

McGill

SYMPOSIUM ON JOURNALISTIC COURAGE



Wednesday, October 26, 2011

Grady  College

The McGill program is funded by the McGill Lecture Endowment.
Contributors include Gannett Foundation.

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Excerpts from four group discussions:

- Resisting the retreat from foreign news
- Terrorism, tornados and telling visual stories
- The baseball story no one wanted told
- The courage to collaborate, cooperate

Note: This report was written by JoAnn Anderson.
The report is online at www.grady.uga.edu/mcgill,
click on the Symposium button.

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Welcome



John F. Greenman

John 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 fifth year, is an outgrowth of the McGill Lecture.

For 33 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 eight McGill Visiting Journalists for a six-hour discussion.

Topics will include:

- Resisting the retreat from foreign news
- Terrorism, tornados and telling visual stories
- The baseball story no one wanted told
- The courage to collaborate, cooperate

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?



*McGill fellows Joe Williams,
Polina Marinova, Felicia Harris*

Resisting the retreat from foreign reporting

McGill Visiting Journalists

Annie Murphy, independent journalist

John Schidlovsky, director, International Reporting Project, Washington D.C.

Moderator:

Lee B. Becker, professor, University of Georgia

Annie Murphy is redefining how Americans learn about the world, one story at a time.

As an independent journalist who covers South American news, Murphy works in a variety of platforms – print, radio, broadcast and multimedia – for organizations such as NPR and The Atlantic. It's this kind of flexibility that allows her to cover a variety of beats and under-reported stories – from the boom of graphic designers in Brazil to the rise of stroller use among Bolivian mothers. And as more American news organizations cut their budgets for international reporting, to Murphy, it's become more important than ever for Americans to learn about international events.

"You cannot get dressed without interacting with other countries," she said at the McGill symposium, noting that Americans often seek ways to be entertained when they read the news, but still need vital information from abroad.

It's these kinds of journalistic challenges that John Schidlovsky wants to combat. As the founding director of the International Reporting Project, Schidlovsky encourages more international reporting in U.S. media. The Project sends reporters and editors every year to under-reported areas around the world, such as Africa, for extensive workshops to report on local issues, as well as develop relationships with sources. Against the idea of 'parachute journalism,' as Schidlovsky calls it, the five-week workshops allow the reporters to really do in-depth reporting.

To Schidlovsky, the old newsroom mentality is dying. "American journalism abroad is in decline," he said. "There is a greater dependence on smart, local journalistic freelancers. Lots of news agencies drop foreign bureaus, but there are still great opportunities to do foreign news, and far greater opportunities to do foreign freelancing."

McGill fellow Tiffany Stevens asked, "Even though international reporting is not being done as much, international reporting is still essential. How do you make your stories essential to Americans seeking entertainment?"



Visiting journalist John Schidlovsky

"I think newspapers have a role to play. They are contracted, with local and national emphasis. But with more Americans overseas, there's more and more a need for more international understanding," Schidlovsky. "We make connections with everyday lives with religious conflicts, business and security issues ... There is a vast opportunity for many Americans to be informed."

McGill fellow Felecia Harris asked Murphy about the difficulties of getting sources to be open as a journalist who is not native to the area. "Hearing your stories, as an international reporter, how do you get people to open up?"

Murphy advised that while translators can always be used, having a grasp of the native language is huge. "You can't fake respect. Always try to be genuine when you're trying to communicate with people," she said. "I think letting people know they can trust you is important, and it's good to go the extra way," adding that when she is in Chile, she tries to speak Chilean Spanish to get sources to be comfortable with her.

Jason Hatford asked about the ongoing coverage of Africa and its development.

Schidlovsky said that Project's freelancers see competition from Chinese and Portuguese media. "Media coverage is huge because of China's involvement with Africa. Our fellows came back looking at agricultural resources, and China is looking at those same resources in their reporting."

"We make connections with everyday lives with religious conflicts, business and security issues ... There is a vast opportunity for many Americans to be informed."

—John Schidlovsky



Visiting journalists John Schidlovsky and Annie Murphy, moderator, Lee Becker

Murphy added that in Mozambique, there's been a lot of Brazilian coverage from freelance media, and it has been interesting to see reporting there shift away from mainstream media outlets.

McGill fellow Elizabeth Wilson asked about the financial model for foreign freelance reporters.

Murphy advised to look for paying positions. "As you build up your portfolio, find ways to finance your trips to do different stories," she said. "Build relationships with different outlets and avoid paying out of your own pocket."

Schidlovsky added that it is possible for freelancers to gain more writing opportunities if they repurpose their stories for different media outlets. "It's a challenge as a freelancer, but there are so many outlets in print, broadcast and online," he said.

McGill fellow Alyson Wright noted the decline of international reporting, and asked if the speakers saw a gradual shift to better journalism in the future.

"I think we've reached a low point, but we're coming back. Traditional outlets have cut back. But new models are coming up," Schidlovsky said. "Maybe in the traditional media arena, there will be ways online to do international reporting in a way that's profitable. If the online pay model is the new way, that may be the hope."

Terrorism, tornados and telling visual stories

McGill Visiting Journalists

David Handschuh, staff photographer, *The New York Daily News*, New York, NY

Jeff Roberts, staff photographer, *Birmingham News*, Birmingham, AL

Moderator:

Mark E. Johnson, senior lecturer, University of Georgia

For Jeff Roberts, April 27, 2011 began as a simple day off from his job as a staff photographer for the *Birmingham News*. As he drove home from lunch at his favorite pizza joint, he noticed an unfamiliar sight on the highway through Concord. There was no traffic on the road – just him, his old Volvo and the presence of two figures hovering in the dark sky.

“Driving along, I glanced up in the sky, and I saw what I thought were two crows doing a lazy dance in the air,” Roberts said. “And I actually pulled over to look, and I realized it was not crows, but roofing shingles falling.” Roberts realized a tornado was on the ground – and he was dangerously close to it.

Tornado warnings were nothing new for north Alabama, as its gully terrain and proximity to Texas winds made for frequent inclement weather. But this day was different, as a tornado outbreak was already whipping through the Southeast.

Roberts quickly pulled into a convenience store parking lot, and shortly after, “the Volvo tail rocked once, twice. Clunks of houses, entire roofs, metal, started to fly across,” Roberts said.

“Seeing cars, houses, ATVs, and what I think were people just wiped clean, just flew away.”

Roberts survived, and with his Volvo intact.



Visiting journalists Jeff Roberts and David Handschuh, moderator, Mark E. Johnson

Over the coming hours and days, Roberts met families whose lives were upended by the tornado's destruction. He recalled some advice from his late mentor Spider Martin, a photographer whose work during the Civil Rights movement helped spur on the Voting Rights Act. “I heard him say, ‘Do what you do. Do not become part of the news. Don’t become part of the story,’” Roberts said. He began taking photographs, offering a unique vantage point that his colleagues were unable to shoot because the destruction made it difficult to navigate the roads.



Capturing breaking news during a crisis is a familiar feeling for David Handschuh, a *New York Daily News* photographer and a photojournalism professor at New York University.

Visiting journalist Jeff Roberts

Handschuh was getting ready for his first day of class on September 11, 2001. Instead, he decided to follow a bevy of fire trucks buzzing to the scene of the plane crash in the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

"They were in their own hearse going to their own funeral – they just didn't know it yet," Handschuh said of the firefighter respondents, who all died later in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack.

Handschuh spent some time in lower Manhattan taking photos of the destruction, but soon a little voice from within told him to run instead. "I've never run away from a photo in my life," Handschuh said. "But I put my camera down and ran."

Swept up in the dust and debris of the towers collapsing, Handschuh credits the New York City rescue emergency teams for saving his life. "I run into people and they say that it's terrible that I got hurt. And I tell them, No, it's okay that I got hurt, but it's better that I am alive," he said.

Handschuh's work for the *New York Daily News* has received numerous awards and acclaim over the years, including Pulitzer Prize nominations, and awards from the New York Press Photographers Association and the New York Press Club.

But as he described one of his photos of the burning towers, figures eclipsing a blue sky with acrid black smoke and bright orange flames, he said, "I've gotten many awards for this, but I'm embarrassed to have taken it. I'm humbled by what happened that day."

Moderator Mark Johnson expressed although these events happened a decade apart, it was important to examine the grieving period and the after-effects on the journalists' lives. "How was that progression for you, to go back to work and feel ready to shoot again?" Johnson asked.

"At one point, I thought I'd never take a photo again. And then I said I would never take a photo of a dead or dying person again," Handschuh said. "It was a huge change for me as a breaking news photographer, and I never looked back. Probably everyday in our career, we should evaluate what we're doing as journalists, and better serve our readers."

"Showing grief without getting in someone's face is important," he said. "I think there are a lot of young students now that think everything needs to be shot with a 17-mm lens. Learn to shoot a little long."

–Jeff Roberts

Roberts said that going out and talking to others in his town became important in his healing process. "I couldn't believe that people that had just lost everything would take the time to wave to a news photographer," Roberts said. "They would stop what they were doing, and I would get the courage and talk to them. Their resilience and resolve made an impression on me."

McGill fellow Alyson Wright asked how difficult it was for the photojournalists to separate their job responsibilities from being directly affected by tragedy.

Handschuh said he was concerned for the community of journalists impacted by the emotional and physical trauma, and that it helped to have programs and outings celebrating being alive.

Roberts said that being a part of the town made it easier to talk to people, because he was not an outsider. "But trying to do my job when I knew I had friends dead and injured was hard," he said.

McGill fellow Sarah Osbourne asked that in tragic events such as these, how important it was for a photojournalist to stay objective. "How do you get journalists to stay that middle ground, even though they're trying to recover from what they've seen? What would you say to them?"

Handschuh said, "First thing you tell a journalist is that you're a human. All journalists really need and are entitled to a recovery process. It's a normal, rational response to an abnormal, irrational experience."

Roberts said that adopting some techniques, such as using a longer lens, helps downplay the invasive nature of photography during tragedy. "Showing grief without getting in someone's face is important," he said. "I think there are a lot of young students now that think everything needs to be shot with a 17-mm lens. Learn to shoot a little long."

Handschuh said that despite the risks, the desire to cover the truth in news through photography remains a universal one. "I think there is a thin line between foolishness and bravery and in this career, we straddle it on a daily basis," he said. "I cannot tell just my story – it's the story of every journalist running towards danger when everyone else is running away."

"I think there is a thin line between foolishness and bravery and in this career, we straddle it on a daily basis. I cannot tell just my story – it's the story of every journalist running towards danger when everyone else is running away."

–David Handschuh



Terrorism, tornados and telling visual stories session

The baseball story no one wanted told

McGill Visiting Journalists

Mark Fainaru-Wada, ESPN, San Francisco, CA

Lance Williams, *California Watch*, San Francisco, CA

Moderator

Patricia Thomas, professor, University of Georgia

For 14 months, the lives of Mark Fainaru-Wada and Lance Williams hung in limbo, and all because they wanted to keep a promise.

As enterprise reporters for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, they began investigating the September 2003 steroids case involving BALCO, a pharmaceutical company that had affiliations with some of the professional sports industry's biggest athletes and stars, among them Barry Bonds and Marion Jones.

"If we did a poll about steroids and performance-enhancing drugs used in sports, about is it going on? Many would say yes, of course it's going on," Williams said. "But eight

years ago, people didn't believe it was an issue in sports. Not just among fans, but sports writers were not aware of performance-enhancing drugs."

After the federal government had raided the San Francisco-based company, which had fronted as a vitamin seller, the reporters found that the company had endorsements from professional athletes in exchange for the company's steroids.

Fainaru-Wada and Williams spent three years tracking down sources who would share firsthand accounts of athletes using performance drugs.

"We amassed a ton of sources, and they all wanted to know: how are athletes getting a pass?" Fainaru-Wada said. "Why is the government treating it like a regular drug case, going after dealers and not the buyers? It was an upside-down case. Why aren't athletes being held accountable?"

The sports community initially resisted the story, disbelieving the steroid use and cheating by athletes. But that was about to change after the federal grand jury proceedings.

"It was only after we obtained transcripts from grand jury proceedings, with athletes mentioning in their own words using injections, or lying like Barry Bonds did, the story got noticed," Williams said. "After these stories ran, Congress, associations and fans got interested, and the story took off."

As the story broke, Fainaru-Wada and Williams both received acclaim and praise from the sports community, the media and even from then-President George W. Bush.

They also published a book about the BALCO scandal called, "Game of Shadows," which became an instant



Visiting journalists Mark Fainaru-Wada
and Lance Williams

“Imagine sitting down and trying to explain to your kids that Dad might go to prison for doing his job.”

—Mark Fainaru-Wada

New York Times best seller, and caused Major League Baseball to do an internal investigation of performance drug use.

But the “most special of all” experiences, as Williams said, was in Spring 2006 when “we got subpoenaed about the identity of our sources, and [the federal government] sentenced us to prison.”

During the 14 months of their court proceedings, the reporters continued to work as the Hearst Corporation, which owned the Chronicle, “fought like crazy to keep us from going to jail,” Fainaru-Wada said.

At the same time, they faced the difficulties of balancing work and the possibility of being sentenced. “Imagine sitting down and trying to explain to your kids that Dad might go to prison for doing his job,” Fainaru-Wada said.

But the reporters remained loyal to their sources, and refused to reveal those identities.

“We made promises to people, and when you do this kind of reporting, you have to protect these sources,” Fainaru-Wada said. “We let them know we would not tell them where it came from. This was a government that made an odd choice of protecting athletes, and was a government zealously going after reporters.”

During the court proceedings, the reporters were encouraged to lobby in Washington, D.C. for a federal shield law that would protect journalists from having to reveal sources. Their trial received widespread attention in the media, with many journalists and politicians requesting the Justice Department to relook at the case.

Shortly afterward, the identity of a lawyer who gave information to Fainaru-Wada and Williams was revealed, and the lawyer was sentenced to 30 months in jail as the two reporters were then released of their charges. “The dealers didn’t get hardly any time in prison,” Fainaru-Wada said, noting the end of their story’s saga remained bittersweet.

McGill fellow Lilly Workneh asked the reporters how they managed to work as a team for years.

Williams, now an investigative reporter for California Watch, said that as a hometown paper, the duo didn’t want to be beaten on their own turf. “We later faced some competition from the British media, so there was a tabloid mentality,” he said. “We couldn’t let that happen.”

Fainaru-Wada, now an investigative reporter for ESPN, praised Williams’ ability to pursue and maintain relationships with sources. “He keeps track of old sources for a while, and he’ll call and check in,” Fainaru-Wada said. “I learned from him it’s invaluable to maintain sources.”

Both reporters recounted how Williams went as far as tracking down the grandmother of Greg Anderson, Barry Bonds’ longtime friend and weight trainer, to understand how the professional athlete may have had access to performance drugs because of this relationship.

McGill fellow Polina Marinova asked if they were at a smaller paper with not as many financial resources, would the reporters have been as resolute with the decisions they made in their case.

Fainaru-Wada said that the same story would not have happened at a smaller paper. “There was not a lot in investigative journalism in this area, and they freed us up for three years to work on this story,” he said, adding that at a smaller paper with meager finances, they may have been forced to reveal sources to avoid the costs of going to court.

Williams added that regardless of a news organization’s size, they should still go after big stories if they can. “Don’t shy away from tough stories because [the government] might get you,” Williams said. “You can deal with this. Think of it as a price of doing business. It’s for a purpose and a cause.”

The courage to collaborate, cooperate

McGill Visiting Journalists

Jan Schaffer, director, J-Lab, Washington D.C.

Erich Schwartzel, project editor, Pipeline, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Pittsburgh, PA

Moderator:

John F. Greenman, professor, University of Georgia

For Jan Schaffer, collaboration is the new competition when it comes to the future of journalism.

"I grew up with the classic journalism model that included scooping your competition. It's different now," Schaffer said, noting that the industry is fraught with a dying business model and increased competition.

As the executive director of J-Lab at American University, Schaffer is at the forefront of helping reshape the business model for journalism through financing new ventures in participatory journalism and citizen media. Through the J-Lab, journalism projects are financed and promoted through grants to help offer insights on experimental journalism that could help pave the way for the industry.

Schaffer believes that one of the key tenets of saving journalism is for news organizations to collaborate with each other for content.

"Why collaborate? If you don't have as many feet on the street, it can help fill gaps in coverage, offering robust coverage and a bigger pipeline," Schaffer said. In addition, she said it helps bring validation to new start-ups that pair up with respected organizations, and opens up new advertising opportunities.



Visiting journalists Jan Schaffer and Erich Schwartzel, moderator John Greenman

"Collaboration gives a megaphone to the diversity of journalism. These partnerships amplify and add robustness to your own coverage, as they help give better coverage in your area."

– Jan Schaffer

It's the kind of new journalism that Erich Schwartzel is immersed in at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. As the head of the paper's Pipeline website, he oversees stories and interactive on the natural gas drilling on the Marcellus Shale, which has a huge economic and environmental impact on its community.

"The shale will rewrite how elections are won as it's now the second greatest source of natural gas in the world," Schwartzel said, adding that the biggest oil companies in the world were now setting up shop in Pennsylvania.

With new stories and interactive content on the site every day, the Pipeline keeps its citizens informed on drilling in their area, and it's all done with a small budget and staff, Schwartzel said.

In addition, the project has allowed the *Post-Gazette* to experiment with a new form of journalism.

"The Post-Gazette is not exactly a hotbed of innovation, but it does have storied tradition," Schwartzel said. "With the Pipeline, it's allowed the newsroom to experiment and throw things and see what sticks," and has helped bolster the paper's reputation with the site's in-depth reporting. In addition, the Pipeline has become a national source of information for other oil-rich places, like Texas and Colorado, Schwartzel said.

McGill fellow Tiffany Stevens asked Schaffer that as one of journalism's biggest strengths is the diversity of voices, how big of concern was there for homogenization when collaboration was involved?

Schaffer said, "Collaboration gives a megaphone to the diversity of journalism. These partnerships amplify and add robustness to your own coverage, as they help give better coverage in your area."

McGill fellow Lilly Workneh asked how some of these partnerships are formed.

For the Pipeline and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, "writers work independently and there's a case-by-case basis on partnerships," Schwartzel said.



McGill fellow Lilly Workneh

He gave an example of working on a story about the shale and working with a reporter who knew the geography of the area well. "I covered the story from the business end, and my writer wrote the township bit. It was the perfect marriage of us coming together and using our resources," he said.

For the J-Lab, a committee looks at proposals and geographic information to decide which initiatives to fund, Schaffer said.

Grady journalism professor John Greenman noted that while this new kind of journalism offers great promise, there are great hurdles. "What kind of advice would you give if these students wanted to go entrepreneurial?" he asked.

"Entrepreneurial is the key word in journalism right now, and lots of it should be built into curriculum," Schaffer said, advising that if journalism school programs create their own news sites, they should be operated year-round for the best practice. "It's lots of real-life learning," she said.

Schwartzel said that when he graduated from school to become a journalist, collaboration was not on his radar, and the opportunity for entrepreneurial spirit in journalism was important now.

"In terms of collaboration, be willing to try anything," he said.

Participants

Lee B. Becker, professor, University of Georgia

Rachel Bowers, McGill Fellow, senior, Newspapers

Mark Fainaru-Wada, reporter, ESPN, San Francisco, CA

John F. Greenman, professor, University of Georgia

Jason Hafford, McGill Fellow, senior, Broadcast News

David Handschuh, McGill Visiting Journalist, staff photographer, *The New York Daily News*, New York, NY

Felicia Harris, McGill Fellow, graduate student, Journalism

Mark E. Johnson, senior lecturer, University of Georgia

Sam Kaswala, McGill Fellow, senior, Newspapers

Polina Marinova, McGill Fellow, senior, Newspapers

Annie Murphy, McGill Visiting Journalist, 2010 IRP Fellow, independent journalist, South America

Sarah Osbourne, McGill Fellow, senior, Magazines

Jeff Roberts, McGill Visiting Journalist, staff photographer, *Birmingham News*, Birmingham, AL

Jan Schaffer, McGill Visiting Journalist, director, J-Lab, Washington D.C.

John Schidlovsky, McGill Visiting Journalist, director, International Reporting Program, Washington, D.C.

Erich Schwartzel, McGill Visiting Journalist, project editor, Pipeline, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Pittsburgh, PA

Tiffany Stevens, McGill Fellow, Senior, Newspapers

Patricia Thomas, professor, University of Georgia

Joe Williams, McGill Fellow, senior, Magazines

Lance Williams, McGill Visiting Journalist, California Watch, San Francisco, CA

Elizabeth Wilson, McGill Fellow, senior, Magazines

Lilly Workneh, McGill Fellow, senior, Publication Management

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