

# Silurian News

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DONALD G. McNEIL Jr.  
Times science and health  
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Covid-19 and vaccines  
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## Lifetime honors for Kalb Brothers

BY MORT SHEINMAN

Instead of covering history in the making, their accustomed preoccupation, the Brothers Kalb — Bernard and Marvin — made a kind of history of their own in December, putting an exclamation point on two lives of remarkable journalistic accomplishment.

On the afternoon of Dec. 16, before a Zoom audience of some 160 Silurians, family, friends, former colleagues, contemporaries and classmates (such as this one), the Kalbs became the first dual winners of the Silurians' Lifetime Achievement Award, an honor that goes back more than half a century to 1969 when Walter Cronkite became its first recipient.

It was an occasion to be savored, filled with warmth, affection and, for the many journalists, a reminder of why they were drawn to the profession and to principles of impartiality and truthfulness that kept their work honorable. When Bernard explained what it was that drove him to work as a journalist for 78 years, he spoke of "a lust in yourself to know what is going on."

In introducing them, Silurians president Michael Serrill lauded them as "two titans of 20th century journalism" and second vice president David Margolick recalled how impressed he was as a youngster listening to these "voices of civilization and sophistication" on CBS News.

"There was nothing pompous or off-putting about them," Margolick said, adding that they inspired him to become a journalist.

There were tributes from longtime CBS anchor Dan Rather, who called the Kalbs "a credit to their heritage" and "a credit to our country." Charles Sennott, a co-founder of Report for America, which fosters local journalism, and Nancy Gibbs, former editor of Time magazine (2013-2017), and one of Marvin Kalb's successors as director of the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government also lionized them.

"There couldn't be better role models for the craft of journalism," Sennott said.

Claudia Kalb, Bernard's daughter, recalled her father starting dinnertime conversations by asking, "What's the headline?" She spoke of appreciating her father's endless curiosity in his worldwide postings and how close her father remained with her uncle Marvin.

The brothers were visibly moved by all the encomiums and reminiscences, though Bernard joked that "I had no idea there were so many press agents on our payroll." Marvin told a story that captured their principled journalism. He recalled how as a teenager he edited a summertime newspaper at Lido

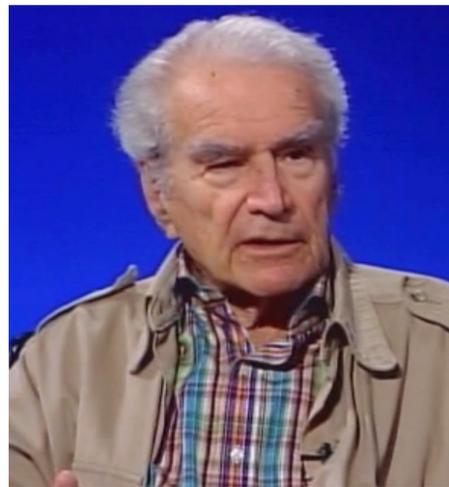
Beach on Long Island that featured photographs of vacationers in bathing suits. One man slipped him a \$50 bill to make sure his daughter's photograph appeared in the next issue. Uncertain what to do, Marvin called his older brother, who told him to return the money.

"That," said Marvin, "was my first lesson in Bernie Kalb ethics."

Both Kalbs are native New Yorkers. They each attended public schools and each is a graduate of City College. They worked together at CBS News and at NBC News, and collaborated on two books. For the most part, however, they carved out discrete and distinguished careers.

I first met Marvin in 1950, when I was a freshman at CCNY and he was a senior. (Well, we're both seniors now, super-seniors actually. Marvin turned 90 last June, the "baby brother" to Bernard, who'll be 99 in February.) He was the sports editor of The Campus, City College's student newspaper, and had a press-box view of one of the most dramatic sports stories of that year: the unprecedented double-championship victory of the school's basketball team in the NCAA and NIT tournaments. I was lucky to be a new kid on his staff, to watch him work and learn.

Kalb, a rangy six-footer, full of energy and blessed with a deep baritone and easy sense of humor, cut an impressive



BERNARD KALB



MARVIN KALB

figure. He reminded more than one fellow student of a young Abe Lincoln. As a 16-year-old freshman, I was in awe.

The euphoria over the basketball players' exploits lasted until the following season, when CCNY was revealed to be one of many schools involved in a nationwide gambling scandal in which players were paid to shave points. The episode tarnished everything that happened earlier and taught Kalb something vital to journalism: the need for healthy skepticism.

"For the rest of my life, this basketball scandal would taint my memory of what was otherwise a rich and rewarding col-

lege experience," Kalb wrote in a 2013 article in The Atlantic, "and it also taught me important lessons in journalism helpful many decades later in my coverage of wars and political upheavals."

He warned against being "a cheerleader with a typewriter," and said if more news organizations had used "a dash of skepticism" when reporting on the activities of government "we might have been able to avoid Vietnam and Watergate."

Kalb's career has been a testament to having learned that lesson well. Following his graduation from CCNY, he stud-

Continued on Page 4

## Sizing-Up-Trump Sequel Is All in the Family

BY DAVID MARGOLICK

It was two weeks after the election, and Clyde Haberman, formerly and formidably of the *New York Times*, asked Maggie Haberman, very presently and conspicuously of the *Times*, to assess the state of Donald J. Trump.

She made short work of her father's first batch of questions. Trump would

leave the White House once his loss was certified, though not without crying "fraud" on the way out. Yes, he'd box Biden in with various executive orders; maybe he'd go to war with Iran. But predicting just what the guy would do was impossible, even to perhaps his foremost chronicler, someone who'd followed him since her days in City Hall. At least one thing, though, was clear: his departure

would be "very, very ugly."

Prognostication is cheap, though, and as polite as he is, Clyde has never been one to settle for softballs, even with his own daughter at the plate. So he quickly pivoted to more titillating stuff, while understanding, surely, how unlikely it was that Maggie would dish. Kindness, even solicitude, were his cudgels.

"We are a journalism group, so let me ask a couple of journalism questions," he began gently. "I don't know to what degree you can be completely forthright on some of them but the first one would inevitably be your own relationship with Trump. Can you discuss at all how accessible he has been to you, or maybe remains to you? I mean, you do have extraordinary stories, so presumably you are talking to some people, and..."

It was a long wind-up, seemingly designed to lull her into at least a minor indiscretion. It didn't work. In fact, she said, before he finished, "I am talking to some people but I would never say who those people are, whether it was him..."

"...fair enough," he conceded.  
"...or somebody else," she continued. "And because we are a journalism group I assume this group would understand

Continued on Page 4



Father-and-daughter news duo Clyde Haberman and Maggie Haberman were guests at the Fall Silurian Session.

## President's Report

Dear Silurians:

So long, Donald Trump. We're not sorry to see you go.

It is a commonplace fact of journalism that much of what we do on a daily basis is simply report what people say--politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen. Sometimes what they say is of dubious credibility, and our stories point that out by quoting other people offering a counterpoint. Until four years ago we were rarely forced to take responsibility ourselves for deciding whether a statement was true or false. Then Donald Trump came along.

According to the Washington Post's Fact Checker feature, the number of lies told by Donald Trump during his time in office approaches 25,000. And the lying took on bizarre dimensions after the Nov. 3 vote, with Trump declaring ten times daily that he won the election, that the vote count was fraudulent, even after the votes in swing states were certified as accurate, often by Republican officials. One recent day Trump made 15 misstatements of fact in just ten minutes.

Trump's constant lying—and that of many of his fellow Republicans worried about antagonizing Trump's loyal base—has put the press in an awkward position. We can't go find a Democrat or an expert to contradict him every time he tells a lie. And what the President says is news by definition, so we have to report it. But to maintain OUR credibility we are forced to pepper our stories with such phrases as: "...the President claimed, without evidence..."; "the president falsely asserted..." and a dozen similar warnings to our readers that what you are reading is fiction.

Then, of course, comes the President shouting that, no, it is we who are lying, that we are the "fake news" and "enemies of the people" whose sole purpose is to bring him down.

This daily fight with the holder of the highest office in the land has been enervating and exhausting for those who populate our newsrooms. And it has done permanent damage to our profession, assuming that many of those 70 million people who voted for Trump believe what he says about journalists and journalism. As a story in *The Atlantic* put it recently, "Trump..., capitalizing on 'truth decay' and diminishing trust in sources of factual information..., exploited them more effectively than anyone else has in American history."

On Jan. 20, the nightmare—for the press and for the nation—will finally end. That doesn't mean the press and the Biden Administration will always see things the same way. Maggie Haberman, our guest at a Silurians Zoom program in November, noted that reporters were already complaining that President-elect Joe Biden was not making himself available enough for the usual press conference interrogation. But we all hope that those phrases "without evidence" and "falsely claimed" will, for the most part, be put back in the box.

Maggie, interviewed by her father Clyde, pulled in a record number of Zoom watchers. (See a story on that event in this issue, and go to our YouTube channel on Silurians.org to listen to the whole program.) We also attracted a large audience for the presentation of our Lifetime Achievement award to Bernard and Marvin Kalb on Dec. 16, and expect the same when we host Don McNeil, health reporter for the *New York Times* and expert on all things Covid, at our Jan. 13 meeting.

By the way, we moved that program up a week so it wouldn't conflict with the Biden inauguration, which most of us will watch with great relief as our presidential tormentor fades into the background.

Stay safe.  
Michael Serrill  
President



# KAMALA HARRIS CHOICE RECALLS AN ILL-ADVISED ASSIGNMENT

BY CAROL LAWSON

For women like me, the night of July 19, 1984 triggered an explosion of joy and hope. It was the historic night when Geraldine Ferraro accepted the Democratic nomination for vice president of the United States. She was Walter Mondale's choice for running mate, the first woman named to a national ticket. (Kamala Harris, whose nomination set off this chain of memories, was the third, though she was the first black woman.)

For legions of women like me who had seen their careers diminished by sex discrimination and had fought endless battles to crush it, the thrill of the moment was electric. My heart burst with excitement, my eyes overflowed with tears.

But my exhilaration didn't last long. The next morning when I arrived at my desk in the Style department of the *New York Times*, my editor gave me an assignment that completely destroyed my euphoria. She wanted me to go to Queens to interview Ferraro's hairdresser.

Her hairdresser? What a throwback! When did the *Times* ever interview the barber of a man running for President or Vice President, particularly on the day after he was nominated — as if his hair was his most important qualification?

I tried to persuade my editor that this assignment was a bad idea — a dumb idea, really — but she was adamant: "This is your assignment," she said.

The editor assigned Bill Cunningham, the *Times*' famous fashion photographer, to go with me to shoot the hairdresser. Bill's dim view of this assignment matched mine, but he went along. Al-



GERALDINE FERRARO

though he was known for traveling all over Manhattan on his bicycle, Bill also knew the ins and outs of the subway system and was able to navigate our journey deep into Queens.

We found the hairdresser's tiny salon in a quiet neighborhood of Queens. Our arrival surprised and puzzled him. He couldn't understand why we were there — just as Bill and I couldn't. Whenever I asked a question, he answered with a few non-informative words: "Mrs. Ferraro comes here," or "I cut her hair."

Soon Bill and I were ready for the long trip back to Manhattan. At the office, I told my editor that I didn't have a story. She insisted that I write one.

Somehow I wrote enough to satisfy her, but I followed up by writing something else: a letter to Arthur Gelb, the managing editor, to say that an article

about Ferraro's hairdresser at this historic moment for women would be a big mistake. It would make *The Times* look foolish.

To Arthur's credit, he consulted not his male masthead colleagues but the group I called the Front Wall, the row of secretaries who sat in front of the masthead editors' offices. The verdict of these women was unanimous: responding to Ferraro's historic nomination with an article about her hairdresser was embarrassing.

Arthur killed the story.

Which brings me to Kamala Harris. Thirty-six years later, women are again celebrating the nomination of a woman to be vice president of the United States on the Democratic ticket. But this time journalists are writing about her professional accomplishments, not her hair.

# JONATHAN DIENST HONORED WITH PETER KIHSS AWARD

BY TONY GUIDA

On the night of Tuesday September 15, Jonathan Dienst was burning up the phone lines to his sources at the NYPD and FBI chasing information about a Queens man arrested in a house brimming with explosives. Not for one of his investigative reports, but to help a colleague enrich her story of the arrest for Channel 4's 11PM news. The next night: Dienst spent a good part of it sharing professional advice with a class of aspiring journalists.

Snapshots of those two evenings might as well be X-rays. They reveal the essential Dienst: tenacious reporter, dedicated mentor. What they don't show is that he appears to have been born for both roles. As a result, Dienst was honored with the Silurians' annual Peter Kihss award, given to a journalist with an outstanding career but also one known for mentoring younger or newer colleagues.

"Dienst," in German, is a masculine noun meaning "service" or "duty." Jonathan's first glimpse of how he might render service came from horrific television images of an airliner blown apart by terrorists. Pan Am flight 103. December 1988. Dienst was 20. Two of his Colgate classmates died in the mournful sky over



JONATHAN DIENST

Lockerbie Scotland.

Through that winter, Dienst binged on the work of investigative journalists sifting through the wreckage of 270 lives. Eventually, their stories exposed failures by the U.S. State Department leading up to the catastrophe and Pan Am's mendacity in its wake. "A great service," Dienst called it. "Heroic," too. He saw his future and embraced it.

Now, as chief investigator for WNBC and a frequent contributor to NBC News, Dienst has crafted a distinguished reputation as a scrupulous and relentless

reporter. He is also a pillar of the WNBC intern program providing nourishment for cubs hoping to be bears.

On the terrorism beat, his work includes deep dives into the two attacks on the World Trade Center as well as plots to bomb the Federal Reserve Bank, Times Square, and fuel lines at JFK airport.

The Dienst menu also offers a special in political corruption. An excellent choice when one's beat includes New Jersey, a banquet of turpitude even before the place became a State. Its first colonial governor, Lord Cornbury, fed a rapacious appetite for other people's money on a steady diet of bribes and embezzlement.

One Garden State mayor went to prison on the strength of Dienst's excavations. And his exhaustive probe into Senator Robert Torricelli's misdeeds forced him to abandon his run for re-election. Tips of the Dienst iceberg that also helped sink two former NYPD detectives, an FBI agent, a Brooklyn judge, a Bronx city councilman, Jeanine Pirro and Bernie Kerek. There's plenty more on the Dienst resumé, but you get the idea.

It is worthy of note that on the afternoon between the two snapshots described above, Jonathan Dienst accepted

# Television Reporting Veteran Tries Brushing Away Hostility to Immigrants



Former television news reporter Betsy Ashton spent months painting immigrants living in and around New York City in an effort to highlight their courage and their contributions to their adopted homeland.

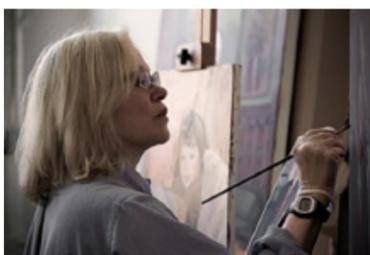
BY BETSY ASHTON

By the beginning of 2017, I had had enough.

Our new president, Donald Trump, continued to claim immigrants coming from south of the border were “bringing drugs, crime. They’re rapists.” At best, he claimed, all immigrants were “stealing our jobs.” When he banned Muslims, even war refugees who had helped our troops in Syria and Afghanistan, and his admirers cheered what I knew from solid news reports to be lies, I felt that I had to do something.

Living and working in Long Island City, Queens, in the borough with the country’s highest concentration of immigrants, in a city where 52 percent of businesses were owned by immigrants, it seemed that I had to help tell the truth about people I saw every day, to lessen the fear about why they came here and whether they took jobs or made a contribution.

But I was retired from my nearly two decades as a television news reporter, was far removed from the deadlines of newsrooms and challenges of nailing down the truth in words and film. Indeed, I was enjoying a return to an art career I had abandoned years earlier, and was busy painting commissioned portraits



BETSY ASHTON

of and for the rich and accomplished. For someone who loves pushing oil paint around tautly stretched linen, I was focusing on how posture, the position of hands, the turn of a mouth, a glance, and the arch of a brow reveal character and soul.

I decided that others — working journalists — could compile the facts and numbers and tell some stories, but maybe, just maybe, I could use my art to humanize the ordinary immigrants who live here.

There is something special about sketching a person while interviewing them in their home or workplace, watching their eyes as they tell me their story, catching a smile that reveals a passion, studying repeated gestures of hands that almost scream, “This is who I am.”

At first, finding subjects was easy. Edilson Rigo managed the espresso bar that I visited on the five-block commute to my studio. He readily agreed to pose and tell me his immigration, story. After the eighth bloody robbery at a pizza parlor they owned in Sao Paulo, Brazil, they closed up and moved to the safer countryside. But chef Eddie was young, loved cities, and posted online to see if anyone needed “a pizza man” in New York. Someone did and sponsored him. He has since opened and run several cafés and coffee bars, become a citizen, and suffered the pandemic lockdown with the rest of us. His latest café in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, is “temporarily” closed. But he’s always been wildly bullish on America.

“When you come here and see everyone interacting and building this country, it’s a beautiful thing,” he said. “We have to keep it this way.”

Advised to paint 18 portraits — the number needed for a solo art show — I sought subjects from many countries, faiths, and cultures. Some were very close to me: Polish-born nurse Beata Szpakowicz Kombel, works in my doctor’s office, but

had to learn English and repeat years of nurses’ training all over again to get licensed here. Diego Salazar, who arrived as a penniless high school graduate from Bogota, Colombia, was hired as an apprentice in a picture frame shop and became an expert in repairing and reproducing antique frames. He now owns the building next door to my art studio and two more.

But how to find the undocumented? Willing to paint them in shadow and not reveal names wasn’t enough for two Mexican cleaning ladies, terrified of being deported. But many visits over coffee to Eddie’s shop turned up someone who had a Guatemalan housekeeper.

Maria-Salomé’s husband had abandoned her with their five children, ages three to sixteen. Unqualified to do more than laundry, she could not earn enough to feed them. Her choice: become a prostitute or leave Guatemala and send money home to a relative, who would raise the kids. “Indecent work? No, no!” she told me. And so she hired a “coyote” and crossed Mexico and the Rio Grande at night. “BAD, bad!” is all she would say of the trip that included two scary days and nights of walking through parched desert brush until a bus picked them up on a lone road at two in the morning. She was lucky to get to New York where Guatemalan men renovating a house got her a job cleaning up the construction dust. Hired as that home’s housekeeper, she sent money home for 24 years, until she had saved enough to get a proper green card.

A week after I finished her portrait, Maria flew to Guatemala to hug grown children she had supported for almost a quarter century, to meet their husbands and wives, and hold grandchildren she had never touched.

Finding a Syrian refugee took months. Not even Kurds, who had fought battles on behalf of U.S. troops, were being allowed in. Joe Berger told me at a Silurians’ lunch that he knew of synagogues working with HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, that were helping Syrians settle in the U.S., and he put me in touch with one woman, who led to another, who’d worked to find an apartment, job, schools, and sewing machines



Syrian Muslim, Amina Ahmed, her husband, and three children lived in hellish underground conditions in Malaysia for five years before being rescued by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

for Amina Ahmed, her husband, and three children. The family had owned and ran a grocery in Aleppo, Syria’s financial center, and stayed until nightly government bombing came dangerously close to their suburban home. Fleeing on tourist visas to Malaysia — all they could get — they wound up living in hellish underground conditions there for five years before HIAS discovered their plight and sponsored them into the U.S.

As a Muslim Kurd educated in Syrian schools, Amina was stunned to be “saved” by Jews. “They educate us to hate Israel. I now see it’s more complicated. These are good people!” Amina now has a good business doing alterations for many Jewish customers out of her family’s Westchester apartment.

That’s a truly American story.

Instead of criminals, I found people with the guts and drive to leave war, poverty and political turmoil for hard beginnings in strange new places. Isn’t that immigrant pluck one of the forces that made America great?

*Betsy Ashton spent nearly two decades reporting the news for radio and TV stations in Washington, DC, New York City, and CBSNews. She is now an artist/writer as well as past president of the Silurians. “Portraits of Immigrants” is slated to open at Concordia College in Bronxville in March, 2021, and to go to Snug Harbor in Staten Island at a later date.*



Edilson Rigo immigrated to New York after his pizza parlor in Brazil was repeatedly robbed.

# An Appreciation of Betsy Wade, Injustice Fighter

BY JAN BENZEL

If you're a Silurian, chances are you knew Betsy Wade, who died Dec. 3, at 91. Betsy was many things, but she was not shy. She made it her business to get

## Kalb Brothers

Continued from Page 1

ied Russian language and literature at Harvard, where he got his M.A. In 1956, he was working on his Ph.D. in Russian history when he was hired by the U.S. State Department as a translator at the American Embassy in Moscow. A year later, he became the last correspondent recruited by Edward R. Murrow to join CBS. Assigned to the Moscow bureau and later to Washington, Kalb became a familiar television presence. In 1980, he moved to NBC News as chief diplomatic correspondent and host of "Meet the Press."

In 1987, Kalb became founding director of the Shorenstein Center, remaining until 1999. Today, he is a guest scholar at The Brookings Institution, hosts "The Kalb Report," a periodic discussion of media ethics at the National Press Club and is a contributing analyst for National Public Radio and the Fox News Channel.

Kalb has written or co-written at least a dozen non-fiction books, including Kissinger, a 1974 biography of the former Secretary of State cowritten with brother Bernard, and two novels, including one also co-written with Bernard. His many honors include two Peabody Awards and the DuPont Prize from Columbia University.

Bernard Kalb was an acclaimed newspaperman, television broadcaster, author and media critic for decades, but he made headlines of his own in 1986 when he resigned as a spokesman for the State Department under Secretary of State George P. Schultz to protest a government "disinformation" campaign against Col. Muammar e-Qaddafi of Libya. In so doing, he became a hero to many for calling attention to the importance of governmental credibility, an issue that resonates even more strongly today.

"Faith in the word of America is the pulsebeat of our democracy," Kalb said. "Anything that hurts America's credibility hurts America."

"In his final official act," wrote columnist William Safire, Bernard Kalb "rose above State Department spokesman to become the spokesman for all Americans who respect and demand the truth."

(When he was spokesman, I met Bernard at a City College alumni dinner and remember his cheerfully introducing himself as "keeper of the nation's ambiguities.")

For more than 30 years prior, Kalb covered international affairs at The Times, CBS News and NBC News and was based in Indonesia, Hong Kong, Paris and Saigon. Kalb was also the founding anchor of "Reliable Sources," CNN's critique of the media, and, for a decade, a frequent panelist.

No story about the Kalbs would be complete without mentioning the phone call from Bella Kalb, their mother. As the story goes, both brothers were working at CBS when a call came in and a voice said, "This is Marvin Kalb's mother. Can I please speak to Bernard Kalb?"

"I've heard that story. I often tell it myself," said Bernard, according to a Times profile. "There's no sibling rivalry. Only sibling love."

to know people, from the publisher of The *New York Times* to the editors and reporters to the copy boys and girls to the printers. She had great zest for the collaborative element of putting out a daily newspaper.

I first met Betsy on the Times' night national desk in the early 80s, where a famously foul-mouthed supervisor treated me, a young green female editor new to the paper, with skepticism (to put it politely).

Betsy, who would calmly pull out her knitting as she waited for reporters to file their stories, looked out for me, answering the questions I muttered under my breath and making sure I occasionally had someone to grab dinner with. Her kindnesses were legion, shown in the outpouring of stories about her when her death became known.

By the time I was watching her knit on the national desk, the four-year class action suit *Elizabeth Boylan v The New York Times*, had been settled. Betsy, using the name "on my driver's license," she would say, was the named plaintiff among seven who represented some 560 female employees at the paper, who had successfully sued for equal pay and opportunity for advancement. She had also just finished four years as the first woman to lead the New York Newspaper Guild.

Of her firing at the *New York Herald Tribune* because she was pregnant, she told me: "When something like that happens to you it sets your politics in order right fast."

Betsy had been passionate about journalism her entire life. She was proud of the women's suit, and of the adoption in 1986 – better late than never – of Ms. as Times style. (She worked behind the scenes on that effort, but her hand is unmistakable.) But the real fire in her belly was for the work itself.

She described with enormous relish taking part in the coverage of two of the biggest news stories of the second half of the 20th century: the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Pentagon Papers, which involved the high drama of working at an anonymous suite at the New York Hilton on Project X, 7,000 pages of top-secret documents obtained by *The Times* that detailed the history of American involvement in Vietnam. Allan M. Siegal, the foreign editor at the time, asked Betsy if she wanted to join the project, adding that it might lead to jail time. Would she mind?

For the last 14 of her 45 years at *The Times*, she wrote a weekly column called



BETSY WADE

the *Practical Traveler*. I was her editor for a few of those years. Among the lines of coverage she was most on fire about was travelers' safety. She was an early champion of defibrillators, and staff trained to use them, on airlines, writing persuasively about lives that could be saved by the quick medical attention they afforded. Her reporting was so persuasive, in fact, that Punch Sulzberger had the devices installed in the

Times building on West 43rd Street. She was onto eco-travel early, and sorted out the real from the window dressing when it came to green hotels and tours. She fumed that there was no efficient, inexpensive public transportation from New York City to its airports.

If Betsy saw unfairness — in actions, paychecks, treatment or language — she set about challenging the institutions that perpetuated them. With her collegiality — which is not to say she wasn't tough; she was tough as nails — she showed a generation or two in the newsroom that generosity was a good way to go.

*Jan Benzel was an editor at The Times for 30 years, most recently as editor of the Metropolitan section.*

## Sizing-Up-Trump Sequel Is All in the Family

Continued from Page 1

that." "Yeah. OK," he added, a bit dejectedly.

Later on, when Maggie took some questions from her virtual audience, her Trump ties arose again. And she was just as resolute: if she wouldn't discuss it with him, she said, she wasn't about to with anyone else. "By the way, I should add that she has not answered it even at family gatherings," her father volunteered. "This is an endless frustration."

For the two Habermans it was a return visit to the Silurians, following a more traditional session at the National Arts Club at the dawn of the Trump era. Since then, Maggie has become a familiar face (on CNN) as well as an indispensable byline, picked up a million and a half Twitter followers, become a piñata on the left and right. And signed up to do a Trump book.

This time, the duo spoke not over rubber chicken but from contiguous rectangles on a computer screen necessitated by the coronavirus pandemic, with 173 other squares listening in. What grizzled veterans called the Silurians' largest audience ever was treated to an insider's reflections on a bizarre slice of American history and, incidentally, a demonstration of two great journalists in action.

Only Clyde addressed their blood tie, and only glancingly. He spoke of the pain he felt when his daughter was maligned, though more, he insisted, as a fellow reporter than as a father. And he winced upon hearing that she texted at the wheel.

"Not anymore," she assured him.

"OK. Good to know," he said.

Were there Trump-related stories she regretted doing, he asked, or wished she'd done, or that were especially satisfying? She could better answer, she replied, in six months, after she'd had more sleep. But generally, she said, she was pleased with her coverage.

"There are a million headlines that I wish had been written differently," she

conceded, noting that, thanks to Twitter, reporters had to monitor such things in a way they never previously had to do.

*The Times*, she said, had been slow to recognize the power of Twitter, especially after inviting the Twitterati to assume the role its now-defunct Public Editor once played. She'd returned to Twitter herself after a self-imposed and well-publicized exile because, she said, no one covering a man who lived on it could responsibly stay off it.

Though faulting the *Times* for overselling the Mueller probe – its readers grew convinced Trump "was gonna get frog-marched out of the Oval Office" when it was over, she said – she stood by the paper's performance in the Trump era. "In general, I think that we did the best we could have covering a pretty extraordinary four years," she said.

Her father asked her about her forthcoming Trump book, and the direction it would take, especially given the glut of them already. "It's not an untapped genre, that is true," she conceded. But alone among White House correspondents, she noted, she'd had a prior history with the man.

"Part of what confuses people who cover him and people who are around him in Washington is they sort of had never seen someone like him, but if you covered City Hall in New York, you actually understand him somewhat well," she said. Her book, she said, would bridge those two worlds.

"I hope there will still be an appetite for it in a year," she said. "I think there will be because I think we'll be writing about this period of time for decades to come."

She took umbrage at a suggestion from the floor that the locals had failed to cover Trump adequately or sound the alarm to everyone else. "Ridiculous," she called it. "The New York press spent an enormous amount of time trying to explain to people the President's real business record, and it didn't matter to a public across the country who had gotten to know him through *The Appren-*

*tice*, she said. "Voters had every piece of information they needed."

"One of the most disappointing aspects of the last four years for me is in watching the knee-jerk, reflexive, 'but the media...' response to everything," she said. "How about the voters?"

But even her newsroom colleagues, she suggested, were initially naïve about him. "People chose to assume that the office would change him," she said. "I said this to my entire D.C. bureau, that he is not going to change, I am telling you what he is," she recalled. "I was diminished, waved off, told I was too tired from the campaign, that I wasn't seeing things clearly. People just didn't want to believe what they were hearing."

Veteran *New York Post* newsman (and Silurian Governor) Myron Rushetzky directed a question to both Habermans. "You have been assigned to write Trump's wait-order obituary," he typed. "Other than a few obvious blanks, what is your lead?"

On this one, Maggie ducked. "I don't write obits," she said.

"Well, I do," her father chimed in, noting he had about 25 advance obits in the can. "How about, 'HE'S DEAD,'?" he suggested.

Along with their assorted other distinctions, the Habermans are surely the only father-daughter combo to migrate from New York's sauciest paper to its most staid. One last exchange of theirs hinted at which of them retained more of the South Street sensibility.

"I have to ask, as an old *New York Post* person, albeit pre-Murdoch but still a tabloid, the inevitable question, 'does this marriage last?'" Clyde asked.

"Between Murdoch and Trump?" Maggie asked.

"Between Trump and Mrs. Trump," Clyde replied. "Oh. That marriage," she said. "I have no idea."

*David Margolick spent most of his career at the New York Times and Vanity Fair. He's now finishing up a book on comedian Sid Caesar.*

# The Pitcher and the Columnist: A Beautiful Friendship

BY IRA BERKOW

I call it the night that Tom Seaver and I slept together, but it was a great deal more innocent and monumentally less risqué than it sounds. The story:

It was the last Sunday in January, 1970, when Tom Seaver and I, along with Joe Louis, the former great heavyweight boxing champion, and Curt Blefary, a journeyman major-league outfielder most recently with the Yankees, rushed from the Baseball Writers dinner at the Waldorf-Astoria to catch a train.

Seaver had been awarded “Player of the Year” by the New York baseball writers, and the four of us raced to Penn Station in hopes of arriving in time to catch the 10:30 overnight train to Rochester. There Seaver, who that year had compiled 25 wins and a 2.21 earned run average and led the Mets to a World Series championship, was to receive the 1969 Professional Athlete of the Year award, and Louis would get a Lifetime Achievement award, both presented annually by the Hickok Belt Company headquar-

1, 200-pound hurler would stoically have to make do with his sport jacket and tie.

Well, Louis went to bed early and the three of us stayed up late talking sports. I remember the conversation came around to the “greatest athletic feat,” and Seaver said, “Sandy Koufax, for having pitched four no-hitters.”

The organizer of the Rochester event, who made the sleeping arrangements, had Tom and me sharing a compartment with bunk beds. The room was so small that it seemed if you turned around you’d bump into yourself. Tom and I shrugged and flipped a coin. He got the lower berth and I the top one. “Now I know what Rube Walker meant,” said Seaver, referring to Rube Walker, the Mets’ pitching coach, “when he said you really came to know your roommate when teams used to travel by train.”

Only a few hours later, jostled and

*“We shared meals and we shared laughs. He could be silly, with a rather goofy giggle.”*

tive, regardless of the affection one might feel for a subject. But a particular circum-

stance, in this case, changed that worthy dictum to a significant degree for me.

The following baseball season, in April 1970, three months after that train ride, NEA hired Seaver to write a once-a-week column. I was to shepherd the column. I’d call Seaver and we’d discuss a subject and then, using his words, I’d fashion a column. He was thoughtful and often generous, as he was, for example, to Gil Hodges, the Mets’ manager, who was, he said, “my most important influence in professional ball. He was a pro’s pro. He held that there were no prima donnas on this ball club. He had one important rule: Everyone is treated alike.”

Seaver also had a great admiration for the professionalism of Henry Aaron, and recalled the first time he faced the legendary slugger, as a first-year Mets’ pitcher in 1967: “The first time I faced him, I was a rookie. I got him to hit into a double play on a sinker down and in. I could have lit up a victory cigar. I was so proud of myself. I figured I had his number. And he figured I was figuring that, too, because I threw him the same pitch in the same spot the next time he came to bat and he whacked it into the left-field seats for a three-run homer. Another piece of education.”

And through the years I covered Seaver as objectively as possible, and sticking to what I saw and how he performed, with that long, powerful stride off the mound and so low to the ground that his right knee would drag through the dirt, besmudging his pants leg, as he went. His was a luminous 20-year major-league career, from the Mets to the Reds, back to the Mets, to the White Sox to the Red Sox and, finally, enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, with 311 wins against 205 losses and a 2.86 earned run average. He was sixth all-time in major-league strikeouts with 3,640 and won three Cy Young awards as best pitcher in the National League.

We shared meals and we shared laughs. He could be silly, with a rather goofy giggle. I saved a photograph of us on the Busch Stadium field in St. Louis before a 1982 World Series game between the Cardinals and Milwaukee. I was covering the game as a columnist for *The New York Times* and Seaver was working as an analyst for NBC-TV. He made a silly face

with scrunched up mouth for the photographer and later sent me an autographed copy of the photo, with the inscription: “To Ira – Are you proud to know the mature #41. Best as always, Tom Seaver #41” (his uniform number).

Seaver, had lived with his wife Nancy, and two daughters, in a house in



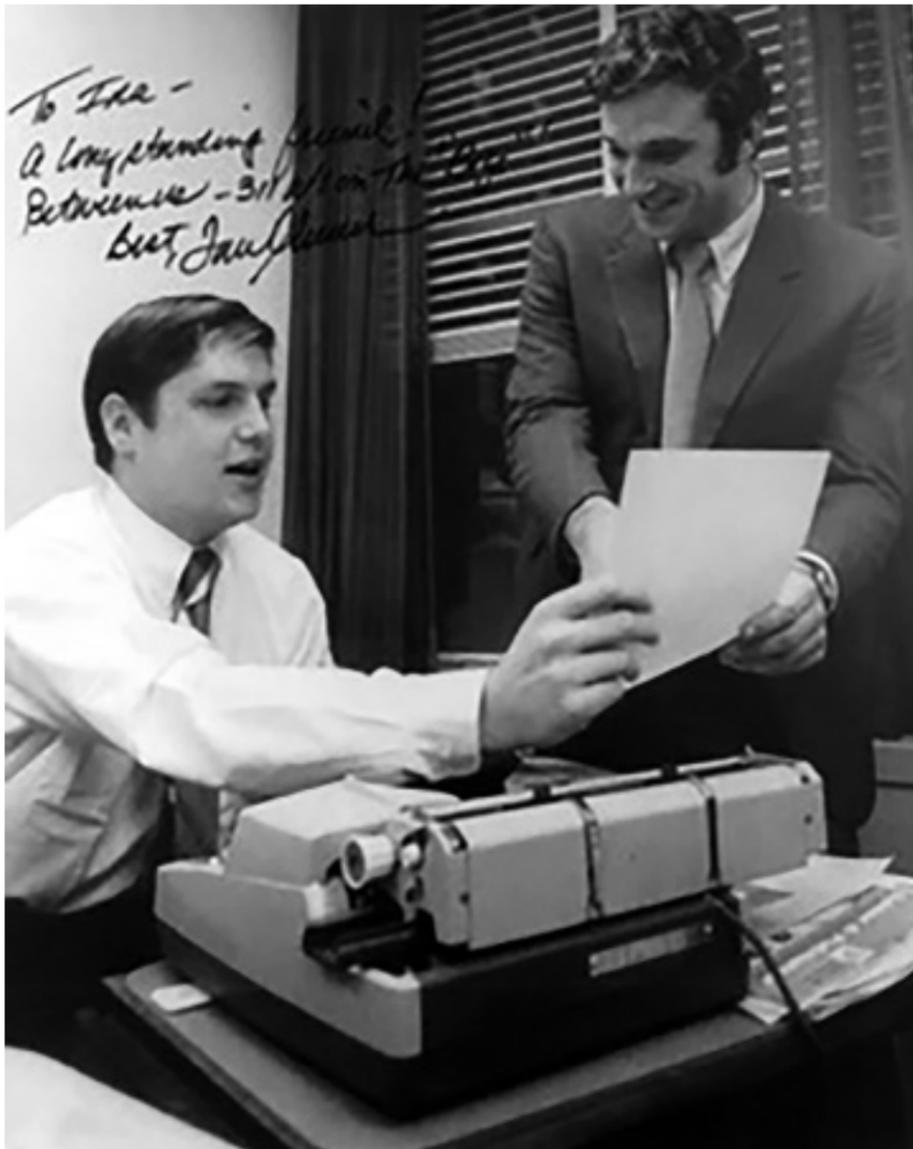
TOM SEAVER

Greenwich, Ct., then moved to Calistoga, California, where he joyfully produced quality wines. In the fields, he contracted Lyme Disease. It affected him in numerous ways, including with an increasing loss of memory. In 2013, I ran across a publicity photo of the two of us in the NEA office when he began the column, and it showed Tom behind a typewriter and handing me a supposed draft. I sent the picture to him to be autographed, and wrote “My best to Nancy, and with hopes of good grapes and fond memories.”

About a month later, he sent back the photo autographed and with it a note. The note read, in part, “Sorry for taking so long to get back to you, but this Lyme Disease is no fun.” The autograph on the picture read: “To Ira – A long-standing friend! Between us – 311 W’s in the ‘Bigs.’ Best, Tom Seaver.” Needless to say, there had never been any “Bigs” in my past.

On August 31, Tom Seaver, who had become reclusive the last few years, died from complications of Lyme Disease, Lewy Body Dementia and Covid-19. He was 75 years old. I have framed the photo of two of us together in the NEA office, two young friends, exactly a half century ago.

*Ira Berkow was a longtime sports reporter and columnist for The Times and shared in the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for national reporting for the series, “How Race Is Lived in America.” His most recent book, How Life Imitates Sports: A Sportswriter Recounts, Relives and Reckons with 50 Years on the Sports Beat, was published by Skyhorse this past summer*



Tom Seaver wrote a weekly baseball column for Newspaper Enterprise Association in 1970 and Ira Berkow was his editor.

tered in Rochester.

I was then the 30-year-old sports columnist and sports editor for Newspaper Enterprise Association, a Scripps-Howard feature syndicate, and tagged along to write a story about Seaver. I don’t remember what Blefary was doing with us – maybe he got lost, he had been noticeably drinking – but he would soon make his presence felt.

We luckily grabbed a cab at the Waldorf curb, and made the train, with little time to spare. In the hurry, and as the train began to chug north, Seaver realized he had forgotten to take his overcoat from the hotel. The 25-year-old, 6-foot-

dreamy, we emerged onto the Rochester platform. It was raining in the dark before dawn and Seaver and the rest of us waited for the laggard chartered bus. Blefary, in an act of kindness that only a hitter might perform in respect to a star pitcher, took off his coat and draped it over Seaver’s right, pitching shoulder. Tom expressed surprise, but also gratitude. Finally, the bus made its appearance.

And so ended the night that I slept with Seaver – rather slept above Seaver. But it was the beginning of a lifetime friendship. Now, a journalist should, in the best of all possible worlds, remain objec-



Tom Seaver, with Ira Berkow, mugging for the camera.

# Seymour Topping: A Personal Recollection

BY DAVID A. ANDELMAN

It's difficult to overstate just how much Seymour Topping meant to my life, my career, my self-image as a journalist. Quite simply, I would not be the same person, my work would not have been as rich, nor as comprehensive, and certainly would have lacked whatever humanity I succeeded in bringing to it, without Top. He died in November at the age of 98, surrounded by his daughters and his remarkable wife of 71 years, Audrey.

I first stumbled on Top, or should I say he stumbled on me, in December 1968. Topping had recently become foreign editor at The New York Times following an already-brilliant career as a foreign correspondent. I was then a fledgling night beat reporter at Newsday in Garden City, though with grand foreign-correspondent aspirations. My friend Roy Silver, the Times venerable Nassau County reporter, happened to live next door to Gerald Gold, Top's deputy, who mentioned in passing that Top was looking for an eager young man to become his news assistant in a program to recruit younger correspondents for overseas assignments. Top hired me and for the next 14 months, I learned what it meant to be both a gentleman of The Times and of the world from a master of both.

My brief was to arrive by 8 a.m., scan the wires, the overnight telexes from some 40 correspondents scattered across bureaus from London to Tokyo and prepare a morning note, ready for Top when he walked through the door shortly after 10 o'clock. If there was an urgent 'rocket,' I was authorized to ring him at home, which I did on rare intervals with trepidation, but was met always with kindness and appreciation. Gradually, through that amazing year (man's first walk on the moon, Bloody Sunday, Northern Ireland, the Prague winter), I learned, bit by bit, the history behind this remarkable, calm, soft-spoken man who appeared to carry the whole world so lightly on his shoulders. It was Top who taught me



SEYMOUR TOPPING AND HIS BELOVED WIFE AUDREY

all I needed to know about the essence of a foreign correspondent—down to his Rolex GMT Master wristwatch and Burberry trench coat, each of which I eventually acquired as soon as my meager budget allowed.

It was his personal and professional history that made him such a consummate foreign editor, then managing editor of The Times, finally director of the Pulitzer Prizes. Essentially, Top made his mark in Asia—hardly surprising since he was seduced into this career by reading, as a teenager growing up in the Bronx, Edgar Snow's "Red Star Over China." As a correspondent, barely 26 years old, for The Associated Press, he was held prisoner overnight by the People's Liberation Army in a peasant hut outside Nanking on the doorstep of the Battle of the Huai-Hai, the only correspondent with Communist forces when Mao Zedong definitively defeated the army of Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek. In the course of 14 years with the International News Service, then the Associated Press from Nanking to Saigon, London to Berlin, he became the first American correspondent in Vietnam since World War II.

Following a succession of scoops, The Times hired him in 1959 and he would spend the next 34 years at the paper. In Moscow, where he served as bureau chief, he broke the news of the Soviets downing the U-2 spy plane of Francis

Gary Powers in 1960 and chronicled the emerging rift between the Soviet Union and China. It was Top's stories from Moscow about the aggressive moves by Nikita Khrushchev that John F. Kennedy was reading throughout the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. Then it was back to Southeast Asia as bureau chief from 1963 through 1966, reporting on the first moves by the American military into the colonial wars of Indochina—in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. It was, in retrospect, perhaps fortuitous, perhaps quite intentional, that I would follow Top into Southeast Asia as bureau chief a decade later.

When I eventually made my way overseas, I finally got around to asking Top how I would know — or better still, how he would know — if I'd succeeded as a foreign correspondent. I still recall his reply:

"If, at the end of your tour in a particular region, whether it is two, three, four years or more, your readers can feel that they have lived there with you, experienced your experiences, felt as you felt, had an intimate sense of the texture, the hopes and dreams and aspirations of the people whose lives and civilizations you are chronicling, you will have succeeded. You must always carry each of them on your shoulder so that they can see and feel and smell as you do, through your eyes and ears and sensibilities." Those wise words guided and motivated me.

By the time Top returned to New York as foreign editor, the paper and the world were changing at an ever accelerating rate. It was Top who, with executive editor A.M. "Abe" Rosenthal, shaped the Times coverage of a period of tumult and transformation—Vietnam and the

Pentagon Papers, Watergate, East-West confrontations as the Cold War peaked, a Middle East in the grip of dictators in those pre-terrorist years. Abe & Top—they were really inseparable—created the multi-section paper, transformed it into a national, then an international force in journalism.

There were long stretches when Top really ran the newsroom, created each day's front page, doled out to each desk the news hole and established the look and feel of the product.

Top was also very much a leavening force in the newsroom, moderating Abe's mercurial moods and running interference between Abe and the publisher. So I was hardly surprised that it was Top who wheeled an aging Arthur Ochs "Punch" Sulzberger down the aisle of Central Synagogue at Abe's funeral in 2006. He also never forgot those whom he mentored and who loved him. When I took over as editor and publisher of World Policy Journal, he eagerly agreed to join my editorial board as its chairman.

Following The Times, Top found his way to Columbia (whose library is now a repository of his archives) and its Graduate School of Journalism. There, he was proud to take over administration of the Pulitzer Prizes, a most worthy capstone to a remarkable career.

But he was proudest of his five daughters, each born in different world capitals where he was based—Susan in Saigon, Karen and Lesley in London, Robin in Berlin and Joanna in Bronxville, NY, not to mention his seven grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. He was especially proud of his beloved wife, Audrey, daughter of the remarkable Chester Ronning, the first Canadian ambassador to Mao's government and the son of a missionary to China.

Audrey and Top met in Nanking and, herself a brilliant journalist and photographer, followed him to every posting, through every tribulation. Indeed, her final poignant tribute in an e-mail to me was perhaps most evocative of his life and all they shared:

"Top joined his ancestors this morning. He read his last headline — Biden Wins. Top met his last deadline and died with a smile....We are all proud of him and grateful for our 71 years of happiness. Never a dull moment. Top sends his love forever to all of his best friends the world over."

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## Gail Sheehy

Continued from Page 8

clean up the property. In 1972, Sheehy traveled to Northern Ireland to report on the women involved in the Irish civil rights movement. The British government had created the Special Powers Act that allowed British soldiers to round up Catholic men. The women and family members left behind became fierce fighters. Sheehy was standing next to a young boy right after a march, and as British soldiers moved in, a bullet struck the boy in the face. That day, Jan. 30, 1972, became known as Bloody Sunday. Sheehy escaped, fleeing to safe houses and made her way back to the States, but the experience affected her deeply.

It was about this time that she began work on *Passages*. After conducting 40 interviews for a book on couples, many in their late 30's and early 40's, she became intrigued when they expressed feelings of being unsettled. She researched the work on midlife crises of

several academics and coined the term "Second Adulthood" to describe the equilibrium that follows the crisis.

In the 1980's, Sheehy began to work with Cambodian refugees. While visiting Thailand in 1981, Felker pointed out a camp of Cambodian orphans that he suggested would make a good story. Sheehy visited the camp and the couple decided to adopt her second daughter, Mohm, who lost most of her family during the murderous Pol Pot regime.

Felker and Sheehy had a tempestuous romance for some years but it turned into a happy marriage in 1984 and she nursed him for two years before his death in 2008. She was visiting her last companion, Robert Emma Gonna Jr., a former Harvard professor and a co-founder of *People* magazine, when she was stricken with pneumonia.

*Stewart Kampel was an editor at The Times for more than 40 years.*

# From Brass Tacks to UFOs: The Tale of One Hard-Nosed Reporter's Strange Journey

BY RALPH BLUMENTHAL

I wasn't thinking much about UFOs or aliens when I landed in Texas in 2003 as Southwest bureau chief for The New York Times.

Growing up in the dawning space age, I'd shared my generation's romance with science fiction, its rosy colonies on Mars, starship voyagers and bug-eyed monsters. But my realities evolved as I got into painting and sculpture at the High School of Music and Art and journalism at City College, Columbia graduate school and The Times. I spent my entire newspaper career covering hard-edged stories filled with perceivable, verifiable facts about cops and mobsters, Nazi war criminals, the arts, and the ever-wild American West.

And then about a year after arriving in Houston, I came across a used paperback from 1999 that carried me back to my origins. It was *Passport to the Cosmos*, by a renowned Harvard psychiatrist, John E. Mack.

I'd never heard of it, nor its prequel, Mack's 1994 blockbuster *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*. They detailed his years of serious research into the many ordinary men, women and children, devoid of identifiable mental illness, who came to him with stupefying accounts of terrifying interactions with alien beings that (or who?) who beamed humans up from their nocturnal beds or daytime cars into hovering spacecraft for pseudo-medical probes and reproductive procedures seemingly bent on breeding a hybrid race. The elusive evidence included mysterious scars, frequent proximity of UFOs during reported abductions, and the sometimes physical absence of abductees.

Passport was Mack's attempt, after a tormenting inquiry by scandalized superiors at Harvard Medical School, to put his work in better context, tempering some of his earlier certainties, but it was still plenty sensational. He had grown convinced, for example, that the bizarre encounters — which he gave credence to as evidently real, if unprovable, absent any other explanation he could find — seemed related to warnings against the continuing despoliation of the planet.

"Astonishingly," he wrote, "the damage we have been inflicting upon the Earth's life-forms appears not to have gone 'unnoticed' by whatever intelligence or creative principle dwells in the cosmos, and it is providing some sort of feedback to us, however strange its form seems to be."

UFOs? Aliens? Harvard? Mack was not just any ivied academician. A charismatic, cobalt-eyed innovator of community health services, he had written a groundbreaking biography of Lawrence of Arabia that had won a Pulitzer Prize in 1977. He had joined world physicians and a Nobel laureate campaigning against nuclear weapons, talked Middle East peace with Yasir Arafat, and pio-

neered mind-altering breathing techniques that took him back to his earliest traumatic childhood memories. Mack was an early devotee of the Czech-born transpersonal psychiatrist Stan Grof and his technique of regulated breathing, called "Holotropic Breathwork."

But his career had been largely conventional until a captivating artist-turned-abduction researcher, Budd Hopkins, launched Mack into his own investigation of an unfathomable mystery: why were so many seemingly normal people coming forth with these searing narratives of encounters with alien beings? A Temple University professor also researching alien experiences, David M. Jacobs, made them a triumvirate.

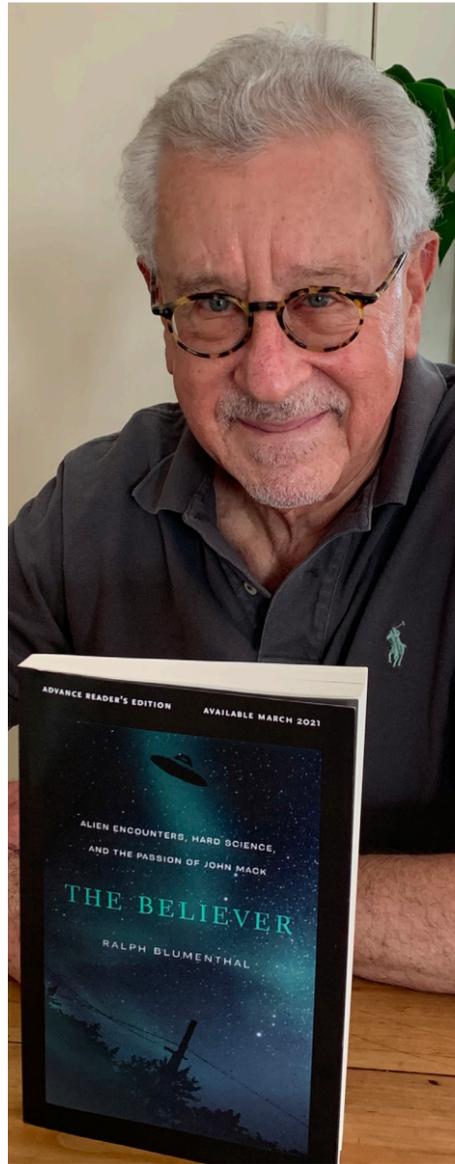
I thought that Mack, then almost 75 and living in Cambridge, could make a compelling profile and figured to call him up for an interview. Naively, I had no idea how famous, or infamous, he already was. And then, days later, I picked up the paper to read he was dead. In London for a symposium on his beloved T.E. Lawrence, he had exited a Tube station late one night, looked the wrong way crossing the street and been run over by a drunk driver. Police reports ruled out any foul play.

I wasn't immediately thinking of a book. My last book, *Miracle at Sing Sing* on the "fearless fighting warden" Lewis Lawes, was just then coming out and I hesitated to plunge into another punishing publishing project on top of my day job.

It also felt somewhat odd for an investigative reporter like me. I had broken stories on the hunt for wanted Nazi war criminals like Klaus Barbie and Josef Mengele, embedded with precinct cops around the city, exposed shifty dealings at the Port Authority, tracked the botched terrorism investigation into the 1993 truck-bombing of the World Trade Center that might have headed off the 9/11 attacks, and tried to figure out who was who at the wake for the rubbed-out Colombo family mobster Joey Gallo.

But now — aliens?

And then I learned anew the eerie les-



RALPH BLUMENTHAL

another book. I didn't think, though, it would take 16 years.

To my surprise, I found that the Macks and I had repeatedly crossed paths in what Carl Jung called synchronicities — apparent coincidences that seem random, with no causal relationship, yet may be meaningfully related through unseen cosmic threads.

John's father, Edward, was an English professor at the City College of New York when I was an undergrad and student

editor there in the early 1960s. (I had gotten my job through The New York Times, as the old ad campaign went, but I was paper-trained at The Campus.) Much later, Mack's stepmother, Ruth Prince Gimbel, a New Deal economist whose first husband, a great-grandson of the founder of the Yale Club in the Great Depression, left scholarly papers in a historic collection I came to be archiving at Baruch College, where she had once taught and where I also taught.

Mack's cousin Walter Henry Liebman 3d, known as Terry, the last brewer

of his family's Rheingold beer and a good source of family history, turned out to be living across the street from

me in Manhattan. Then too, I'd been spending summers teaching journalism to international high schoolers at Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, NH, epicenter of a flying-saucer craze in the 1960s and not far from the site of abduction's lode star, Betty and Barney Hill's incomprehensible 1961 encounter in the White Mountains, as told by John G. Fuller in the book and subsequent movie, *The Interrupted Journey*.

I spent the years after Mack's death reading, researching, interviewing, and writing, including a 2013 piece on Mack for *Vanity Fair* online ("Alien Nation: Have Humans Been Abducted by Extraterrestrials?") and, with Times colleagues, exposés of the Pentagon's secret efforts to track UFOs. Finally my book, *The Believer: Alien Encounters, Hard Science, and the Passion of John Mack*, is set for publication by High Road Books of the University of New Mexico Press on March 15, 2021.

So what did I conclude? Read the book to find out. I'll only say there are no easy answers. But I've grown surer of what UFOs and aliens are generally not -- hoaxes, publicity stunts, products of mental illness or the delusion of crowds.

John Mack would take issue with the title of my book. He swore he was never what people called a believer but was only following a trail of overwhelmingly powerful anecdotal evidence, the kind of eyewitness testimony that gets people convicted in court and executed.

There were, for example, the unexplained scars and lesions, including wrist wounds on a quadriplegic abductee that could not have been self-inflicted. After an abduction, experiencers often found themselves oddly displaced or translocated.

A snowmobiler named Cathy had been dumbfounded to discover her missing outer garments neatly piled beside her. A woman called Jill had found herself back in bed, "tucked in so hard I couldn't get up." Her husband hadn't done it; he had been "turned off," asleep the whole time. "You can't tuck yourself in," Jill said. "I tried it."

Others reported waking with their pajamas on backward or inside out, or naked with the nightclothes they had worn to bed nowhere to be found, or their feet caked in mud. Drivers were confused to find themselves suddenly far from where they had been, way off the intended road, or much closer to their destination than they remembered.

As I say in "The Believer," I believe Mack believed. He believed in the unquenchable human spirit and an infinite and benign cosmic intelligence.

He believed in taking risks and breaking boundaries to boldly explore the deepest secrets of existence, which no one yet has come close to fathoming. Never mind aliens, where did this table and chair—and everything and everyone else—come from? John Mack set forth, journeyed far, had many adventures, and returned to tell the tale around the digital firelight, for humanity's sake. It's what heroes do. It's what human beings do.

*Ralph Blumenthal reported for The Times from 1964 to 2010. He was on the Metro team that won a Pulitzer Prize for breaking news coverage of the 1993 truck bombing of the World Trade Center. He has been a Distinguished Lecturer at Baruch College since 2010.*



Dr. John Mack wondered why so many normal people told of encounters with alien beings.

son of our profession: we don't choose our subjects as much as our subjects choose us.

In deep grief, the Mack family put off my inquiries. But eventually, Mack's three sons agreed to provide access to their father's private archives. By then it was inescapable. I would have to do

## Obituaries

### Gail Sheehy, 1937-2020 Ground-breaking Journalist and Cultural Interpreter

BY STEWART KAMPEL

It would not be an overstatement to say that Gail Sheehy was one of the most influential journalists of the 20th century, particularly in writing her ground-breaking best-seller, *Passages*, which traced adult life's changing stages and the opportunities they offer for emotional growth.

Sheehy, who died of pneumonia on Aug. 24 at the age of 83, was the author of 17 books, many spun off the *Passages* model, and numerous psychologically probing profiles of major political leaders like Margaret Thatcher, Mikhail Gorbachev, Anwar Sadat, both president Bushes and Hillary Clinton, published in *New York* magazine and *Vanity Fair*. Sheehy sometimes practiced New Journalism, or creative nonfiction, using

a variety of literary devices to denote social class or the thoughts of a central character.

She was a relentless believer in on-the-spot reporting. "Whenever you hear about a great cultural phenomenon, drop everything," she said in a commencement speech at the University of Vermont, her alma mater. "Get on a bus or train or plane and go there, stand at the edge of the abyss, and look down into it. You will see a culture turned inside out and revealed in a raw state."

For *Passages*, which was on the best-seller list of *The New York Times* for three years, she explored predictable adult crises and suggested how they could be used for making creative decisions in shaping the years ahead. She named the stages "provisional adulthood" (from 18 to 30), "first adulthood (30 to 45), "sec-

ond adulthood" (45 to 75) and "third adulthood" (75 on). And for many Silurians, of which she was one, she had a message: "Older is better."

The book, published in 1976, sold more than 10 million copies and was named one of the 10 most influential books of modern times by the Library of Congress. For the paperback rights to a book about menopause, *The Silent Passage*, in 1992, she received an advance of \$1 million.

Raised in the suburb of Mamaroneck, N.Y., the daughter of an advertising man, Sheehy graduated from the University of Vermont and got her first job with J.C. Penney, the department store chain. She traveled across the country putting on educational fashion shows for college home economics departments. At the same time, she wrote for the company's magazines. She married Albert F. Sheehy in 1960 and moved to Rochester, N.Y., where she supported him while he attended medical school.

Interviewed for a job on the women's page of *The Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, she thought the editor was reluctant to hire her, fearing she would leave if she became pregnant. She did get hired and learned some valuable lessons. "The paper," she said, "taught me to write on deadline and to see that to get the good stories — to build a career — I had to get in on it early and have vision."

The Sheehys moved to New York, where she gave birth to a daughter, Maura. The couple divorced in 1968. She got a job in the women's section of *The New York Herald Tribune*. She approached Clay Felker, an editor, and pitched a story about men in Manhattan who held "specimen parties," using women to bring in more attractive women. He told her to "write it as a scene."

It opened her eyes to a novel kind of journalism. She took on major journalistic assignments, following Felker's advice to write "big stories." One of the first was an exclusive interview with Robert F. Kennedy shortly before he was assassinated. After her sister became addicted, she covered the rise of amphetamine use in New York. Sheehy helped her sister get off drugs and they attended the Woodstock music festival to hide from her sister's drug pusher.



GAIL SHEEHY

In 1969-70 Sheehy won a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship to attend graduate school at Columbia University. While there she studied under the renowned anthropologist Margaret Meade, who, she said, inspired her to become a cultural interpreter.

For *New York* magazine in 1971, Sheehy wrote a series of articles on local prostitution called "Wide Open City." One centered on characters called Redpants and Sugarman, and she came under criticism for fictionalizing a character who she later acknowledged was a composite of several actual women. Felker took the blame for removing a paragraph explaining the composites. The story was told in the book *Hustling*, later made into a television movie of the same name starring Jill Clayburgh as Redpants and Lee Remick as the journalist. Sheehy was also the inspiration for a reporter in the HBO series *The Deuce*.

In the summer of 1971, Felker and Sheehy, by then a couple, rented a house in East Hampton. While there, Sheehy and her daughter found an abandoned box of kittens, but since they could not take them back to New York, her daughter suggested they take the kittens to the "witch house" across the street. It was there that Sheehy first encountered Little Edie Beale and her mother, the reclusive cousins of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, living in a dilapidated 28-room mansion called Grey Gardens.

Sheehy spent a few weekends on the beach with Little Edie learning about their bizarre story. The result? *The Secret of Grey Gardens*, a story in *New York* magazine that caused a sensation. After the article was published, Mrs. Onassis gave her cousins \$25,000 to

Continued on Page 6

### Linda Goetz Holmes, Advocate for Allied POWs

BY ALLAN DODDS FRANK

Inspired by a conversation with a WWII prisoner of war, Linda Goetz Holmes found her journalistic chops in her middle age.

A chance encounter on Shelter Island, N.Y. with an Australian staff sergeant who had been imprisoned by the Japanese army during World War II, prompted her to begin investigating the treatment of POWs in the Pacific.

That initial conversation in the 1990s with POW Cecil Dickson led Holmes on a three-decade-long crusade to call attention to the mistreatment of American and Allied prisoners-of-war by the Japanese Army.

Dickson had been captured as a member of the Australian Pioneer Battalion and forced to work on the bridge that was featured in the classic, Academy-Award winning movie, "Bridge Over the River Kwai." Dickson, a journalist from Melbourne, had written his wife during 3½ years in captivity and she passed the letters on to Holmes. That led to her research on her first book, *4,000 Bowls of Rice, a Prisoner Comes Home*, published in 1994.

Through the next three decades Holmes, a former president of the Silurians (2004- 2006), performed as an international investigative reporter, military historian, advocate for P.O.W. restitution and class action lawsuit consultant.

Her relentless pursuit of the subject generated three books, earned her appointments as a military historian advising the U.S. National Archives and involved her as an expert witness in lawsuits seeking compensation from the Japanese for POW victims.

Holmes father, longtime Silurian Theodore Goetz, was an executive with Westchester Rockland Newspapers and Linda went to high school in Scarsdale before graduating from Wellesley College.

Her first job was in television production at the Ted Bates ad agency before

she moved to CBS where she met and, in 1959, married producer Theodore Holmes. They had two sons before they divorced.

As a single mother juggling two children between New York City and Shelter Island, Linda wrote for local publications and was active in the Hay Beach Association before she began seeking justice for POWs. She was so dedicated to the cause that she named her Lakeland terrier "Cecil" in honor of the POW.

By then, her sons were adults and as her elder son Theodore recalls: "From the time I was nine years old, she was pretty much a single mom. She did really well.... We were proud to see her get to do what she had wanted to do for all these years. And do all the travelling. She actually visited China at least twice."

In 2000, her second book, *Unjust Enrichment: How Japan's Companies Built Postwar Fortunes Using American POWs*, documented how Japanese companies exploited American POWs as forced labor. Her final book in 2014, *Guests of The Empire: The Secret History of Japan's Mukden POW Camp*, exposed Japanese biological warfare experiments conducted on POWs at a Mitsubishi facility in Manchuria.

"She was a real blood hound hounding the Japanese," her son Philip told *The Silurian News*. At one point, she tried to enlist George Takei of "Star Trek" fame, even though he was from the other side of the equation and had been interred in California. That is how big a net she threw in trying to get the Japanese government to apologize and compensate POWs for their health problems."

Holmes, who was also a longtime member of the Overseas Press Club of America, spent her last days at San Simeon by the Sea, a nursing home in Greenport, N.Y. before dying Aug. 18 at the age of 87.

"She left instructions for almost everything, but no obituary," Philip said. "The thing that she wanted to be remembered most for is this body of work."

### Dan Andrews, Queens Spokesman

Dan Andrews, the spokesman for more than two decades for two consecutive borough presidents of Queens, died on Oct. 12 at his home in Bronxville, N.Y., after battling cancer for several years. He was 72.

Andrews, a 1970 graduate of St. John's University and a long-time Silurian, began his journalism career as a caption writer at United Press International in New York.

He was promoted to reporter and eventually was named chief of UPI's City Hall Bureau. In 1990, he left UPI and headed over to Queens Borough Hall as the spokesman for Claire Shulman, then the borough president. He performed the same duties for Shulman's successor, Helen Marshall, until retiring at the end of 2013.

In an interview with the *Daily News*, he was asked to cite some of his most

vivid memories of his time as a Queens spokesman.

"Going to Elmhurst Hospital with Claire after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks," he said. "The staff was told to expect hundreds of people. It was heartbreaking. They had no survivors to treat."

In the same *Daily News* article, Andrews was asked what "lessons" he had learned as a reporter and as a spokesman.

"After 40 years in the communications business," he answered, "I am still amazed at how badly so many of us communicate. We frequently don't say what we mean, or mean what we say . . . and too many people hold grudges. Effective communication is essential. Words are powerful. They can inspire or disappoint, hurt or heal, and sadden or gladden the feeling of others. Most important, words can generate the sound of laughter from a child."