Silurian News

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Society of the Silurians
EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM AWARDS DINNER
The Players Club
16 Gramercy Park South
Wednesday, May 22, 2013
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Dinner: 7:15 p.m.
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Members and One Guest $100 Each
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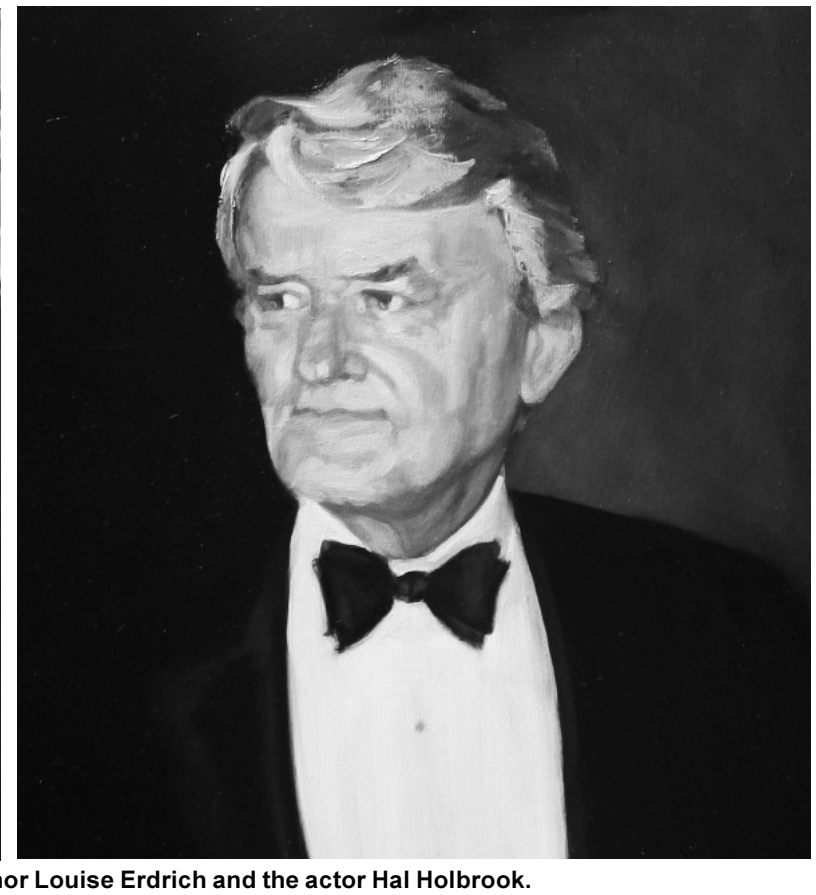
MARCH 2013

A Roundtrip, From Artist to Journalist

BY BETSY ASHTON



A pair of oils on canvas: The author Louise Erdrich and the actor Hal Holbrook.

Those who remember me as the consumer editor of WCBS-TV and CBS News may well wonder how I made the switch from journalist to professional portrait artist. It's not the typical move from the newsroom. But I was an artist before I ever picked up a microphone.

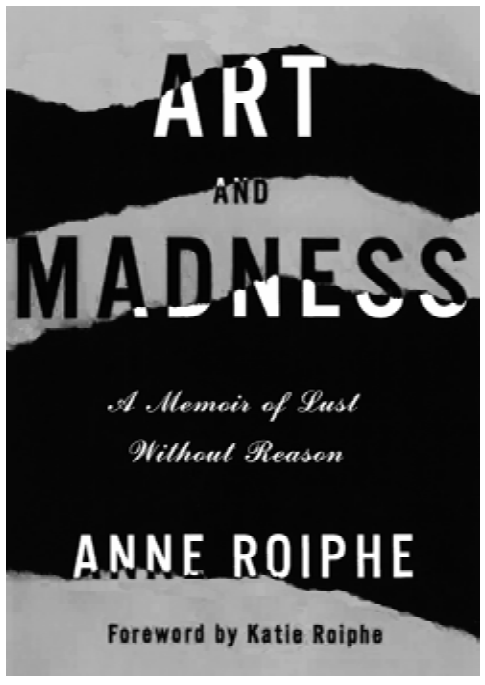
From the time I was old enough to hold a pencil, I sketched things — mostly people — especially my teachers. "Betsy, what are you doing? Bring that up here," the teacher would scold. When I walked the paper up to her desk, her tone would change. "Oh! May I keep that?" And so I figured that I had potential as an artist. I also grew to love history, political science, debating, and international relations, but I majored in art in college. My first job involved illustrating ads for the G.C. Murphy Company — not exactly great art — so I quickly switched to teaching art in high school. But overcrowded classrooms filled with kids who took art mainly to escape music or shop or have a "play period" prompted me to go back to graduate school for a Master of Fine Arts degree, with the intention of teaching art in college and painting.

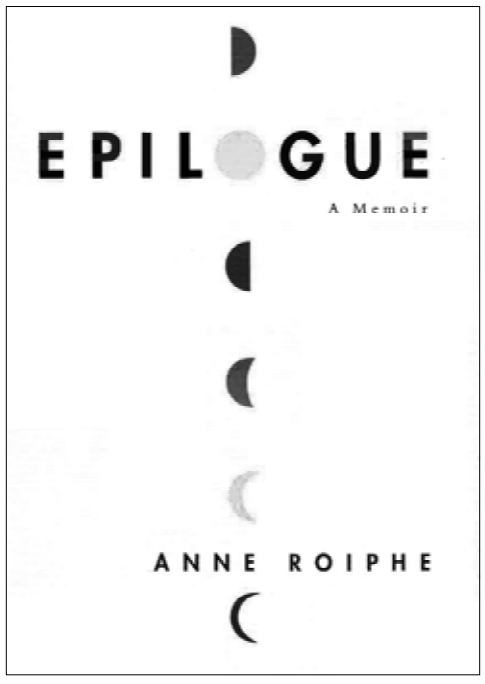
My timing was terrible. In 1969, the art world was totally enamored with Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, and people who threw balloons full of paint at the wall. I was not an Abstract Expressionist, Minimalist, or looking to do the next shocking thing. People interested me: their character, stories, motives, how they change or are changed by the world around them. I had already painted dozens of portraits of fellow high school teachers and their friends, and had done more than a few cartoons for various publications. I found myself having the wrong skill set in an art world that I thought was going bonkers. In the summer of 1970, Gene Davis,

Continued on Page 4

The Memoirist: A Journalist With Creative License

BY ANNE ROIPHE





Anne Roiphe is a novelist and journalist and the author of two memoirs and a football stadium's worth of personal stories included in fiction and non-fiction, and bald opinion.

You could say a memoir writer is a reporter whose assignment is herself. But that is only partly true.

A memoir writer is a journalist with a point of view that cannot be purely objective. There is always an agenda in the writing which would spoil decent journalism but serves as the fuse that fires memoir with its energy, its passion, its intensity.

A good journalist needs to tread with caution and listen with a degree of skepticism, and check the facts. A memoir writer on the other hand needs to abandon caution, confront the dangers, expose the very things that we are trained to hide from others, our flaws, our greed, our excessive egos. The good journalist learns to keep himself still, like a guard dog at the doors of hell, seemingly asleep, large head lying still on his front paws, his tail barely twitching, but ready nevertheless to devour what may came his way.

A memoir however requires a letting down of the guard, a willingness to be uncomfortable, to rush around and bite if necessary, to growl, if you must, to admit to longings that might bring shame or regret to yourself and others. Memoir therefore risks the anger of those who, like unwilling dandelions, get caught in the rotary blades of your lawn mower.

A journalist is committed by professional ethic to finding the truth of an event, a past story, a present calamity, a social condition, to ride a political wave until it crashes on the shore and then to examine the spray, the sand, the dents it made or is making on its way. A journalist is a kind of Paul Revere riding through the pages calling out, the English are coming, and they are always coming. The journalist is committed to bringing news to the public, news of hunger, news of war, news of fashion, news of human folly and greatness and always to report on what is, what really is. Which is why we get so upset when stories surface of journalists who fake, or pretend to have interviewed or report on distant affairs from their armchairs at home. Those are the journalists who have betrayed their profession and all the rest of us who depend on the trust of our readers.

But a memoir is written with other goals besides the literal truth. Memoir may be an act of revenge against a parent who failed or a world that betrayed the hopes of a child, or a family. A memoir can accuse a whole culture, a world of slavery, or poverty, or oppression, or colonialism, or just the common meanness of the human heart. A memoir can be written, and often is, out of hate for someone or something, and at the same time it can contain a hidden recipe for avoiding the pain that was. A memoir can report on a battlefield or of sickness or of loss. It can be a complaint against God or against nature. It can be a story of survival or of defeat. It can be a political statement or a revelation of personal pain or both at the same time.

Memoir is never written as an intentional lie, although surely there are lies and distortions in our memories that make memoir writers falsify even when they are most intent on telling the truth. The memoirist has no fact checker and so can slide or slip away from the facts and sometimes the facts themselves are not enough to tell the tale and the memoir writer may have to add, imagine, conjure what might have been in order to reach the truth of

Continued on Page 4

President's Letter

I'm pleased to report that the Society of the Silurians is on a roll. Dues payments have come in earlier than ever, and many of them have included a little – and sometimes a lot – extra. Thanks to all those who have helped get us on a solid financial footing. It wasn't so long ago that we were teetering on the brink.

Our luncheon programs have been great, with terrific speakers and good audiences. And the Lifetime Achievement Award Dinner was a winner. Not only was Gloria Steinem a most worthy honoree, but her remarks were special. If you missed them – or just want to hear them again in their entirety — go to our Web site, Silurians.org, which, by the way, is filling up with good material.

Our Web chairman, Joe Vecchione, has been doing splendid work in sprucing up our Web site and providing lots of new features. One of those is a report on interesting achievements by our members — books, major articles, promotions, etc. If you have any such tidbits – plus any new ideas for the Web site – send them to him at joelizv@comcast.net He's been working with our great webmaster, Fred Herzog.

Bernie Kirsch, after an auspicious start with his first two issues as editor of the Silurian News, is hard at work on the next one, which will appear in time for our Awards Dinner on Wednesday, May 22. He welcomes ideas for future articles as well. He's at bernardkirsch@mac.com

I can't repeat too often that one of the most important services of our society is the one provided by our Contingency Fund. It stands ready to give financial help to members who may have fallen on hard times. Requests for assistance are held in strictest confidence and can be relayed to me, myron.kandel@turner.com, or to committee chairman Larry Friedman at lfbef@aol.com.

We've also been adding some distinguished new members. You can see the listing elsewhere in this issue. But we're still on the look-out for more. The requirement is 12 years in journalism. An application blank can be downloaded from our Web site.

– Myron Kandel

George Bookman: Distinguished Silurian at 98

(This is the first in a series of articles on notable Silurian members.)

BY MYRON KANDEL

The oldest member in every organization is a special person. But the oldest member of the Society of the Silurians, George B. Bookman, who turned 98 last December, is much more than that. He's exceptional — due to a remarkable career in news, wartime service, public relations and a commitment to improving journalism.

George started his professional journalistic career in the dark days of the Great Depression, when as a student at Haverford College he obtained a paid summer internship in the financial department of the New York World-Telegram. But his taste for journalism went even farther back: as a young teen-ager he wrote a social column for a newspaper on the Jersey shore, where his family spent its summers.

He subsequently spent more than three-quarters of a century in communications — as a magazine and newspaper reporter and editor in Washington and New York, as public information chief at the New York Stock Exchange and the New York Botanical Garden, as an author and as an active participant in a number of journalistic organizations.

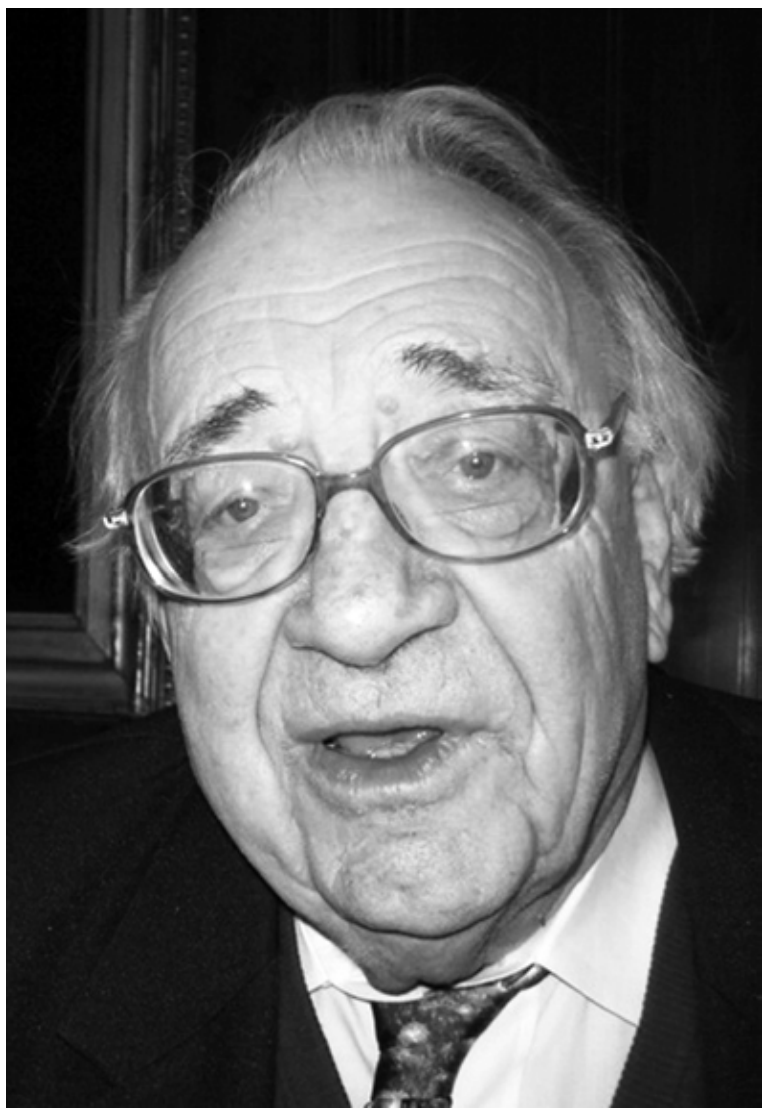
Nowadays, he's showing some of his 98 years. His step is a bit slower, his memory not as keen as it once was (whose is?), and his hearing is not as good as he would like. But his mind is sharp, his sense of humor is always evident, and his genial nature is still as enviable as ever. Send George an email, and you'll get a reply within the hour. And he's still the news junkie he's been most of his life.

Until very recently, he was present at most Silurian luncheons and dinners. And it was a treasured presence, especially because he was often accompanied by Ruth Bowman, his lady love for the last decade. He also has a distinction that many of his friends — including this writer — can attest to and envy. They've never heard a negative word expressed about him. He has legions of devoted admirers.

George showed his talent early on. Following graduation from Haverford as a member of Phi Beta Kappa in 1936, George sold a lengthy magazine article titled "Life Begins at Graduation" to the Ladies Home Journal. It appeared while he working at The Villager, a Greenwich Village weekly, where, in addition to writing and editing news, he sold ads. After a year there, he created, together with two equally young friends, an "ultra-progressive" newsletter for students and then started a newspaper feature service, which ran out of money after a few months. Next came a stint with the McClure's Syndicate.

His big break came in 1939 when David Lawrence, the columnist and magazine publisher, hired him as a cub reporter for U.S News to cover a number of New Deal government agencies, particularly those involved with the economy. He then moved to The Washington Post, where he covered the White House among other assignments. With World War II looming, he joined what later became the Office of War Information, with a recommendation from President Roosevelt's press secretary Steve Early that supported his desire to be sent overseas.

Utilizing the language he perfected while spending his junior college year in Paris, he was assigned to a post in Brazzaville, in what was then French Equitorial Africa, the only territory in the western world that flew the Free French flag. Among other duties, he made broadcasts in French and English that were short-waved to North Africa and Southern France. After spending time in Beirut, Lebanon, George moved to Italy, following behind American troops as they liberated that country. He was responsible for all the news and propaganda in the forward area as the Allied troops advanced and the Germans retreated.



The oldest member of the Society of the Silurians, George B. Bookman

After two and a half years overseas, he was granted home leave, the highlight of which was his marriage in December 1944 to Janet Schrank Madison, who was to be his bride of 57 years before her death in 2002. Janet had a stint as a Washington reporter for the United Press. They had two children; the first, a daughter, arrived while George was back overseas, in Austria. Even though the war in Europe was over, he couldn't get back to see her until she was nearly three months old. He and Janet then had a son, and George now also has four grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

A lifetime of journalism, from the U.S. News to the Botanical Gardens.

The Post offered George his old job back — but only at his old salary even though he now had a family and it was four years later. So he went back to David Lawrence's magazine and later moved to Time's Washington bureau. Next came Fortune's board of editors in New York, and when that proved a bit dull, he went to Wall Street in 1962 as public relations chief of the New York Stock Exchange.

At the NYSE, George won the respect of a bunch of often-cynical Wall Street reporters, who found him trustworthy and knowledgeable. He helped the exchange president Keith Funston popularize the slogan "Own Your Share of American Business," which attracted a new generation of investors to the stock market.

Along his journalistic path, George met and interviewed some of the world's most famous people. Among them, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, the Shah of Iran, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Nelson Rockefeller, Ludwig Erhard, Wild Bill Donovan, Jimmy Hoffa, Jean Monnet, William McChesney Martin and Pope Pius X11, to name a few. When the Pope offered him rosary beads he had blessed, and George said he was not a Catholic, the Pope suggested he give them to someone who was. George gave them to his parents' long-time housekeeper, who was thrilled with the gift.

After he and Janet bought a Revolutionary-era house in Millbrook, NY, adjoining a sprawling arboretum owned by the New York Botanical Garden, George received a job offer he couldn't refuse – heading public affairs at the Garden, which involved spending two days a week at the arboretum. So he left the bulls and bears of Wall Street for a more bucolic setting. Among other achievements there, he broadcast a program on gardening that ran on WCBS radio for two years.

Then in 1979, the NYSE asked him to help out again, and George decided to create his own consulting business, with other clients, including the Dreyfus Corp., Time Inc., the Business Roundtable and the U.S. Dept. of Energy. He remained busier than ever, at an age when many of his contemporaries were retiring, and he continued working until he was nearly 86.

He has also maintained his love for the news business, having been active in a number of journalistic organizations in addition to the Silurians. He served as president of the Deadline Club (the New York chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists); headed the Admissions Committee of the Overseas Press Club for many years, and appeared in the Financial Follies show of the New York Financial Writers' Association, among other activities. "I like the company of other news people," he told me recently.

In addition to writing hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles, speeches, broadcasts and reports, George wrote his autobiography, "Headlines, Deadlines and Lifelines," largely at the urging of his children. It was published four years ago and is filled with personal letters to and from his wife dating back to his World War II days, and to his parents even before that. It's a fascinating account of a remarkable life.

"The book," he explained, "has been written for personal reasons, not to become a New York Times best-seller, but if that should happen, I could live with it."

When Anchors Are Weighed Down by Facts

BY MERVIN BLOCK

I've obtained an interview with the author of a new book about anchors' bloopers and blunders: me. But is it proper for me to interview myself about my book? Of course. I, me and yours truly are all of one mind. No conflict. The title of my book is "Weighing Anchors: When Network Newscasters Don't Know Write from Wrong."

Q. What does the book say about anchors?

A. Plenty. It documents deceptions, distortions and delinquencies.

Q. How did you come to write the book?

A. I kept hearing anchors making mistakes, some serious, some startling, some apparently deliberate — like fiddling with facts. I figured the mistakes would add up to a good read.

Over the years, I've read a lot about anchors' wardrobes, their hairdos, and their delivery. Yet rarely about what they deliver. I poked around on the Internet, but I couldn't find any article or book that examined scripts delivered by network anchors. Some faulty scripts are written by anchors, and some are written by staff writers. There's no way for an outsider to know who wrote what. You might call it a scriptease.

Q. How did you go about your project?

A. I listened to the networks' evening newscasts. When I heard something that was wrong or questionable, I noted it on a clipboard. I didn't just hear newscasts; I listened. In a day or so after noting a boo-boo, I'd visit a database (Factiva or LexisNexis) and check a transcript of the newscast in question. And I kept at it.

I started by writing articles for my Web site (mervinblock.com). At the outset, I didn't identify any culprits. No names, no blames. But a friend urged me to use names (though not his). So I began using names, and my articles seemed stronger — and more interesting.

Q. After you ran across an anchor's mistake, did you talk to the anchor and get his side of the story, his explanation, for what went wrong?

A. No.

Q. Why not?

A. I had the goods — really, the bads — on him. What would the anchor tell me, assuming I could get him (or her) on the phone? Would the anchor say, "I never wrote that"? I would have asked, "Well, why did you read it on the air? You're the managing editor of the newscast. And you're responsible for every word uttered on your newscast." So why talk to anchors before using their names? Say, do movie and theater critics phone actors before lambasting them in a review?

Q. How did you proceed?

A. After I collected a fistful of faulty scripts, I'd try to find a theme, then write an article for my Web site. After a while, it occurred to me that I had the makings of a book. When I assembled all the articles, I reorganized the material, tried to sharpen it and added a lot of new material.

Q. What were some of the most common problems in the scripts?

A. Inaccuracies, grammatical errors — mangling and strangling language — and carelessness with the truth. In many such cases, exaggerated efforts to use "tonight" even when the story broke many hours earlier, even the previous day. Although I did identify the culprits in my book, I hesitate to mention them here. After all, I try to focus on the sin, not the sinner. You know the names: the evening stars, who don't always shine.

Here's one misrepresentation: On a 6:30 p.m. newscast, an anchor said there was news "tonight" that an attack on a prison in Iraq had occurred at sundown. The sundown was in Iraq, but never mind. On the next night in Manhattan, 24 hours later, that anchor said the attack occurred "overnight." In fact, Reuters had moved a story the day before at 2:47 p.m. ET; Reuters said the attack had begun around 10 a.m., ET. That was 32 hours before the anchor called it an "overnight" attack. That's why I called that account "The Overnight Life of Brian."

Another irregularity also sticks in my mind: an ABC correspondent was anchoring "World News." The fill-in anchor, Jake Tapper, whose regular day job was covering the White House, began a story this way: "We're learning more tonight about an unusual story of survival in Wisconsin." But the story of the man who slipped in waist-high snow and was buried under snow for several hours had occurred earlier — more than four and a half days earlier. Tapper didn't tell us when the accident happened, the man's age, occupation or even the name of his town.

A section of my book about a CBS anchor is titled "When Exclusive News is Not Exclusive — and Not Even News." No wonder I call one section, "Alas, Poor Couric."

I also write about anchors at CNN. One head reads: "Blitzer Cries Wolf." And I write about a CNN anchor who's also a "60 Minutes" correspondent, Anderson Cooper. He almost automatically introduces his CNN newscast by saying, "Happening now." Or "Breaking news." Usually, the story is neither. And he often says, "Keeping them honest" — but doesn't identify them. Honestly.

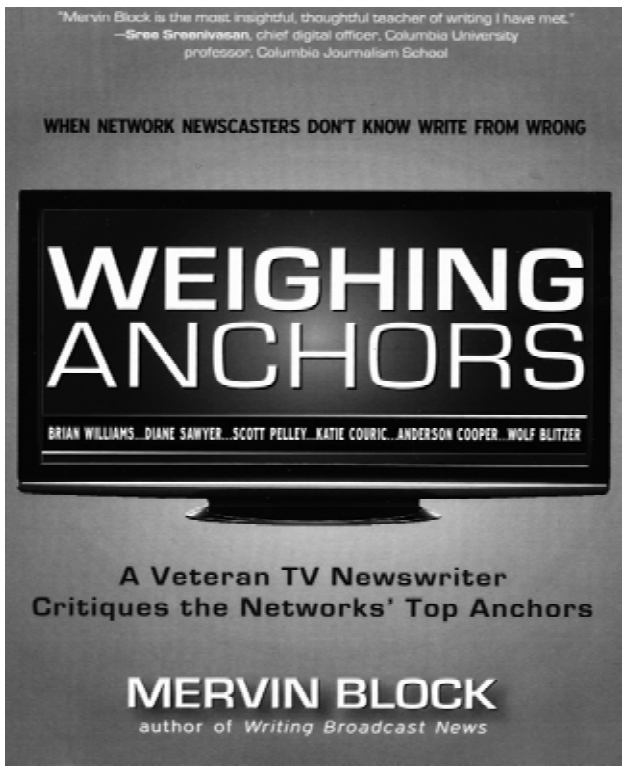
Q. What do you think of your book — honestly?

A. I'm not a disinterested party, so please let me quote Robert Feder, the media critic of TimeOutChicago:

"When network anchors murder the language — which they do night after night — thank goodness there's Merv Block to perform the autopsy. No one has a better ear or sharper pencil than Merv Block. He's a one-man quality control department for the broadcast news business. His wise and witty dissections of TV's highest-paid poobahs and their verbal blunders are both hilarious and appalling. After reading his collection of spot-on critiques, you'll never watch TV news the same way again."

I didn't know Robert Feder; now I think the world of him.

As for the anchors, they all have their strengths. But to borrow from the Book of Daniel and the Book of Block, the anchors have been weighed and found wanting.



Mervin Block wrote news for Walter Cronkite on the CBS Evening News, for Frank Reynolds on the ABC Evening News, and freelanced at NBC News. Block taught broadcast news writing part-time at Columbia's journalism school for more than 30 years. He's a former Chicago newspaper reporter.

Eye-Openers Are Not an Exact Science

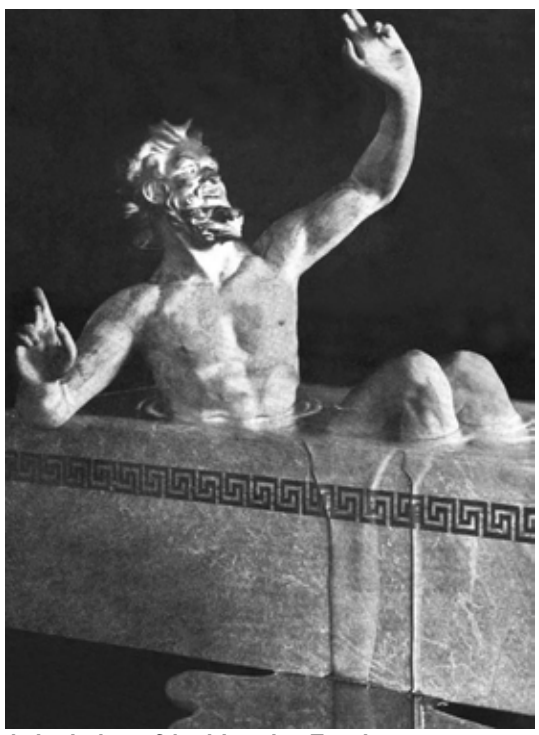
BY BEN PATRUSKY

Science writers, like scientists, occasionally have "eureka" moments of their own. For this science writer, two spring to mind, each a personal game-changer.

The first came in the in the mid-'60s when, as the research reporter for the American Heart Association, I spent much of my time roving the nation's labs for features on what investigators were up to. What I wrote, for the most part, were procedurals, process-en-route-to-discovery stories. I had come to an institution affiliated with Case Western Reserve University to report on efforts to better define the rudiments of kidney function as prelude to the development of new disease therapies. Interview concluded, my host removed my overcoat from a hook on his office door. Beneath the coat, tacked to the door, lay what looked to be a map, crudely penciled, on sketch paper.

As we said our goodbyes – and more out of courtesy than curiosity, thinking it a child's doodle – I asked about the drawing. "That's Yugoslavia," he said. "Why Yugoslavia?" "Long story," he said. "Want to tell me?" Reluctant at first, he soon relented.

As a renal specialist, he had been recruited to investigate a chronic kidney malady that had affected inhabitants of small, discrete communities situated along the Danube River and its major tributar-



A depiction of Archimedes Eureka moment.

ies in what is now Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia and Herzegovinia. There was reason to think the culprit was a river-borne agent. For one, individuals of the same ethnic stock dwelling in mountain hamlets above the river were malady-free.

My host had traveled to the besieged area to oversee the collection of urine specimens from ailing villagers and, subsequently, from healthy mountain dwellers, who were to serve as "controls." The roads were primitive; those to the higher elevations perilously steep and barely navigable. It being the rainy season, the constant downpour made the ordeal all the more onerous. The collection effort took several miserable weeks to complete.

Done at last, he made his way home, but not before a stop in London, there to deliver his cargo for analysis by another member of the international medical-forensics team, a world-renowned toxicologist. The vials had been packed in a carrying case tailor-made for the task. Boarding the airport shuttle to the city, my sleep-deprived host handed the case to the driver for storage in the bus' luggage compartment. Disembarking at the city terminal, he watched as bags were unloaded. The carrying case never appeared. Scotland Yard was alerted. A widespread search ensued. The samples were never recovered. Days later, and just weeks before my interview, a dejected but stalwart Hall had no option but to return and repeat the laborious collection process.

I wrote not the basic kidney story but of the unexpected hazards of research and the trials and tribulations of a dedicated man of science. It received very wide play. And thus was born a serial peripheralist. From then on, a deliberate visual sweep of the margins of my interviewee's office/lab surround and the serendipitous search for any unusual "artifact" became routine practice for me, and the catalyst, over the years, for a plethora of wonderfully surprising and enriching reveals.

The second "aha" (OMG or WTF might be even more appropriate, given the circumstance) came years later, when, now a fulltime freelancer, I was a frequent contributor to a magazine that specialized in long-form narratives about scientific exploration. In this instance, I was reporting on efforts to tease out details of the molecular choreography that allows genes to have their proper say. It was an intensely competitive pursuit, as is most front-line research. Among the string of investigators I had arranged to interview were two at separate institutions, each the leader of a research team that had, using different experimental schemes, independently solved a major chunk of the puzzle, an achievement of seminal consequence.

One of the two was widely celebrated (let's call him Dr. Palmer) and far more senior than the up-and-comer heading the other team (designated here as Dr. Douglas). The record shows, indisputably, that Palmer and his group were the first to publish on the discovery, beating the Douglas group to the punch by a few weeks. In science, priority — being first — is the big enchilada; from such spring prizes, grants and tenure.

After interviewing Palmer about the labors that underlay his team's success, I moved on to Douglas's lab. There, I briefly recounted to Douglas what I had learned

Continued on Page 6

A Roundtrip, From Artist to Journalist to Artist

Continued from Page 1

known for painting stripes, insisted I paint nothing but stripes on huge canvases — not that I have anything against stripes — but I didn't want to spend the rest of my life laying down and ripping up masking tape. And I was too ambitious to want to pursue an aesthetic that would be dismissed as passé or irrelevant by critics and historians. I needed a new direction.

Opportunity came from a surprising event. A friend, whose portrait I had painted, invited me to draw cartoons that were filmed for an arts conference held in Washington's Mayflower Hotel. Then-F.C.C. Commissioner Nicholas Johnson spoke there about his new book, "How to Talk Back to Your Television Set," the thesis of which was, if you don't like what you see in television, don't just sit there and complain about it; come up with a better idea and pitch it to the program directors of your local stations. These are the public airways, he explained, and you should have a say in how they are used.

I took the book and inhaled Johnson's words. Julia Child was teaching French cooking on television, so I decided to teach art on TV, and spent the summer reading every book I could find on television production. Fortunately, there weren't many, so I quickly moved on to assembling a portfolio of projects that could be taught on TV. Two of Washington's five local program directors gave me a chance to audition. One immediately hired me to do a weekly segment on WTTG-TV's daytime "Panorama" program. (It had three hosts, one of whom was Maury Povich.) I earned $50 a week.

President Nixon, followed by a bored Washington press corps, spoke at that conference. I found the reporters far more interesting than Nixon's speech and got into a hallway conversation with them. The conversation got around to the emerging women's movement, and someone from Mutual Radio told me that a producer was looking for a woman to report on it. Now that was interesting! I called the producer and was given a chance to write a couple of 3:30 second reports on the movement's key issues, then go to the studio and record them. I wrote one on the use of the term "Ms.," another on the concept of equal pay for equal work. Three days later, he called back to say, "A, you can write; B, you have a voice, and C, you've got the job."

A few weeks later, an activist I'd interviewed for the radio reports called to say that she'd just learned that WWDC was looking for its first full-time woman news reporter. "You should apply for that job," she said. "But I've never taken a journalism course." "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

Thus began a wonderful 20-year run as a radio and television news reporter, sometime anchor and host, filled with the joy of learning, while earning far more money than I'd ever dreamed possible. There was no time for art, except once. In 1977, assigned to cover the courts for WJLA-TV in Washington, I sat through a big trial with an artist who wasn't very good. I told my boss that I could do the sketches far better. And so I became the only television news reporter ever to do her own courtroom sketches.

I retired from television at the end of the 1980's, when I married the president of a major corporation, who lost his job shortly thereafter. He soon convinced me to go with him to Antigua to restore his old plantation house. That sounded attractive. And so I restored a house and gardens, traveled a great deal, and wrote an (unpublished) novel and memoir. Twenty years later, an unplanned divorce necessitated a return to work. But what work? The networks weren't hiring 60-year-old women who had been out of the business for 20 years. And writing - at least my writing - did not provide much income.

Quite by accident, I ran into Everett Raymond Kinstler, who had painted my then-husband's portrait as well as seven U.S. Presidents and hundreds of dignitaries. Hmm! Maybe I could go back to painting people, do what I love, and possibly make enough money to survive and thrive in my dotage. Kinstler agreed to become my mentor, directing my study throughout a two-year tune up that involved winning scholarships and studying full-time at the National Academy School of Fine Arts and the Art Students' League. What a thrill to find realism alive and thriving amid the finest workshops and instruction in the country. I joined the Portrait Society of America and the National Arts Club and Salmagundi Clubs. Age was, thankfully, not an impediment. Kinstler was, and still is, painting in his 80's. Aaron Shikler, who painted Kennedy's portrait, is 90 and still painting. To them, I'm a kid.

Betsy Ashton: A Self-Portrait.

Four years ago, I set up my own studio next to the Silvercup Film Studios in Long Island City. After painting a lot of folks for free to build up a portfolio of sample work, I am now — thank God — getting paid. I did Myron Kandel as one of my samples, and was invited to paint Hal Holbrook for the Players' collection (it's at the top of the stairs on the second floor). It hasn't been easy launching a luxury product at a time of deep recession, but I've found work. You can see my paintings on my Web site at www.ashtonportraits.com.

Right now, I'm painting a portrait of a former U.S. Ambassador to the Court of St. James that will hang in the U.S. Embassy in London. My work will be hanging next to Gilbert Stuart's John Adams and George Washington. Not too bad for starting over at 60.

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The Memoirist: A Journalist With Creative License

Continued from Page 1

the material that is his or her story, his or her truth.

The good journalist never invents details, tempting though it might be. The memoir writer may sometimes tell you the color of the curtains or report on the fading of the sun when those facts may or may not be correct. Details are needed so the reader can more easily enter the story and sometimes the little details are written to capture emotion rather than reality.

The journalist is not allowed those small leaps of imagination. The memoir writer needs them because the emotions of the story are crucial to the endeavor. Of course the facts should be true but a small allowance is made at the edge of the bedside of a dying father. For instance, it is possible to describe, by the oxygen tent, a cup of coffee turning cold, when the author is not fully sure that the coffee was cold or was there in the first place. The memoir writer will not fabricate the pain of the moment. The good journalist will not describe the unknown or unknowable, or invent the convenient telling detail.

As journalists our responsibility to our readers is to add to the depth of their understanding of the world we all inhabit. It is to report on political, calamitous ways of man and nature, storm and war, divorce and murder, election and firing squad, the glory of science, the squalor and triumph of commerce.

As memoir writers our work is to mine our own stories for both the truth of our private experiences, the moral implications for others, and to explore the terrain of the private on the assumption that there is nothing unique under the sun and we need each other's most intimate tales to learn how better to survive our own journeys.

Also memoir writers, unlike our finest journalists, are often out for revenge against the crimes of neglectful parents, cruel twists of fate, death itself. Memoir writers recognize Job, calling out God for his lack of justice, as a colleague in good standing. The journalist is more like a spelunker down in the caves. It's risky business and you better get your footing right but your eye is on the outside, no time for dreaming.

Anne Roiphe: The memoirist has no fact checker.

Many of us are both journalists and memoir writers. We use our tools in the service of both disciplines. But we know the difference the way the sailor knows his ropes.

Steinem: An Evening of Honors

BY BILL DIEHL

Gloria Steinem received the Silurians Lifetime Achievement Award at a gala dinner at The Players on Dec. 4. President Myron Kandel presented her with a plaque inscribed, "In recognition of a lifetime of excellence as a writer, editor, feminist, and activist, whose advocacy for gender equality has placed her in the pantheon of civil libertarians everywhere."

Steinem was introduced by Tony Guida, who noted that "Gloria has always defined feminism as a revolution, not a reform. And we all know that revolutions don't succeed overnight. Sometimes they don't succeed for years. Sometimes, I guess, they don't succeed at all. And sadly sexism is still rampant in this culture."

Guida, the Silurians former president, quoted a remark that Steinem made in 1962 in an article she had written for Esquire: "I've never heard a man ask for advice on how to manage a career and marriage." Her comments were prescient since a year later, Betty Friedan published her groundbreaking manifesto, "The Feminine Mystique."

Now, 50 years later, Gloria Steinem has not lost a step in fighting for the revolution. "This world of ours has always been ruled by men and what a mess we have made of it," she told the audience. "It isn't that women are going to do a better job looking after this world, if we do it by ourselves. No, it's because we understand now that if a group of men make a decision by themselves, they are more likely to choose the most aggressive solution, even if it's wrong. And a group of women are more likely to choose the most conciliatory solution, even if it's wrong. But if we have a group that really represents humanity as it exists, we are much more likely to have a full range of alternatives."

Photo by Mort Sheinman

Gloria Steinem is still fighting for the revolution.

Explaining that she was honored to receive the award, Steinem remarked playfully, "First of all, it's for a lifetime, which in my case is now 78, a reminder of age and immortality which I definitely need, because I have a deep conviction that I'm immortal. And this causes me to plan poorly. Actually I did have another reminder recently when I was campaigning [for Obama]. I was on television a lot and I was trending on twitter, and people thought I was dead, because why else would I be trending on twitter."

"What stirs me up," Steinem continued, "is the memory of my mother, who, when I was very little, began to show me how to take a piece of typing paper, fold it into threes, so it was in columns. You could hold it in your hand like a reporter's notebook, because there were no such things manufactured at the time. And indeed when she tried to be a journalist her very first writing had to be under a man's name, otherwise she couldn't be published. So I suspect that like many women now, I am living out the unlived life of my mother. And this is a huge step forward.

"We should be proud of this, but it's also true that we need to move forward to a time when parents live out their own dreams. And children don't feel that they have to carry on in order to make up for lost talents and lost lives. I think however that the reason I'm really moved by this [award] is the big one—how much my mother would have loved it. She wanted so much to come to New York, be a journalist here. She would have loved so much to be in your company."

Steinem went on to talk about the "Top 10" reasons she loves journalism. Journalism, she began, is a portable profession, because you can do it almost everywhere. "I once interviewed circus people who told me that the sword swallower is the most revered person in the circus world because he, or she, doesn't need a high wire or elephants or even a tent," she said. "The sword swallower can work wherever it's possible to attract a crowd. And I think the same is true of us and even more so now that technology has made it possible for us to put words down in different places."

As Steinem continued to enumerate her top 10, she said, "Writing allows you to say what you wished you'd said on the spot. For instance, the other day I spent three hours waiting on the tarmac in a plane and finally the pilot offered a movie to pacify us. And the young man next to me said 'I don't watch chick flicks.' I don't know if I could have challenged him on the spot but when I went home I thought, how about prick flicks! For all the movies that have glorified World War II as the last time we could be both vio-

Continued on Page 6

A Story of Capture and Escape

BY HERBERT HADAD

Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter and columnist David Rohde told more than 90 guests at the monthly Silurian luncheon on Jan. 17 a riveting account of his capture by the Taliban in Afghanistan in November 2008 and his escape, seven months later, in June 2009.

While co-chief of The New York Times South Asia bureau, Rohde arranged a meeting with a Taliban commander. "What frankly convinced me to go…was the competition," he said in his remarkably unassuming manner. "He was not there, a car blocked the road, there were gunmen, rifles. It's amazing how fast a situation can change."

They had conspiracy theories that he was a spy. "We will send a blood message to Obama," they told him.

Rohde, now 45 and a Reuters columnist, was ultimately able to speak with his captors. They called me a "golden hen" for the ransom he might bring. He was not beaten, he was given bottled water, he grew a beard, he taught them to sing "New York, New York."

Rohde and a local reporter, who had been abducted with him, were able to escape by climbing over a wall of the compound where they were being held. He told of how The Times and other media kept the kidnapping quiet out of concern for the men's safety.

Photo by Mort Sheinman

For David Rohde, being held captive twice was enough; he is now a columnist.

Rohde and his wife, Kristen Mulvihill, photo editor for Cosmopolitan, wrote the book "A Rope and a Prayer: A Kidnapping From Two Sides," He is now at work on another book, "Beyond War: Reimagining American Influence in a New Middle East."

Fate in a way had prepared Rohde for his tribulations. As a Christian Science Monitor reporter in 1995, he witnessed the aftermath of the Srebrenica massacre of Bosnian Muslims by Bosnian Serbs but was secretly arrested and held for 10 days. His coverage brought his first Pulitzer Prize, in 1996. The second, in 2009 as a Times reporter, was shared for coverage of America's deepening involvements in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

I had interviewed Terry Anderson of the AP for The New York Times after his seven years as a prisoner of terrorists in Lebanon and asked him what kept him strong. He said he thought about his young daughter. Rohde, married for just two months when he was seized, was asked the same question after his talk. "I thought of my wife," he said. "My job was to keep alive, to give her the life she deserved."

Members in the News

Gerry Eskenazi had an article on the Opinion page of The Wall Street Journal (Jan. 22) about the regard Brooklyn fans had for the late Stan Musial.

Linda Holmes was honored by the Shelter Island town board when they proclaimed Dec. 27, 2012, "Linda G. Holmes Day in the Town of Shelter Island." The honor was in recognition of her eight years of service on the Suffolk County Planning Commission, Town Planning Board, Chair of the Town Drug Abuse Prevention Council and several other committees over the years.

Evan Wiener's new e-book, "America's Passion: How a Coal Miner's Game Became the NFL in the 20th Century," about the origins of professional football in the coal mining country of western Pennsylvania, came out recently on smashwords.com and can be purchased for $2.99

Polly Guérin has recently had published "The Cooper-Hewitt Dynasty of New York," a story of wealth and generosity, politics and integrity and family and community that unfolded in New York.

Silurians Member BLOGS

- **Arlene's Scratch Paper: a blog of her writing, photography and random musings by Arlene Schulman**
- **Grossblogger – The only blog you'll ever need by Lewis Grossberger**
- **Novelist Online Onpaper by Kenneth Crowe**
- **PollyTalk From New York by Polly Guerin**
- **The Media Beat – a multimedia commentary by David Tereshchuk**

P.S. Please mark the following in your 2013 calendar:

- **Luncheons: March 21, April 18 – both Thursdays**

Awards Dinner:
Wednesday, May 22
Players Club
16 Gramercy Park South
(East 20th St between Park Ave S. and Third Ave)
New York City

Steinem: An Evening of Honors

Continued from Page 5

lent and right, I now understand that we have spent more money making films and television series about World War II than we spent on World War II. And all these shoot-'em-ups, with no dialogue to translate, and more interest in death than life, and [featuring] women, usually younger, and less clothed than men, is often more appealing. So if I am guided by chick flicks, why not guide fans toward prick flicks, don't you think?"

Moving to another topic on her list, Steinem cited an editorial meeting she once had at Ms magazine, which she co-founded in 1972 with Letty Pogrebin. "We were looking," she said "for all the women who had slept their way to wealth and power. . . and we found women who had slept their way — to a nice house and charge cards. But those who slept their way to real power were sons-in-law. And then we made a list of families that had the disaster of not having a son, so they had to find a son-in-law, and it was just fascinating how long this list was. Now we see that [wealthy] women are rebelling against [supporting their husbands] and instead giving millions to women's groups.

Steinem is still active as a feminist and reformer. Several years ago she founded the Women's Media Center with Robin Morgan and Jane Fonda to make women more visible and powerful in the media and to provide a level playing field for men and women journalists. "We are beginning to see that there's no such thing as women's issues and men's issues," she continued. "We have the power to change consciousness, change language. How great is that. So I hope that we stick together and provide a community for each other, supporting this kind of exploration and purpose. I'm very, very proud to be in this room and I hope that this is just the beginning of any subversive organizing cells."

Eye-Openers Are Not an Exact Science

Continued from Page 3

from Palmer. I then invited Douglas to elaborate on his group's work, only to be startled by what followed. No sooner had he begun than he hesitated and of a sudden began to weep. After a while, gathering himself, he said, "What he told you is just not true" and, a beat later, added, "He already has it all, he didn't have to do what he did." He then proceeded to tell me his version of the discovery story.

According to Douglas, he had been invited to give a talk about his team's effort to researchers at Palmer's institution. Douglas was in a quandary. He understood that he was entering a rival's lair; that the Palmer's group was tackling the same piece of the puzzle. He had concerns about disclosing in full measure as-yet unpublished data that had led his team to its solution. Not knowing where the Palmer group stood in its hunt, Douglas worried about giving away too much. Maybe he should hold back some essential details until the results were in print. Being first to publish new findings was crucial, after all.

After deliberating with colleagues, Douglas decided to bare all. Palmer was too busy to attend Douglas' formal presentation. But, at Palmer's behest, Douglas did join Palmer in his office after the talk for a private briefing.

A few weeks later the Palmer group's paper appeared. To Douglas' dismay, it offered the exact same step-by-step delineation of the intricate molecular minuet and resultant construct that he had described to Palmer and his colleagues during his visit. But close examination of the Palmer paper convinced Douglas that the data presented in it was nowhere near sufficient to arrive at or justify the paper's stated solution. To Douglas, the paper's proposed solution was without question a clear rip-off of his team's work, a case of intellectual thievery, pure and simple.

But Douglas had no way of proving conclusively what he was alleging. And he recognized that going public with such a charge, especially against so revered figure as Palmer without unassailable evidence would almost certainly put an end to his — Douglas' — career. But he deeply resented and despaired over having been cheated out of primary credit for such a key discovery, was hard put to explain why a person of Palmer's reputation and accomplishment would commit such an unconscionable act, and was at a loss as to what to do about it. As was I.

I drafted a 7,000-word story that covered the research efforts of perhaps a dozen investigators. The centerpiece was a description of Palmer's and Douglas's parallel investigations. Being in no position to referee scientific squabbles and in the absence of unimpeachable proof, I had little choice but to stay away from Douglas' allegation. But because I believed Douglas, I had him "reporting" his findings first (technically true, if you count his oral presentation at Palmer's institution) and Palmer "publishing" first (also true), a subtle but, to my mind and to the knowledgeable readers of the magazine, a significant distinction.

It was the policy of the magazine to give scientists whose work was cited an opportunity to review the manuscripts, but only for scientific accuracy. It didn't take long for Palmer to call my editor and take issue with the reporting/publishing sequence. He claimed that Douglas' recollections were off and that he had gotten the timing all wrong, owing perhaps to major stresses in Douglas' personal life. And since I hadn't been an eyewitness to the events, Palmer told my editor, I was in no position to judge. In the end, my editor asked me to back off. To my everlasting regret, I did.

I must admit to having once been rather starry-eyed about science and its practitioners, but hardly a total naïf. I understood that donning a white coat didn't suddenly transmogrify researchers into angels. And I had been exposed in the past to questionable behavior that gave me pause. But I had never been as immediately and directly involved in anything as shocking to me as this. If someone of Palmer's towering status could plagiarize as alleged and get away with it, perhaps a lot more scientific skullduggery was afoot than I had imagined.

Disillusioning as it was, the episode proved highly instructive, serving as it did to make me from then on a far warier, far more skeptical, more distrusting and more vigilant – read savvier — science writer, or so I'd like to think.

For the record: "Palmer" remains an Olympian eminence. "Douglas," having elected to keep mum, went on to enjoy a distinguished research career of his own.

As for my Cleveland kidney specialist: he and colleagues never succeeded in getting to the root of the disease, now dubbed Balkan endemic nephropathy; it remains something of a mystery to this day. But he continued to find considerable solace in the notion that the putative thief had mistaken the purloined urine vials for samples of a precious slivovitz.

Ben Patrusky is executive director of the not-for-profit Council for the Advancement of Science Writing.

All the Words Fit to Print

BY GERALD ESKENAZI

Chuck Ramsey, the New York Jets' punter, was crying. It was the first time I had ever seen an N.F.L. player in tears.

"What's wrong, Chuck," I asked after the Jets had lost a Monday night football game in Seattle. "Was it that punt they blocked?"

"How would you feel," the kicker asked, "if the coach said to the entire team, 'I can fart farther than you can punt?'"

How, indeed?

Now, my problem was how to get that quote of a lifetime into The New York Times. I failed.

The Times, that paper of record, was also the Old Gray Lady. Its style book was written in stone, like ancient commandments. Its mission, among many others, was never to offend — even on the sports pages.

Thus, on my first horse-racing assignment at Aqueduct, a helpful editor told me, "Remember, you can't say a horse came from behind in the stretch." I wondered, Is there some editor in an ivory tower on West 43d Street looking for dirty words or double-entendres?

Soon after my immaculate debut at Aqueduct, I covered the Preakness, the second jewel in the Triple Crown of racing. The huge infield was packed with thousands of fans, so many that management needed to have portable toilets for them. So I dutifully described the "Port-a-Potties," as they were called. In fact, they were trademarked.

No way. All references to portable toilets were wiped clean.

Dirt, or words that sounded like dirt, seemed to be a no-no at The Times. I once asked Muhammad Ali whether he enjoyed Southern cooking.

"Does a pig like slop?" he replied, rhetorically. "Slop" is a southern locution for food fed to farm animals. But I guess it has some other nasty connotations. The quote was killed.

There were many other no-nos at the paper. When Catholic schools played each other, certain verbs could never be used. For example, St. Cecilia could never "down" St. John's. And of course, St. John's could never "top" St. Cecilia's.

And once, when I was en route to Madison Square Garden, my sports editor told me not to mention the word "puck" in a hockey story. Seems the printer's union was in contract talks, and the linotypers could not be trusted. So I used the word "frozen disk" and "hard rubber disk" instead of "puck."

Of course, those of us who work with words are delighted when we can invigorate the language with a new phrase, or find an athlete who has a new way of saying something old and tired.

I am grateful still to the old Mets manager, Wes Westrum, who remarked after a close game, "Boy, that certainly was a cliff-dweller!"

And Joe Gardi, a Jets assistant coach, is in my pantheon of wordsmiths, because he told me, when discussing the team's problems, "We've got to nip it in the butt." Perhaps so, but not in The New York Times.

Which brings me back to Chuck Ramsey.

After he told me that Coach Walt Michaels had used the word "fart" I called the paper. It was close to midnight in New York. I told them what I had. They told me they'd call me back, that it needed a command decision. The response was fairly quick—you can't use the word, but you can paraphrase it. So I dutifully quoted Ramsey as saying that Michaels had yelled "I can spit farther than you can punt."

However, one of the tabloids in the city actually used the real quote. And then Newsday, which had a media columnist then, wrote a big story about how every paper in the city had approached that f-word. Newsday wrote that The Times altered the quote.

That embarrassed the powers at my paper, and an edict came down from on high: Never again is a quote to be altered for any reason. You can use brackets to show that a word has been changed, but not actually change a quote directly.

I mentioned that edict to Ramsey later that week.

Some years later I was at a game in Nashville, with the Jets playing an exhibition. Ramsey had been retired, but I happened to spot him at the players' entrance, where he was visiting old friends.

"Hey, Jerry," he called. "Over here. I want you to meet someone." He introduced me to a friend.

"This is the guy," he said to his friend, as he held my hand, "who made me famous in The New York Times. They have a rule about me there."

I felt good for Chuck. Glad he could laugh about that odious moment. Still, some part of me wishes I could have made history at the paper.

Puck? What Puck?

And meanwhile, here was what was happening at the Daily News. Mort Sheinman recalled that, in the late 1950's, when he was a clerk in the sports department there, there was a also directive discouraging the use of the word "puck" in reports of hockey games.

From Mort: "The hard round object the skaters kept banging with their sticks was generally referred to as 'the rubber,' or 'the disk.' At the same time, the Yankees had a pitcher named Johnny Kucks. That's how he's listed in the Baseball Encyclopedia, but in our shop, he was known as Johnny Disks."

New Members

Daniel Day: Twenty-one years with the AP, bureau chief in Omaha, Seattle and San Francisco; now director of news and editorial services at Princeton University.

Richard Esposito: Senior investigative reporter and George Polk Award winner at ABC News, Pulitzer Prize-winner at New York Newsday and a former Daily News editor.

Jane H. Furse: Formerly a reporter and writer at New York Post, Daily News (for which she still freelances) and contributor to New York Times special sections.

Myron Farber: Investigative reporter at New York Times from 1966 to 1993, and since 2001 a consultant with the Center for Oral History at Columbia University.

Clyde Haberman: With The New York Times since 1977, as a metro reporter; City Hall bureau chief; foreign correspondent in Tokyo, Rome and Jerusalem; and columnist. Winner of the Silurians' Peter Kihss Award in 2008.

Julia Kagan: Award-winning editor who's been an editor and writer at many national magazines, including Ladies' Home Journal, Back Stage, Consumer Reports, McCall's, Psychology Today and Working Woman.

Marsha Kranes: Former associate metro editor at New York Post.

Frank Leonardo: Veteran New York Post photographer, now with JE Photos, an online archive.

Maralyn Matlick: Former Sunday editor of New York Post and former deputy news editor of Daily News.

Tim Metz: Financial writer, editor and columnist for Wall Street Journal, now a principal in Metz Group, specializing in corporate and financial communications and media relations.

David Saltman: Veteran TV producer with CBS, CNN and CNBC; now head of Pinnacle Productions, producer of documentaries, films and books.

Paul Steiger: Executive chairman and first CEO and editor-in-chief of Pro Publica, former managing editor of Wall Street Journal, and winner of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Silurians.

Terri Thompson: Director of the Knight-Bagehof Fellowship in Economics and Business Journalism at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism.

In Memoriam

Thomas Liggett, 94

Ed Wergeles, 93

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