Gay Talese to Speak at 2006 Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference

By Paul Knight

My first encounter with Gay Talese was at a dinner table with nine other students from last fall’s literary nonfiction class.

Our professor, George Getschow, had us read “Frank Sinatra Has a Cold,” Talese’s profile of the blue-eyed singer. It was the most complete profile I’d ever read. Esquire named the article its best in the magazine’s 70-year history. And Talese never interviewed Sinatra.

Now Talese headlines our literary nonfiction conference. Getschow calls him the “Michelangelo of literary journalism.” Tom Wolfe says he’s the founder of New Journalism. And in July, this master of nonfiction will speak about a life of turning fact into art.

Getschow used the Sinatra profile to teach how “immersion” journalism, which Talese is famous for, can produce a story that reveals a greater truth than any story written from interviewing a subject.

Talese’s new book, A Writer’s Life, details how he became this new type of journalist.

It started when he was an 18-year-old sports reporter for the University of Alabama, and the football team suffered its worst defeats in the school’s esteemed football history.

Talese began empathizing with Red Drew, the team’s coach. And in his column, “Sports Gay-zing,” he tried to write stories that were different from...
Mr. Jones Goes to Iraq

While most graduates this May will be starting new jobs, worrying about moving and repaying student loans, Mayborn graduate and veteran photojournalist Donald Jones will be on a flight to Kuwait to be embedded for three-months with troops in Iraq.

From Kuwait airport, he will take a military flight into Baghdad International Airport, then a helicopter or armored car ride across the city to the “green zone” in southern Baghdad, where he will receive his journalist’s credentials. From there, he will fly to ar-Ramadi or al-Fallujah, where he will stay with units from the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force.

Jones has spent more than $3,000 on the required body armor for the trip, while arranging with the Fort Worth Weekly to provide the needed credentials and support to get embedded.

He will graduate with his master’s in journalism May 13, and will leave for Iraq May 16. His son, Brian, is a Marine currently stationed in Fallujah.

Jones has previous experience in a war zone, serving as a Marine in the Vietnam War, and worked as a photographer for Gamma-Liaison in Nicaragua and El Salvador during the 1980s.

“I’m a photojournalist; that’s what I do,” said Jones when asked about his reasons for going. Jones will return Aug. 13.

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the thrashings Drew received from the paper’s writers.

Talese got an old scrapbook from the coach’s wife and wrote stories from the black-and-white pictures and newspaper clippings from Drew’s time as a naval officer in World War I. Talese used these same researching methods throughout his career.

Talese was never interested in traditional journalism, and at the university, he began experimenting with his writing. In 1951, the football team lost more than half its games. Talese responded by writing the season as a Shakespearean tragedy.

This from his column:

To win: to lose: to get wrecked, routed, o’erwhelmed And consumed by prissy Villanova....

Talese then landed a job at The New York Times as a 22-year-old sports reporter. Talese would write The Kingdom and the Power about his career at the Times. Getschow considers it a must-read for journalists.

But Talese also created a style there, covering sports as no one had before. Talese says he was influenced primarily by fiction writers, such as Faulkner, Hemingway and Fitzgerald. He subscribed to The New Yorker.

Talese longed to give his readers the “being there” feeling of fiction. Talese explains in A Writer’s Life:

I was a reporter, not a fiction writer. And yet if I could get close enough to some of these athletes...I might be able to write factually accurate but very revealing personal stories about big-time athletes while using their real names, and then get those stories published in the straight-laced New York Times...Again, without faking the facts, my reportorial approach would be fictional, with lots of intimate detail, scene-setting, dialogue, and close identity with my chosen characters and their conflicts.

Talese did just that. As a sportswriter, he found themes in boxing that were perfect for his fiction-esque style of nonfiction writing. He wrote more than 30 articles during his 10 years at the Times about heavyweight boxer Floyd Patterson. He spent so much time with the boxer that he considered Patterson his “literary property.”

Talese has written profiles of Marilyn Monroe, Joe DiMaggio, Muhammad Ali and Sinatra.

A Writer’s Life, his seventh book, will be published April 25.

Getschow says Talese’s speech at the Mayborn conference will show the power of factual narration, and that facts, when artfully presented, are more compelling than fiction.

David Granger, editor of Esquire magazine, says the Mayborn conference “is rapidly becoming one of the most vital gatherings of writers in America.”

Getschow says having Talese speak at the conference “solidifies that reputation and enhances it.”

Paul Knight is a journalism senior at UNT and a freelance writer.
The 2006 C.E. Shuford Journalism Banquet
Saturday, April 8, 2006

The 2006-2007 Mayborn Scholars, from left to right: Pablo Lastra, Sarah Junek, Randena Hulstrand, Candace Davis, Karina Ramirez, Bello Ayodelle, Mark Ross, Mayborn Director Mitch Land, Hans Masro, Patricia Spencer, Trevor Naughton, Sarah Whyman, Andrew Rogers and Michael Mooney, Mayborn Scholars not pictured: Rickie Adams, Kendall Anderson, Jocelyn Foster, Margaret Gupton, James Lucas, Nicole Turner and Megan Weadock.

Mayborn students Casey Conway and Don Jones, with his wife, Mary Alice Stanford, enjoy live jazz at the reception. Banquet speaker Al Henkel, NBC producer, spoke about covering the aftermath of Katrina for NBC Nightly News. Nancy Kihenia and Patricia Ombwayo helped greet guests at the banquet.

Leslie Obinego, with her outstanding student award for public relations.

Mitch Land congratulates outstanding graduate student of the year Michael Paul Harris ('05).

George Getschow and wife Cindy, pictured with Bob Mong (center), recipient of the 2006 Distinguished Professional Achievement Award.
James Mueller Publishes Book About Bush and the Press

By Randena Hulstrand

Assistant professor James Mueller addresses President George W. Bush’s rigid information control of the press and the precedents set by his actions in his forthcoming book, Towel Snapping the Press: Bush’s Journey from Locker-Room Antics to Message Control. The 224-page narrative follows the president’s lifelong association with the press, showing how his relationship with reporters developed over the years and how he’s modified his tactics with his press interaction.

“Towel Snapping the Press is an informative book that’s also fun to read. That’s because Jim Mueller interviewed 29 journalists, recorded their often-amusing anecdotes, and then put present practice into historical perspective. What comes out is a dual portrait of the president and the press,” said journalism professor Marvin Olasky of The University of Texas at Austin, in the book’s foreword.

Mueller interviewed journalists from a variety of media who have covered Bush throughout his career, such as Helen Thomas, Bob Schieffer and Bill Plante.

“I used the phrase ‘towel snapping’ as part of the title for this book,” said Mueller, “because Bush is someone who towel snaps. He is like the quarterback in the locker room, snapping his teammates with the towel, but nobody snaps back.”

The book details how Bush learned early on how to interact with the press. It started when he was 8-years-old during his grandfather Prescott Bush’s 1952 Senate campaign and he learned even more during his father’s political career, where he acted as a gatekeeper for reporters who wanted access.

“Bush knows a reporter’s job better than reporters know his job,” said Mueller. “He is comfortable with the press and he has a natural charm.”

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Congratulations to our Spring ‘06 graduates

Raymond Graham
Iffat Hasan
Anna Hobbs-Little
Donald Jones
Nicole Osei
Hannah Seddelmeyer
David Woodford

Networking is creating and building relationships with people who will help with job or internship leads. Career professionals estimate between 60% and 80% of jobs are found using effective networking skills. Here are some tips for navigating the network:

1. Create a list of contacts you feel comfortable talking with about your job search, such as family, friends, schoolmates, co-workers, managers, faculty members, alumni and others.
2. Set a goal of getting at least one new contact from each of your initial contacts.
3. The most effective networking is done in person. Have a

rehearsed “pitch” or a written personal summary ready that tells about you, your skills and career goals.
4. If you do get a referral, the best way to contact them initially is by email. State who referred you and ask to set up a brief meeting to get more information. Do not send your resume at this point.
5. Have questions ready for the meeting, focusing on ways to help you in your job search.
6. Always send a thank you note and keep your contacts aware of any change in your status. Give them the opportunity to celebrate with you when you’ve landed the job or internship.

Ask Nancy

Dear Nancy,

How can networking help my career?

Nancy Eanes, pictured with Mayborn graduate David Wachanga, now serves on the board of directors of the Texas Public Relations Association.

James Mueller has been a professor at UNT since 2000.
Mayborn Updates:

• The spring 2005 issue of COVER magazine, the annual magazine produced by graduate and undergraduate students in the magazine production class, won third place for overall excellence in the general magazine category from the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association. The spring 2006 issue comes out the first week of May.

• Mayborn graduate Joyce Tsai is currently interning for The Kansas City Star as part of a Knight Ridder internship program.

• Mayborn scholar Hedish Connor (‘05) has taken a new position at Verizon.

• Mayborn scholar Haven Rowland (‘05) started a new job with the district office of Texas State Senator Jane Nelson.

• Mayborn graduate Elizabeth Clark (‘02) is a new editor at Carolina Gardener.

Mueller from page 3

As a businessman and Texas Rangers baseball executive, Bush learned how to use the press to his advantage to sell baseball tickets, Mueller said. Then as governor, he cultivated a smaller press corps, helping him to maintain control of his relationship with the press.

With chapters in the book titled “Shaving the Ear Hair” and “Eating the Zombies,” Mueller describes how the press became critical of even the length of Bush’s ear hairs once he was in the White House and how he developed his control tactics with the press “zombies” to keep them away from administration sources.

“Bush doesn’t fear the press…he doesn’t kowtow to them,” said Mueller.

Bush has bypassed the mainstream press with fewer interviews while surrounding himself with a loyal staff, making it easier to plug leaks.

Mueller also suggests in the book that objective reporting by journalists has become a standard of the past.

“Since the public already perceives the press as unbiased, we may as well go ahead and allow a partisan press. This way media can align themselves with a political party and then people can check multiple sources to test the accuracy of their views. Web sites and blogs are allowing this to happen anyway,” he said.

In writing the book, which he has been working on since Bush’s election in 2000, Mueller used his 25 years of experience as a newspaper reporter, editor, photographer and professor.


Randena Hulstrand is a Mayborn graduate student.