The McGill program is funded by the McGill Lecture Endowment
Excerpts from four group discussions:

• Covering Conflict and Caring
• Covering Elections when Press Freedoms are Under Attack
• Mental Illness: Fighting Stigma with Personal Stories
• College Sports and Sexual Assault: Giving Voice to the Victims
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Welcome

On behalf of my colleagues in the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, welcome to the McGill Symposium. The McGill symposium, now in its tenth year, is an outgrowth of the McGill lecture.

For nearly 40 years, the McGill lecture has brought significant figures in journalism to the University of Georgia to help us honor Ralph McGill’s courage as an editor.

Roundtable discussions in 2006 with industry professionals and faculty led us to develop the McGill symposium as the next step in honoring McGill and exploring journalistic courage. The McGill Symposium brings together students, faculty, and leading journalists to consider what journalistic courage means and how it is exemplified by reporters and editors.

Today 12 McGill Fellows – undergraduate and graduate students selected by a faculty committee for their strengths in academic achievement, practical experience and leadership – join five McGill visiting journalists for a six hour discussion.

Topics will include:

- Covering Conflict and Caring
- Covering Elections when Press Freedoms are Under Attack
- Mental Illness: Fighting Stigma with Personal Stories and
- College Sports and Sexual Assault: Giving Voice to the Victims

Today will be a success if the journalists, faculty and students engage each other rigorously to try to answer the question “What does courage look like in journalism?”
When he travels to a dangerous place to cover conflict, photojournalist Louie Palu carries a picture of his family in his helmet. It reminds him who he’s responsible to first — his family and his safety. Although it’s easy to romanticize foreign correspondence or war reporting, it’s important to remember the reality of it as well. To capture important moments, photographers must be there in person to document the scene. Sometimes that scene can be unsafe.

“There’s a tradition of covering conflict, even dating back to Francisco de Goya, a Spanish painter who documented the disasters of war and human rights violations as Napoleon invaded Spain,” he said.

Palu has covered stories worldwide in Pakistan, India, Mali and Libya for publications such as the BBC, Sunday Times Magazine, TIME, Newsweek and The New York Times. He covered the war in Afghanistan from 2006-2010 and the Mexican drug war from 2011-2013. While showing a collection of his photos during the McGill Symposium, Palu explained how war reporting has changed over the years, especially as news organizations and social media have made access more pervasive. He’s now competing with governments that manipulate images of an event, including terrorists with their own Twitter accounts. He showed photo essays from a magazine called Inspire, which the militant Islamist organization Al-Qaeda produces to play up positive aspects of their operations.

“These are strong outreach tools they use to talk to people through the Internet,” he said. “We can’t go cover ISIS. We have to use their images.”

While documenting war conflict in particular, Palu tries to cover both sides equally in some way. Palu looks for different angles and stories to tell about the people involved. He thinks about how they’ll be used in a publication, how they’ll compete with other important news of the day, and how important aspects may be emphasized or minimized depending on the news organization using his images.

“War isn’t just about two armies,” he said. “Both sides kill, even the side where you’re standing.”
For a series about Marines on the cover of Newsweek, for example, Palu took portraits of service members with massive burns on their faces. It showed reality, rather than a sanitized view of war.

In a conflict zone, however, this can be tough to keep in mind. Fellow Elizabeth Fite wondered how Palu shows both sides, especially when covering countries that don’t demonstrate democratic ideals or respect for citizens of all races, genders or beliefs. Palu agreed that when he sees children get hurt by landmines or shrapnel, in particular, he has become angry and unsure. In most cases, he follows the Code of Ethics of the National Press Photographers Association and thinks about it when he has doubts.

“My job is to show the different sides, and it’s up to the readers and voters to get angry,” he said. “The photos don’t change what’s happening, but they can empower us to change it.”

While documenting the Mexican drug war, Palu photographed human rights violations, murders and assassinations that occurred as part of the drug trade. He documented 140 killings during his first month. Part of his job required not only taking the photographs but also understanding the scene and knowing who was killed, who killed them, and how they did it. Sometimes, cartel members sent messages to police at the scene of the murders, and other times, police killed to send a message to the cartels.

“Both sides would set up their own photo, and we’d try to work around it, just like covering politics or staged photos,” he said. “It’s a tale of rough guys and Robin Hoods down there who act like they’re killing for justice.”

Through sources, Palu kept track of the safe and dangerous cities for travel on both the Mexico and Texas sides of the border. He was more careful about investigating areas that he wasn’t familiar with, but it also didn’t stop him from taking daring photos. He interviewed gang members to learn their backstories and found women in shelters along the borders who had stories to tell.

“We were all the same when we were two years old,” he said. “How did they get here? Who are they now? What motivates them?”

Palu first became interested in documenting images overseas because his parents are Italian immigrants, and they shared stories about growing up during World War II and their struggles. Palu wanted to connect to his heritage and learn more about countries where conflicts occur today. When he travels, however, he often doesn’t tell his mother all of the details about where he’s traveling and what he’s seeing.

“Many of my family members know what I do but don’t want to see it,” he said. “When students tell me they want to cover conflict, I agree to give them advice but make sure they’ve talked to their family first about the possibility of getting wounded or shot.”

McGill Fellow Cory Cole asked about the importance of getting close to subjects in a conflict zone but also staying safe. Palu agreed
that in combat, it’s sometimes necessary to move close to the action to show trauma, revenge and hate in the scene. At the same time, he often sees young photographers move too close to the gunfire, where landmines are laid.

“They target us and want to kill us,” he said. “We’ve got to get close but be careful.”

Fellow Kaitlyn Yarborough asked Palu how he prepares himself to travel to dangerous conflict zones. He starts by preparing health insurance, vaccines and legal paperwork, and then he talks to fellow photojournalists or government officials who have traveled recently to the location. He also prepares physically for the strain of long days and lugging equipment.

Most of all, he focuses on a healthy lifestyle while he’s gone and when he returns to maintain balanced mental health. Alcohol and drug abuse can run rampant on confined military compounds, and Palu runs, cycles, meditates and does yoga to keep himself entertained and physically active. He also avoids alcohol when he returns from an assignment and prioritizes sessions with his therapist.

“You’ve got to give yourself the management tools to deal with trauma and stress,” he said. “There’s still a stigma, even with my guy friends, about therapy, but it’s one of the best decisions I’ve made.”

That also means finding friends and trusted coworkers while on the ground in a combat zone. Fellow Josh Jones asked how Palu maintains professional relationships with soldiers and officials without having a conflict of interest. It’s necessary to bond with them, Palu agreed, but noted that journalists must draw a line ethically. If someone is shot, it may be fine to help carry a wounded soldier to a medic, and Palu has done that before. If a soldier asks him to hold a gun or carry ammo, however, he refuses. He will not be part of the combat.

Journalists should also feel responsible for their fixers, drivers and translators who help them navigate the area, Palu said. Understand what they’re being paid, find out if they’re equipped with armor, and plan emergency contact information and first aid kits for them as well.

“They’re part of your team,” he said. “They’re risking their lives to help you, and you’re responsible for them.”

Palu encouraged the Fellows to find workshops, conferences and fellowships to develop their skills and meet other photojournalists. He regularly attends sessions with the National Press Photographers Association and White House News Photographers Association to be inspired by others and their work.

“The importance of photography has never been more important than now,” he said. “Do what you believe in, and you will figure out the rest.”
The 2016 Election will be one for the history books, both for the polarizing campaigns and the challenges to press freedom. As Republican candidate Donald Trump called out reporters in public, sometimes by name, Democrat candidate Hillary Clinton gave a subtle cold shoulder to press members to control coverage. With press freedom under attack from social, legal and philosophical angles, journalists are wondering whether this is the “new norm” and if future campaigns will follow this example as the way to treat media members.

“I think this election will have an asterisk next to it in history books,” said Greg Bluestein, a reporter for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution who has covered politics in the Atlanta area for more than a decade. “I’ve never felt this level of hostility toward the press.”

Reporters often receive public critique, especially if they cover politics as a beat, Bluestein noted, but this year’s election cycle seemed more vitriolic than usual. At political rallies, it’s common practice for politicians to take a jab at well-known reporters or their news organizations during speeches to garner applause, and journalists learn to shrug, laugh and continue reporting. When this happens to Bluestein, politicians often seek him out after the event and act cordial. However, this tactic seemed more extreme during Trump’s campaign.

“He called reporters ‘slime’ and said we were horrible, terrible people,” Bluestein said. “In the middle of a giant room during a rally, that can rev up supporters who turn around a hurl insults at you.”

At the same time, Trump has been one of the most accessible candidates during a campaign, often calling radio programs and TV shows to give his input. He also pitted journalists against each other at the same publication for interview access. Even as he blocked the Washington Post from an event, for example, he agreed to an in-depth sit-down interview with reporters from the staff. In contrast, Clinton held few press conferences in the 100 days leading up to Election Day and stopped inviting press pools onto her plane to travel to campaign events.

“I worry that her model is going to become the norm because candidates will see they can limit press coverage,” he said.
“Her style may set a precedent.”
That’s why Clinton’s health became a mystery during the campaign, said Mary Katherine Ham, a CNN contributor and senior writer for The Federalist. When Clinton quickly left a Sept. 11 gathering and seemed weak, her departure developed into a big news story. She didn’t have a pool of reporters around her, so nobody captured the full details of what happened on the scene. In fact, her escape from the event seemed secretive.

“That’s why we put a pool of reporters with candidates at that point in the campaign,” Ham said. “Everything a candidate does is important.”

At the same time, both candidates know reporters at top national publications by name, and neither seems to mind making enemies, Ham added. Both candidates broke paradigms, and reporters seemed beholden to access. When Chris Wallace of Fox News Sunday refused to host Trump on the show over the phone rather than in the studio, Ham cheered.

“I’d like to see more courage like that. We shouldn’t be led around by the nose,” she said. “As we move down the road toward campaigns being like reality TV shows, it’s important for us to push back.”

As Trump’s administration takes over in 2017, the erosion of access is the key press freedom to watch, she added. During President Barack Obama’s administration, the White House public relations team took on a more direct role in distributing photos and creating a curated “brand” around the First Family. Members of the White House Press Corps pushed back occasionally during the past eight years, sometimes with success.

“We’re supposed to take these photos. We’re supposed to document these moments,” Ham said. “Instead, we’re seeing this West Wing story that is delivered to the public.”

That erosion is happening on the local level, too, Bluestein said. Thousands of reporters cover national elections, but few reporters watch state and local elections. As Bluestein has covered elections, inaugurations and legislative sessions at the Georgia Capitol during the past decade, he’s seen fewer reporters in the press box. This means bills, votes and decisions pass by readers without investigation or commentary.

“Georgia is the ninth biggest state in the country, but only a handful of reporters cover what’s happening,” he said. “As journalists, we’re on the front lines of these state decisions.”

In addition, as commentary expands online and through social media, election coverage often runs through a gamut of “news of the moment” stories. McGill Fellow Michelle Baruchman wondered how 2016 compared to previous campaign years where certain gaffes, such as Howard Dean’s on-stage rant in 2004 or Mitt Romney’s “47 percent” remark in 2012, seemed to end the campaign. This year, outlandish comments persisted.

“We’ve seen Trump make a
mistake every 15 seconds but keep going, so we’ve seen the pendulum swing,” Ham said. “Instead of a cloistered political candidate, people want someone who will say everything.”

These pervasive negative comments may have broadened the public’s tolerance for gaffes, she said. Plus, the 24/7 news cycle makes it more difficult for gaffes to rise above the noise and stay there, Bluestein said. At the same time, this election cycle has opened room for racist and sexist comments to go unanswered, he added. When these comments surface, Fellow Lauren Herbert asked, how can reporters cover the news in an unbiased way?

“That’s my job. I open up about where I stand and that I don’t like either candidate,” Ham said. “When I see a blip on Twitter, I work hard to check the context of what was said and how it was phrased.”

At the same time, stories that wouldn’t have landed on the news assignment desk a few years ago are being assigned as quick-hit stories for the day, Bluestein said. Reporters are required to be aware of their own click-based metrics, and editors often use them in annual evaluations and performance reviews.

“It’s a profound change in the industry, and everyone I know has to deal with ‘getting clicks’ as a part of their job,” he said. “It’s a constant struggle to write the well-thought-out premium story of the day and an easy blog that will get clicks but not truly serve the readers.”

On top of that, managing social media coverage during the election is an added responsibility, as well as a detractor. It can also affect morale. Since he’s Jewish, Bluestein routinely receives anti-Semitic comments on his stories and posts. He often mutes them and ignores them, not wanting to give the commenters any attention or satisfaction for bothering him.

Ham is also used to negative comments from social media followers but thinks 2016 has been more abusive than usual. More “trolls,” or fake accounts that intentionally target social media users with harassing comments to elicit a reaction, are posting sexist, racist and offensive posts, she said. In addition, more paid troll farms are being funded to unleash hateful comments. On some days, Ham avoids the comment section of her stories to shield her emotional well-being. Other times, she chuckles that she receives hate mail from both sides of the aisle.

“Part of the job now is that you have to protect yourself,” she said. “I’ve seen some people stop using Twitter because of the comments. I hope the extreme ones will simmer in 2017 after the election.”

As election coverage transitions to stories about the new administration, Ham hopes the American public will demand important stories in the political arena. Part of the erosion of access during the campaign is related to the erosion of trust in media as an institution, she said. If Americans care less about how journalists are treated or what access they have, it’s harder for reporters themselves to push back against candidates. In 2017, that could shift again.

“The silver lining of this campaign is who knows what will happen next time,” she said. “Since I’ve been in D.C., I’ve seen political campaigns become more professionalized and manipulative. It’s time for the press to push back.”
Mental Illness: Fighting Stigma with Personal Stories

McGill Visiting Journalist: Carrie Siedman, Reporter, Sarasota Herald-Tribune

Moderator: Patricia Thomas, Journalism Professor at the University of Georgia Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication

After mass shootings in Tucson, Colorado and Sandy Hook in 2011, 2012 and 2014, a national conversation developed about the shooters who were young white males with mental health issues. What caused them to become violent? Is there any way to help them or stop them?

As she watched the conversation grow, Carrie Siedman, a reporter at the Sarasota Herald-Tribune in Florida, noticed a change in tone toward her own son, Keaton, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia at age 22. She found that acquaintances and friends had misconceptions about his brain disorder and thought he might have violent tendencies.

“It was every parent’s nightmare,” she said.

Siedman attended family support groups in the Sarasota area for parents of adult children with mental health disorders and heard stories similar to hers. Parents struggled to find help for their children and often ran into roadblocks when lining up health services, medications and job opportunities.

“I was living in a dichotomous world where I saw the headlines on one side and my personal life on the other,” she said. “I started feeling strongly that the side I was hearing from the families was not being told.”

Siedman decided to write about the families and their children. Her 2015 special project on schizophrenia, called “The S Word,” received the Media Award from Mental Health America, the Community Engagement Award from the American Society of Newspaper Editors, and the Best Features or Series Award from the Society for Features Journalism.

As she began reporting, however, she knew sources might not want to reveal their identities in the community newspaper, especially around a condition such as schizophrenia. Although mental health conditions such as depression and bipolar disorder have sparked more conversation in media outlets in recent years, schizophrenia still conjures negative associations.

“Even though the families knew me, loved me and trusted me, they didn’t want to have their faces and names in the newspaper and online,” she said. “People tell me I was brave to tell this story, but it’s people like my son who were willing to put their faces on it who are brave.”

Siedman worked on the story in her own time for several months in addition to her daily work as a
reporter. Herald-Tribune editors support long-form narrative journalism and feature several major projects each year. When Siedman suggested the idea for the series, the editors advocated for her to write her own story.

“Reporters can find amazing stories but have to fight the good fight to showcase them, and the editors trusted her, which can be rare,” said Pat Thomas, journalism professor at the University of Georgia Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication. “Carrie reacted to the zeitgeist that mentally ill people are dangerous, and she found the face of that.”

Siedman began reporting by talking with the people she knew in the mental health organizations in Sarasota. She followed one young man who dropped out quickly due to qualms about his reputation. She then worked with another young man for three months who stopped because his father didn't want him to face potential repercussions in the future. Siedman worked with a third young man, Patrick, for six months to tell his story. Then six weeks before publication, he hesitated and told her he wanted to back out. She met with him and talked calmly with him about the story and what she intended to write.

“I was ready to give up six months of work,” she said. “As someone who writes about mental health respectfully, I wasn’t going to tell him that he had to do the story.”

The next day, Patrick called back and agreed. He was full committed.

When the section ran, Siedman wrote pieces about Patrick and Keaton and how they handle their daily lives. The community reaction was so strong that the Herald-Tribute scheduled two forums for community members to have important conversations with those involved with the story. The first forum, which had room for 100 people, filled to the brim with 150 readers. The second event cut off at 350 reservations.

“It was wonderful because the participants who are usually hidden and scorned were at the head of the table and celebrated,” she said. “People really do want to talk about mental health.”

Since the series, Patrick and Keaton have expressed gratitude to Siedman and said they're glad they spoke on the record and advocated for their disorder. At the same time, reporters must be careful when covering mental health stories, Siedman said. As a 2016-2017 Carter Center Mental Health Journalism Fellow, she heard a tragic story about a fellow reporter who profiled a young man under age 18 who later regretted that his story was searchable online. When he prepared to graduate for college and look for jobs, the source asked the reporter and news publication to remove the story, but the news organization declined to take it down. In the end, the man committed suicide.

“This is real. It's not casual to write about people who have disorders,” Siedman said. “It's paramount for both the reporter and subject to take care of their mental health. Even reporting on this can be traumatic.”

The Tribune-Herald also got creative with its use of images, graphics and art for the series. Some of the sources’ families didn’t want their names or photos used, so the newspaper set aside a stipend to hire an artist to create images for the series. The artist, who also struggles with schizophrenia and has only found work as a janitor at a local mental health institution, illustrated themes and his struggles with the brain disorder. His work was framed and exhibited at the community forums as well.

“It was an inventive way of getting around the challenge of not having photos while also giving insight into the gifts of people who have mental health challenges,” Siedman said.

Fellow Will Robinson asked about the challenge of swimming against public perception and negative stigmas about mental health disorders. With movies and other entertainment media that dramatize the criminally insane, how can journalists present a responsible message?

Media messaging is getting better, but it could still use work, Siedman agreed. Most people with mental health issues lead normal lives, take medication and deal with issues such as finding work, community and social services like everyone else. The extreme 10 percent who self-medicate and become violent, however, are the ones who often receive news coverage, she said.

“There’s way too much focus on that end of mental health disorders,” she said. “I’d love to see reporters continue to tell the other side, too.”

Explainer stories about mental illness in general are helpful, Siedman added. With the Herald-Tribute series, she wrote a story that
corrected misconceptions about schizophrenia, particularly the still-lingering belief that it means multiple personalities or psychotic behavior. For reporters, the Carter Center is a good resource to turn for information about disorders and the best way to describe them correctly in stories.

Fellow Michelle Baruchman asked when mental illness should be covered as part of a news story. For example, when shootings occurred in San Bernardino in December 2015, several news outlets sparked a conversation about mental health issues before suspects were named.

“We have to be careful about the breaking news end of things. Incorrect information always comes out initially,” she said. “Personally, I don’t think mental health should be part of any story unless it’s relevant and there’s a doctor’s diagnosis.”

Fellow Jaylon Thompson asked how Siedman was able to write about her son, both personally and emotionally. In one article, Siedman shared Keaton’s first psychotic break, when she picked him up from college at age 22. He was put in isolation in a psychiatric hospital after pushing a police officer across a room. While there, he received medication he had never taken before, and he left the crisis unit and disappeared for 10 days. As Siedman shared her story, she heard that others had experienced the same and appreciated her insight.

“That’s how you reach people and relate to people,” she said. “Yes, it was intensely personal, but I saw the value in sharing the story and hearing from others that they weren’t alone.”

Siedman added that young journalists are the hope for mental health conversations in America to improve. As readers gain more awareness, more people can be diagnosed accurately, services can improve, and everyone will benefit.

“We’re all on the mental health spectrum,” she said. “Few of us have never had a moment of anxiety. This isn’t ‘us’ versus ‘them.’ This is all of us.”

Siedman shared several tips for journalists interested in telling mental health stories with compassion:

1. Ask yourself, “Is this relevant?” When covering breaking news in particular, does a mental health question come to mind? If so, is it documented and a legitimate factor to the story?
2. Educate yourself. Don’t approach a mental health story without knowing the condition you’re profiling. Read current research so you can convey your knowledge and sensitivity.
3. Don’t rush sources. This isn’t a story you can do quickly during a 45-minute interview on a Tuesday. Build trust by spending several hours on your interviews during multiple meetings.
4. Apologize when necessary. If you make a mistake with terminology or elsewhere and someone points it out, acknowledge the comment.
5. Find a way around obstacles. If you face issues naming sources or taking photographs, look for solutions such as illustrations.
6. Don’t cling to your story. If sources back out, let them. It’s tough to give up six months of work on a great project, but in the end, people’s health comes first.
7. Consider untold stories. Investigative teams are writing about abuse in state mental health hospitals and violence, yet many stories aren’t being told about the people who live normal lives with mental health issues daily. What positive stories about recovery, health services and healthy living can you share in your community?
For investigative journalist, a career rises and falls on great ideas. Investigative reporter Walt Bogdanich has pursued great ideas for 35 years at the New York Times, ABC News and the Wall Street Journal. He never struggled to develop questions and pursue the answers, earning Pulitzer Prizes for his work in 1988, 2005 and 2008.

In 2013, Bogdanich began reporting his next story based on a tip within The Times newsroom. He always bonded with the sports desk writers and enjoyed talking to them about the latest games. The sports editor told him to check out a story about Jameis Winston, a quarterback at Florida State University charged with sexual assault against a female student. Florida State was on its way to a national championship, and Winston was headed toward the Heisman Trophy. Huge titles were at stake. Although the sports beat wasn’t his usual area of expertise, Bogdanich’s investigative sense tingled when the local prosecutor revealed that a rape charge wouldn’t be pursued and there were problems with the police investigation.

“You don’t hear prosecutors complain about police because they depend on them for evidence,” Bogdanich said. “What’s wrong with this picture? Something wasn’t right.”

National reporters flocked to Tallahassee for the prosecutor’s press conference but promptly left. That’s when Bogdanich arrived and asked questions. He didn’t set up a meeting or call first. He simply showed up. The prosecutor welcomed Bogdanich into his office, and they talked for three hours.

“And boy, did he unload,” Bogdanich said. “He unloaded about the police and what they did wrong.”

Bogdanich didn’t ask if the conversation was on the record. He simply took notes and then asked to return with a video camera. Take chances and don’t give sources — especially officials — too much time to think about why they don’t want to talk, he advised.

“Do it in person. Go there. The whole dynamic changes,” he said. “They can’t hang up the phone on you.”

Since Bogdanich wasn’t a college football fan before covering the story, he didn’t anticipate the obstacles he’d face while reporting the story. Although he had thick skin and moxie already as an investigative reporter, he learned...
even more while interviewing university officials and battling public relations professionals at a large academic institution.

At one point, for example, he called Florida State to speak with the Title IX coordinator. Bogdanich scheduled a meeting with him, as well as the campus police chief and other top university officials. As soon as he arrived in Tallahassee, however, he received a voicemail saying a new crisis manager was hired to handle press questions about the case and that all of his appointments were canceled. The real kicker — the crisis manager was a former investigative reporter.

“He knew the reporting mentality and what I wanted to hear,” Bogdanich said. “He said everything was off the record and then proceeded to spit out untruths about what happened with the case.”

Bogdanich also worked around the donors who support not only the Florida State athletic program but also university-related expenses such as administrators’ salaries. These groups aren’t subject to open records laws, so Bogdanich faced reporting roadblocks. Similarly, when pursuing documents from the university and local medical institutions, he had to battle the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) laws that protect student and patient files.

“That’s part of what you have to expect with investigative stories,” he said. “However, I didn’t expect what I got with this one.”

McGill Fellow Kaitlyn Yarborough asked about his reporting process and how he found the information that they university didn’t want him to access. Bogdanich first reached out to the sexual assault victim to hear her full story. Then he interviewed others, always keeping their motives in mind. In emotional and traumatic cases such as sexual assault, he said, sources may want to speak out of revenge, anger or attention.

“You have to be careful where you step in a story like this,” he said. “It can be an emotional minefield.”

Throughout the reporting process, Bogdanich decided to focus on the police investigation timeline and whether it was fair to the case rather than individual personal accounts. He explored whether the investigation complied with the law and took the assault seriously. He didn’t want to make a judgment about whether the assault occurred.

“I assembled the evidence and presented it in as fair a manner as I could,” he said. “I wanted to document the failings in a way that was unassailable.”

After the story ran, Bogdanich received emails and voicemail messages that were so angry and threatening that he debated requesting coverage from the security personal in The Times newsroom. He received threats on his life. Ultimately, he decided not to report them as formal complaints.

“I learned early on when reporting about organized crime that if they actually threaten you, they don’t harm you,” he said. “Instead, you have to worry about the ones who don’t threaten you but just do it.”
When Bogdanich saw another sexual assault complaint at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in New York, he knew another investigation was at stake. He made 14 visits to the victim’s mother’s apartment before he felt any inkling that he would be able to do the story. He had to gain her trust and show he was serious about explaining her daughter’s side of the story. Unlike the Florida State case, the Hobart and William Smith case didn’t have much documentation or investigation paperwork to bolster the story. Without the victim’s voice, he didn’t have a story.

“That’s what you have to do sometimes,” he said. “These stories are real and awful and readers need to know about them, so you take the time to do them.”

After that story, Bogdanich worked on a story about a 14-year-old girl who was raped during her first month of high school. He saw through her eyes how terrible social shaming had become, especially with social media and other anonymous websites that posted unseemly comments about her. The girl’s parents wanted Bogdanich to write the story, and he wanted to write the story. But he decided not to do it.

“It was a good story, but it was hard to see what it was doing to her,” he said. “I didn’t think she’d be ready to have her name spread out there nationally, and the paper backed me on the decision.”

Fellow Lauren Herbert asked about Bogdanich’s method for contacting and approaching sources, especially victims of sexual assault. He explained that encouraging people to talk is a skill. With emotional and sensitive conversations, reporters must spend time with the source, be patient and let them talk when they’re ready. These aren’t brief, scheduled conversations over the phone. Instead, they’re multiple long conversations in person that slowly reveal the narrative.

“To be an investigative reporter, you need 100 tactics to get the information you need,” he said. “I owe it to my readers to do what I can in the bounds of good taste and fairness to get people to talk.”

In the Hobart and William Smith case, for example, Bogdanich visited the family 10 times before ever pulling out his notebook. During one of the visits, the victim got a new dog, and Bogdanich bonded with the dog. She was able to watch his interactions and demeanor before agreeing to do the story. Once she trusted him, Bogdanich was able to convince her to go back to the campus with him and talk about what happened.

“I don’t go in, take the information and leave,” he said. “I build a relationship and honestly care, even if I don’t write the story. We still keep in contact today.”

Across his decades of investigations into organized crime, the tobacco industry, sports and Chinese manufacturers, Bogdanich has noticed a trend of power abuse. In many cases, a system doesn’t work properly and institutions leave gaps where individuals are harmed. Those are the stories he enjoys reporting the most — not when one corrupt politician makes a misstep, for example, but when an entire system isn’t working that should be fixed. An investigative story about systemic issues may lead to reform.

“I care about lasting change and playing a role in making that happen,” he said. “As corny as it sounds, isn’t that one of the more noble callings of journalism?
Participants and Contact

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Louie Palu, Freelance Photojournalist
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