why did she do all this? Reeder wanted readers to see Iraqis as people, not as enemies.

“Life is still so difficult over there for them,” said Reeder, who teaches a photography course at UNT.

Despite concerns of having limited coverage of this most recent war in Iraq, Timms said he feels this has been the best war reporting situation since Vietnam.

Based on his experiences as a pool reporter in the first Gulf War and in Somalia, he felt that this time around, he got to see the war closer up and from a more personal perspective of the soldiers.

He said that during the first Gulf War, reporters were kept at arm’s length from military units. During interviews, reporters had a public relations officer standing at their side.

This time, they didn’t have to deal with that.

In the Gulf War, Timms spotted a tank with a Texas flag flying from the antenna. Small talk with a marine led to the discovery that the soldier was a law student from Dallas. After learning that Timms worked for The Dallas Morning News, the marine invited Timms to travel with their unit, giving him access he would not have otherwise had.

In Iraq, he came under fire several times. “It’s not a safe place, and that is the downside of the embed process too,” Timms said. “If you are really embedded, you will be facing the same risks as the soldiers do.”

As for Kovach, a car bomb exploded outside her base, blowing out the windows from some of the buildings. During an all-night operation, she heard firing on her unit’s periphery as they ran from place to place to find the safest spot. Yet she was not safe on her own – a mortar round was shot at her group, landing 500 feet away.

To deal with these situations, or even unnerving travels down unsafe roads, Kovach says reporters rely on each other for support.

“You go back to the hotel and drink a bunch of whiskey and then move on,” she laughs. “Then later on, you touch base with each other and form this sort of fellowship.”

Journalists experience a similar kinship as soldiers in a unit when they return home to the everyday grind.

“You get this sense when you come back that other people don’t understand what you are going through,” she said. “So all these journalists clump together and talk about their experiences and have this sort of reunion.”

Veronica Acosta and Melissa Ferro are seniors at UNT. Acosta has a double major in journalism and international studies.

Kevin Posival is a senior journalism and creative writing major at UNT. He graduates in May.
the war in Iraq. There is a notable difference in the death caused by natural disaster and that of a war, he said. “With war it’s immediate – like a car bomb,” he said. “But with this, the body is decaying, smells worse. It’s nastier.”

The tsunami differed from other disasters he’s covered in that “there are more dead bodies – that’s the big difference,” Bouaphanh said.

“I prefer conflict over stuff like this. It’s a different environment, it’s free reign over the country to a certain extent [military is still highly present in some area], you can basically go where you want, go right up to the body.”

He said the mentality of covering the tsunami is different than war and that it’s hard to compare the two. Car bombs, shootings, kidnapping – it’s a different way of working, and in that way it’s easier, he said.

“From fighting and conflict to a tsunami that doesn’t discriminate, all kinds of people are affected – young and old,” he said. Still, spending time in a war zone prepared him for the tsunami, he said.

“If I hadn’t covered all those dead bodies ... ” said Bouaphanh, referring to his time in Iraq. “[That] made it much easier.”

Hitting Home

Anu Raghunathan, a reporter who recently moved back to Chennai, India, from Dallas to be near family, was in bed at 6:30 a.m. feeding her 7-month-old daughter when the quake struck.

“I initially thought that my knees had become wobbly from my vigorous exercise the previous night but the shaking persisted,” Raghunathan said. “It was as though someone were shaking the bed from underneath. I was puzzled.”

Later, her sister, who lives nearby, called to tell her it was an earthquake. As soon as she understood what had happened, she contacted her former employer The Morning News to see if she could help out. It wasn’t until she got to the coast, where she interviewed victims in fishing hamlets, that she grasped the full measure of how devastating the event had been.

Raghunathan met a mother who told her the heartbreaking story of losing both her daughters “to the sea.” She also spoke of a 17-year-old whose mother died in the tidal wave.

“Being a mother, I could truly empathize with the mother who had lost her daughters and with the daughter who lost her mother,” she said. “I still remember the hurt in the 17-year-old girl’s eyes. I still remember the lost look on a mother’s face – a mother who had lost both her daughters to the tsunami.”

Raghunathan, who will see first hand the recovery process for years to come, said she was depressed after covering the stories for The Morning News.

“My only consolation was that these stories needed to be told,” Raghunathan said. “Only then readers would get a feel for what was happening in this part of the world and only then could we drum up more aid.”

Although many journalists say the experience of being surrounded by so much death and devastation changed them, those who are used to covering war and other tragic events say it was just another big story.

“I’m [still] the same person,” Bouaphanh said. Some were moved to continue to try to help.

In late February, Khanna returned to the region for about a month, primarily as a doctor with the International Medical Corps, but she also sent back online reports for CBS 11 from Banda Aceh.

In an e-mail, in early April after returning from a month-long trip in Banda Aceh, Khanna told COVER magazine that the extent of the damage is still “unbelievable.”

“Pancaked buildings are still collapsed and untouched. Debris is everywhere,” she wrote. “The Acehnese people in Banda Aceh are trying to pick up the pieces of their lives ... I was touched at the responsiveness of the Acehnese to my medical care and tried to be respectful of their customs.”

Cassie Bernet is senior UNT journalism student. She will graduate in May.
situation and there are efforts in Congress to pass a federal shield law. I think that would be helpful because it would offer a degree of clarity here.

Q. Why do you think they continue to pursue you and Judith Miller given the one source that came forward?

A. A lot of it has to do with Robert Novak who named Plame originally. If Novak has already testified, and he won’t say if he has, but if he has, then what does he [the prosecutor] need us for? And if he hasn’t testified then why isn’t he in contempt of court? It’s all very confusing to me, and I’m in the middle of it.

Q. Judith Miller said, “I risk going to jail for a story I didn’t write for reasons a court won’t explain.” Do you feel the same way?

A. I did write some things that are relevant to this case so I don’t feel exactly the same way but I am as frustrated as Judy that a lot of the court’s information is being kept sealed from us – which is ironic because the court and the prosecutor felt we can’t be trusted with knowing this information. Yet, ironically, we’re very good at keeping secrets because, at the same time, we’re about to go to jail for our ability to keep secrets. We’re being denied all the facts in our case and it would be helpful to know.

Q. Why is the grand jury after you and Miller instead of Novak or someone in the Bush administration?

A. The grand jury is basically a tool of the prosecutor. It’s prosecutors who call and summon them. They have a tendency to do what he wants so it’s really about him. I don’t know if they’ve called Novak. My lawyers tell me that it would be very helpful to know if he’s been called. I know they’ve subpoenaed a lot of people in the Bush administration. I just don’t know whether he has what he needs to write his report, in which case I don’t know why he needs me.

Q. You covered both the Clinton administration and the Bush administration. Compare and contrast how they dealt with the media.

A. All presidential administrations are wary of the media. They know they need to use the media to get their message out but at the same time they’re wary of them. No administration is cozy with the press but that said, I think things were a little easier to cover in the Clinton years. There was a little more access. It was a little easier to get people to talk and such. I don’t begrudge the Bush administration for that. It’s certainly their prerogative not to talk to the press if they don’t want to.

Q. Have you talked with your son about the situation? Does he understand what’s going on?

A. No, he’s 6. We’ve not told him about my situation. I think the feeling is we’re going to wait to see what happens, and we don’t want to worry him needlessly.

When it comes time, it’s going to be hard to explain because I want my son to have respect for the law. At the same time, I want him to understand why I would be willing to risk incarceration for something like this. It’s going to be a difficult conversation if it has to happen.

Q. How do you go about preparing for jail?

A. I really haven’t. In a way, I don’t think you can. I guess I’ll tell my wife where the car insurance stuff is. But I’m still hoping reason will prevail in the 11th hour.

Q. Has this experience changed the way you approach your job?

A. I think, like a lot of journalists, I didn’t think much about legal privileges. I assumed if I wanted to talk to somebody on background or off the record that we were free to do so. We wouldn’t have the risk of jail at the end of the conversation. I think, like a lot of journalists, I was somewhat naïve about that. I’m certainly not anymore.

Jeff Andrews is a senior journalism student at UNT. He graduates in August.

http://mayborninstitute.unt.edu
me some stability that journalism doesn’t have in terms of hours, etc. That’s become more important to me now that I have a family.”

The Newsroom Comedian

Before he quit journalism, Drake Witham had been a reporter since age 15 when his mother had to drive him to and from his first job at the local newspaper in 1987.

When he started at The Dallas Morning News in 1999, he loved the pressure of rushing out to get the story and working the long hours to get it done. But he also loved comedy, and there’s just nothing funny about covering murders and car accidents.

Though he had an outlet for his jokes at company parties, delighting his co-workers with impersonations of their bosses, he finally gave up his steady job and moved to Los Angeles to break into the late-night world of stand up.

“I just didn’t want to regret not giving comedy a shot, and you can’t do it halfway,” he said.

Last year, after performing at a Boston comedy festival, Witham gave his tape to a man organizing tours to perform at military bases. Thinking he would be sent to Asia or bases in the United States, he was surprised when they asked him to go to Iraq. Witham became one of five Comics on Duty, who performed for the troops last August.

“Stranger than being in a foreign country is being in a war zone and knowing that people are dying all around – soldiers, citizens, young, old,” Witham said. “I didn’t see any fighting but you could hear gun shots and explosions.”

Witham performed up to three shows a day for audiences as small as four and as large as 1,000 in tents, on flatbeds and even in some of Saddam Hussein’s palaces.

“The crowds were not all that different [from clubs] other than almost every person was holding an M-16,” he said.

“Afterwards is when I could feel the difference because they would wait in line for 30 or 40 minutes to talk to us and tell us ‘thanks’ and that’s the first time they’ve laughed in six months.”

Back home, Witham is relieved that he doesn’t have to worry about being kidnapped each day, but he spends most of his time finding ways to pay the bills.

He still freelances; he wrote about the Oscars and kept a journal for The Morning News while in Iraq. He writes new material for his act and performs for free around Los Angeles. He finds similarities between journalism and comedy.

“I got out because I didn’t want to spend my life reporting what other people did.”

Drake Witham, comedian

“Journalism was all about righting the wrongs, you know ‘comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable,’” he said. “It’s the same in comedy in that I want people to laugh, but I want them to think about things in a different way. ‘Hey that is obnoxious when people do that.’”

Not having a map or a boss is exciting and a little scary, but he’s happier this way.

 “[Journalism] is a noble profession for many because there’s an element of righting the wrongs and comforting the afflicted,” he said. “I got out because I didn’t want to spend my life reporting what other people did.”

Sloan White is a senior journalism student at UNT.
I hate to see women portrayed as “needy” – less educated, less fortunate, unable to make their own decisions, and dependant on their husbands. Too often in my country, that’s how women are shown. But women are perfectly capable of running their own companies, taking care of their families and making a difference.

I was inspired by a woman like that – my grandmother. Born in 1924, she was married at 18 and widowed by 26; left alone to raise five children and one unborn babe. My grandmother, who finished only the fourth grade, went back to get a degree as a midwife. She never remarried; instead she was determined to educate her five kids.

When I came to America to study at the University of North Texas, I was surprised by the range of magazines for women that could be found anywhere. Though that was not my first encounter with magazines, it was surely the first time they caught my attention.

I’ve been reading all the stories I find interesting. I’m amazed; inspiring women are involved in everything – politics, media, and fashion.

They grace the covers of what seems like thousands of magazines, each one specializing in topics concerning women. Other than magazines for brides, there’s nothing geared toward Mozambique women. Can you imagine a country with 10 million women and not a single women’s magazine? I plan to change that.

In the United States, most women take these magazines for granted. However, in places like Mozambique, a woman’s magazine could make a huge difference in the lives of women. It could make them aware of their rights, inspire them to make better decisions in their lives and give them the information they need to avoid diseases such as AIDS.

When I return home this summer, I plan to launch just that kind of magazine – one that will not only interest, but inspire women.

Mozambique is a Portuguese-speaking African country, with about 18.5 million people and 13 official dialects. It sits between South Africa and Tanzania with a long, beautiful coast bathed by the Indian Ocean to the east.

Through the years, I have watched the growth and change in Mozambican women’s attitudes, and I regretted that there was not a media outlet to capture those changes. Of course I also realize that even if there were such a vehicle, it is likely that I would not like the way it portrays women.

A former communist country, the government changed, but the system is slow to eliminate the residue left behind by the former regime. The FRELIMO (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) has been in control of everything since it became the ruling party in 1975. Though it is now a democratic country, it is a one-party democracy that decides everything about society.

FRELIMO assumes all Mozambican women are members of a national organization called OMM (Organization of Mozambican Women), which it created more than 50 years ago. Officials think everything concerning women should be decided by this organization and ignores what opposition parties think.

The politics of the country is not my only challenge. Only 46.4 percent of the population is literate. Of that, only 14.8 percent are women, leaving me to find an audience within the one-third of women who can read.

To add to the challenge, only 9 percent of women can afford to buy a magazine every month. Most read them at their hairdressers,
Although his father was never the kind of dad to play ball with his kids or get as involved in sports as Sherrington might have wished, he showed his children how to live an upstanding, moral life.

“He was a good man,” he said.

His father’s death at age 59 made Sherrington more aware of the fragility of life, despite what seems total indifference to it by others.

“Having my father die when I was 22 may have affected me from the standpoint of I’ve always been very conscious of death and the end,” Sherrington said. “The fact that he didn’t get to know any of my family or my wife or anything probably is my greatest regret. But, the other side of that is I was very conscious of how ephemeral life is. It’s over sometimes before you know it.

“So it always bugs me when you read stories about someone who dies and people will say, ‘Boy that really puts your life in perspective,’ and I think ‘Yeah, for you it has for about an hour,’ and then they go back to doing exactly what they were doing before.”

Sherrington’s life revolves around his family. He and his wife, a Realtor, have four children. Sherrington prides himself on being able to take his kids on Indian Guide and Princess campouts on weekends, times when he could be covering sporting events.

Although his job is important to him, Sherrington says it “pales in significance” to his family. Though it’s changing somewhat, sports writing is not traditionally seen as a natural career for a family man because of the extensive traveling requirements.

Sherrington added that he is annoyed when athletes or coaches say they are retiring to spend more time with their families, because it is usually not true. “I’m not being cynical by saying that, it’s just truthful,” Sherrington said. “I don’t like it because it cheapens it for all the rest of us who are spending more time with our family.”

Fellow Morning News sportswriter Barry Horn says that family man persona is not a part of who Sherrington is, but who he is entirely.

Horn described Sherrington as the “heart and soul of SportsDay,” as The News’ daily section is called. He said Sherrington is someone respected by his colleagues and the one most likely to buy them lunch.

Sherrington’s family life “gives him a good perspective on a variety of issues that some people might not see,” Horn said.

As for his writing, Sherrington is so good at it because of his listening skills and the fact that he is an easy going person who does not try to evoke a reaction in his columns, Horn said.

Sherrington has his own niche. Many women read Sherrington’s stories, even if they don’t read anything else in the sports section. But, he says, there are always people who want him to be one of the extremes – a hammer, criticizing everything, or lauding praises on everything.

Sports writing is not always as “black and white” as most people make it out to be, Sherrington says, and if he is indifferent on a subject, he’d rather just tell a story.

He hates being wrong, he says, but does not have a problem with being critical when called to do so, particularly on ethics.

“I’ve had people call me a moralist, and I’ll write them back and say, ‘What’s wrong with that?’” Sherrington said.

“All the stuff that happened at Colorado, steroids, any of those kinds of issues, to me, those kinds of things are important. Everything else is just fun and games,” he said. “I’ve been very strong on those types of things. That kind of stuff’s important – people’s lives, your health, people cheating, all those kind of things.”

For the most part, Sherrington says he likes to practice “fly-on-the-wall” style journalism, and that he is a smart aleck who likes to have fun with his subject matter, but one will find a “moral, righteous tone to it.”

He believes doing the right thing is much harder as a youngster and progressively becomes easier with age because people learn to expect and respect the consistency with which you display your beliefs and moral values.

“I like to think I’m a very empathetic person, and so I’m very conscious of that,” Sherrington said. “Sometimes it slips, you write things, but that doesn’t mean you spend every day on every column trying to get to the greater meaning of life. But, I’d like to think on the whole, that I do.”

Gabriel D. Brooks is a senior journalism major specializing in sports. He graduates from UNT in August.

NOVEL APPROACH CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

in literary nonfiction in the Southwest.

The conference costs $150 for students not enrolled in the three-week course and $250 for non-students.

For more information contact the Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism at 940-565-4917 or e-mail Land at mland@unt.edu.

Marie Watts is a senior journalism student at UNT.

TOUGH DAY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

her sisters, friends, coworkers and her editor. She stays motivated by focusing on the process of the trial and reporting the facts.

“My mother would read all my trial stories and would be like, ‘I don’t know how you can sit through this,’ and ‘It’s just so horrible,’” Becka said.

That made her think.

“I realized that it’s my job, and it’s not the most important job in the world; it’s not like a surgeon or someone who is saving lives in the operating room, certainly that’s important,” she said. “But I have an important job to not only represent what the crime victims go through and what the defendant’s side of it is, but to let Dallas County residents know what crime is going on.”

Emily, too, feels an obligation to tell the story of the person who dies, or in some cases, the person who committed the crime. She particularly wants to help people understand why something happened.

Because she’s covered stories about mothers who’ve killed their babies, she gets a lot of readers asking, “why did she do that?”

Emily said.

“I think that you can’t think too hard about why someone did something because if you begin to understand then you probably have a problem of your own,” she said.

Langford finds comfort in the fact that the good images and stories outweigh the bad. She finds that running in the morning before beginning draining stories helps her handle it.

“I just tell myself, especially when covering horrible things, that it’s not about me, it’s never about me,” Langford said. “When you put it in that context I’m paid to be an observer.”

Some reporters try to avoid those draining stories, but Langford welcomes them.

“I’m glad to write about these things because I think they need to be written about, or else I wouldn’t do it,” she said. “If you want to be a news reporter, this is what it is. It’s not a pretty sight; it’s just as newsworthy and fascinating and worth the same stakes in a newspaper as anything else.”

Veronica Acosta is a senior journalism and international studies double major at UNT. She graduates in May.

ENTERTAINMENT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

privacy for them.

Ultimately, the quality of the reporting about celebrities comes to individual reporters and their integrity. The media and celebrities need each other to accomplish their tasks and neither should feel limited in their jobs despite the other.

“I make a living as a film critic not as a gossip person,” Cogill said. “I always try to take the high road. I don’t always succeed, but that’s my goal.”

Jennifer Manis is a senior journalism major at UNT.
Seasoned Journalists Offer Career Advice

“Do everything you can as an intern. No task is beneath you. Get to know everyone and try to learn some aspect of every job around you. You may think you know what you want to do when you graduate, but you may change your mind. You’ll learn everything that’s out there through internships. Work, work, work. That should be your motto. You’re young, work it. It will really pay off in the future.”
– Marie Biggs
executive producer
KLTV (Channel 7), Tyler, Texas

“Because you can get hired on at a really good publication after you’ve had an internship there because you have proven yourself. You can try to get in with a big publication and start at the bottom, usually with an internship. Or you can start at a small publication, which is what I did, and it’s good training, because it is like the boot camp of journalism, because if you work at a small newspaper you cover everything. You have to do city hall, features, police reporting, courts, everything. You get a big overview, and because the staff is smaller, you have to write a lot. It was really tough, but it was great training.”
– Gretel C. Kovach
reporter
The Dallas Morning News

“When you are in school, if you can get an internship at a good newspaper or a good news organization and do a good job and get to know some of the editors and some of the reporters or the people who do the hiring, that will certainly come in handy for when you are trying to graduate. I know [at The Dallas Morning News] they are looking to hire really good self-starters, and people who have done a good job as interns or clerks [at The Morning News]. Anything you can do in an internship to distinguish yourself, that will give you an upper hand.”
– Holly Becka
reporter
The Dallas Morning News

“I would suggest doing an internship to get your foot in the door” and photojournalists should send their portfolios to the head photo editor at the publication to which they’re applying.
– Khampha Bouaphanh
photographer
Fort Worth Star-Telegram

“Getting an internship is always the biggest thing. We make lots of hires, relatively speaking, of interns. If you work for people and they see what you’re like, they see your work ethic, they see your intelligence, they see your interest level, they see the questions that you ask, or that you’re a go-getter, then that makes a huge difference for editors.”
– Kevin Sherrington
sports columnist
The Dallas Morning News

“Read. After you determine what interests you, read everything about that subject you can. When I started at Texas Monthly in 1995, I read every major political story the magazine had published since its founding in 1973. That gave me a great foundation and gave me the confidence to get in on the ‘conversation.’ And when you’ve read everything you think you need, read more.”
– Brian D. Sweany
senior editor
D Magazine

“I started in this business so long ago that I phoned in stories to a rewrite man – dictating straight from my notes. In hindsight, I see that taught me to ‘tell’ a story, not ‘write’ it. Our stories ought to sound more like conversation and less like research papers. Tell, don’t write.”
– Steve Blow
metro columnist
The Dallas Morning News

“It’s always good to have many other interests going in your life at any point in time. For me, when I cover situations where I have to be sent somewhere for a draining situation, I have to make sure I have running time, or cycling time, or something just to let my mind go a drift, because you really can get too focused on something.”
– Terri Langford
staff writer
Houston Chronicle

“One thing I wish I would have learned more in school is, when you get out of school you will most likely be working for a smaller paper or a bureau and will be covering bureaucracy, a lot of city government, a lot of school stuff. I wish I would have known more about open records laws– what I am allowed to get by law and how to go about asking for it, to make myself a better reporter. So if you can be familiar with how city government works, how school districts work and how open records request works, it will help with your stories.”
– Holly Becka
reporter
The Dallas Morning News

“Always make the call and knock on the door of a family member [in a tragic story]. I know it’s hard, but there is the chance that if you don’t ask them if they wanted to talk, then they would have wanted to. You might get the door slammed in your face, but always make the effort.”
– Jennifer Emily
reporter
The Dallas Morning News

COVER writers Veronica Acosta, Cassie Bernet, and Gabriel D. Brooks contributed to the tip box. Stephanie Sarles is a student at the Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism.”

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