

Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism
P.O. Box 311460
Denton, TX 76203-1460
(940) 565-4564; Fax: (940) 369-8959
<http://mayborninstitute.unt.edu>

spring 2003

COVER

Gonzo Lives!
An exclusive interview
with Hunter S. Thompson

Murder,
she writes
The blood, sweat and tears
of crime reporting

Cracking the Tough
Journalism Market
Finding a job and keeping it

Risky Business
Journalists are in
danger at war and at home

Beginning a Journalism Career???

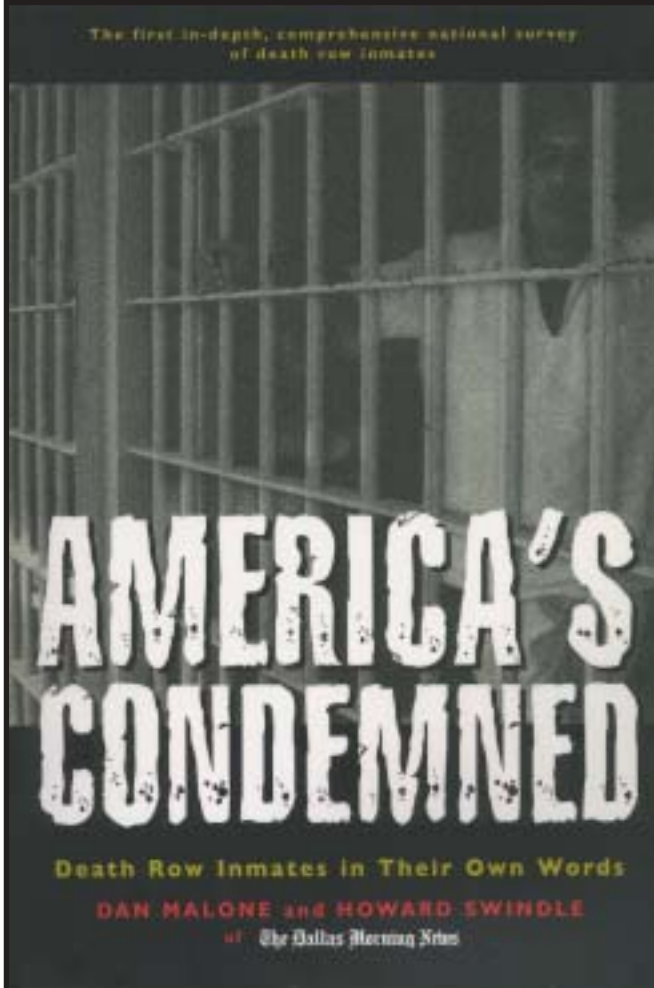
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Autographed by Dan Malone, Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism student, and Howard Swindle, UNT alum.



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The Final Point

Covering the Cowboys used to be exciting. Sports journalists are waiting to see if new coach Bill Parcells can bring back the magic.

Story by Nathan Stallings
Illustration by Marjorie Owens

There's been a lot of noise in the Dallas-Fort Worth professional sports market of late, but the fuss isn't over the Dallas Cowboys but those "other Dallas teams," the Mavericks and the Stars. This isn't just because the Mavericks and Stars are better than the Cowboys, which they clearly are. It's also because the gang at Valley Ranch has kept a low profile since the hiring of coach Bill Parcells in January.

Granted, there have been some personnel moves, such as the release of future Hall of Famer and all-time leading rusher Emmitt Smith, and the signing of free agent wide receiver Terry Glenn. But we have heard relatively little from the Cowboys. Press conferences have been few and far between. This might be because of the new coach or because the Cowboys camp may not want to make any promises they can't keep or say something that could back to bite them, as happens all too often.

After coming off three straight 5-11 seasons, fans and those involved in the organization are wondering when the Cowboys will return to their glory days, not to mention the sports journalists who have covered the blown opportunities and humiliating losses ad nauseum. They, like everybody else, are waiting to see whether Cowboys owner Jerry Jones' hiring of Parcells will turn things around.

The coach does have a track record of turnarounds. He led the New York Giants to their only two Super Bowl titles in 1986 and 1990. He transformed the New England Patriots from a mediocre franchise into a Super Bowl runner-up. And he took a less-than-mediocre New York Jets team to the AFC championships in 1998 before retiring from coaching after the 1999 season.

Now Parcells is back at the helm of one of the most storied and decorated franchises in the history of professional sports. Can he work his magic again with the 'Boys?

"I certainly hope so," says Dale Hansen, the outspoken sports anchor for WFAA-TV

(Channel 8). His comment underscores the underlying frustration many sports journalists and commentators have had with the team and its management.

Randy Galloway, sports columnist for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and host of "Sports at Six" on WBAP 820, has been among the most critical commentators about the team's downward spiral. The hiring of Parcells is "a huge change in direction," he says. "Jerry had taken the team back to where it was in the late '80s."

Mickey Spagnola, a columnist at DallasCowboys.com and host of the "Ranch Report" on radio station KTCK, adds: "Most people, players included, are paying attention to detail more, but then that is normal anytime someone new comes in to coach." The key, he says, is "once the newness (of Parcells) wears off, how do the players react?"

That's a real good question, Mickey. Will they perform below their expectations like they have since their last Super Bowl title in 1995, or will they live up to their full potential and return the Cowboys to Super Bowl glory?

Parcells is the right man for the job. His credentials prove that, but he may be under more pressure this time than ever in his long career. This isn't the New England Patriots, this isn't the New York Jets or the New York Giants. This is "America's team."

It's also "an international team with international interest," Spagnola says. "Everyone seems to care about the Cowboys, one way or another. Love 'em or hate 'em, but they have some sort of attachment. No matter where in this world I have traveled, people understand Dallas Cowboys, from Japan to Italy. People are passionate about their Cowboys."

Coach Parcells, the whole world is going to be watching. Especially the men and women behind the notepads, the mikes and the cameras. Give 'em something worth reporting, like a Super Bowl.

Or two. ©



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Photo courtesy of Simon & Schuster

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It is fitting for the Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism to publish a magazine that addresses the professional concerns and issues of media practitioners in the Southwest. In our back yard, the eighth-largest media market in the United States, the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex has served our students well since the founding of the journalism department more than 50 years ago. We take great pride in our alumni who work across the Southwest. Our students continue to benefit from these professionals. Indeed, some of the topics covered in this issue were first brought to our attention by these professionals when they have visited our classes over the years.

The magazine also gives students an opportunity to learn by researching journalism issues relevant to the current media market. The outcome—a professional magazine—provides students a tangible publication of their efforts, which, we hope, contributes significantly to the professional conversation of journalism in the Southwest. As the only nationally accredited professional master's program in Texas, the Mayborn Institute intends to lead the way in journalism innovations.

The Frank W. Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism was founded in 1999 through a generous gift from the Frank W. and Sue Mayborn Foundation Advise and Consult Fund at Communities Foundation of Texas, Inc. Through this gift, the Mayborn Graduate Institute is able to offer \$200,000 in scholarships every year. The Mayborn Institute is located at the University of North Texas in Denton, about 17 miles northwest of Dallas.

We invite journalists from throughout the Southwest to give us feedback on this project, story ideas and to continue to provide valuable insight to our students who will be working on future issues of the magazine.

Mitch Land, Ph.D.
Director

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COVER

Publisher
Mayborn Graduate Institute of
Journalism
Director, Mitch Land, Ph.D.
Professor, Richard Wells, Ph.D.

Editor
Kathryn Jones
Adjunct Professor of Journalism

Staff writers
Robin Fletcher
Richard Ham
Trish Harjes
David Harper
Victoria Healy
Ruth Ann Hensley
Megan Middleton
Jeff Ryder
Brooke Scoggins
Anthony Spencer
Nathan Stallings
Alisse Wobser

Copy editors
Sabrina Goldenberg
Amelia Stiffin

Art directors
April Kinser
Marjorie Owens
Katie Richardson

Photography
Kirsten Faulder
Ahna Hubnik

Advertising and marketing
Monique Echaniz
Liz Jennings
Melanie Jones
Jason Mershon
Stephanie Mulder
Irene Rodriguez



So you want to be a columnist?

The Dallas Morning News' Jacquelyn Floyd puts the job in perspective.

Story by Trish Harjes

If brutal deadlines, obsessed fans, vicious public responses, desperation for story ideas and letters from prisoners are your idea of a fun and easy job, maybe you have what it takes to be a columnist. Just ask Jacquelyn Floyd, a popular and award-winning columnist for *The Dallas Morning News*.

Many newspaper or magazine columns seem deceptively simple and effortless. But anyone who's been in the position of churning out one week after week or month after month, like Floyd, can tell you that's not the case. "Journalists who don't write a column think you just sit down, and it falls out of your head, but you have to pry it out with a crowbar," she says. "A good column has to be topical, pointed and well-written, and it's tough to hit all of those targets all the time."

Writing a column and reporting a story aren't completely unrelated, Floyd explains. "The same amount of research and dedication goes into each type of writing, but what distinguishes the two are the style and execution in which each is delivered," she says. "Writing a column

requires a human touch that can be difficult to muster time and time again. You have to find topics that you care about and want to share with the public. A great deal of yourself is invested in what you write, and when you write a column, you are put in the spotlight."

That was a big change for Floyd after she switched from news and feature writing to producing a column. "As a columnist, your name is much more tightly associated with your work than if you were a general assignments reporter," she says. "You put yourself into the writing, and your personality comes through to and connects with the audience." She certainly didn't anticipate the fame her column brought her. She says it has put her "in an unexpectedly public position. As a columnist, I have been asked to give speeches, emcee banquets, ride in parades and bowl for charity. While I have many other faults, a craving for fame or publicity is not among them."

The biggest challenge in writing a column for Floyd is dealing with the public. "I get a great deal of praise and positive feed-

back from complete strangers, which is certainly pleasant," she says. "But I also get some remarkably vitriolic responses from people who disagree with me. I get a lot of unsolicited mail from people who are crazy, obsessive or in jail. I sometimes miss the anonymity of being just another byline."

Even if you are willing to put up with all the crazies and don't mind bearing the responsibility of being in the public eye, writing a column requires talent and drive. It requires a writer who's disciplined, self-directed and has a unique spark that gives his or her voice a reason to be heard.

Those who can hack it find the job to be quite rewarding. "There is no better job for a journalist," Floyd says. "Your range of topics is broad, your use of language unlimited, your relationship with readers surprisingly intimate. I wanted the job because I have always been interested in being a writer. I don't want to fix the world, I just want to describe it in a way people will find illuminating or entertaining." ■

hard for my editor to justify my working on an investigative piece when he has three stories he needs covered.” says Steve McGonigle, a veteran metro reporter for *The Dallas Morning News*.

The corporate environment also influences how editors and executives manage the legal aspects of investigative reporting. “We live in a very litigious society,” says Howard Swindle, projects reporter at the *News*. He edited several Pulitzer Prize-winning stories, including a series on law enforcement abuse in Texas that won a paper a Pulitzer for investigative reporting in 1992.

“The public views media companies as organizations with deep pockets,” he adds.

Increasingly, managers and editors have to evaluate stories, especially investigative pieces, not only on newsworthy merits but also from the legal perspective. In the past a good libel lawyer would

suggest changes to stories to help retain the hard-hitting journalistic content while protecting the organization from a potential lawsuit.

In the current era of mergers and cutbacks, however, media outlets that might have retained local legal counsel in the past now seek advice from the corporate lawyers who may or may not care whether the story runs, but definitely care about the bottom line. No one wants to be the legal counsel who approved the story that landed the organization in court. Cautious attitudes at the executive level eventually filter down to the newsroom. That could lead some editors to stop pushing reporters for investigative reporting altogether. “Not only have investigative teams gotten smaller, but the organizations are not encouraging reporters to do investigative work,” McGonigle says.

Another reason for a decline in the number of hard-hitting investigative stories is the way the media – local television in particular – has used so-called ‘investigative’ reporting to bolster ratings. Often investigative pieces are saved to run during the ‘sweeps’ period. “What passes for investigative work at some TV stations is little more than something they have ripped out of the newspaper or

some kind of consumer report,” McGonigle says. A notable exception is WFAA-TV (Channel 8) and reporter Brett Shipp, whose investigative series last year about Dallas police informants who planted fake drugs on defendants sparked an official inquiry, resulted in the dismissals of dozens of charges and won the station a prestigious duPont-Columbia University Silver Baton, broadcast journalism’s equivalent of the Pulitzer. Too much of the ‘new investigative reporting’ in TV, however, is packaged to appear original but is not. Some

“It’s hard for my editor to justify my working on an investigative piece when he has three stories he needs covered.”

–Steve McGonigle
veteran metro reporter for
The Dallas Morning News

TV stations hire consulting firms who package an entire piece, including scripts, images and experts. A significant number of these ‘investigative’ reports insult the audience’s intelligence. Often, mundane subjects like speeding on a local freeway are hyped only to fall apart upon closer inspection. This type of ‘new investigative reporting’ severely affects the credibility of the entire journalism profession.

Consumer apathy is also partly responsible for the decline in investigative reporting. The modern adult faces increasing time demands and has grown accustomed to getting sound bites of information. Most adults under the age of 35 grew up with evolving new forms of media. CNN was the first round-the-clock news service. Viewers can tune in there for the latest headlines and news as it happens. Subsequent copycat channels have sprouted to serve up quick bites of news. Since the advent of wireless technology and text messaging, a consumer can select specific bits of information sent to a wireless device.

To keep pace with this flood of data, many people have started to compartmentalize information into broad chunks of data. Most major forms of media, including magazines, are significantly

shortening stories based on a belief that attention spans have shrunk. For instance, *Rolling Stone* magazine, which has traditionally been filled with stories that often contain more than 5,000 words, has resorted to running more stories with shorter lengths.


What does this say for the future of investigative reporting? Has it outlived its usefulness? Most investigative reporters say no. The key to the future of investigative reporting lies in the media’s ability to speak to a fragmented audience. Some investigative reporters are switch-

ing to alternative newsweeklies such as the *Dallas Observer* and *Fort Worth Weekly* that can devote more time and space to long investigative pieces. “Traditional papers don’t allow reporters the freedom to work on a project for an extended period,” says Charles

Siderius, investigative reporter and feature writer for the *Dallas Observer*. “Alternative publications let you spend weeks on a project and you really get to know the subject matter.”

Another option for the investigative reporter employed at a traditional newspaper is a concept known as ‘theme parks.’ This concept integrates the web with the traditional paper. Instead of holding an investigative story and running it all at one time, the story is broken earlier and run as smaller parts of a continuing saga. Only the most current update would run in the paper with the rest of the background information available online.

Whatever the form investigative reporting takes, future investigative reporters will still need to reach a broad section of society, says the *News*’ Howard Swindle. “We’ve traditionally used areas that each member of the audience can relate to such as taxes, health issues and the economy,” he says. “There is a fundamental sense of urgency that arises when something affects you personally.”

Recapturing the sense of urgency that once defined investigative reporting and made it the soul of news is essential if Woodward and Bernstein’s legacy is to survive. 



Cracking the Tough Journalism Market

How to find – and keep – a job in the midst of layoffs and uncertainty.

Story by David Harper
Photo by Kirsten Faulder

Come December, University of North Texas senior Ryan Peterson will have done everything possible to prepare himself to enter the journalism job market. He will have earned a bachelor’s degree in journalism, completed two newspaper internships and served as a managing editor and writer for the student newspaper, *NT Daily*. He will leave the school with a diploma in one hand and a handful of resumes in the other. But in the tight journalism job market, will he find a job?

“It is a pretty tough market, and I think everyone goes through the worrying about getting a job,” says Peterson, who’s 21. With all the experience underneath his belt, though, he is hopeful about finding one. “And I don’t care if I have to start at a small paper,” he adds.

Advertisers running ‘scared’

Peterson is wise to take such a realistic

view. The flat economy and the war in Iraq have forced advertisers to clamp down on spending. Layoffs and hiring freezes have chilled the journalism job market. The journalismjobs.com Web site lists 27 pages of media workforce reductions since October 2000.

“Right now advertisers are scared,” says Dan Dunn, editor of *Fort Worth, Texas* magazine. “Because of the war, they are worried about how consumers are going to spend their dollars.” Dick Hodgson, publisher of Northeast Newspapers Inc, which includes the *Haltom City News*, *North Richland Hills News*, *Richland Hills News* and *Watauga News*, adds: “To me, it’s grim everywhere. Ad revenues are in the toilet and have been for months. The economy is killing people. Once the war is over, the market will probably get back to normal and things will ease up.”

At the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and elsewhere, many job openings are going unfilled. And some working journalists who had been looking to make a change to another paper are clinging to their current jobs. “The job market is tight for experienced journalists because job openings are being kept open rather than filled,” says Dave Lieber, columnist for the *Star-Telegram*. Those with jobs “are staying put,” he adds.

Although a hiring freeze is in place at the downtown Dallas offices of *The Dallas Morning News*, the newspaper is filling some reporting positions in its suburban publications, says Selwyn Crawford, a staff writer for the Metropolitan section who also does some recruiting. “Overall, we are hiring primarily in the suburbs,” he says. “At the downtown Dallas office, we are not hiring hard-news people at all.”

Outlook, pay for journalists mixed

Despite the increase in the jobless ranks earlier this year at the state and national levels, some indicators suggest improvement is on the way for the media sector. Magazine Publishers of America reports that in year-to-year comparisons from February of last year to this year, advertising revenue rose 9.9 percent and ad pages increased by 3.1 percent.

The long-term outlook appears even brighter. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, hiring trends for print media are expected to rise faster than the average for all occupations through the year 2010. Many baby-boomers are retiring, creating job openings. Also, demand for technical writers will increase because science and technology continues to expand and grow.

In Texas, editor positions will show the fastest rate of growth in the print sector, outpacing writers and authors, according to the Texas Workforce Commission's comparison of occupational data from 2000 to 2010. Dunn says there's a "dearth" of copy editors for newspapers. "The job market could be good for editors," he agrees.

However, reporters and correspondents will see their number of jobs decrease, according to the TWC. But public relations will have large gains. Jobs for PR managers and specialists will add a combined 4,100 jobs. PR is also where the highest pay is (see chart).

For photographers, average salaries are expected to be about \$20,000 at small papers and the mid-\$30,000 range at larger-market papers, experts on the subject estimate. Competition for jobs will be high with more job seekers than openings. However, the expected increase in online publications will create more demand for those who are specialists in digital images.

Nationally, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports broadcast positions will grow only 10 percent over the same period, lower than the 15 percent increase predicted for all industries combined.

Advice for new graduates

If the current job market is tough for experienced journalists, it can be particularly hard for new J-school graduates. Veteran journalists agree that new grads such as Peterson should start their journalism careers at a small-market paper before making the jump to a large-market publication. Small papers may offer the most job openings, but also can give the new journalist more opportunities to hone a variety of skills.

"Writers coming in from other papers have had greater exposure in other areas,"

Dunn said. "By building their skills by doing a variety of tasks at a small paper, they will have an advantage over someone who has not. You can't limit yourself to one area. Having layout/design skills would be good. Being multi-talented is a plus." Crawford at *The Dallas Morning News* agrees that new grads most likely will have to start at small dailies and weeklies. "They're doing a disservice to themselves to start at a large paper," he says. "Only the really talented ones are going to start at a large paper."

Having the ability to do many tasks may not be an option but rather a requirement at multi-media corporations such as Belo, which owns the *News*.

"Journalists may be required not only to write and do photography, but go in front of the television camera as well," Crawford says. "Journalists need to know how to do it all."

Hodgson says small papers in particular need people with across-the-board skills. "Layout and photography are very helpful," he says, adding: "I would love to have journalists with people skills and layout skills."

To help get that first job, Nancy Eanes, career development specialist at the Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism, encourages students to do as many internships as possible. "When a *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* or a *Dallas Morning News* sees that you have already completed two or more internships, your resume goes to the top of their stack," she says.

Eanes also stresses the importance of knowing as many people as possible in the industry. "Network, network, network," she adds. "I can't say it enough. Students should get involved with student clubs and volunteer for campus projects that would give them viable experience using their skills. They add to their resumes/portfolios with each experience. Students should get to know their professors personally. When it comes time for letters of reference, this is critical."

Although having good contacts and excellent journalism skills are a must, new grads also need to keep things in perspective and temper their expectations in the current market. In all likelihood, "you're not going to be the next Woodward or Bernstein," Hodgson says. "It's better to just get on with reality and get on with your career." Young journalists like Ryan Peterson plan to do exactly that.

Where the jobs are in Texas

Public relations specialists
+ 2,490 jobs, up 34.4 percent

Public relations managers
+1,610 or 36.4 percent

Editor positions
+1,270 or 20.7 percent

Writers and authors
+830 jobs or 20.3 percent

Reporters and correspondents
-70 jobs, or 3.6 percent

...and where the \$\$ are

PR managers
\$61,634

PR specialists
\$45,606

Editors
\$40,472

Writers and authors
\$40,004

Reporters and correspondents
\$27,500

Figures are for median pay, meaning half make more and half make less than the stated amount.

SOURCE: Texas Workforce Commission

Does Investigative Reporting Have a Future?

Yes, but the heady days of gumshoe reporting in the post-Watergate era are fading.



Story by Richard Ham
Illustration by Marjorie Owens

In the early 1970s an obscure, largely unreported crime occurred in a hotel room a few yards from the Potomac River. This seemingly insignificant crime was the Watergate break-in. An inquisitive reporter for the *Washington Post*, Bob Woodward, was dispatched to cover the story. After almost two years of chasing leads on the particulars of the story, Woodward, teamed with Carl Bernstein, broke the Watergate scandal that forced a corrupt president from office. Their feat launched a renewed interest in investigative reporting and strengthened the sense of social responsibility for journalism students in colleges across the nation.

Almost 30 years later, journalism is undergoing profound changes. We can deliver information to our audiences via many channels. Cable news broadcasts

around-the-clock, newspapers have put up Web sites and satellites can link journalists with their readership or audience from anyplace in the world. But as technology allows the media to provide a dizzying breadth of coverage, some media-watchers, educators and journalists themselves worry that the depth of coverage has fallen by the wayside. Investigative reporting has become secondary to the weekend guide or the travel section.

Three factors are responsible for the trend: an increase in corporate ownership, the media's own treatment of the genre and consumer apathy. In the decades since Watergate the concentration of media ownership has evolved from a significant number of small-to-large organizations across all media to

huge mega-media corporations. According to Ben Bagdikian's *The Media Monopoly*, 50 corporations controlled most mass media in 1983, with the largest merger valued at \$340 million. At the beginning of the 21st century the number of large corporations dwindled to nine with the largest merger (AOL Time Warner) totaling \$350 billion.

This shift has affected investigative reporting in two ways. Media corporations are overly driven by profit margins to look good on Wall Street and an increased fear of litigation. Many executives – and editors, for that matter – are focused on the bottom line. In an era of declining profit margins it has become more difficult to defend the expense of an investigative team that may not produce for weeks, months or even years. "It's

"I was trying to do an interview and once he said to me, 'I could just put you in my closet and no one would ever know what happened to you.' "

—Donna Fielder

in unexpected ways. She grew up in a small town northeast of Gainesville called Callisburg and left when she was 17 to get married. Her first marriage lasted eight years because the man she married physically abused her, she said. "When I grew up, I divorced him, and the last time I saw him, he broke down the door, and I defended myself with a .22-caliber rifle until help could arrive," she says. "That experience gives me a greater perspective on crime victims and makes me appreciate the Second Amendment."

In 1979, she graduated from the University of North Texas with a degree in journalism. That same year she was hired at the newspaper. About five years later she began her career as a crime reporter. "I love the dynamics of a crime, what makes people do what they do, what finally sends them over the edge — how people rationalize the things they do and seem surprised that they are going to jail," Fielder says. She's written, but so far hasn't published, two of her own crime novels.

Young journalists often start out on the cops beat, get a little experience and move on. Fielder stands out as someone who's not only stuck with it, but also covers the beat because she enjoys it. "It's generally rare for there to be, on American newspapers, any significant continuity on that beat," says Roy Clark, a senior scholar at the Poynter Institute. "It's one of the beats where new people are broken in. If you're somebody with some stamina and a love for that beat, it's a precious gift for that newspaper and its readers."

But Clark warns that often reporters who are on a beat for a long time can lose their objectivity when dealing with sources, only writing positive stories. Fielder, though, says she tries to cover the good and the bad on the beat. For instance, one of her stories helped get a sheriff indicted and convicted for bribery; another contributed to a Denton

County judge's exit from the bench. "I really like the idea that something we write actually changes something for the better," she says.

Covering such volatile stories prompted Fielder to get a license to carry a gun, but she says she has never had the need to protect herself with it. "It does feel good to know it's there," she says. And feeling confident about her safety goes a long way when scaling bridge railings in a dress to get to the scene of an accident, fighting off a biting dog or staying calm when bizarre strangers offer up threats.

She recalls an incident in which she visited a man who had a complaint about the Denton police, but did not have a telephone and wanted a reporter to come to his apartment. "I wasn't comfortable at all," she says. "He was supposed to have a wife, and she wasn't there. I was trying to do an interview and once he said to me, 'I could just put you in my closet and no one would ever know what happened to you.' I said, 'yeah they would, because they know where I am,' and I just went on like it was a perfectly normal thing for him to say."

That tough attitude has made being a woman police reporter easier for her. "My persona is very strong and very aggressive," she says. "I've developed that real tough kind of attitude, like, 'don't mess with me' and it works real well." She's seen some young women police reporters come and go quickly because police officers tried to bully them and succeeded. "If they (officers) figure out that they're not going to be able to intimidate you, then they respect you for it, and you can build a relationship," she explains.

Sgt. Steve Macsas with the special operations section of the Denton police department has worked closely with Fielder and says she has a reputation for being trustworthy. "The reason she is trusted so much is because she's always been a fair reporter,"

Sgt. Macsas says. "It's not something you get overnight. You earn it, and I believe she's earned it."

For instance, when Fielder and a photographer rode along with a police task force when it was serving warrants, they agreed not to publish photos of any task force member with a ski mask on because that person might be recognized later. When an editor wanted to run a picture that would violate her promise, Fielder stood her ground and made sure the photo wasn't available. "I'd given my word," she says.

Of all the challenges Fielder has faced on the job, though, the hardest is talking to loved ones of crime victims. "What gets to me is not seeing the dead person, but if one of their loved ones is there, seeing their grief and reaction to it, that's real hard on me," she says. "Many a time I've sat down and interviewed somebody, and they were crying, and I was crying."

Fielder knows firsthand what it feels like to unexpectedly lose a family member. Her son, Ricky, was 19 when he was killed by a hit-and-run driver on Interstate 35. "He had car trouble and was walking to get help," Fielder says. "We never found out who hit him. It was a terrible time in our lives. Richard had just survived surgery after one of his kidneys collapsed. He was very ill, and I had to handle all the things that go with a sudden death. I took Richard to the funeral in an ambulance."

Dealing with the tragedy of her son's death has given her insight into what families deal with after a death. "I learned a lot about what it feels like to have something that horrible visited on you, and I think it made me more sensitive to the feelings of people I have to call for comment when something similar happens to them," Fielder says.

She once covered a story about a young



Philip True



Daniel Pearl



Jennifer Servo

Risky Business

War, murder and violence take a grim toll on reporters and photojournalists.

Story by Jeff Ryder and Robin Fletcher

The 1998 murder of Philip True serves as a solemn reminder of the physical dangers journalists face in the field. Among others, the True case illustrates how risky the journalism profession can be, and why news organizations and their employees should address safer working environments and guidelines for the future.

True, a *San Antonio Express-News* reporter, ventured on a 10-day, 100-mile solo hike through the Sierra Madre Occidental range to research the native Huichol Indian culture. He embarked on the hike on Nov. 28, 1998. His body was found a few weeks later in a shallow grave at the bottom of a canyon.

Bob Rivard, the *Express-News*' editor, says True did not follow the suggested guidelines that many news organizations recommend to journalists in the field, one of which is never traveling on dangerous assignments or to isolated and sensitive areas alone. "We definitely practice the buddy system," Rivard says. "Philip

should have practiced it as well."

However, Rivard stresses the *Express-News* has not backed away from sending reporters into volatile, hazardous areas to cover stories since True's death. "We haven't pulled our punches at all," he says. "We're still out there, doing what we do, but we're just more careful about it."

Other journalists whose colleagues have been murdered are being especially cautious. Brian Travers, a meteorologist at KRBC-TV in Abilene, was the best friend of Jennifer Servo, a weekend anchorwoman murdered in her apartment last October. "We don't know if Jennifer's murder was aimed at TV station crew or was personal," Travers says, "I find it hard to believe that it was someone she didn't know. She always locked her door. She was careful."

Travers emphasizes that both his and his co-workers' concern for safety remains on heightened alert in light of Servo's death. "Now we all lock our doors, even in the day, even when people are over," he says. "We are scared. We go out with other people. We don't go anywhere alone. We still don't." He adds that his

station managers have asked their employees to walk each other out to their cars after work and have recommended that no one go out alone. Travers also pays more attention to his environment. "You just want to be aware of your surroundings and more aware of having to watch what you say," he explains. "On TV, especially."

No one has been arrested for Servo's murder. The investigation remains an open case with few clues to the identity of the killer or the reason behind the killing.

In another well-known case of violence against a Texas journalist, *Texas Monthly* writer-at-large Jan Reid almost died in 1998 while in Mexico City to see a boxing match that featured a boxer he had profiled in the magazine. Reid and some colleagues were robbed, and he was shot, when thugs jumped in their taxi. He recovered and is still writing for the magazine.

While True and Servo's deaths and Reid's close call shocked journalists in Texas, the death of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl brought the risks of reporting to a national audience. Pearl's murder was believed to have been carried out by Islamic extremists in Pakistan after

dining from pg 5

out by Islamic extremists in Pakistan after he attempted to connect Muslim militants to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. "Danny's death changed everything," says Robert Frank, a senior writer for the *Wall Street Journal*. Frank spoke in February at a panel discussion at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism sponsored by the Daniel Pearl Foundation.

Sherry Ricchiardi, senior writer for *American Journalism Review* and professor at Indiana University-Purdue, has written many stories on dangerous reporting assignments and their aftermaths. She acknowledges that editors play a pivotal role in the approach to such situations. "Editors tend to tell us not to do anything that will get us killed, whether we are in Iraq or at home covering violence," she says.

Despite the warnings, journalists die on the job. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), an international monitoring organization, in March reported that 20 journalists, including Pearl, were killed in 2002. It was the lowest level in 17 years, which the committee attributed partly to decreasing military conflicts around the world.

However, that number seems likely to rise this year because of the number of journalists killed in the war in Iraq. CPJ and the South Asia Journalist Association (SAJA) have made recommendations for reporters covering overseas assignments in hostile territories, and special boot camp training was enforced for reporters covering the latest war. The organizations can be contacted or visited online at <http://www.cpj.org> or <http://www.saja.org>.

In an article titled "Guidelines for Covering Terrorist Actions and Crisis Situations," Bob Steele of the Poynter Institute details some practical strategies journalists can use to increase their safety and lessen the chance of physical risk in the field. They include balancing the release of information with law enforcement and medical teams' necessities, avoiding speculation of identities or

intentions of possible terrorists and reporting on a crisis without focusing on specific details of victims. The full article may be viewed at the Poynter Institute's Web site at <http://www.poynter.org>.

Although these resources offer valuable information about preventive measures, journalists still face life-threatening hazards on the job. In the event of a fatal injury, a news organization and its staff must cope with the loss of a colleague and work to bring some sort of closure to co-workers and family members.

Rivard and the *Express-News* know firsthand how involved this transition can be, as well as how difficult it can be to win justice for the victim. In February a Mexican court reversed the guilty verdicts of two men convicted of True's murder, which pushed the case back to a lower court. This latest development is part of a four-year battle with Mexican

authorities to convict the **H u i c h o l** Indians who admitted to killing True in 1998. Juan Chivarra de la Cruz and **M i g u e l** Hernandez de la Cruz were released, and their 13-year prison sentences over-

turned because of an undisclosed conflict of interest within a state appeals court.

"The case is caught in a legal whirlpool," Rivard says. "The system is not used to presenting results, and people are suspicious of authority."

Despite this setback, Rivard and the Hearst Corporation, owner of the *Express-News*, have established a trust to ensure that True's widow, Martha, and his son, "little Philip," are provided for (including a secured education for True's son). Also, with Martha True's help, the *Express-News* has instituted the annual Philip True Awards which recognizes local journalists for their outstanding effort in the newsroom.

As for the current status of the court case, Rivard vows to continue the fight. "The bottom line is we aren't going to quit...we're going to stick on," he says. "We may never get satisfaction from the judicial system, but we aren't going to go away." ■

"Editors tend to tell us not to do anything that will get us killed, whether we are in Iraq, or at home covering violence."

--Sherry Ricchiardi
American Journalism Review

"Some restaurants know me so well, I think if I died and came back reincarnated they would still know it was me," Griffith says. Yet she rarely resorts to any type of disguise. "Enough people know me by now I think they would say, 'Oh gosh, there's Dotty in a red wig. She looks pretty stupid.'"

June Naylor, a restaurant critic for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, freelance writer and self-proclaimed "dining freak," has had her cover blown more than once. While escorting her mother to a luncheon review, she was spotted by a table of her mother's friends. "One of them yelled across the room to me, 'June! Are you here to do a review?'" she recalls with a laugh. "And I thought to myself, 'Not anymore.'"

Even though anonymity comes easier to some reviewers than others, they all agree that the critic's position is a public one and the responsibility it carries is significant. Thus, these reviewers take great care to share an informed, balanced opinion with their audience. Although their opinions are influential, none saw themselves as a power-broker whose reviews could spell success or doom for a restaurant.

"Good reviews don't keep a bad restaurant open, and bad reviews don't close a good restaurant," says Nancy Schaadt, freelance writer and lead restaurant critic for *Fort Worth Weekly*. In fact, Schaadt, like the other reviewers, considers panning a restaurant one of the least enjoyable aspects of the job. Naylor echoes that sentiment. "If I can tell people are really trying hard and it's still a flop, it makes me really sad because I have to write the truth."

"Tough but fair" is the moniker friends and colleagues have attached to Griffith. "That's what I aspire to be," she says.

If being a restaurant critic or a freelance reviewer is what you aspire to be, here are a few things to consider. Not only will you be spending more time in restaurants, you'll probably be spending more time at the gym. But if you can overlook the experiences of some of these reviewers, such as watching a giant cockroach crawl out from underneath a salad, or seeing a chef pick his toes, or dodging a river of raw sewage flowing through a restaurant that's about to be reviewed, you could have what it takes. In the meantime, sticking with the molten chocolate cake may be a safer bet. ■



When an elderly woman was found dead earlier this year beneath a mound of beer cans in a van with her dead son, it was up to Donna Fielder, a veteran crime reporter, to visit the scene and battle the lingering stench of death. Fielder, who has seen a lot of bizarre things while covering the crime and courts beat for the *Denton Record-Chronicle* for almost 20 years, said the grisly case "is one of the strangest continuing stories" she's ever reported.

"I stood in the front yard of that house where two people lived for years with none of their neighbors paying them the slightest bit of attention," she says. "I stood near the van

where they both died, perhaps as much as two months apart, and was assaulted by the strong odor of death and wondered how their neighbors could not have noticed. The one woman who lives around the corner came and talked to him (the son) several times in the weeks before he died as he was sitting in that van. She asked about his mother, and he once told her, 'I guess Mother's gone,' and yet she did nothing and told nobody. She had to have smelled death in that van."

Fielder is an icon of sorts in Denton for her popular Sunday columns and her crime reporting. She began covering the police beat after a stint as a

writer and editor in the paper's lifestyles section. In 1982, while she was lifestyles editor, she started writing her column that continues today. A mother of three and grandmother to four boys, she often has written about her family, including her mother, children and husband of 29 years, Richard, in her column. He died of lung cancer in January of 2002.

Keith Shelton, the former *Record-Chronicle* editor who first hired Fielder, says people will buy the newspaper just to read her work. "She's one of the few people who can sell papers," Shelton says.

Some of Fielder's life experiences molded her as a journalist

Murder, she writes

Covering the crime beat for almost 20 years is more than a job for the *Denton Record-Chronicle's* Donna Fielder. It's an addiction.

Story by Megan Middleton
Photos by Ahna Hubnik



Gonzo Lives!

An Exclusive Interview with Hunter S. Thompson

Story by Brooke Scoggins
Illustrations by April Kinser

A dark, twisting road in Woody Creek, Colo., near Aspen leads to a towering gate. Iron vultures perch on top of two poles and glare down with glowing red eyes. "This must be the place," I think. "How Hunter can you get." No one but Hunter S. Thompson, king of the gonzo journalists, could have designed such a bizarre entrance to his house.

I had been in search of the elusive Dr. Thompson for weeks. His publisher, Simon & Schuster in New York, had passed along his telephone number and it had taken several attempts before we finally hooked up and had a rambling interview. The pull of meeting Thompson was too strong to resist. So in early April a couple of friends and I piled into a pickup and drove a full day from Denton to track him down.

My friend Michael Taliaferro, a recent graduate from The New School in New York, brought his camera. After leaving Denver we head to Thompson's favorite local watering hole, Woody Creek Tavern. It's hard to miss. A sign on top of the bar sports a huge pig wearing a Santa hat.

Thompson isn't there, but the bar's owner calls his house to let him know we've arrived. It's already 10:30 p.m., but it's Thompson's "working hour." He's got an interview to do and we wait. The bar closes, but the owner lets us hang out. We're thinking we may have to sleep in the truck.

Finally, around 12:30 a.m. we get the word that we can go on up to Thompson's house. But first the bar owner hands us two posters with a big peace sign. Thompson has autographed them and scrawled "Bush Sucks" across the front.

When we had talked by phone,

"I got into journalism (after) I discovered it was one of the only jobs that I didn't have to get up early in the morning. Any job that I can get up at two-thirty is better than any job I have to get up early."

—Hunter S.
Thompson
Gonzo Journalist

Thompson blasted President Bush and the war with Iraq, which he called "evil." He's especially critical of TV coverage. "TV is just a wasteland of any kind of intelligent

coverage of the war," Thompson says. He singles out *The New York Times* for doing a good job "considering the situation, just blatant, outrageously illegal, unacceptable piracy – worse than piracy, international piracy – just invading this country." He goes off on Bush again and chuckles when he remembers that I'm from Texas.

After driving on another twisting road for about 10 minutes, we find the house. Christmas lights line the stairs. We knock on the cabin's door. Anita Bejmuk, Thompson's fiancée, greets us. She has long blonde hair that's braided and is very fit and pretty. Thompson dedicated his latest book, *Kingdom of Fear: Loathsome Secrets of a Star-Crossed Child in the Final Days of the American Century*, to her.

Bejmuk leads us through a front room with a large buffalo head on the wall. "This way," she says, then goes off to grab some beers. Thompson sits in a kitchen area that has been converted into an office. His orange typewriter is piled high with papers in the cluttered room. Multicolored lights made of shotgun shells drape a window. On top of a shelf is Thompson's famous hat, the one he wears on the cover of *Kingdom of Fear*.

We shake hands and his words are inaudible – they sound more like short grunts. "Sit down, sit down," he says in his deep gravelly voice. Thompson, who's 65, has on a button-down shirt with wild

stripes. A long gold chain and pendant hang from his neck. Reading glasses perch on his nose. A cigarette dangles from his fingers.

I sit down at the end of Thompson's desk a little nervously. I've been a fan of his books for years and enjoy the way he uses his own experiences to tell stories that millions of people want to read. He has a way of grabbing readers by the neck and pulling them into his stories.

In front of me are two versions of *Kingdom of Fear*, a rambling memoir of sorts that jumps around Thompson's life, from his first confrontation with the FBI at age nine when he got in trouble for pushing a federal mailbox into the path of a speeding bus, to his later escapades fueled by intoxicants. "I haven't changed much since I was turning over mailboxes," he says. The version of the book that was released in the United States has a cover photo of the author making an obscene gesture. On the back jacket is a photo of him naked (a rear view) and shooting a shotgun into the air.

"See, he is looking at you on the cover and his back is on the back," I say with a chuckle. "I never thought about that," he says. The second version, which may be released in Europe, has a collage of colors and pictures to appeal to a younger audience. He and Bejmuk ask what I think about it. Yeah, I respond, I like the brighter one.

To hear Thompson tell it, he got into journalism mainly because he didn't have to punch a time clock. "I got frustrated early on in my career. I could see that I wasn't ever going to be able to live to be a writer and work in this office," he says. "I got into journalism (after) I discovered it was one of the only jobs that I didn't have to get up early in the morning. Any job that I can get up at two-thirty is better than any job I have to get up early."

This explains his usual 3 p.m. breakfast time. He stays up late at night working. In addition to books, he writes articles for *Vanity Fair* and other

magazines and Web columns. Lately he's been involved in trying to get a murder conviction overturned for a young woman he believes was wrongfully imprisoned. "I'm the poet laureate for the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers," he says. "I think we have a good chance of winning this. I don't think that any decent human can look at that case and say that she needs to be in prison for the rest of her life."

Thompson hands me a black binder with the "Hey Rube" articles he writes



"You can't just laugh at the vote and say it means nothing. People don't vote, they lose whatever democracy and freedom they had. It's like a dollar bill. If you don't use it, someone else is going to."

—Hunter S. Thompson
Gonzo Journalist

for ESPN. He wants me to read out loud. I turn a page and begin reading "Love Blooms in the Rockies." It starts with a commentary on Dan Rather, then moves to sports and the blizzard that shut him off from his fiancée. "Slow, slow," Thompson tells me. About a third of the way through I finally find my rhythm. Thompson puts his hands halfway in the air and grunts at certain points. I can only guess that he likes what he's hearing.

The writer hands Michael something to read, too. It's a long quote by Theodore Roosevelt. Part of it reads, "To announce that there must be no criticism of the President, or that we are to stand by the President, right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile, but is morally treasonable to the American public. Nothing but the truth should be spoken about him or anyone else. But it is even more important to tell the truth, pleasant or unpleasant, about him than about anyone else." The quote sums up Thompson's view that people need to speak out about the wrongdoing they see in politics and government and use their votes to change things.

"You can't just laugh at the vote and

say it means nothing," he says. "People don't vote and they lose whatever democracy and freedom they had. It's like a dollar bill. If you don't use it, someone else is going to."

Despite his reputation as an egotist, he sounds almost humble when he assesses his place in journalism and literature. "I haven't done anything rare or unusual in American writing," he says. "Mark Twain did all this."

But Thompson's outlook is bleak for journalists who want to continue the gonzo style versus conventional journalism.

"Gonzo journalism is just something that was different," he says. "The way that I was writing, a lot of journalists have done it. Just the momentary style of the times."

Three of Thompson's books are considered landmark works of gonzo journalism: *Hell's Angels* (1967), *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971) and *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72* (1973). His works routinely become bestsellers. *Kingdom of Fear* was a bestseller, too, but has received mixed reviews.

"Any style of writing different from the accepted norms is going to have trouble being accepted as good for us," Thompson says. "Mark Twain was mocked by the establishment all his life. They have been called lunatics and radicals, or wrong and dangerous. Yeah, rebels."

It was around 2:30 a.m. when we left. We snapped some photos. Thompson put on his big shaded glasses and posed with us. He patted me on the back and we said goodbye.

He's a rebel and a celebrity, but first and foremost Thompson considers himself a journalist. Even with all of his criticisms, he still embraces the journalistic profession and those who practice it. "Journalists have been part of my tribe, my people," he says. "It's a pretty good tribe, and I'm proud to be one." ■

On the Road Again

Story by Alisse Wobser
Photo by Ahna Hubnik

Ah, the life of a travel writer. Exotic destinations, luxurious accommodations, fine cuisine and you get paid to write about it. But wait -- what about the mad museum rush, the red-eye flights and the uncomfortable beds? It turns out that the life of a travel writer isn't quite so footloose.

"It's not that I vacation for a living," says Patricia Rodriguez, travel editor for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. "People think that you're at fabulous places and that's part of it, but the job is to cover travel as a beat."

June Naylor, a Fort Worth freelance writer, knows how difficult travel writing can be. She once went on a whirlwind tour of eight museums in one day for a story she was doing on Montreal. "You have to be prepared to do a lot more in one day than most people would do," she says. This is often because travel writers have to balance out the cost of travel with the income that will be generated by the story.

Naylor recommends trying to combine several story ideas into one trip in order to generate more articles. For example, when visiting New Orleans for a story, you may want to venture out into the surrounding areas to gather information for an article on the Cajun lifestyle of southern Louisiana. Also, try to rework the story using another angle so you can sell a new article about the same location. As long as the stories are different, this is a completely acceptable practice, and one that can help keep your pocketbook full.

Travel is a beat that is also mined with ethical dilemmas. For example, while it can be tempting to accept freebies from hotels, restaurants and tourist attractions, doing so could make it impossible to write a completely objective story. The person or entity offering the perks will expect good reviews and the writer could be prone to oblige after spending a free weekend in a luxury suite.

What's more, many publications forbid accepting freebies and may fire staff employees who take advantage of such perks. Rodriguez says that at the *Star-Telegram*, this policy also extends to freelance articles. "A lot of us don't want to buy stories that are from writers who have been on hosted trips. How can you take money from someone and then write



an impartial story about them?" she asks. To ensure that her own stories are objective, Rodriguez prefers to remain anonymous at her travel destinations and saves any interviews with hotel or restaurant staff until her visit is almost over.

Because it seems so glamorous, many people are interested in writing travel stories -- really more writers than are needed. "I think freelance travel writing is probably the hardest thing in the world," Rodriguez says. "I get about 80 submissions a month and of that I'll probably buy one or two." Naylor adds: "It's hard work because there are a lot of people out there freelancing, but it's a lot of fun. To become successful at it you have to work very hard. Your work has to be exceptional, and it has to be very interesting."

Even if it's not always glamorous, travel writing can be exciting. As Larry Bleiberg, travel editor of *The Dallas Morning News* explains, "I've been interviewed on (the French island of) Réunion, and I had a TV camera follow me around a waterfall. My French is terrible, so I said the only thing I knew-- 'Je suis Indiana Jones' ('I am Indiana Jones'), which they loved."

Traveling for a living is definitely for the open-minded and adventurous. Often, travel writers who take the road less traveled find some unusual things waiting for them. "In Italy, my friend and I decided to stay in convents," Rodriguez recalls. "It's cheap, and the nuns give you breakfast, but they also look at what you're wearing and have a 9 p.m. curfew. They live an austere life, so they don't turn on the heater in winter. It was so cold we had to sleep in our jackets and mittens!"

For some writers, the possibility of setting their own hours and traveling when and where they want makes freelancing particularly attractive. Others who don't like the unpredictability and financial uncertainties of freelancing might prefer to find a position as a staff writer on a newspaper travel section or magazine. Either way, travel writing may not always be a dream vacation. But the journey of covering the beat can be as rewarding as the destination. ■