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Inside Journalism

Columbia College Chicago

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INSIDE JOURNALISM

MAY, 1990

A Newsletter Published by the Journalism Department of Columbia College

J-STUDENTS RECEIVE SCHOLARSHIPS

Four j-students have been selected as recipients of the Curtis D. MacDougall scholarship. The scholarship is named after the late journalistic pioneer and professor emeritus at Northwestern University.

In 1986, MacDougall's widow, Genevieve, started the Curtis MacDougall scholarship. The *Columbia Chronicle* receives \$500 a year for students "who have made the greatest contribution to the paper," according to Les Brownlee, journalism instructor and MacDougall's son-in-law. This year the endowment is twice as large, because the award for 1989 was not issued. Four *Chronicle* staffers will each receive \$250: Tanya Bonner, reporter; Lance Cummings, executive editor; Mitch Hurst, editor-in-chief and Mary Johnson, reporter.

In addition to the obvious monetary advantages of this scholarship, it will add an additional professional touch to their resumes.

Don Gold, advisor to the student paper, and a former student of MacDougall at the Northwestern Medill School of Journalism, describes him as "a distinguished man; very much a product of the Midwest. He cared about people rather than institutions." Out of all the teachers Gold encountered throughout his college career, MacDougall was one of the few who "really made a difference."

Brownlee remembers his late father-in-law with the deepest affection, saying, "I adopted him as my father some years ago." He describes MacDougall as a man who "established a concept of journalism at Medill and whose program helped build the curriculum there." MacDougall's book, "Interpretive Reporting" is used in

reporting courses in colleges across the country.

—Cheryl Steffen

PETERSEN BRINGS VERSATILITY TO J-STAFF

Clarence Petersen, a recent addition to Columbia's j-department, brings his students 31 years of newspaper experience. Petersen began teaching News Reporting I last fall and currently teaches Copy Editing II on Wednesday evenings.

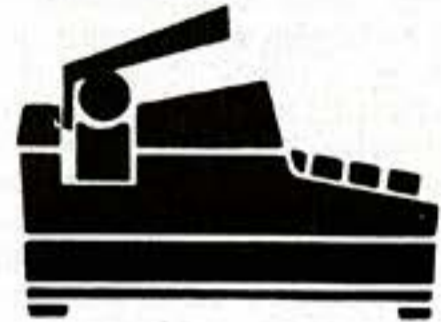
He says it was easy to switch from teaching reporting to editing because "there isn't much difference between the two." In fact, they are so intertwined that it is difficult to do one well without understanding the other.

"Writing will make you better at editing and editing will make you better at writing," he says.

Petersen wasn't sure about teaching at first. He was asked to join Columbia's j-staff by *Chicago Tribune* colleagues, and Columbia teaching veterans, Dan Swanson and Peter Gerner. He soon found it enjoyable and has created a method of teach-



Clarence Petersen



ing that reflects his personality. "I want to have a good time with it and be able to see the students learn something," he comments.

During his years at the *Tribune*, Petersen has done a "round-robin" of jobs, switching between editing and writing. "Editing is all about thinking and clarifying. It's making sure you understand something and that it reads well."

Petersen's rule about writing: "Everything you write is going to have a mistake."

As a high school student, Petersen's interest was sparked in journalism when his father ran for village board president. He says the experience made him see the relationship between politics and the media.

While a freshman at the University of Illinois, Petersen began to write for the *Daily Illini*. "Only when I got to college did I realize that I could do this for a living."

During college, he worked summers for the City News Bureau of Chicago and in 1956, he landed a job at the *Chicago Tribune* as an assistant television critic. "In those days TV was boisterous and I could never resist writing something funny, if there was something funny there."

He then moved on to the *Tribune Magazine*, writing and editing for all the feature departments. His humorous pieces made regular appearances in the

Tempo section. "Writing comedy is difficult to do, so most editors didn't let many writers do it."

After a while, Petersen ran out of punch lines because of writer burnout. His editor suggested a stint on the copy desk to cure the writer's blues.

It took a little persuasion at first, but Petersen eventually went to the copy desk. After seven years he became a copy chief. "It worked out and now I even read the labels on cans." Petersen also produces a paperback review column, which he began to write in 1965. "Someday I'll even read a book all the way through," he says.

Petersen's favorite book about writing is titled, "On Writing Well." He says it is fun and "right on." The book is used for discussion in his copy editing class. "Students should learn about the good reference books that are out there because there are so many bad ones. You can provide an atmosphere where writing happens, but you still need reference books around."

Petersen's student, junior Kevin Dorsey, says, "You can trust his editing skills and his remarks are useful. He is a great person to learn from."

Petersen plans to remain an anonymous copy editor for a few more years, but "I do have other fish to fry. I plan to go back to school and learn all about computers."

—Sherri Murray

MARK ADDRESSES INTERVIEW CLASS

Norman Mark, arts and entertainment reporter for Channel 5, addressed Nick Shuman's Front Page Lecture class on entertainment reporting in April. Mark is one of few reporters in this category.

Mark admits all that glitters is not gold when dealing with celebrities. Sometimes you have to dig hard. "Just write exactly what they say. Whatever they're trying to hide will come out."

Simple job? Thumbs down.

Mark recalls his dilemma before interviewing Rob Lowe on the release of his new movie, "Bad Influence."

"I had to figure out how not to bring up the connection between the title of the movie and the sex video episode," says Mark. "But you have to ask the hard questions as well as the easy ones, or you'll lose your audience."



Norman Mark

Determining which stories will draw the desired audience also isn't easy, especially when there is new talent on the scene.

Some interviews are done live, others come in what Mark calls a package, an edited version of a tape of a performance or movie with background material on the talent.

Mark began his reporting career, after toiling in small town radio and with the City News Bureau — an organization that has employed a large number of CC j-department graduates. Several years later he moved from print to television, where he has reported for several years on major events and people in the recording industry, movies and theater. A recipient of numerous awards, Mark has written several books and expects to release another soon.

He attributes his success as a reporter to making the right connections at CNB and to his passion for reporting.

He warns students against expecting to begin their careers as entertainment reporters. "When looking for that first job don't define yourself as a specific kind of reporter because there are [only] a few positions out there in specialized reporting."

Mark urges students to make good connections in their profession and to tell everyone they know that they're looking for a job, because reporters fresh from college no longer exist on the assignment desk.

"The ones who will make it are the ones who get rejected and keep coming back. Learn from your mistakes,

change your act a little. At some point the world may not be ready to accept you, but you figure out another way to get in," Mark says.

Inside Journalism's mark for that advice? Four stars.

—Angelique Creer

THE "FREE" IN FREELANCING IS COSTLY

The work is hard, the hours are long and the pay is uncertain. So why bother with freelance writing?

"I like the flexibility," says j-instructor Jim Ylisela. "I may work 60 hours a week, but they're my 60 hours."

Freelance writing requires time and money—research, interviews, phone bills, postage and traveling expenses. Furthermore, freelancing requires a lot of discipline and an entrepreneurial spirit. After all, you have to "sell yourself" to publishers, and then collect on your efforts later.

"There is no average waiting period for payment," says Ylisela. "It defies all prediction."

Ylisela has written for publications such as *Chicago Magazine*, the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*. But like most freelance writers, he keeps his "real jobs," teaching at Columbia and Northwestern University, in order to insure fiscal security.

"Freelancing is not glamorous, and at times it can be a real grind. If you don't have a story commissioned, you spend a lot of time begging for information because you don't have a large news organization backing you up," says Ylisela.

Marcia Coeburn, another Chicago freelancer who has written for publications such as the *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Magazine* and *The Reader*, has survived solely on her freelance work for 11 years.

"I'm willing to live on a very small amount of money compared to other people," Coeburn says. This makes it possible for her to survive during down periods. "You really are out there on your own," she adds, implying that it can be scary at times.

Coeburn says freelancers sometimes have to juggle their talents among various types of writing in order to support the kind of writing they prefer to do.

SUMMER INTERNSHIPS AVAILABLE

Attention all j-students planning on a long, lazy summer. Instead of letting your brain rot, why not further your career with a summer internship?

Internships give you the opportunity to put writing, reporting and editing skills into practice while earning academic credit.

Don't delay. Make an appointment with Carolyn Hulse today.

The best opportunities go fast.

—Sheridan Chaney

It seems the common denominator among freelancers is "suffering." Why do freelancers choose this admitted misery? When pressed for explanation, freelancers share a sly smile characteristic of their lot. It has something to do with the "free" in freelancing; that may be artistic freedom, or the freedom of independence.

The flip side is the spirit of perseverance necessary to be an independent writer. One must endure long hours with only the company of a keyboard.

Students wishing to freelance should begin by acquiring clips from whatever sources are available. The beginning writer is wise to approach a publisher with a story proposal before he or she writes anything. The style of a publication and its readership will help the writer determine the approach to take in researching and writing a story.

But until a writer has developed regular sources, the best advice is: Hang on to your regular job and keep trying.

—Karen Zarker

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Most of us who have been here a while know about *Inside Journalism*, but just how many know how it came into existence?

In the Fall of 1987, a brand new publication appeared in the mailboxes of j-students. This publication would serve as a means of telling j-students, faculty and others about what's happening in the j-department and about the people who make it happen.

This was the dream of Nat Lehrman, who upon his arrival as chairman a few years ago, wanted to develop a newsletter strictly by and for the j-department. It became a reality when a student took matters into her own hands and published the product we know as *Inside Journalism*.

Josephine (Gibson) Porter, a 1988

Columbia graduate, was a j-workaid when she was asked to help out on this new endeavor. "Nat asked me to help him with a name, and he discussed the format with me and gave me ideas for stories." Porter proceeded to bring Lehrman's conceptualization to life. The format would go from a one page letter to a three column, four page letter with pictures, graphics and computerized typesetting, which characterizes the now three-year-old newsletter.

There is a lot of sentiment behind that corny little typewriter in the right hand corner of *IJ*. "Nat and I were looking through an art book and found a picture of a typewriter. To me, it represents writer. I thought it was cute." So the logo became the trademark that appears on each issue.

Porter also pitched the idea of making the newsletter into a class. "I talked with several students who showed interest in working for it." In the Spring of 1988, the first *IJ* class, was in session.

Porter says the early editions of *IJ* were done by hand. "I would lay out the newsletter. The writers would type their stories in the graduate newsroom and then have them typeset by Nat on his computer's Ventura desktop publishing program. Sometimes we would be here late at night and on Saturdays just to get that one edition out, but we made the deadline."

Her experience as editor prepared her for other positions. She interned at the American Association of Medical Assistants where she did typesetting, layout and article writing for its newsletter and magazine.

She later sent out resumes, and one of them landed at the *Hyde Park Herald*. She was hired last August as their Editorial Production Manager. She's responsible for the layout of the paper, supervising the paste-up, rewriting press releases and occasionally writing news and feature stories. "The

skills that I learned at Columbia help me do my job here."

Porter advises students to do as much freelancing as possible. "A lot of students won't consider it because they are afraid no one will give them a chance. Don't be afraid to try." She also encourages networking with teachers. "Express your interest in journalism, ask them about positions or internships that might be available, show them clips of your work, and when the time comes, ask them for recommendations."

Because of her excellent work for the newsletter, she didn't have to worry about getting one from Lehrman.

After three years, three editors, 12 editions and over 35 writers, *IJ* has achieved what it set out to do: keep the j-department informed and serve as a role model for others wishing to produce professional newsletters.

—Gayle Mitchell

1990, YOU'RE NO WATERGATE

Panelists discuss future of investigative reporting

Six investigative reporters from various media participated in a panel discussion of investigative reporting as part of award-winning authors Neil and Susan Sheehan's visit to Columbia.

The panel included the Sheehans, Pam Zekman, investigative reporter for Channel 2, Chuck Neubauer, chief investigator for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Mike Lyons, j-department instructor and chief investigator for the Better Government Association and moderator Bill Recktenwald of the *Chicago Tribune*.

Most of the panelists said that if the general public compares today's investigative reporting with such well-known exposes as Watergate, which led to the resignation of former President Nixon, and the Pulitzer-prize winning Pentagon Papers, obtained by Neil Sheehan, which exposed U.S. practices in Vietnam, it would be easy to believe that investigative reporting is on the decline.

"I think when you get a period like that in Vietnam, after a long period of stagnation in the 1950s and early 1960s, there was an awful lot out there to be uncovered and much of it had great ramifications," said Neil



Panel on investigative reporting reviews ethics and techniques. From left, N. Sheehan, Pam Zekman, Bill Recktenwald, Chuck Neubauer, S. Sheehan, Mike Lyons.

Sheehan. "Some perceive investigative reporting as lessening because we are not in a state of crisis like we were in the time of Vietnam."

Pam Zekman, investigative reporter for Channel 2, said the quantity of investigative reporting has decreased in some media, but the quality remains the same. "There has been a concern on the part of the media that investigative reporting is getting too risky and expensive," Zekman said.

Television and small newspapers have cut back the most on investigative reporting, according to Zekman, who pointed out that WLS recently disbanded its investigative reporting team. But she says investigative reporting in Chicago is still alive and well and most newspapers still have very active investigative reporting teams that perform effectively.

Risk is something j-students should prepare themselves for if they want to pursue investigative journalism as a career, according to the panelists. "A reporter went to jail for refusing to reveal a source," said Zekman. "You have to psychologically make up your mind that you are willing to take that risk to protect your source."

Neil Sheehan advised getting a good lawyer. "There is no limit to the vindictiveness of people. I was sued and it took a year out of my life. It has a real chilling effect. I can see why a small paper would say they can't touch a particular subject."

One of the highlights of the evening was a debate about the nature of inves-

tigative reporting. "Is that the best you can do—a story about Cecil Partee?" asked Recktenwald, referring to the BGA story about the state's attorney's alleged illegitimate child. Lyons responded by defending the BGA and some of its investigations. "Just getting a source to come forward is in itself investigative journalism," Lyons said.

The j-department sponsors of the panel said they were particularly pleased with the turnout for this event. There were people sitting in the aisles, and the question and answer period was particularly lively.

—Tanya Bonner

SHEEHANS' VISIT A GREAT SUCCESS

Even after 10 days of a grueling, non-stop schedule, j-department guest-artists-in-residence Neil and Susan Sheehan say it would be their pleasure to return to CC again.

"We were very impressed with the fact that mom and dad aren't paying for most of the students here," Neil says. "That's the grit it takes to be a reporter."

During their stay, the Pulitzer Prize winners participated in two panels with some of Chicago's top writers and reporters. But panels, dinners and special appearances were not the highlight of the Sheehans' visit, according to Susan.

What they really enjoyed, she says, was the interaction with j-students,

which involved class lectures on interviewing techniques, magazine writing and journalistic ethics.

Susan says they noticed "a curve in student's ability. . .we noticed how different their abilities are," especially in their proofreading skills.

After critiquing the work of students in the Senior Honors Seminar and the graduate program, Susan says it was obvious some students did not spend time verifying the spelling of names and places.

"For a young person, proofreading and copy editing are very important," she says. "Not doing them is laziness."

Senior j-student Dan Corcoran, one of the students critiqued, says, "It really put lots of pressure on us to do a good story. . .but it was good pressure in the long run."

Tamara Sellman, another student in the honors class, adds, "It was good for us to be able to talk freely with people of that caliber. In the future when we're being edited, we can look back and think, 'Neil Sheehan's editors did the same thing when he was young.'"

—Jacqui Podzius

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