When Socolow Talked, Cronkite Listened

A SILURIAN PROFILE

BY CARL D. SPIELVOGEL

Sanford Socolow spent 32 years at CBS News, most of them in high-profile posts, including six as executive producer of the “CBS Evening News With Walter Cronkite.” But his career in journalism goes much farther back, all the way to the Stuyvesant High School Spectator; then as the editor-in-chief of the Stuyvesant High School, I initially thought of it as a personal capstone, the culmination of a lifetime in journalism. Having been a senior editor at Newsweek, editor of the Saturday Review, and editor-in-chief of BusinessWeek for more than 20 years, I saw my new posting as a chance to pass on my experience to the next generation. Boy, was I wrong. As the journalism world changed in content and delivery, I was the one who became a student.

To be perfectly candid, the new world seemed upside down to me. In the traditional world I knew best, journalists defined what was newsworthy and decided how and when to cover it for essentially passive consumers who occasionally wrote a letter to the editor. It was a one-way street.

The Internet changed all that. “The people formerly known as the audience,” as NYU’s Jay Rosen memorably described them, could now talk back. In fact, anyone could now be a journalist – or at least commit an act of journalism on their blogs or web sites. Pretty soon we had to embrace the even more radical rise of social media, starting with YouTube, Facebook and Twitter and now including Instagram and Pinterest. News was fast becoming a conversation – a process that invited community participation, that could be distributed using social media.

“When you heard from him in the field, you were the conscience of the crowd,” said Morley Safer, now of 60 Minutes. “He would make nice notes when they didn’t.”

Sandy we now know, Safer replied: “There was no Luddite. He understood the old ways. The technological tide was going to come. And you had to be ready for it.”

No, the real problem is not journalism per se. The defining issue is now financial: The traditional business model that invited community participation, that could be distributed using social media.

Sometimes with great reluctance, I came to see the value of the new technologies. I slowly realized that digital technology would enrich journalism, creating an interactive, multimedia form of storytelling that invited community participation, that could be personalized, that could be delivered on a vast array of mobile devices, that could be consumed globally, that could be distributed using social media.

And so, I finally managed to embrace the changes necessary to create a new school for a new age.

My personal passage is, of course, a microcosm of the larger struggle within the journalism profession to come to terms with the digital reckoning. Though many mainstream media companies have been hobbled out by all those layoffs, a parallel universe is slowly growing in journalism. Everywhere you look, new digital outlets are springing up that offer promising alternatives – from Politico and ProPublica to the Texas Tribune and BuzzFeed, to say nothing of blogs, web sites, and hyperlocal ventures. This year, something called Inside Climate News won a Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting, and a blog named California Watch was a Pulitzer finalist for Public Service. There is more journalism produced today by more people on more platforms than ever before. And much of it is reaching new audiences through social media, creating new communities of like-minded readers.

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Kathleen Campion, a financial journalist whose career includes 20 years with Bloomberg News. She began as a financial reporter and in 1983 became a television correspondent for Business Week’s Satellite News Channel. A year later, she became host of “Smart Money” on the Lifetime Network, and then did a three-year stint as an anchor and correspondent for “The Wall Street Journal Report,” a weekly magazine show. In 1989, she moved to CNBC as an anchor, and in 1992 she joined Bloomberg News as a manager. More recently, she transitioned to producing and anchoring a two-hour weekly show on the arts.

Joseph Connolly, a veteran of radio news, has been with CBS Radio/Wall Street Journal since 1992. Other roles include managing news anchor and a project secretary to Sen. Christopher Dodd of Connecticut. Before joining the Journal, he was managing editor of WTOP News in Washington.

Tobe Elkin, a journalist since 1990, writes largely about consumer technology brands and digital media. She started as a stringer for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and went on to work as a reporter of reporting and editing posts, including Associated Press staff writer in Charleston, W.Va., and Albany, N.Y. She was a re- née editor at North American Publishing Co., covering technology marketers and retailers. Also was an editor and reporter at Advertising Age and editor at OnlineMedia Daily, a e-mail newsletter, and a freelance writer and consultant for such clients as AOL, Fox Digital Media, Media magazine and eMarketer, where she is currently senior digital strategist.

Martin Gottlieb is the editor of The Bergen Record and the Herald News of North Jersey. His career began at The Record in 1973 as a reporter. Since then, he has edited editorial pages and managing editors at The Record and The New York Times, where he was a Pulitzer Prize-winning political reporter in 1984.

This Time, Breathing
A Lot Easier on Stage

BY MAGEE HICKEY

The last time I put my flute to my lips on a concert stage it was an utter disaster. Barely a sound came out.

It was the summer of 1972. I was 17 and studying classical flute at one of the most famous conservatories in the world, the Fontainebleau School of Music outside Paris. Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein had studied with my same teacher, Nadia Boulanger.

I was way out of my league and I knew it.

Only two things separated me from all the other music students studying at the conservatory: talent and discipline.

So when I tried to play the Siciliano movement from the Bach Sonata for Unaccompanied Flute in the end of the summer recital, my entire body was shaking. I couldn’t take a deep breath. And that, sadly, is the key to playing the flute. You need to breathe. You need lots of air for a beautiful, rich tone, subtle, lyrical phrasing and pitch-perfect intonation. I had none of that. The sound coming from my flute that night was atrocious. A croaking frog with laryngitis would be a kind analogy.

Fast forward 41 years.

Dec. 21, 2013. Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. 7:30 p.m.

I am once again putting my flute to my lips in public after a hiatus of more than four decades. Why, oh why, was I trying this again? Wasn’t failing once at it enough?

I am once again putting my flute to my lips on a concert stage it was an utter disaster. Barely a sound came out and trying to succeed at something I’d always loved before it’s too late.

It has to do with losing both my wonderful parents in the last few years. Neither could read music, but they required that their four children take music lessons starting at age 5 and we dutifully did. And they sent me to France that summer of 72 not because I was so talented, but because they wanted me to believe in myself and my dreams.

Somehow, going back to music school at age 57 and really trying to practice at least an hour a day (something I’d never done before) brought me back to my childhood. And my parents.

In my quest to relive those happy years taking Dalcroze classes, I stumbled upon a fantastic chamber music program at the Lucy Moses Community Music School on the Upper West Side, directed by a wonderful flutist, Diane Taublieb. I was incredibly nervous at the placement audition, sounding once again like that laryngitic frog. But the flute teacher saw something in me; maybe it was desperation or maybe she just felt sorry for me. I remember she acknowledged that she knew I was a TV reporter that she’d seen many times over the past three decades. I think she sensed I was taking a big risk, stepping out of my comfort zone.

Luckily for me, I found the right flute teacher. Diane is exactly my age and is also a married mother of two girls who had lost her own father the same week I had lost mine in 2011. Short, Diane just got me. She understood I didn’t expect to be the next Jean-Pierre Rampal or James Galway. I just wanted to play the flute better, make music and have some fun. And get over my anxiety of playing on a concert stage.

Diane placed me with two other musicians way above my skill set. Like in tennis, it’s always a good idea to play with people better than you. Sarah Monte, 38, a jewelry and stained-glass designer by profession, is a superb clarinetist. Danielle Errico, 30, a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, plays piano like a dream. We began to work on Gabriel Faure’s Dolly Suite, originally for piano four hands, transcribed now for flute, clarinet and piano. We became fast friends.

We really enjoyed making music together so we called our trio Les Trois Amies.

Everything was humming along musically last spring. We would meet once a week for a two-hour coaching session with Diane, with an informal recital at the school in June. And then clarinetist Sarah got the bright idea. “Hey girls, why don’t we audition for a chance to play our piece at Carnegie Hall in December?” she cheerfully chirped. Sarah had heard about this great group called the Amateur Classical Musicians Association founded by Alberto De Salas to encourage people just like us to play on a big-time concert stage.

I immediately started to hyperventilate, thinking of my 1972 flasco in France. “There is no way I can play at Carnegie Hall, even if it is just the Weill Recital Hall,” I told my fellow musicians, “I will just be too nervous...” Slowly breathing, heart palpitation, dry mouth. Frog-like croaking. All that anxiety came flooding back to me.

But my two comrades coaxed me into at least the audition for the ACMA “Passion Through Performance” concert. Time to face my fear, I told myself. And my heart was clearly in my throat. We played for just 60 seconds of the allotted 90, before the judges said that they had heard enough. I thought we were toast and slinked off the stage, dejected and sad. But at least we tried, I said to myself and others.

Fast forward one time back and waited and waited and waited for word of our rejection or selection. Finally we got an email saying that we had been chosen, one of nine chamber music groups to perform at Carnegie in December.

And now the real panic set in.

So many people have asked me how can I be on television reporting the news night after night for more than 30 years and seem so calm and in control, but ask me to play the flute in public and I fall apart? The dirty little secret is I used to get extremely nervous reporting on air, doing live shots and anchoring. There are some old videos of me announcing courtroom verdicts that I would be mortified to see again. I was so anxious, hyperventilating and gasping for air. We even had viewers call and ask “why is that redheaded reporter having a heart attack on the air?” But over time, I gained confidence that I knew what I was doing and that confidence showed on the air.

As more than one news director told me, “If you put the attention on the work, how to cover the story the best way you can, and not on your own on-air performance, there’s no reason to be nervous.”

Just do the work and everything else will fall into place.

That was my mantra for the six months leading up to Carnegie. Sarah, Danielle and I practiced like crazy. And whenever anyone asked me to emcee a fundraiser, like the ArchCare Gala for the Archdioce of the Woodhull Hospital fundraiser, I would ask if my classical music trio could play. I wanted to play as much as possible in public to get over nerves.

Finally, the big day, our Carnegie debut arrived.

Dec. 21. I was the most nervous I had ever been in my life. More nervous than my wedding day. More nervous than when I first went into labor with the first child.

A lesson from the best: James Galway with Magee Hickey.
From David Pitt, Always the Right Word

BY JOY COOK

Fencing shaped him: grace, sharp wit, and perseverance against challenges. So did two decades as a scuba diver. David Emmett Pitt, a former president of the Society of the Silurians who died Feb. 24, was best known as a passionate professional.

He was an editor and foreign correspondent for The New York Times, and then moved on to help UNicef – the United Nations Children's Fund — rivet global attention on the Sudan/Darfur genocide, and the fates of women and children trapped in other wars. He died upside down five days after his 67th birthday and a decade-long fight with a degenerative illness. “David loved words and history and seeing where it all fit,” said Barbara Crosette, who was a New York Times foreign correspondent when he was an assistant foreign editor. “He was our tether when we were in difficult places, a stickler for research, scientifically identifying dinosaur bones and fossils excavated near their home in Hastings-on-Hudson, where the boys and a sister, Debra, grew up.”

“David was a tenacious fighter,” said Tim, a magazine copy editor in Manhattan. This was a legacy from their Texan father, James, along with the requisite bourbon and branch-water. The senior Pitt, a Time Inc. executive who died in 2011, was a gregarious fixture at Silurians dinners and luncheons for years.

David was president of the Silurians from 2006 to 2008. Among his recruits to membership was the UN, Salim Lone from Kenya, who taught for 50 years at the Columbia J-School, made no secret that he was her student, who taught for 50 years at the Columbia J-School, made no secret that he was her favorite student. In a fond obituary in the Silurianah, he mentioned the verbosity of his former professor — “an enduring and patient heart in the world.”

His friendships and colleagues were interwoven. “David was a pioneer in radio in the early 70’s, at WGRG 110 in Pittsfield, Mass. We were the first (and only) AM station doing that new mix of music, culture and politics… we only found on FM.” said Stephen Rose. “Decades later, after I knew my wife Kathy as an editor on the Times’s foreign desk, David helped me find work at Unicef.”

“We were colleagues through so many crises. Sudan/Darfur was probably the most traumatic, when Carol went in person; but we also had extreme hunger, civil war, soldiers, so many tragedies.”

From 1994-97 at the UN, David was spokesman for a World Summit for Social Development. He became a regular on the status of women.

The film critic Judith Crist, a Siluriann who taught for 50 years at the Columbia School of Journalism and was the first female to win a Pulitzer Prize, announced later.

David Pitt

in Arlo Guthrie’s famous tribute “Alice’s Restaurant” to the classic dixieland outfit, the Essential Point, the lobster shift – the meccas for years.

A memorial service will be announced later.

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SILURIAN NEWS

MARCH 2014

breathing A Lot Easier

Continued from Page 3 of our two daughters. More nervous than he was the time he solo anchored a newsboat in Providence, Rhode Island.

And I just kept calmly telling myself to breathe deeply and play the best I can. No one is expecting Jean-Pierre Rampal or James Galway up at that stage. We are amateurs who love classical music.

I thought of my parents who always believed in me. I thought of my husband, Rick, who’d been lovingly by my side for 31 years. He’d married a TV reporter, but now had also gotten an amateur flute-ist who’d been practicing some pretty scrappy high notes sometimes two and three hours a day for the last year… I thought of my two daughters, ages 22 and 26 in the audience, who’d be so proud if I succeeded, but would be mortified if I fell apart on stage, and of my two sisters, my two oldest friends from kindergarten, various teachers, friends and supporters who came to cheer me on.

So what happened?

I thought I could have been a lot better. I could have been a disaster. My two daughters told me they looked over at their father when I was playing with tears streaming down his cheeks. My husband, more than anyone else, knew how much this moment meant to me.

After our Faure trio with Les Treos Amies was over, we received thunder- ous applause because we’d packed the house with so many friends and family. I felt I could have done better (of course) with a jazz trio. The piece was called Baroque and Blue from Claude and Jimmy’s band, getting live, a favorite of mine made famous by Jean Rampal in the 70’s.

And the best news of all is I have been invited back to play at the annual Weil Recital Hall on April 5. Another ACMF Passion Through Performance concert. Another Claude Bolling selection called Tangotango.

So I have little time to conquer those nerves, breathe deeply and toss that flute!

From Print to Digital: My Turbulent Path

Continued from Page 1

sustained journalism, based largely on a lucrative stream of advertising revenue, has seriously eroded. Consider the plight of newspapers, still the source of most original reporting in the U.S. Between 2005 and 2012, newspapers lost 60 percent of their print advertising revenue—a decline of more than $28 billion. And now digital advertising revenue on newspaper websites hasn’t come close to making up the difference largely because of hyper-low advertising rates on the web.

I am not a futurist. I do not claim to know how the public will consume media 10 years from now or what the next Twit- ter will be. But I do believe that we will find new revenue streams for quality jour- nalism in the digital age. Readers are now starting to pay for content, advertisers are developing new ways to target digital readers, and publishers are learning to use e-commerce. Some publishers are even becoming more than just newspapers and magazines; they are learning to be infor- mation platforms, building deeper relation- ships with their communities — whether those communities are geographic or de-

In this new era, and whatever the new formats, I think we must keep techno- logical change in perspective. The new technologies, as dazzling as they seem, are but a means to an overriding end. And that end is journalism. — a true kind of journalism – a journalism that is vitally needed in this

breathing A Lot Easier

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My Life in Show Business

BY BILL DIEHL

BREAKING NEWS! I killed Bob Hope, but he wasn’t dead!

It happened June 5, 1998. My prerecorded Hope obituary, along with clips of Hope’s comedy routines, were sent out on an ABC Radio Network newscast from the Arizona Congressman Robert Stump announced, on the House floor, Hope’s passing. A staffer told Stump he saw the news on a wire service. Luckily, I had a phone call to Hope’s publicist, Ward Grant, quashed the story. “Bob Hope is alive,” he said. “He’s home, having his breakfast.”

We were able to correct the error before the newscast ended, but the damage was done and the Drudge Report didn’t let us forget it.

I had interviewed Bob Hope a number of times over the years and in 1981, when I interviewed him at West Point, he told me he was going to have a talk with his old friend President Reagan about gun control. “I think the violence today is a concern of every citizen,” Hope said. “I don’t see any reason why we shouldn’t have gun control. It doesn’t mean hunters are going to have their guns taken away—it’s just an idea. What’s wrong with that?” His words went out on all the wires for challenging Reagan and taking on the powerful gun lobby. It was always a thrill to talk to this great entertainer whom I had idolized growing up in the 1950s in Corning, N.Y., where I listened to him on the radio and watched him on TV. In the basement of our home I had a tiny transmitter microphone that could broadcast my voice for several blocks in my neighborhood and I fantasized about working as a network broadcaster one day. That dream came true in 1971 when I arrived at ABC and it has been a wild ride for four decades. Fun, fascinating and frustrating at times, but always exhilarating.

Even though I was originally hired as a news correspondent, show biz was on my radar and the network let me do occasional interviews with such big stars as Jack Nicholson, Jerry Lewis, Mel Brooks, Jane Fonda and Roy Rogers. Here are some brief reminiscences.

Roy Rogers was born Leonard Franklin Slyke. Although I think about anything other than Leonard Franklin part, he said he changed his last name because Richard Burton, who was a star in the film “Lawrence of Arabia,” but he also starred in “Caligula,” and was quoted in various media for slamming the film as “boring rubbish.” In my interview, however, O’Toole said, “I am in no way ashamed of one scrap of what I did in “Caligula” because I fought like a tiger to make sure that my character Tiberius was given the proper respect.”

I met George Burns when he was a lively 87 and promoting his new book, “How to Live to be 100 or More.” “Do you want to live to be a hundred?” I asked. “Why not,” he said. “I’ve got all kinds of old jokes and I’ve got to use them.” Burns added, “People practice on getting old. They have a tendency to fall in love with their bed. Jack Benny once told me, ‘I didn’t sleep last night.’ I said, ‘How did you sleep the night before?’ He said he ‘slept great.’ So I said, ‘Sleep every other night.’”

I interviewed Mia Farrow during the time she was embroiled in the nasty fight with Woody Allen. She had agreed to talk about her latest film (not one of Woody’s), called “Widow’s Peak.” Just before I turned my tape recorder on, her publicist, Lois Smith, said, “Bill, if you mention Woody, she’ll walk!” Near the end of the interview I took a chance and said, “Mia, you’ve been going through a rough year. It hasn’t been easy. How are you holding up?” Smith glared but Mia gave me a minute. She said, “You know, I just don’t know what to do about that. This has been my life and I don’t have the objectivity to say whether it would have been better another way. Whether your life has been easier than mine or mine may be easier because of this. I’ve had a good life. My children have given me immeasurable satisfaction. I’d be a fool to complain.”

During one of my several interviews with Mel Brooks, he told me: “Comedy is one of the most durable products known to man. It has more immortality in it, the diamond-hard immortality that drama will never have, because it sanitizes the world, it points a finger at social inequality and it celebrates and castigates our human eternal behavior.” I asked him to pick a time in history that he would want to live in and he replied: “It would be the French Revolution, and I would be the King of France [It’s good to be the king!], to have my way with women and with dwarfs and do anything that my fantasies would allow me to do. I would have loved it right up to when they marched the king up to the guillotine and chopped his head off.”

When I told Jack Nicholson in 1982 that he might be up for an Academy Award, he said, “All honors are suspect.” But then he added, “At the same time, it’s a promotional device and an honor. It’s a peer-group award and they do a pretty good job of representing every point of view about acting. I like glamour in the movie business, nothing grim about it. It’s the greatest job you can get.”

I’m with Nicholson about a great job. What I’ve been doing all these years covering the world of show biz has truly been the greatest job you can get.

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Bill Diehl was ABC News Radio’s longtime chief entertainment correspondent when he retired in the fall of 2007. In 2008 he was called back to freelance for the network, producing and voicing celebrity features for ABC’s magazine show “Perspective.”
Thank You, Mr. Bigart, Thank You

By Ben Patrusky

What would Homer Bigart do?

That would become my lifelong mantra and thanks to it, the legendary reporter and war correspondent who inspired it, I found the courage to pursue a career in science journalism. I really don’t think I would have done so without having Mr. Bigart (it was always “Mister Bigart to me”) watching my back.

Let me stipulate that I never met the man, never talked to him and really had no idea what he looked like. Only long after I made my decision to go the science reporting/writing route did I actually see a photograph of the bespectacled Mr. B. But I knew his byline. Knew of his two Pulitzers (won during his years at The New York Times after joining, The New York Times). And I had read, of course, avidly. I loved his dispatches. Who didn’t? His prose was lean, muscular, crisp, unadorned and altogether beautiful. And he was brave and unflinching. And I admired him, all the more when he wrote slowly, written-conversing, right up until dead-line. Like me.

And that, like me, he had a profound stutter.

It was early in my college days in the mid-fifties, when I discovered that about him. Reporting excited me, but, given the burden of my stuttering, I didn’t dare to call him.3 And I developed enough courage to give it a try and did succeed in making the editorial staff of The Campus, one of the two competing CCNY newspapers. But much to my delight, I discovered seeing my stories in print, worried my self-sick with each new assignment.

The calls that had to be made – merely the need to introduce myself, to say my name – was harrowing unto itself. I had the misfortune of having two phonemes, “b” and “m,” and two of my name, each of which gave me pronounced difficulty, both giant obstacles to be hurdled. I thought of name-changing, of running away, of hiding. I realized that there were the face-to-face interviews, the need to pose questions, lots of them, often in a halting, stumbling fashion, me red-faced and struggling, spittle flying, doing all that I could to untie my knotted tongue. Simply the thought of it was enough to cause me boundless grief and shame.

I hung on for two years. After too many sleepless nights, I succumbed to my dread and asked for general assignment and fea- tures to become the paper’s drama reviewer, a far less verbally demanding gig. I actually realized that I had better start paying a lot more attention to my grades as an electrical engineering major, a line of work that represented a secure harbor for a stutterer like me.

I returned to school to complete my studies with a promise to my parents that I’d pursue journalism and push a far more promising and lucrative career as an engineer. Two weeks before semester’s end, as I weighed engineering job offers, I decided to call Mr. Bigart. The news editor had left, the slot was open and it was mine to fill if I wished it. I did and did. And not too long after that, an unexpected, last-minute proffer of a fel lowship to a new science writing program at the Columbia University Journalism School sealed the deal. I still had my stuttering to contend with, big time, but I also had Mr. Bigart.

And I continued to draw lessons from him. I had heard him to be a man of saucy wit with a gift for sparkling zingers who never seemed to worry about stumbling over and blowing a line. Like the story about his fiercely competitive NY Herald Tribune colleague, Marguerite Higgins, with whom he shared (along with three others) a 1951 Pulitzer for coverage of the Korean War, and who he, apparently had many good reasons to dislike. When informed that Higgins had had a baby, Mr. Bigart was purported to say, “Woo-hoo the m-m-m-mother?” Or, this, also about Higgins: “I’m in going to l-l-l-light a match to her tampon and b-b-b-blow her up?” Those who recounted these stories always mimicked the stammer, making it central to the telling and funny for listeners. Funnier, yes, but for me also cringe-inducing, as was, for me, all stutter-depen dent humor. A truly valiant man, Mr. Bigart, thought I, doing something I’d hardly ever dare chance were there even the barest hint that a punch line might give me trouble. That too would change.

I was surprised to learn, too, that stuttering actually gained him some advan tage from time to time. Richard Phillips, in his 2009 memoir “God and the Editor: My Search for Meaning at the New York Times,” writes: “Bigart was known for stuttering while asking questions. Sym pathizing with him, sources would go to great lengths to talk, reaching out to fill the gaps, often revealing more than they desired.”

I discovered stuttering’s potential value for myself but, rest assured, always inadvertently. One especially memorable in- stance occurred early in my tenure run ning the annual New Horizons in Science briefing for the New York Times, the not-for-profit Council for the Advance ment of Science Writing, this briefing gives science reporters a heads-up on seminal developments that are likely to make news in the coming months and years, as re ported by front-line scientists. My job was to unearth those scientists, as many as 20 to 25, for each of the 30 years I did it. Needless to say it involved, in addition to hours of library research, countless phone calls and interviews.

In this case, I was in pursuit of a re knowned cosmologist with some major news in the offing, despite my having been told repeatedly that there was no chance of getting him; he was known to deny virtually all requests for interviews and talks. I made the call anyway. He answered, we chatted and to my amaze ment, he accepted my invitation. When I finally met him at the briefing, I could not resist asking why he had agreed to come. He said: “Ben, I heard your stutter. I stutter too. I admired your cour age. I couldn’t say no.” And thus was his longstanding reluctance to speak to reporters explained.

Over the years, the severity of my stuttering has eased, a case of studied dodgery or aging or maybe both. There are those who are surprised to find that I do stutter. (At one point I was even asked to sign on as science correspondent for a local TV news show.) And I do, of necessity, some public speaking now and again. That said, and despite all the tricks, evasive ploys and disguises I developed over time in hopes of avoid ing detection, I remain a stutterer — never really sure, never free of its dreaded advent. My name’s the same, the stutter, but the blocks have to be tor pedoes be damned. Homer Bigart died in 1991. I never got to thank him.
Meeting Mr. Audubon

It is 1835. Richard Locke, the editor of the fledgling New York Sun, has a story he wants to run. He brings it to Benjamin Day, the owner and publisher of The Sun.

“Good stuff,” Day finally says, “but something’s missing: it needs art—artwork.” He gives Locke the name of an artist he knows of who will work fast and cheap.

As the boat passes West 3rd Street the city gives way to farms and open countryside. A grid system for developing the whole island of Manhattan has existed since 1811, but so far its implementation is largely theoretical.

“Good always comes first—Jean Jacques in French, you know.” Lucy tells Locke. “No! I’m afraid I didn’t think it through. Louis XVI’s daughter, the son of Louis XV, but you must never bring it up.”

They totter through the house to the kitchen, where the artist poles restlessly at the windowsill.

Meeting Mr. Audubon an excerpt from an unpublished novel by veteran New York illustrator Robert Grossman.
A Web Site That’s Purring Along

On last Dec. 17, Ben Smith stopped by the Players Club to talk about why hard news and cat videos, and other cute stuff, can co-exist in the same place. And that place being BuzzFeed, the Web site where he is the editor-in-chief. It is also the Web site that has received more than 100 million hits a month, he told a packed house of Silurians and their guests.

One of its formulas for success? “You do provocative things to get people to talk about you,” he said. “You get “traffic by attacking, criticizing someone,” someone like Nat Silver, and copying the link, and then you hope, he said, that he gets attacked back, and a link is attached, and on and on and on.

Mr. Smith, now 37, joined BuzzFeed in 2012, after moving from a reporting job at the Baltic Times in Latvia, where he started New York City’s first political blog, to The Daily News, and then to Politico, where he was the senior political writer.

He said that political blogs became the place where the 2008 election was played out. But 2008, and blogs, were such a long time ago. Now, “twitter sucked the

A Night
Of Honors
For Topping

He has been a witness—and sometimes a player—to history for almost 70 years, and Seymour Topping shared many of those dramatic moments when he was honored with the Silurians Lifetime Achievement Award.

Obviously touched by the honor, Top, as he is universally known, kissed the place on the day of the Players Club at the annual fall dinner on Nov. 14.

And then the 91-year-old started telling stories about a career that began as a correspondent in Asia in 1946 and that eventually brought him to The New York Times in 1959. During his 33 years at The Times he was chief correspondent in both Moscow and Southeast Asia; foreign editor; managing editor, and director of editorial development. Along the way, he recalled.

The Filipininos and 1946 and talking Saigon in 1951. It was a young Congress- man, John F. Kennedy, and he was touring Asia and wanted to know what Top thought about the future of Vietnam. Top believes that had JFK lived, he might have reached out to Ho Chi Minh and averted the conflagration that followed.

One of Topping’s five daughters, Robin, described her father as “a good soul,” and remembered how they discovered a listening device in a bedroom light in Moscow. She suggested that the KGB might have heard “interesting pillow talk.” She spoke proudly of the fact that he also has written four novels.

His wife of 63 years, Audrey, remembered their first meeting in China and how, the next day, he had romanced her with “a rickshaw full of roses. We went out and have been dating ever since.”

Asked about his thoughts on the future, Top ended the evening by saying: “Have faith. I do, and I think we’re all going to come out well.”

— Gerald Eskenazi

In Memoriam


Jon Anderson, 77, retired in 2006 from the Chicago Tribune, where his enormously popular “City Chat” column had appeared since 1995. Before joining the Tribune, he’d been a bureau chief for Time magazine. He died in January.

Jerry Sherman, 83, was a financial writer at the New York Journal of Commerce, who became a columnist, associate editor and foreign correspondent, and later went into public relations. He died in Nov. 2013.

Stan Brooks, 86, long-time voice of 1010 WINS, winner of the Peter Kissin Award in 2006, died in Dec. 2013.

— Herbert Hadad

The Wit and Wisdom of Walt Bogdanich

The tall, slim, bespectacled gentleman in jeans looked out at some 100 Silurians and newsmen and newswomen at the February luncheon and uttered, “It’s an intimate dating group here.”

Chalk it up, Walt Bogdanich’s sense of humor. He is an investigative reporter with three Pulitzer’s to his credit, as well as four George Polk Awards and two Overseas Press Club awards.

He said his brand of reporting is not for the timid. “I was named in a $10 billion. I ended up not paying a penny.' “

Another Walt Wisdom: “I don’t—and I can’t speak for others,” said Bogdanich.

Another questioner suggested that some people seemed to be “too big to in-” to which Bogdanich objected. “We do not care how big you are,” he said. “We don’t bring cases to bring money in. We want the world to see what they have done.”

— Gerald Eskenazi

The Press And the Prosecutor

He was introduced as “the most im-"portant prosecutor in the country” by Silurians’ president Allen Dodd Frank. And Preet Bharara, the United States At- torney for the Southern District of New York, repeatedly spoke of the necessary synergy between the press and his office.

First, though, Bharara, referring to a widely reported case involving an Indian diamond merchant, quipped: “Before I start, I do want one housekeeping thing that I feel is necessary based on recent events. Just a show of hands if you could let me know if you believe that you have diplomatic immunity — I’d appreciate it.”

Speaking at the Jan. 14 luncheon at the Players Club, Bharara said he is an avid newspaper reader among the dozen publications he regularly reads. He quoted a speech by President Kennedy and said that journalism “is the only busi-ness protected in America” by the Con-stitution.

“Unlike many other Government of-"fices, we don’t shrink from the press,” he said.

Bharara was appearing just after an other one of his high-profile cases had made Page One news— the indictment of an Indian diplomat living in New York, charged with visa fraud and crimes against a domestic worker. The State Department intervened on diplomatic grounds and had her return to India.

Bharara, born in India, conceded he had undergone bitter criticism by some in the Indian press: “That I targeted some- one from India, and that he had brought the charges to his “white masters.” But Bharara brought laughter from the Silurians when he added that these so-called white masters were “Erich Holder and Barack Obama.”

Ironically, he was named 2011’s “Per-“son of the Year” by the publication India Abroad. He made a Time magazine cover in 2012 with the headline, “This Man Is Bustling Wall Street.” His office has more than 200 assistant attorneys, and said he is understaffed and is laboring under a budget freeze.

Bharara did not discuss individual cases but reiterated his contention that the press and the prosecutor should work in tandem — "the press can bring bad conduct to our attention." He did admonish journalists in general in one area: too much attention, he claimed, is wasted on breaking stories on cases that are about to come out of his office, rather than “ferreting out” leads that could uncover criminal activity.

“Many people call journalists instead of the F.B.I.,” he said, in speaking of the trust many journalists hold with the pub-"lic.

Despite Bharara’s repeated twinning of justice and journalism, he was asked some tough questions about how govern-"ment investigators operate. One ques-

The internet has changed more in the last three or four years than it has in the previous 10, he noted. And probably, you ain’t seen nothing yet, I said.

— Bernard Kirsch

Jan: 14: Preet Bharara

Mort Sheminan

Feb: 18: Walt Bogdanich

Mort Sheminan

Nov. 14, 2013.
Audrey & Seymour Topping

He was the first to tell the world Nanking had fallen to the Communists.

A knock on his hotel-room door in Saigon in 1951. It was a young Congress- man, John F. Kennedy, and he was touring Asia and wanted to know what Top thought about the future of Vietnam. Top believes that had JFK lived, he might have reached out to Ho Chi Minh and averted the conflagration that followed.

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