

McGill

SYMPOSIUM ON JOURNALISTIC COURAGE



October 22, 2014

Grady  College

The McGill program is funded by the McGill Lecture Endowment.

McGill

SYMPOSIUM ON JOURNALISTIC COURAGE

Excerpts from four group discussions:

Ferguson, Missouri: When conflicts come home

The NFL beat: Exposing the ills in America's favorite sport

The courage to ask tough questions

Face-to-face with Ebola: A reporter's perspective

This report was written by Carolyn Crist

October 22, 2014

Grady  College

The McGill program is funded by the McGill Lecture Endowment.

Contents

Welcome	3
Ferguson, Missouri: When conflicts come home	4
The NFL beat: Exposing the ills in America’s favorite sport	7
The courage to ask tough questions	10
Face-to-face with Ebola: A reporter’s perspective	13
Participants	19
Contact us	19

Photos by Sarah Freeman,
unless noted

Welcome

John F. Greenman: 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 eighth year, is an outgrowth of the McGill Lecture.

For 36 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.

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 four McGill Visiting Journalists for an five-hour discussion.

Topics will include:

- Ferguson, Missouri: When conflicts come home
- The NFL beat: Exposing the ills in America's favorite sport
- The courage to ask tough questions
- Face-to-face with Ebola: A reporter's perspective



John F. Greenman,
McGill Program Co-Director



McGill Program Co-Director
Diane Murray

Today will be a success if the journalists, faculty and students engage one another rigorously. We hope, by day's end, to answer a question posed by Melissa Ludtke in a recent Nieman Reports. Melissa asked: What does courage look like in the practice of journalism?

Ferguson, Missouri: When conflicts come home

McGill Visiting Journalists:

Wiley Price, photographer, St. Louis American

Moderator:

Mark E. Johnson, senior lecturer, University of Georgia

Wiley Price has captured moments of tragedy, protest and peace as a staff photographer for the St. Louis American for 30 years. When a St. Louis police officer shot and killed 18-year-old Michael Brown in the nearby neighborhood of Ferguson in August 2014, Price was ready to record historic moments for his community publication.

For weeks after the initial protests began, Price shot new images each day as he followed families, angry youth and community activists. Initially shocked by the large crowd of protestors, Price watched St. Louis' race relations develop into a deeper conversation as white residents joined the protests and new cases of injustice came to light.



McGill Visiting Journalist Wiley Price

"When disasters happen, that's when we as photojournalists 'go.' We have no other choice," said Mark Johnson. "Most journalists dropped in and made images of Ferguson and left. Wiley Price is not one of those journalists. His work shows depth of coverage and an understanding of the community."

Price explained dozens of images during the first session of the McGill Symposium, from the first gathering of protestors in front of the police department in early August to ongoing unrest in mid October. He caught the tension between older activists who have called for racial equality in St. Louis since the 1960s and younger, angrier African American males. He juxtaposed Ferguson's multi-million dollar police department with poor protestors. He shot the largest candlelight vigil of his three-decade experience — with more than 1,000 people — from the top of a hill.

"I was surprised by how many people first showed up in front of the police department," Price said. "It scared me because I realized this wouldn't be fun."

He drove the streets in the mornings and found out-of-town volunteers cleaning the streets. He focused on women, particularly those who weren't African American, and shot the looks on their faces and the words on their signs.

"I've never seen protests with so many women," he said. "Protests are usually male-driven, and here are women screaming at police. It was really kind of intimidating."

He showed up in the rain to shoot protests in front of a burned-down gas station. He attended conferences where medical examiners explained autopsies. He covered a protest that closed down a major highway near the airport and other impromptu marches that blocked intersections.

"I didn't have to look for a picture," he said. "They crossed my path every second. Just shoot."

He shot the funeral 16 days after Brown's death and found a new angle — from the pews upstairs, looking down as ushers carried the casket out of the front door. He watched the community regroup after someone burned down Brown's memorial in September. When another 18-year-old black man was shot in October, Price attended the protests that followed. He watched as groups shut down three Wal-Mart stores in the area and religious gatherings brought together protestors from every denomination. More than 3,000 people showed up to a national march, and Price focused on the white protestors carrying signs and yelling.

"The messages were on point," he said. "St. Louis white people were hating other white people. Even the black residents were commenting on the massive amount of white people in the protest."

Price was most proud of an image he took of Alice, an adopted African American child, standing with her white parents. She held a sign "I love being black" and her parents' signs read "Black lives matter."

"Nobody carries a sign that is not what they are thinking," Price said.

The St. Louis American continues to receive reports about police arrests each day, and Price shoots nightly protests in front of the police department. He says the town is now split between two factions — those who believe there is racism in St. Louis and those who don't.

"This has been a chronic problem, and there's finally a conversation," he said. "This is the first time we're seeing white people fighting white people about a black situation. People are taking sides."

Based on Price's knowledge of the area, the McGill Fellows asked about the politics, government and police coverage of St. Louis and Ferguson. Price discussed



One of the many images captured by Wiley Price during the Ferguson, Missouri, riots.

how authorities lacked leadership in handling initial protests and ongoing conversations. With multiple law enforcement groups on the ground — including the National Guard — the region and state will face a significant economic burden due to the property loss and sales tax loss. Even the school systems shut down for some time in August.

"This situation has been coming for some time. I'm surprised it took this long," Price said. "Everyone thought it would be St. Louis City rather than Ferguson, a quiet community with a median income of \$75,000. You can see it coming, but people don't want to pay attention to it."

As the protests continued and national publications sent photographers and videographers to cover the news, Price saw journalists who were handcuffed and reporters who bickered with officers about coverage.

"It was a gross overreaction by the police, and at times the media would get integrated into the mass of protestors," he said. "What started as a peaceful protest turned into yelling. The police provoked it, and it became a debacle. You can't make this up."

As the tension grew, so did social media comments, though Price believes the protest violence would have happened regardless of the extensive media coverage.

As a local journalist, Price felt less pressure from police and wasn't questioned as often as others, including a handful of journalists who were forced out of a McDonald's. The group stopped for a dinner break, but several officers began to dismantle their equipment and push them out of the restaurant.

"Police need to give classes to officers on how to handle the media. Don't arrest them. They're there to do their jobs, just like you are," Price said. "Why bother taking apart their equipment? You're being taped by another media crew across the street."

Some journalists looked for confrontation during those heated moments, but Price avoided it.

"Some protestors are looking to be in the paper and on TV, but the photographers would point out to each other not to shoot certain people who just want to be in the news," he said. "A couple of photographers said an officer were being rough, but then they got in his face instead of walking away."

Instead, Price finds it beneficial to get to know police and fire officials in his area, especially when he plans to cover breaking news events such as car wrecks and house fires. Price discussed several instances when he was moved from the scene or arrested by officers who didn't know him but was brought back by another official who knew him well. He's even received apologies from police chiefs for rough handling by new employees.

"It's vitally important to become a friend to the police department. You're no longer a threat when they know your first name," Price said. "I always show up. And during the protests, the other journalists asked me who the officers were."

When national reporters first arrived in town, a few local reporters were starstruck, but there was generally a healthy camaraderie among all the reporters, he said. They would share names and source information while following protestors.

"The tension of Ferguson and the media, media and the police, and the police and protestors makes for a horrible soup. They don't go together but have to operate around

each other," he said. "When all of this is over in a few months, there will be a lot of lessons learned."

Fellow Wallace Morgan noted that Price captured images of a black officer with his arms around protestors. She asked about national media giving equal coverage.

"Peace doesn't make news. Some protestors want peace, but the national media wouldn't have been there for that," he said. "Once the protestors burned down the service station, it brought the national media to our front door."



Fellow Erin Smith asks Price about his willingness to be arrested for a photograph

Fellow Erin Smith asked about Price's willingness to be arrested for a photograph. You can't do your job if you're in jail, she added.

"I always let the paper know I refuse to get arrested for the sake of getting a picture, and I've never been put in that position," he said. "If an officer tells me not to stand in a certain place, I say 'OK' and shoot it somewhere else. But I'm still going to shoot it."

Fellow Michael Foo asked about advice for photojournalists who don't have close relationships with police officers, firefighters or community members.

"Make it happen for yourself. It makes your life so much easier," Price said. "Photojournalism is a people job. People tell me I'm always friendly and approachable — Why not?"

The NFL beat: Exposing the ills of America's favorite sport

McGill Visiting Journalist:

Ken Belson, sports reporter, New York Times

Moderator:

Vicki Michaelis, professor, University of Georgia

This is a big year for sports news. Consider several issues that intersect with NFL territory alone — accusations of domestic violence, Commissioner Roger Goodell's public announcements, health issues stemming from head concussions, and recruitment gaffes. With a background steeped in business and international reporting, Ken Belson enjoys tackling his sports reporter duties with a different slant.

"Unlike saturation sports coverage or business coverage that can get geeky pretty fast, you have to separate the wheat from the chaff," he said. "You have to decide what people can use and understand and write a compelling story that doesn't run with the flood."

When the domestic violence video involving Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice first surfaced, Belson didn't report it. He focused on the Winter Olympics in Russia and didn't think the New York Times would cover the initial story.

"We try to take a deep breath when stories like these come out and not jump right in," he said. "Once he was suspended, we wrote a fair amount about it."

Belson has adjusted to his position as a sports reporter and the industry's quirks. He's particularly amused by the NFL's trend of apologizing and "cleaning house" at the beginning of the football season. Once suspensions are handed down, the reasoning goes, everyone can focus on football again. Despite the negative events this fall, the



McGill Visiting Journalist Ken Belson
and Moderator Vicki Michaelis

NFL seems to be holding up, said Fellow Jake Leber. Is the NFL "too big to fail" at this point?

"People have short memories for stories, though I do believe this has reached a tipping point," Belson said. "The chorus was never as loud as now (about domestic violence), and the NFL has been taken down a peg. Whether it stumbles further is the question."

What about Goodell's reputation? In corporate cases, it's not usually the crime that sinks executives but the coverup, Belson said. Goodell should have held a news conference at the outset to answer all questions regarding Ray Rice's suspension.



McGill Fellow Ben Wolk

"In the CBS Evening News interview, so much was unanswered," he said. "It looked like a soft interview. A conference would give the appearance of an open and honest approach."

With the concussion controversy, for instance, the NFL has learned how to spin the story and give positive forward-thinking responses as a gut reflex.

"The NFL's outward personality is to look into solutions," Belson said. "They say they're addressing the situation but don't answer it directly."

Even with the domestic violence issue producing headlines, ESPN and other networks don't seem to be hiring female reporters.

"The networks seem tone-deaf themselves. The Sunday talk shows before the games are still all men," Belson said. "In the end, most viewers want to see football, and the game sells. The social issues, such as concussions and the Redskins' name, are pushed off the front page."

With Belson's business background, NFL executives seem willing to work with him on stories. He's open about what he's reporting and tells them what he's doing. If they want to help, that's great. If not, he still reports the story. The worst option is faking your motive or story idea when you ask for an interview.

"After the Ray Rice incident, we asked women in five cities what they thought and asked the NFL if they wanted to be part of the story," he said. "It took 15 minutes to get the chief marketing officer on the phone. You can bet they wanted to be in that, even if it wouldn't be a positive story."

Sports reporters must also balance reporting and being a fan, said Fellow Katy Roberts. ESPN paired with Frontline to do a documentary about concussions but didn't air it

after meeting with Goodell. Can networks produce solid reporting?

"They have a good team of investigative reporters, but at the end of the day, they're paid by this corporation owned by Disney," Belson said. "Plus, they are six reporters among 800 other employees. Is the report front and center on the website or buried under football fantasy and other league information?"

Even non-network news sources have compromised coverage because their viewership or readership depends on it. Some newspapers tend to promote favorable coverage of their teams, Belson said. In Jacksonville, Fla., for example, the mayor encouraged fans to buy tickets, and the paper did as well.

"That's over-the-top boosterism," Belson said. "In smaller cities, there's this deeper issue of sports and sponsorship."

The New York Times is a sponsor of the New York Marathon and U.S. Open. Concerned about compromised coverage, Belson asked the advertising department for details. He found that both sponsorships are in-kind trades, which means the Marathon publishes race times for free, and the Times sells extra papers. No money is directly exchanged in the deal.

Social media further compounds the news cycle. Fellow Jake Leber asked about the way news is spread by league-owned networks such as MLB and NFL sites.

"Social media is a blizzard of kernels of news. We assume league-owned networks have the inside information,

but sometimes they're wrong as well," Belson said. "A PR person once told me he's asked those reporters to correct more facts than others. They live to break news on Twitter."

Fans can be tough to interview as well. If a city is interested in building a new stadium, for example, fans may support it. But reporters should take another approach and report it from another angle, Belson said. In Milwaukee, for instance, a reporter wrote about the new baseball stadium by traveling to a nearby high school that had no goalposts on its field. If the district can't afford goalposts, how can it give money to build an arena?

"Let the story speak for itself," Belson said. "Don't go to the fans in this case. This is everyone's money, so see how it can affect people."



McGill Visiting Journalist Ken Belson talks about the importance of making connections.

When it comes to money questions — especially stadium and taxpayer stories — coverage may depend on the editor or section. If the sports section is too positive, Belson recommends pitching the story to the metro desk for reporting. For example, a protest in Brooklyn about the basketball arena was a perfect fit for the metro section because of its connection to community activists.

"Have friends in different sections," he said. "Ask them if you're getting the story right."

Fellow Wallace Morgan asked if Belson has a process to approach his stories. Belson explained that he likes to get an NFL feature in the Sunday or Monday paper every week or every other week, when people are most likely

"Cast a wide net. You never know what you'll find if you keep asking people who they know."

—Ken Belson

focused on football. He has a cycle of writing 900-word "quick" stories and longer substantial pieces. He also aims to appear on the front page once a month, but with some stories such as the Ray Rice video, he was on the front three times in two weeks. He creates goals for where he wants stories to appear and what important topics he wants to cover.

"The best story ideas are the ones written on the backs of cocktail napkins or on your hand," he said. "You can go to lunch with someone and talk about the obesity problem in the NFL, and there's a story idea."

With larger "issue" stories, Belson advises reporters to talk to "one more person." Speak to as many people as you can to ensure you cover all the angles.

"Cast a wide net," he said. "You never know what you'll find if you keep asking people who they know."

When he traveled to the Cook Islands to report about bankruptcy, Belson asked other journalists for sources. When he reports about the Green Bay Packers, he talks to friends from Wisconsin about trends. As a reporter in Japan, Belson friended nuclear engineers to report about the 2011 tsunami and Fukushima incident.

By forming relationships in his beats, Belson has learned how to connect with tough sources and get great stories later. As a business reporter, he once interviewed BellSouth CEO Duane Ackerman with no goal in mind and allowed a casual conversation to flow. Then he came back the next day for the story, and Ackerman opened up. Years later, when Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, Ackerman gave Belson permission to travel with BellSouth utility crews to find unique stories along the destroyed areas in Gulfport and Biloxi.

"Most NFL owners don't want to disclose much, and it takes time to get to know them," Belson said. "It's becoming more rare these days to start a relationship with no story in mind. It's worth it."

The courage to ask tough questions

McGill Visiting Journalist:

Antonio Mora, host of "Consider This," Al Jazeera America

Moderator:

Carolina Acosta-Alzuru, associate professor, University of Georgia

The secret to a good interview has been hammered into our brains since elementary school: Do your homework. For Antonio Mora, it means feeling like a college student again, often awake until 2 a.m. doing research and preparing for interviews scheduled for the next day. As a reporter for Al Jazeera America, Good Morning America, Nightline and 20/20, Mora has interviewed national and international politicians, celebrities and changemakers for years.

"You've probably heard the saying that '80 percent of success is showing up,' and that's not true with interviewing," Mora said. "Being prepared and

understanding the topic is by far the most important thing you can do for a good interview."

Mora's daily routine is saturated with news. He wakes up and checks news updates in the morning through network broadcasts, social media and news apps on his phone. He then holds a morning conference call with his team to decide the stories of the day. Once at the office, he prepares for the day's interviews and shoots pre-recorded segments in the afternoon. In the evening, he shoots the live broadcast and then returns home to prepare for the next day's interviews.

Different topics and types of interviews require different approaches, Mora said. The length of the interview, for example, predicts how much time you may have to delve into tough subjects. Print, radio, brief television spots and long-form television interviews all require separate tactics and questions.

"So much depends on who you're interviewing," Mora said. "If you're talking to a spokesperson or someone familiar with the media, they're expecting the hard questions. But otherwise, you should start it as a conversation."

For example, Mora once interviewed Mariah Carey for Good Morning America about a Christmas album she recorded. She was married to Tommy Mottola, who headed Sony Music Entertainment in the 1990s and scouted her for the label, and though Mora wanted to ask about it, he first allowed her to talk about charitable giving and the album. As soon as Mora asked a tough question, Carey's publicists jumped into the shot, but she



McGill Visiting Journalist Antonio Mora
and Moderator Carolina Acosta-Alzuru

“Being prepared and understanding the topic is by far the most important thing you can do for a good interview.”

—Antonio Mora

allowed him to continue since he built a rapport from the start.

“You have to measure each situation for a different approach,” Mora said. “Sometimes the hard questions are the only ones. If I’m not doing a live interview, my inclination is to start with easier questions to get the conversation going.”

Sometimes it’s difficult to establish that rapport. One of Mora’s most difficult interviews was with Janet Reno, former President Bill Clinton’s attorney general. Mora asked her about a recent FBI scandal, and she refused to answer any questions, preferring to say “no comment.” He had to find new ways to ask the same questions without building antagonism on live TV. Fellow Ben Wolk asked when and how to keep pushing an interview after someone says “no comment.”

“At some point, it gets stupid. In an interview with (Pentagon press secretary) Rear Admiral John Kirby, for example, I know he won’t answer certain questions, but you still have to bring them up,” Mora said. “One way to do it is by putting out facts and raising questions about them, such as the split between the Pentagon and White House. Even if he says ‘no,’ at least you brought up examples and got the information out.”

In fact, when Mora interviewed Eva Golinger, a former advisor to former Venezuela President Hugo Chavez, on *Consider This*, the tension escalated. Know your facts, such as World Bank numbers, and challenge officials, Mora said.

“I asked her about the poverty rate and residents who didn’t even have access to toilet paper or basic goods, and she was furious,” he said. “You have to stand up to people. Unless you’re prepared, you won’t get that great interview. They’ll throw out a crazy fact and then you’re stuck.”

Structure is important to the interview process as well. You need a beginning, middle and end to lead readers and viewers. Don’t focus so much on the background research that you forget the important questions, Mora said.

“What is important to hear? How do I start strong but end strong?” he said. “Once you do the research, sit back and think. Then write down the questions to ask.”

The most difficult aspect with live television is watching time cues, determining how questions should flow and listening to the producer at the same time. Go into the interview with 10-12 questions listed in a logical order to guide the conversation. Skip points if you start to run out of time. Most importantly, listen and don’t be tied to your questions. If it makes sense to transition to a question out of order, let it flow with the conversation.

“It’s tragic if someone drops a bomb during a live interview and you miss it, so you have to make sure you listen and follow up,” Mora said. “The worst interviews usually have a satellite delay, which makes it difficult to let the conversation flow and have natural pauses. Sometimes you have to interrupt.”

Fellow Hayden Field asked if Mora encountered people who had different personalities on air than off air. How do you put people at ease and encourage them to show their real selves? Talk to them about doing an interview before you put a camera in their face, Mora said.

“If you interview someone at the site of a tragedy or on the street, first introduce yourself and engage them in some way to have a conversation before you put up the camera and lights,” he said. “Act like you’re just another person on the street interested in what they have to say.”

Being a Harvard-trained lawyer must help Mora ask the tough questions, Fellow Brenna Beech said. It helps,



McGill Visiting Journalist Antonio Mora makes a point about how TV news is declining

though Mora was involved with journalism and activism at a young age — first in high school and then in law school in Venezuela. Broadcast journalism wasn't as prevalent in Venezuela, so when he moved to New York, he decided to start his journalism career at a Spanish-language station. The experience with Spanish-language stations and Al Jazeera has highlighted how few minorities are in broadcast journalism newsrooms.

"Networks are missing stories that are important to a growing community. They're going to miss an important part of what's happening in this country," Mora said. "Hispanics watch more TV than any group."

As the Internet further splinters the audience, Hispanics and Latinos are being lost in the mix. Some networks aim for a conservative crowd and others lean toward a liberal crowd. But Univision and Spanish-speaking networks can't be the only ones that appeal to Latinos,

Mora said. Just like the rest of viewers, Latinos want stories about the economy, not just immigration and deportation, and politicians must address broader issues for Hispanic voters as well.

"For the majority of Latinos in America, Spanish is not their first language," he said. "Plus, they hail from different countries. The Mexicanization of Spanish-speaking networks leads to editorial choices that alienate other Spanish speakers and dialects. National origins are lost in the shuffle."

The younger generation has slowed on network viewership as well. With the popularity of Internet news and declines in cable use, Americans in the 18-29 category are being turned off by pundits, talking heads and the repetitive 24-hour news cycle.

"Networks are missing stories that are important to a growing community. They're going to miss an important part of what's happening in this country."

—Antonio Mora

"It's a shame but a reason that TV news has declined in general. It's less substantial and more tabloid," he said. "I think enough people care about serious news to make it a profitable and important service."

Despite Internet popularity, Mora believes viewers will always need journalists to explain the news and cover major historical events. These reporters must be able to tell stories and conduct probing interviews.

"Broadcast news brings that power of well-told stories and pictures," he said. "We may not see the same world with networks and evening newscasts in the future, but there's always going to be a role for broadcast TV in our lifetime."

Face-to-face with Ebola: A reporter's perspective

McGill Visiting Journalist:

Todd Frankel, reporter, Washington Post

Moderator:

Patricia Thomas, professor, University of Georgia



McGill Visiting Journalist Todd Frankel and
Moderator Patricia Thomas

After only four months at the Washington Post, Todd Frankel decided to travel to Sierra Leone to report on Ebola, the fatally contagious virus breaking out across West Africa. Ebola has claimed more than 5,500 lives in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia since July, and journalists from national and international organizations are putting boots on the ground to report the story. But in August, many journalists were afraid to go, and Frankel's seasoned coworkers turned down the assignment.

"The Washington Post has that institutional knowledge about covering wars and natural disasters, but no one in the newsroom was an expert on Ebola," he said. "No one

knew what precautions to take. I prepared for a month before I went."

Frankel asked advice from experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other officials who had returned from stays in Sierra Leone. Ultimately, Frankel decided to go because it's a great story. His wife, a photojournalist, agreed that he should go, and his editors supported the trip.

"When reporters cover dangerous stories in Columbia, if they get kidnapped, they're not doing their jobs right," he said. "Same with Ebola here. If I got the virus, I wasn't doing my job."

Frankel set up an eight-day reporting trip so he would hit the shortest incubation period for the virus. If he contracted Ebola, he could return to the United States for treatment rather than face a 21-day quarantine in unsanitary hospital conditions. He left with a list of story ideas and found his first source on the plane.

"When reporting a story like this, you're hyperaware and constantly hunting," he said. "I stayed in the same hotel as CDC workers and infectious disease doctors and found stories through them as well."

Fellow Wallace Morgan asked how he reported all day and took notes. Where is the line between not enough and too much? Frankel said the balance is tough, especially when there are many stories to tell. Generally,

he scribbled notes on a reporter's notepad during the day and took photographs to capture details, such as street signs and handwashing pots in front of restaurants and businesses. At night, he found time to review the notes and consolidate his thoughts.

"I wouldn't write every day, but I would decide what I wanted to use and what to follow up on the next day," he said. "The hardest part is thinking through all the notes and digesting what you've seen and how to explain it."

Freetown, with one million residents, is tough to navigate safely on a normal day. Facing a city with heavy traffic and no traffic lights, Frankel required a driver and fixer to travel. The fixer – Sullivan, a local photographer – translated for Frankel a few times, but he made it a point to do interviews in English.

Fellow Jake Leber asked if U.S. television coverage has created a feeling of sensationalism around Ebola. The disease is complicated and mysterious, which makes the symptoms difficult to describe in short sentences, Frankel said. Plus, online commenters spread false facts about the virus and scientists don't speak in absolutes about transmission of the virus.

"Some people in Sierra Leone still don't believe it's real, but there's a sense of social distancing," he said.

"You try to paint the best picture you can," he said. "You zoom in on what you see and what's observable to tell the larger stories."

–Todd Frankel

"Everyone stands about six feet away from others, which is tough to do during interviews."

Before he left the country, Frankel bought personal protective equipment, gloves, masks, goggles and rubber boots. Frankel traveled to a few hospitals to look around but didn't go into any treatment areas. Frankel noted the lack of supplies and poor conditions. Nurses didn't follow normal precautions with gloves and masks because they



McGill Fellow Brittini Ray

were worried about running out, so they reused gloves between patients.

"The biggest danger would be to have a car accident and contract Ebola in the hospital. It was tough to digest that information," Frankel said. "I carried around a spray bottle full of bleach. I developed a bizarre OCD."

To report the stories with a humanistic touch, Frankel used a narrative approach and zoomed in on one character to illustrate a larger point. Like a filmmaker, he focused on a tight and manageable scene with dialogue and then shifted to a broader picture to explain the numbers. You can't tell all stories, he said, but you can show the universality of the small story. Plus, it's easier for readers to understand.

"You try to paint the best picture you can," he said. "You zoom in on what you see and what's observable to tell the larger stories."

Telling a story is the key for both readers and those being interviewed.

"When you ask people to share their story, most want to talk," he said. "You're giving them an opportunity to share their story, and even at their lowest moments, they want to tell it."

For the most part, life in Freetown continued as usual. The markets were still full. New laws banned large

gatherings and closed night clubs, but people broke the rules and went to underground discotheques.

"Everyday life went on at the same time," Frankel said. "They just want to be as normal as can be."

Each night, Frankel would eat dinner with infectious disease experts and learn from them. They were afraid as well. It helped him to understand what aspects of Ebola to worry about and what to ignore.

"The facilities are so basic. There's one lab in the country that can test for Ebola," he said. "We can ramp up our response and tests in the U.S., but they can't."

Before he returned, Frankel was nervous about having a fever. He took ibuprofen to pass the fever check and made it on the plane. At customs in the U.S., he was only asked if he brought back beef jerky. Once back at home, Frankel resumed life as normal as possible but still kept a 21-day self quarantine. He tried not to kiss his wife or kids and slept in the basement.

Frankel remained uneasy for awhile and watched as a few cases popped up in the United States. Following the Dallas patients, however, Frankel would be surprised if many more Ebola cases came to the country. Nigeria saw a few cases but was able to stop the spread, even in Lagos, a town of 21 million people. News coverage of Guinea has been limited, likely because residents speak French.

"It'll get a fair bit worse," he said. "It won't become a worldwide epidemic or even endemic in Africa. We will get a hold on it."

The war-torn countries are being hit economically as well. Everyone seems frozen into place, especially farmers who don't want to work in the fields, Frankel said. Plus, employers from Australia, Russia and China



McGill Fellows question Visiting Journalist Todd Frankel about his biggest fears traveling to Sierra Leone.

have pulled their workers out of plants and mines. Many expatriates and foreign shop owners have left the country as well.

"Liberia and Sierra Leone had civil wars, and people are still recovering from that. Then this happens," he said. "The military checkpoints and quarantines are giving

people flashbacks and trauma about losing loved ones and the unseen enemy."

But they have a history of getting beyond disasters.

"These countries deal with Lassa and Marburg virus, which are not as famous, contagious or fatal as Ebola but are similar," he said. "They have a history of these diseases."

Frankel isn't a stranger to tough stories. He reported on Katrina in 2005 and found a way to get into the city with a St. Louis photographer. Frankel found it eerie to see people peek at them behind curtains and face government agents who wanted them to leave. He saw dead bodies that were left in the streets for days.

"My clearest memory from Katrina was driving the wrong way down I-5 with no one else on the road," he said. "We drove one exit too far and turned around and went back the wrong way. It's the little things like that that made us wonder where we were."

Frankel doesn't plan to return to Africa to report additional Ebola stories, but he still has a few ideas in mind that he wants to write from Washington, DC.

"In hindsight, it was all worth it," he said. "It's that flip side – if I did get it – that's difficult to answer. It's an important story, and you don't get too many chances to cover something like Ebola."

Participants

McGill Fellows

Brenna Beech, Senior, Magazine Journalism/Visual Journalism

Aashka Dave, Senior, Journalism

Khadija Dukes, Senior, Journalism

Hyacinth Empinado, Graduate student, Health and Medical Journalism

Hayden Field, Senior, Journalism

Michael Foo, Senior, Digital and Broadcast Journalism

Jake Leber, Senior, Digital and Broadcast Journalism

Wallace Morgan, Senior, Journalism

Brittini Ray, Senior, Journalism

Katy Roberts, Senior, Journalism

Erin Smith, Senior, Journalism, GA

Ben Wolk, Senior, Journalism

McGill Visiting Journalists

Wiley Price, photographer, St. Louis American

Ken Belson, sports reporter, The New York Times

Antonio Mora, host of "Consider This" on Aljazeera America

Todd Frankel, reporter, Washington Post

Moderators

Mark E. Johnson, senior lecturer, University of Georgia

Vicki Michaelis, professor, University of Georgia

Carolina Acosta-Alzuru, associate professor, University of Georgia

Patricia Thomas, professor, University of Georgia



The 2014 McGill Fellows (front row, l. to r.) H. Field, H. Empinado, W. Morgan, B. Beech, A. Dave, E. Smith; (back row, l. to r.) K. Dukes, B. Ray, B. Wolk, M. Woo, J. Leber and K. Roberts

Contact us

For more information about the McGill Lecture and Symposium:

John F. Greenman
706.542.1081
jgreenma@uga.edu

Diane Murray
706.542.5038
murrayd@uga.edu

The McGill program is on the Web at
www.grady.uga.edu/mcgill