The Silurians Celebrate Journalism At Its Best

A striking list of winners highlights the Society of the Silurians Excellence in Journalism Awards for coverage in 2015. In addition to two special citations—the Peter Kihss and Dennis Duggan awards — this year brought 85 submissions from print, broadcast and online media in 18 revised categories.

Top awards for breaking news, features, and investigative reporting went to The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times. Winning Medallions and Merit Award certificates will be presented at the Awards Dinner May 18 at The Players, 16 Gramercy Park South.

For the esteemed Peter Kihss Award, honoring The New York Times reporter who exemplified the highest ideals of dogged journalism and mentorship, the Silurians named Daniel Sforza, managing editor of The Record in Bergen County. Sforza, who groomed countless other prize-winners over the years, was the former transportation reporter who first broke the news, in a web posting, that Capt. Chesley (Sully) Sullenberger III landed a distressed plane on the Hudson River in 2009, saving all on board. (Kihss, a 30-year-veteran of The Times, died in 1984 at 72.)

The Dennis Duggan Memorial Scholarship Award, given annually to a student at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism for exemplary coverage of New Yorkers, was awarded to Megan Cerullo of Brooklyn. Her story profiled the Italian community in the Bronx, among other notable projects. She will intern this summer at The Daily News. (Duggan, whose columns celebrated New Yorkers over six decades in five newspapers, died in 2006 at 78.)

Here is a list of all winners:

**Newspaper, News Service and Online Breaking News Medallion Winner** Wall Street Journal, “Metro-North Crash” by Andrew Tangel

A wide-ranging tour de force of the crash and its after-effects. It is old-fashioned journalism at its best, from gathering quotes and information to recreating the horrific scene with a compelling narrative.

**Merit Award Wall Street Journal, “Brooklyn ISIS Plot” by Pervaiz Shallwani, Rebecca Davis O’Brien and Andrew Grossman**

From its comprehensive lead, it details an intriguing timeline that often reads like a spy novel, with many government sources.


Continued on Page 3

On Feb. 3, 2015, a Journal News photo assistant, Albert Conte, who is also a volunteer fire fighter, responded to a report of a commuter train hitting a car in Valhalla. He helped rescue commuters and also used his iPhone to shoot photographs and video. Staff photographers soon joined him. Their series of photos won the Journal News the medallion for Breaking News Photography. Another of their photos appears on page 3.

**Silurian News**

Published by The Society of The Silurians, Inc., an organization of veteran New York City journalists founded in 1924

**Society of the Silurians EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM AWARDS BANQUET**

**The Players Club**

Wednesday, May 18, 2016

Drinks: 5:30 P.M.  Dinner: 7:15 P.M.

Meet old friends and award winners (212) 532-0887

Members and One Guest $100 each  Non-Members $120

**MAY 2016**

**In the Spirit Of Kihss**

By Martin Gottlieb

Add up the people who count this year’s Peter Kihss Award winner, Dan Sforza, as a mentor and the numbers probably grow from the dozens to the scores and may be even tip into triple figures — not bad for someone who at 45 is a mere pup in Silurian years.

The evidence is there everyday at The Record of North Jersey — known more familiarly as the Bergen Record. To a reporter or two reporters congregate at his desk in some mix of bakery line and kaffeeklatsch, bantering and awaiting instruction, correction and hoped-for pats on the back from an estimable former reporter who served as deputy assignment desk director for a dozen years before being promoted to managing editor in January.

It’s also there in the front-page stories of the interns he invariably takes an interest in and hears from over the years, and at Ramapo College in Mahwah, where hundreds of students have taken his journalism classes since 1995 and received his guidance as faculty advisor to the student newspaper.

That advice at times can be succinct, as one of his mentors, The Record’s new editor Deirdre Sykes, sums up: “be concise and laser-focused, don’t blather when you’ve made your point.” It can also come in lengthy discussions about stories or be transmitted in the course of the personal kindnesses that have helped imbue the Record newsroom with a special collegiality. In the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, when a lot of the staff had no heat or electricity in their homes, Dan was the one who brought in his coffee maker and pods of coffee, tea and cocoa. He deep fried turkeys in the parking lot every New Year’s for the work- ing staff and he chats up his troops when they come by for a helping.

“It’s better to ask questions and listen, rather than to spout out pearls of wisdom,” he said recently. “I find it’s much more effective to help someone reach a desired conclusion than to present a conclusion myself.”

That approach may hold a clue to why his role has spread from editor to teacher to mentor much in the spirit of Peter Kihss. The reporters whose lives he’s touched say that he’s helped them see themselves and trust themselves. That’s often helped them produce their finest work.

“Dan’s even keel, his humor, and his chronic reliability have a calming effect that gives reporters the confidence to do their best work,” observed Shawn Boburg, who benefited from Sforza’s guidance and editing as he broke open the George Washington Bridge scandal and landed two years of sensational scoops exposing systemic dysfunction at the Port Authority.

Chris Maag, a lyrical narrative writer, recalls fretting about whether he could mesh his talents with his new
Bernie Kirsch. projects at this stage in my life. Neverthe
my time and attention. I had no idea that
paintings don’t get done. And I have just
business. If I don’t get into my studio, my
am afraid it has caused me to neglect my
serve the expected two-year term, but I
your president, and originally planned to
you. I have very much enjoyed being
plans great events for the AP.

As the founding director of the AP’s cor
S. Komor to fill one of those vacancies.
year with our Facebook page, is also re
nership to approve at our June meeting.
bership to the board of the

Many members may not be aware that
we have a fund that can provide help to
Silurians as a member. Contact any one of these
and Betsy Wade and George Arzt as new

ANOTHER HELPING HAND
Megan Cerullo, a member, told me that we have a fund that can provide help to fellow Silurians who are in financial need. The Silurian Contingency Fund are held in strictest confidence. Its members have taken on the weekend of our board meetings for years, as our funds permit. Given the current situation now runs in the tens of thousands of dollars, this is a worthy project, indeed!

CHANGES ON THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS
We have some upcoming changes on the board of governors that the members will appreciate at our June meeting. Ralph Blumenthal is stepping down after 15 years of service to the board and will be succeeded by his son, Adam, completing his fulltime position at Baruch College. Barbara Lovenheim, who last year, helped redraft our bylaws and assisted this year with our Facebook page, is also

The mentoring also played a signifi
rational gratification in Dan’s award. He was a
soul mate and go-to guy during my four years as an editor in a dream family. I’ve been fortunate to meet -- his wife, Allison, and his delightful daughters, Lauren, 15, and Charlotte, 12 -- and I know that for all he has developed since he arrived to the Record, it pales beside his devotion to them.

But Dan also represents something

The Record’s reporter Rebecca O’Brien, who was one of the finalists in

Deirdre recalls how Gilbert shared with Dan “her insights, her secrets of the trade, her strict code of ethics, her belief that hard work was at the root of all good stories, her knack for turning a punch in a Page One news break.

“Pat was devoted to Dan’s development as a journalist; he became devoted to her and her principles.”

One lesson Dan learned was to focus on seemingly insignificant details. On one occasion, Gilbert took note of item 27 on a New Jersey Turnpike Authority agenda.

It authorized the hiring of a mortici

Behind it, Gilbert discovered, was a plan to disrupt more than 1,000 bodies from a Potter’s field to make way for an

Looking beyond the Bronx, she found another “ordinary” stories. A holiday cur

Continued from Page 1
news-driven transportation beat. He presented Dan with a deep spreadsheet of ideas and asked which he should at

“Dan was quiet for a few seconds,” he recalls. “Then he said, ‘Just find stor

That was the end of the meeting.”

Chris grasped Dan’s intent. “Behind

We have some upcoming changes on the board of governors that the members will appreciate at our June meeting. Ralph Blumenthal is stepping down after 15 years of service to the board and will be succeeded by his son, Adam, completing his fulltime position at Baruch College. Barbara Lovenheim, who last year, helped redraft our bylaws and assisted this year with our Facebook page, is also re

From Brooklyn to the Bronx to the Duggan Award

Megan Cerullo is the winner of this year’s Dennis Duggan prize, awarded annual
ly to a student at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism who excels at covering ordinary New Yorkers.

At the J-School, the 30-year-old na

Cerullo says she was eager to write about the program because it democratizes a sport traditionally played at “private clubs with membership fees or elite

Looking beyond the Bronx, she found another “ordinary” stories. A holiday cur

Continued on Page 4

PAGE 2
SILURIAN NEWS
MAY 2016
The Silurians Celebrate Journalism At Its Best

Continued from Page 1

In the daily blur of humanity that is New York, millions crowd the subways and sidewalks, offices, bars and apartments, yet people die often alone, unmourned. Sonny Kleinfield was curious about these solitary deaths. Who was this person and what became of all the stuff left behind? Sonny provided the answer in this epic narrative that riveted readers. Piecing together the clues like a detective story, he recreates the death and life of a both prototypical and entirely unique New Yorker.

Merit Newsday, “The 7th Precinct vs. Jack Franqui” by Gus Garcia-Roberts When 26-year-old Jack Franqui, facing misdemeanor charges, handed himself in a holding cell of the Suffolk County Police Department on Jan. 23, 2013, the public was told little — and almost all of it false. Combining through hundreds of pages of previously unreported documents, Gus Garcia-Roberts exposed Franqui’s disturbed history and desperate final hours as he weepingly begged for medical attention and threatened suicide while officers seated nearby ignored him and later covered up their inaction.

Investigative and Public Service Reporting

Medallion The New York Times, “Profiling From Addiction” by Kim Barker Kim Barker exposed a virtually unregulated “housing netherworld” of so-called three-quarter homes that exploits thousands of desperate men and women “recovering from addiction or with nowhere to go.” She fleshed out the story by profiling several residents of homes controlled by an unscrupulous businessman, Yury Baumblit, who allegedly profited from kickbacks and hidden fees on the hundreds of properties he controlled. She exposed the revolving door of tenants, and threatened suicide of one resident who benefited from them.

Merit Newsday, “Hard Knocks” by Jim Baumbach You feel the pain in this extremely well-researched, well-written piece about one of the most important issues — confections — in sports (and beyond) today. It is also a model of investigative and public-service reporting.

Sports Reporting

Medallion Newsday, “Wall Street’s Way” by Charles Levinson This penetrating, deeply reported series of articles goes behind the scenes of Wall Street’s efforts to weaken securities regulation; shines new light on the revolving door between government regulators and the securities industry; and shows how the accounting industry stymied auditing reforms.


Merit The Record, “The Chairman’s Flight” by Shawn Boburg Relentless reporting uncovered the scandal surrounding a sweetheart deal between United Airlines and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey that led to the resignation of the airline’s CEO, the head of the Authority and New Jersey’s Transportation Commissioner.

Science and Health Reporting

Medallion The Record, “After the Miracle” by Lindy Washburn In three meticulously researched, masterfully crafted stories, Washburn explores, in highly personal and touching detail, how a series of modern-day medical “miracles” -- deep-brain stimulation to quell the tremors of Parkinson’s disease; surgery to nip potentially lethal brain aneurysms; immunotherapy for the deadliest form of cancer -- profoundly altered the lives of patients who benefited from them.

Arts and Culture Reporting

Medallion Variety Fair, “Balanchine’s Christmas Miracle” by Laura Jacobs “Balanchine’s Christmas Miracle” is a fresh look at an artistic genius. It reveals George Balanchine’s lifelong emotional attachment to “The Nutcracker,” which began in his boyhood at the Martinsky Theatre in Russia. It also sheds light on the creation of New York City Ballet, the greatest ballet company in America, and its evolution from generation to generation, always buoyed by the dancers’ deep appreciation and affection for Balanchine.

Medallion Vanity Fair, “Might at the Met” by Bob Colacello Written in advance of the opening of the Met Breuer, a new branch of New York’s Metropolitan Museum, Bob Colacello’s article is a deeply reported, sophisticated, and well-timed analysis of the Met’s growing interest in modern and contemporary art. By connecting the dots behind a series of developments that led up to the Breuer, Colacello presents a unique overview of how the collections, boards, and new building projects of the Met, the Whitney, and the Met Breuer are now irreversibly intertwined.

COMMENTARY AND EDITORIALS

Medallion TheStreet.com, columns by Susan Antilla “Watch what Wall Street does, not what it says,” Antilla enjoins her readers and, heeding her own counsel, she does just that in a string of columns, built on solid reporting and trenchant analysis, that expose the duplicities practiced by unscrupulous stockbrokers to intentionally mislead and, ultimately, fleece their clients.

Merit The Record, Editorials by Alfred P. Doblin Alfred Doblin writes meaningful and impactful editorials that offer readers keen-eyed perspective on a broad swath of local issues, always with clarity, reason and a strong sense of decency. His sharply critical examination of a proposed deal to build a new Hudson River tunnel, for example, or his artful takedown of a Republican congressman’s opposition to the party running gay candidates.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Breaking News

Medallion The Journal News, “Metro-North Crash in Valhalla” by Alfred Conto, Frank Becerra Jr., Seth Harrison & Carucha L. Meuse Conto, a photo assistant at The Journal News, was off duty on Feb. 3, 2015, when he got word that a commuter train had struck a car, resulting in a fire and explosion. A volunteer firefighter, Conto was one of the first on the scene. After helping with rescue operations, he used his iPhone to take pictures and email them to the newsroom. Staff photographers
The Silurians Celebrate Journalism At Its Best

Continued from Page 3

Becerra and Harrison soon joined him, resulting in an outstanding package of photographs that led coverage in The Journal News and wound up being used by newspapers and TV stations around the country.

Merit The Record, “A Driver’s Remorse” by Tariq Zehawi

Looking beyond the obvious when he photographed the aftermath of a fatal accident in which a truck struck a car, Zehawi focused instead on this revealing moment when the truck driver, overcome by what had happened, suddenly fell to his knees in the middle of the street.

Feature Photography

Medallion Newsday, “Dunia’s Smile” by Thomas A. Ferrara

Despite a horrendous attack by chimpanzees in his native Congo two years ago that ripped his face apart, eight-year-old Dunia Sibomana of New Jersey is still able to smile while awaiting rare and complicated facial reconstructive surgery at Stony Brook University Hospital. As Dunia’s surgeons laugh with Jennifer Crean, whose family has been hosting the boy since he was brought to the U.S. by the Smile Rescue Fund for Kids to provide a portrait of how photographers used to greet those reunions with their loved ones.

Sports Photography


With no other horse in sight, American Pharoah is all sinew and strength as he comes flying home on June 6, 2015 to win the Belmont Stakes and the first Triple Crown since 1978. Underscoring the challenge of photographing horse races, photographer Williams and his camera were about 50 feet apart when he fired it. He had set it just above ground level and, because of his former bodyguard, challenging his point of crediting Dan’s influence in his work.

In the Spirit Of Keith

Continued from Page 2

mixed.” Dan recalled recently, “that they wore each other’s coats home, not realizing the mistake until they reached for their house keys.

That was a lesson in methodical questioning and building momentum during an interview that I’ll never forget.”

By the time he became an editor in 2004, he had amassed more than 350 front-page bylines and a host of awards. During my tenure, Deidre, then the assignment desk director, and Dan were an unbeatable, indefatigable team, guiding their editors and dozens of reporters who cover North Jersey’s 80-plus towns, Trenton, Washington, and a host of specialty beats. Their edits on the stories of the day were also lessons in the writing of the stories of tomorrow, not just for newbies, but for skilled reporters like Boburg.

“He was a reporter of accomplish-

Achilhowker delves into the uniquely New York world of the leading Republican candidate, profiling the people who work for him (this chief operating officer is his wife Jennifer), challenging his claims of business success, and showing how he turns everything he does into some kind of victory. The story shows how glamorous life can be, but also how he yearned for glamour—can overcome any gritty reality.

Merit Vanity Fair, “Pope Francis at Ground Zero” by Max Abelson

Abelson delves into the uniquely New York world of the leading Republican candidate, profiling the people who work for him (this chief operating officer is his wife Jennifer), challenging his claims of business success, and showing how he turns everything he does into some kind of victory. The story shows how glamorous life can be, but also how he yearned for glamour—can overcome any gritty reality.

Merit Vanity Fair, “Pope Francis at Ground Zero” by Max Abelson

In this brief essay, Elie uses the Pope’s visit to the 9/11 Memorial to reflect on the importance to New York of the beloved former president who even the Holy Father visits the site more as a pilgrim than as a leader of the church. The visit makes clear “that even in an apparently secular city people still conceive of grief and loss in frankly religious terms.”

In this brief essay, Elie uses the Pope’s visit to the 9/11 Memorial to reflect on the importance to New York of the beloved former president who even the Holy Father visits the site more as a pilgrim than as a leader of the church. The visit makes clear “that even in an apparently secular city people still conceive of grief and loss in frankly religious terms.”

Merit Vanity Fair, “Pope Francis at Ground Zero” by Max Abelson

In this brief essay, Elie uses the Pope’s visit to the 9/11 Memorial to reflect on the importance to New York of the beloved former president who even the Holy Father visits the site more as a pilgrim than as a leader of the church. The visit makes clear “that even in an apparently secular city people still conceive of grief and loss in frankly religious terms.”

Merit Vanity Fair, “Pope Francis at Ground Zero” by Max Abelson

In this brief essay, Elie uses the Pope’s visit to the 9/11 Memorial to reflect on the importance to New York of the beloved former president who even the Holy Father visits the site more as a pilgrim than as a leader of the church. The visit makes clear “that even in an apparently secular city people still conceive of grief and loss in frankly religious terms.”

Merit Vanity Fair, “Pope Francis at Ground Zero” by Max Abelson

In this brief essay, Elie uses the Pope’s visit to the 9/11 Memorial to reflect on the importance to New York of the beloved former president who even the Holy Father visits the site more as a pilgrim than as a leader of the church. The visit makes clear “that even in an apparently secular city people still conceive of grief and loss in frankly religious terms.”
BY GRACE LICHTENSTEIN

I left Chicago on an overnight train for Denver. When I awoke, the sun was just rising and cows were grazing in the land near my windows. The wind was blowing in my face, and I decided that I would return to the city of Denver. I grabbed my portable typewriter (I had rarely seen any such device), and I decided to write the story of what I had seen.

The important thing, Bill said, was to treat myself right; the west was so huge and the bag motels I would be glad when I found a place doing business. It was a strip club.

I managed to sample just about everything. But skiers were mostly like mine in the West were comprised of Capital, they don't happen for a few years as well. And then I saw a policeman and realized that this was actually so—and was anybody out there who thought everything revolves around them. Perhaps the greatest upset in the intermountain west.

The important thing, Bill said, was to treat myself right; the west was so huge and the bag motels I would be glad when I found a place doing business. It was a strip club.

I managed to sample just about everything. But skiers were mostly like mine in the West were comprised of Capital, they don't happen for a few years as well. And then I saw a policeman and realized that this was actually so—and was anybody out there who thought everything revolves around them. Perhaps the greatest upset in the intermountain west.

The important thing, Bill said, was to treat myself right; the west was so huge and the bag motels I would be glad when I found a place doing business. It was a strip club.

I managed to sample just about everything. But skiers were mostly like mine in the West were comprised of Capital, they don't happen for a few years as well. And then I saw a policeman and realized that this was actually so—and was anybody out there who thought everything revolves around them. Perhaps the greatest upset in the intermountain west.
When Mike Quill Made Me the Story

BY EDWARD SILBERFARB

January marked the 50th anniversary of the transit strike that crippled New York City, launched the bedeviled administration of Mayor John V. Lindsay, and provided center stage for one of the city’s most colorful and provocative public figures, Michael J. Quill. My own involvement with Quill began several decades earlier.

Mike Quill, a fiery, overstuffed lep- rechaun from County Kerry, started as a “ticket chopper” (the fare collection mechanism then in use on the IRT), and rose to become president of Local 100 of the Transport Workers Union in New York City. He had a thick Irish brogue (some said it was fake) that he used effective- ly in denouncing management, the press and politicians, and in winning favor with his rank-and-file members. They were the subway motormen, conductors, track walkers, mechanics, change booth clerks, porters, bus drivers, in fact any- one paid by the hour who had anything to do with running the City’s subway trains and buses.

It was December of 1961. The union’s contract expired at the end of the year, and the biennial strike threat chorus had begun. “No contract, no work!” was the cry. The drumbeat would grow louder until New Year’s Eve. Traditionally, set- tlements were reached at midnight. I had been covering the 1961 tran- sit contract negotiations for the New York Herald Tribune. Then came the mass meeting of union members to au- thorize a strike. It was in Manhattan Center at Eighth Avenue and 34th Street. Some 10,000 screaming transit workers crowded into the auditorium. I sat at the press table in front of the podium. Quill began with a few incendiary remarks to build the mood.

Then he produced a copy of the day’s Herald Tribune, and cried an unsigned editorial. “I’ll tell you what it says,” he shouted. “You didn’t read it. No work- ing man reads that newspaper. It says Michael Quill wants a strike so he can take over the Central Labor Council (a federation of all New York City unions).”

That’s a lie. That was written by Ed- ward J. Silberfarb (“No! Boo! Hiss!”). You know what we’re going to do? We’re going to take up a collection and send him to jail school. “(Yeah! Quill for jail!)

The shouting and hissing and boo- ing roared down from the rear and from above like an avalanche. I was flanked at the press table by The New York Times and the Associated Press, and I won- dered if I could count on them if things got out of hand. Better yet, I thought, would be to slide under the table.

I didn’t have to. The uproar subsid- ed. Quill turned his attention to other matters, like calling for a strike vote. A thunder of “yea’s” and a strike was au- thorized if no settlement was reached. The meeting ended, and I rushed to a phone booth. The Trib was only seven blocks away, but first edition deadline had arrived, so I had to phone in my sto- ry. Then I walked to the office.

In the city room I drew some amused looks, but the night city editor was not amused. “Where the hell have you been?” I phoned in my story. I was on dead- line.

“You didn’t say that Quill attacked you in front of 10,000 transit workers.”

“I didn’t want to put myself in the sto- ry.”

“Well, you’re in it. The A.P. led with you and Quill. Sit down and rewrite it for the late city.”

While I pecked at the typewriter, and squired at having to tell a first-person story, the editors argued about an editori- al follow-up to the evening’s events and to the editorial, which I had not written, but which Quill had used to arouse his followers.

At first they planned a flame-thrower response, denouncing Quill as a bully and a demagogue who abused the work- ing press. Then calm prevailed and they agreed to say only that the person who wrote that editorial did go to a journal- ism school, but the Trib would accept Mr. Quill’s generous offer and use the money for a scholarship for some wor- thy applicant.

The TWU and the Transit Authority reached a contract agreement after an all-night “cliff hanger” negotiation New Year’s Eve. Four years later they really did strike and paralyze the city. Quill tore up a court injunction to end the strike, said the judge could “drop dead in his black robe,” and was thrown into jail. Suffering from a heart ailment, he was moved to a hospital, and died two weeks after the strike ended. He never became the head of the Central Labor Council. The scholarship money? It nev- er came.

Somebody Else’s Great Idea

BY LEIDA SNOW

A nyone ever take one of your ideas and pass it off as theirs? It’s happened to me, so I can definitely empathize with Maria Dahva- na Headley. Her book, “The Year of Yes,” was published in 2006. Publishers Weekly called it “sheer chick fluff, but amusing.” One newspaper said it was the “poin- gnant and hilarious” story of how Headley dated anyone who asked her out during the year and, “how she found true love.”

Tracee Sioux may have come up with the idea on her own, or maybe — know- ing that you can’t copyright an idea or a book title — she just grabbed Headley’s and came up with “The Year of Yes” in 2012 to answer the question: “What if I did everything my Soul told me to do?” Her book is about aligning “with our Soul’s purpose,” so “the Universe made sweet love to us.”

Flash forward to a new book by Shonda Rhimes titled — you guessed it — “The Year of Yes.” Rhimes, the award-winning creator and executive producer of TV’s Grey’s Anatomy and Scandal, has writing creds, and — may- be — she came up with the idea to spend a year accepting any and all invitations and facing whatever she was afraid of.

The advance public relations from the publisher called this “poin- gnant and hilarious.” Sound familiar?

I figure we’ll be looking at books with that title every few years. Publishers and editors seem to like it — in fact, they may have been involved with choosing the title and/or the idea of these efforts. And it’s a swell theme.

How about a year in which the au- thor decided to say yes to everything her partner asks for, including strange trips or sexual acts? Or 12 months of saying yes to everything her child asks for, in- cluding permission for activities beyond her age group? Or saying yes to her mother’s requests, including spending a whole lot more time with her? Or always saying yes to her boss? Or agreeing to all telemarkers’ offers? The options go to infinity.

Wait a minute, though. In researching “The Year of Yes,” I came upon a cycle of books titled “But Enough About Me.” Nancy Miller published hers in 2002. Jancee Dunn came out with hers in 2006, and Burt Reynolds’ memoir was slated for late 2015. I guess that’s the trick: find a title you like and make sure no one’s used it for a few years. Don’t go for anything too well known, like Love and Peace, and you’re home free.
It’s the lucky man or woman who finds the job he or she loves. Myron Rushetzky found that job. But the most remarkable part of Myron’s saga is that the job loved him back.

For almost 40 years Myron held various staff slots at the New York Post, including the very visible city desk assistant, becoming the informal heart and soul of the paper. The essence of this was a lifelong affair with the often-gruff and manic stable of reporters, photographers and editors was Myron’s practice of sending everyone birthday or anniversary cards. And in a trade where deadlines mean everything, Myron’s cards always arrived on time.

“A Postie once told me that for years he and his wife (he’s now on his #3!) thought that I was off by a day in sending my anniversary card to them—until one year they went back and looked at their mail schedule and realized they were celebrating their anniversary on the wrong day and I had the right day,” he said.

A one-time wireroom clerk, Rose Salisky, went on maternity leave and had a daughter and son, Colette and Lucien. They became the first children of the more than 200 recipients to get Myron’s cards. Years later, her children, now in school, Rose called the Post with a story tip. “Don’t say I retired” — Myron suspended the mailing of cards but keeps the tradition alive via e-mails.

“Myron is a graduate of City College and, according to LinkedIn, dabbled in early jobs — as a stock boy at the Century 21 department store and as office manager for P.R. Man Mortimer Matz. Myron last spoke with Spellman, his mentor, on Dec. 31, 1976. “I was on vacation and called to wish him a Happy New Year and remind him I’d be back to work on Monday, January 3. Bobby died in the early hours of Saturday, January 1. There was no Sunday edition at that time, so I never got to see the devastating reaction of people coming in on Monday and first learning that Bobby had died over the weekend.”

Reporters who served on the paper over the years are known as “Posties” and the whole ragtag cadre has become known as “Post Nation.” And of course they grow old, encounter misfortune, pass away.

Myron has assumed the role of noting the demise of “the Nation” that it’s time to visit for Frank E. Campbell’s.

When former reporter Margie Feinberg was in declining health, Myron alerted the Nation to visit her hospital room. She died without any family, and Myron then helped arrange a memorial service and the shiva, the Jewish mourning ritual.

Far from lugubrious, Rushetzky also “does” weddings, book publications, retirements. Aside from emails, he checks the modern media. He also has been a stalwart Siluriian for many years.

Oh, by the way, he also excelled in his job, a protégé of the late Bobby Spellman. Here is an example of Myron in motion:

“Yes, I worked for Bobby Spellman, ‘God rest his soul.’ Bobby called me ‘Abracadabra’ because with me on the floor, he could reassign other copy people (like Steve Cuozzo or Phil Mushnick or Beth Seymour or Laurel Gross, etc.) to other departments and confidently know that I could cover.

“One hot summer day in 1976 Bobby told me to go up to the Associated Press offices in Rockefeller Center to pick up a hard glossy copy of a photo that an editor wanted (again, this was 1976) and bring back to the office to use for transportation, and be back in an hour!” literally ran from 210 South Street to the East Broadway subway station. I took the subway to Rockefeller Center. I ran through the subway station and through Rockefeller Center to the elevator, rode it up, while running in place, to the AP offices. I burst through the opening elevator doors and ran to the photo department (I had made regular pick-ups there, so I knew where to go.) and cleaned out the New Post coop. I ran back to the elevator, rode it down, running in place. I ran back to the subway. I ran back from the subway to the Post’s newsroom at 210 South Street and handed Bobby the envelope. 65 minutes. Bobby had told me to be back in an hour. I felt like I had let him down.”

He also has had his share of newspaper excitement, including helping to track down reporters after a John Doe who has night serial killer Son of Sam was arrested. With the Post under the management of foreigners with distinctly non-New York accents, Myron also had an amusing story to tell. Also late at night, a bulletin on the wires described a fatal fire in a brothel in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Editor Roger Wood and Metropolitan Editor Steve Dunleavy, both from across the pond and beyond, were at a Christmas party in Westchester County for Rupert Murdoch’s supermamarktet tabloid The Star.

“Roger called to check in. Since he and Steve were at a party, I’m guessing they had consumed some alcohol. Steve started instructing me to call various reporters, who proved to be unreachable and Dunleavy’s intensity rose. Finally I realized what was going on and after letting him rant, I told him that the fatal brothel fire was in Amsterdam, Netherlands, not on Amsterdam Avenue. So —

“Take a moment and think about this: I was a rewriteman (I had made regular pick-ups there, so I knew where to go.) and cleaned out the New Post coop. I ran back to the elevator, rode it down, running in place. I ran back to the subway. I ran back from the subway to the Post’s newsroom at 210 South Street and handed Bobby the envelope. 65 minutes. Bobby had told me to be back in an hour. I felt like I had let him down.”

He also has had his share of newspaper excitement, including helping to track down reporters after a John Doe who has night serial killer Son of Sam was arrested. With the Post under the management of foreigners with distinctly non-New York accents, Myron also had an amusing story to tell. Also late at night, a bulletin on the wires described a fatal fire in a brothel in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Editor Roger Wood and Metropolitan Editor Steve Dunleavy, both from across the pond and beyond, were at a Christmas party in Westchester County for Rupert Murdoch’s supermamarktet tabloid The Star.

“Roger called to check in. Since he and Steve were at a party, I’m guessing they had consumed some alcohol. Steve started instructing me to call various reporters, who proved to be unreachable and Dunleavy’s intensity rose. Finally I realized what was going on and after letting him rant, I told him that the fatal brothel fire was in Amsterdam, Netherlands, not on Amsterdam Avenue. So —
Lots of Pages To Turn

One hundred and fifty people let their lunch get cold as they listened to fellow-journalist Robert Caro spin his fascinating tales about two of the 20th century’s most important figures.

“My books are about power,” said Caro in his talk at the National Arts Club in April. Speaking before one of the largest audiences in Silurians’ history, he detailed the background as well as the nitty-gritty work in producing his books about Robert Moses and Lyndon Johnson.

Caro burst upon the national literary scene in 1974 with “The Power Broker,” the biography and critique of Moses, perhaps the most significant urban planner in United States history. And then, in 1982, he published the first of his projected five volumes on Johnson.

Just the sheer numbers of words fascinated not only the Silurians, but Caro himself. And he credited one of his early newspaper editors with helping him to learn how to dig, to not take things for granted. That advice?

“Turn every page.”

It was a phrase he used often in his talk, and the advice still makes sense. When he was rummaging through hundreds of boxes of notes and letters at Johnson’s Texas library, he came across one that was innocuously marked.

Still, Caro opened it and came across a letter from Johnson’s paramour, Alice Glass. It was simple advice: at a time when those around him were telling him to run for the Senate, she told him to run for the House of Representatives. The rest is history. To Caro it symbolized the fact that those three words he had heard years before, “Turn every page,” worked quite well.

Doing the kind of archival work that his research demanded was a chore he could not do alone. He asked his wife, Ina, to stand before the luncheon attendees. She not only helped him attend to the Silurians luncheon. She was one of the first women police officers to patrol New York’s streets.

Caro opened his talk the night of New York Newspaper Women’s Club Ball. The organization’s president, the gritty feminist reporter Emma Bugbee of the Trib, is dressed to have a sip of the drink of the day, perhaps the Bee’s Knees (honey and homemade gin). Emma started at the New York Tribune in 1910, after graduating from Barnard, and was still there when some of us Silurians worked for it on 41st Street. By then, she was famed for her coverage of Eleanor Roosevelt. Emma’s club, founded two years before the Society of the Silurians, is now known as the Newswomen’s Club. It too has its headquarters at the National Arts Club, and the president is Toni Reinhold of Reuters.

Robert Caro speaking to a sellout crowd of 150 people at the April Silurians luncheon.

—Gerald Eskenazi

Law Enforcement Is in His Genes

Brooklyn District Attorney Ken Thompson’s first words before the Silurians March luncheon were not about his initiatives for handling low-level crime, nor even about his new programs that have made an impact on bringing illegal guns to the city.

Rather, Thompson paid homage to his mother in speaking at the March luncheon.

“I’m standing here before you thanks to Clara Thompson,” he said. “She raised three children alone. She was a female police officer when that was rare. She was one of the first women police officers to patrol New York’s streets.”

Thompson has been at the highest levels of law-enforcement. A former assistant prosecutor in the Eastern District of New York, he delivered the opening statement for the prosecution in the notorious Abner Louima beating and torture case. Thompson also served as a special assistant to the Treasury Department and also founded his own firm.

But now, as the Brooklyn D.A., his far-ranging concerns include breaking up criminal activity such as the “iron pipeline,” which he described as bringing in illegal guns from the South, and using wiretaps to prevent crimes.

“In my two years, we’ve been able to take out three gun-smuggling rings—550 guns,” he said.

Equal important to Thompson is justice for the innocent, and he has created the country’s largest team to look into possible wrong convictions. Another program, Begin Again, helps those with open warrants warrants, along with those that aids young offenders, in certain cases, reach a resolution without a criminal record.

If there is a theme to his tenure, it probably could be summed up with this statement: “As I follow in my mother’s footsteps, I’m determined there will be justice for all.”

—Gerald Eskenazi