

Beyond Journalism

Why Environmental Reporters
Leave What They Love

Plus, The Ethical Freelancer

Inside Story: Tale of the Ibis Takes Wing

Also in This Issue:
EJ Academy Goes Whole Hog
Between the Lines with 'Rain' Maker

A quarterly publication of the
Society of Environmental Journalists

ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM 2015



WEATHER, WATER, ENERGY:

News in Every Neighborhood

Norman, Oklahoma - Oct. 7-11, 2015

SEJ's Oklahoma conference will take you to renowned centers of research and operations in severe weather, oil exploration, climate and water conservation. You'll enjoy a state with nearly a dozen ecoregions, from rolling hills to vast plains, from prairies to forested valleys.

25th Annual Conference of the Society of Environmental Journalists

Hosted and Sponsored by the University of Oklahoma

Home of the National Weather Center

Agenda co-chairs:
Nancy Gaarder
Omaha World-Herald | Omaha.com

Sarah Terry-Cobo
The Journal Record
JournalRecord.com - Oklahoma City

Learn more about:

- ▼ Severe Weather in a Volatile World: The world's top academic and government researchers work here.
- ▼ Tornado Alley: This place gets pummeled, so this is where you'll find the experts.
- ▼ Water: Everybody wants it, nobody has enough - not farmers, ranchers, cities or 'Big Oil.'
- ▼ Climate Change: Adapting crops, cattle and cities.
- ▼ Native American Nations: Charting a new way forward, taking control of natural resources.
- ▼ Oil and Gas Drilling: Advanced fracking techniques, water recycling and earthquakes.
- ▼ Superfund Sites: They don't get much worse than Tar Creek. What works, what doesn't?
- ▼ Climate Science, Climate Nonsense? Politicians deny climate change in D.C., while locals work to repair and prevent disasters.



The University of Oklahoma is ranked in the highest tier of research universities and home to the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication, the nation's "top research park" and the internationally-recognized National Weather Center and other resources:

- ▼ South Central Climate Science Center, consortium of OU, Texas Tech, OSU, Chickasaw Nation, Choctaw Nation, Louisiana State and NOAA
- ▼ OU Radar Innovations Lab
- ▼ Oklahoma Wind Power Initiative
- ▼ College of Atmospheric and Geographic Sciences
- ▼ OU School of Petroleum and Geological Engineering
- ▼ OU Center for Analysis and Prediction of Storms
- ▼ Oklahoma Climatological Survey



www.sej.org @SEJorg sej@sej.org
215-884-8174 #SEJ2015

SEJournal

Spring 2015, Vol. 25 No. 1

To strengthen the quality, reach and viability of journalism across all media to advance public understanding of environmental issues

The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) is a non-profit, tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organization. The mission of SEJ is to strengthen the quality, reach and viability of journalism across all media to advance public understanding of environmental issues. As a network of journalists and academics, SEJ offers national and regional conferences, publications and online services. SEJ's membership of more than 1,200 includes journalists working for print and electronic media, educators, and students. Non-members are welcome to attend SEJ's annual conferences and to subscribe to the quarterly *SEJournal*.

For inquiries regarding SEJ, please contact the SEJ office at PO Box 2492, Jenkintown, PA 19046; Ph: (215) 884-8174; Fax: (215) 884-8175; E-mail sej@sej.org.

Send *SEJournal* story ideas, articles, news briefs, tips and letters to Editor A. Adam Glenn, adam@a2gmedia.com.

To submit books for review, contact BookShelf Editor Tom Henry at thenry@theblade.com.

SEJournal editorial submission deadline for the Summer issue is June 26, 2015.

Advertising deadline for the Summer issue is July 24, 2015.

Advertising rates are available at sej.org/advertise-sejournal or email cbruggs@sej.org.

To Subscribe to *SEJournal* Subscription information is available at sej.org/sejournal-subscription-information or email sej@sej.org.

To Join SEJ Membership in SEJ is open to working journalists, students and faculty. Eligibility requirements apply. Access a membership application at sej.org/how-to-join-sej or contact SEJ at sej@sej.org or (215) 884-8174.





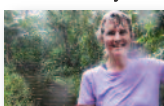


A paraglider accompanies a flock of northern bald ibises across the Alps from Germany to Italy in an effort to reestablish a viable population of the species, which has been absent from Europe for 400 years. The story about the birds earned Chelsea Wald 3rd Place honors in SEJ's 2014 Awards. An interview of Wald, including some striking photos of the migration, starts on page 11.

Photo: © Rick Bateman



Material reproduced in this publication under a Creative Commons license meets all required terms and conditions. For details, see: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0>.

SEJ President's Report	4	Jeff Burnside
Feature: Revolving Door: When Enviro Reporters Leave the Beat Behind	5	Rae Tyson 
Freelance Files: Staying Afloat in Murky Ethical Waters	7	Hannah Hoag 
EJ Academy: Going Whole Hog on Innovative Student Project	8	Laura Ruel 
Inside Story: An Ibis Takes Off...and a Micro Beat Pays Off	11	
Reporter's Toolbox: A Paradox of Plurals — More Than One, or Less?	15	Vicki and John Pearse 
Between the Lines: Making 'Rain' for the Caring Middle	16	Tom Henry 
BookShelf	18	Tom Henry, Christine Heinrichs, Jim Motavalli, Bill Kovarik
Feature: Men in Woods in Indie Films	22	JoAnn Valenti 

Yes, You Should Run for SEJ's Board

By JEFF BURNSIDE

Busy people know how to get things done.

So, when I suggest that you consider running for a seat on the board of directors of the Society of Environmental Journalists, your first reaction (“I’m far too busy!”) can be quickly countered: Busy people are known for managing their time.

Moreover, so many of us are involved with SEJ because its mission means something to us. We’ve joined SEJ, at least in part, because we enjoy making a statement about the importance of more and better coverage of environmental issues. Therefore, it stands to reason that joining the SEJ board will simply enhance that great feeling of supporting a cause in which you believe.

Finally, there is an extraordinary sense of family that comes with serving on the SEJ board, fueled by that shared mission.

The issues board members tackle are many: Taking action to fight FOIA battles, fundraising, conference planning, recruiting new members, guiding our experienced staff with policy, representing SEJ at public appearances, event planning, strengthening our diversity, raising awareness of SEJ at every opportunity.

We are a task-oriented board. Because the size of our paid staff is small, board members are expected to roll up their sleeves and do stuff. There’s no room for only pontificating.

Let’s break down the time and expense:

- Board members must attend the four quarterly meetings, one of which coincides with the annual SEJ conference. Each meeting is held in a different city – often where we’d like to hold a conference and where we want to build an awareness of SEJ.

- Between meetings, the time commitment is limited to two to three conference calls.

- There are a dozen or so email discussions about pressing issues addressed between board meetings.

- In order to save money, occasionally one of the quarterly board meetings turns into an online meeting rather than physically travelling to meet, further reducing your time commitment.

- Does SEJ reimburse board members for all expenses? No. Board members are reimbursed for air travel and hotel costs to the three, non-conference quarterly meetings – minus \$100. We’re not reimbursed for the cost of getting to and from the airports, or most meals. Board members are not reimbursed for the cost of attending the SEJ conference because we’d attend anyway.

The fact is it doesn’t require a lot of your time or money to serve on the SEJ board. If you rise up through the hierarchy and serve as an officer or on the executive committee, there’ll be some additional commitments.



Conversely, there are some very important things SEJ board members must bring to the table. Board members of almost every non-profit are expected to donate an amount of money that suits them.

No one is forcing you. No one is setting an amount. But, it’s entirely reasonable that, if the institution means enough to you to run for the board, it should also get some level of donation from you. Additionally, many foundations that fund groups like SEJ often ask whether each board member has donated.

SEJ is tight with our members’ money. So board members don’t get their conference registration waived. We don’t get our membership dues waived either. It just wouldn’t pass the sniff test.

Another option is to raise money for SEJ. Journalists and fundraising sometimes don’t mix. For example, no one would expect you to solicit funds from people or institutions you cover. So we have a system where fundraising leads are handed off to someone else who can make the inquiry. Our policies severely limit from whom we can accept donations.

The most important thing to remember before tossing your hat in the ring is this: Being an SEJ board member is about giving, not receiving. SEJ welcomes candidates who are in it for all the right reasons, not the selfish ones.

The bottom line is this: Joining the SEJ board is rewarding. It’s special. It makes you proud. You can help guide the world’s leading association of journalists dedicated to more and better coverage of environmental issues. Our members are in every state and province, and many nations. What we do is important. And board members are in charge.

Here’s a little tip: You know those short speeches given by candidates at the membership meeting during the conference? They’re really important. Voters have been known to discount candidates whose speeches convey a sense – rightly or wrongly – that you don’t care that much. Our members are journalists, after all. They’re smart. They care. And it’s a genuine honor to serve on their board.

Will you throw your hat in the ring?

Jeff Burnside is a senior investigative reporter with KOMO television, Seattle’s ABC station, and has served on the SEJ Board for eight years. He’s been awarded several working fellowships and is the recipient of more than 20 journalism awards. A Seattle native, he has reported on coral reef decline, overfishing, killer whales and biomedical research, from locales like Berlin, Bali, the Arctic Circle, Panamanian jungles, and throughout the Caribbean, Hawaii, and the Everglades.

Revolving Door: When Enviro Reporters Leave the Beat Behind

By RAE TYSON

So, here is an SEJ riddle: What do George Orwell, Jim Detjen, Ernest Hemingway, Matt Wald, Mark Twain and Dina Cappiello have in common?

All of them, for a variety of reasons, left daily journalism for careers elsewhere.

In other words, since the days of “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,” “Animal Farm” and “The Old Man and the Sea,” talented individuals have decided that civilization as we know it would survive if they stopped working for the purveyors of news.

Although accomplished veteran reporters have been leaving journalism for decades, it was a pair of recent defections that had the Society of Environmental Journalists listserv buzzing: Veteran reporters — *New York Times*’ Matt Wald and Dina Cappiello of the Associated Press — both announced they were leaving the profession for jobs in the private sector.

Wald, a 38-year *Times*’ veteran who covered energy and transportation from the Washington, D.C., bureau, took a *Times* buyout offer, then accepted a policy job at the Nuclear Energy Institute, a D.C. lobbying group.

Cappiello, a former SEJ board member who covered the environment and energy for AP, left to become a vice president with Edelman, doing energy-related publications work for the firm.

Wald was mildly amused by the reactions to his departure: “Journalism has some aspects of the Mafia,” he said. “It is hard to be allowed out.”

For her part, Cappiello acknowledged that there were things she’d miss after seven years of reporting for AP. “I loved the notion of being an inside-the-Beltway reporter for people outside the Beltway.”

But for the mother of two boys, ages five and three, the daily challenge of working for the nation’s leading wire service while juggling parental responsibilities made her life stressful.

It is a familiar scenario in journalism, where the intersection of low pay, long hours, job insecurity and family responsibilities often triggers a search for better career alternatives, even among dedicated reporters and editors.

“I know a lot of people who are struggling with the same choice,” Cappiello said. “In the end, I, too, struggled with it because it was a hard decision to leave.”

Wald’s new position has him working on nuclear energy policy



Former AP reporter Dina Cappiello, center, interviewing former Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, left, accompanied by an unidentified fellow AP staffer. AP Photo / Charles Dharapak

but not public relations. He explained: “I decided, after 38 years, that maybe it was time for something new.”

Trading on journalistic expertise

Though Cappiello’s departure from AP did not seem to generate as much criticism as Wald’s move, both fueled the debate about veteran reporters moving into advocacy careers.

But the consensus was, perhaps grudgingly, that reporters do generally make good advocates because they fully understand the rules of engagement.

Throughout history, the notion of trading expertise, contacts and experience for another, often better paying, job is certainly not new.

Legislators — local, state or federal — leave office for positions as lobbyists for special interests. Political appointees commonly take lucrative jobs in the private sector after leaving public service.

But the transitions don’t always follow a logical path.

Take former public servants like George Stephanopoulos, who left the Clinton administration for a position with ABCNews and “Good Morning America.” Or former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, who hosted a program on Fox News before leaving this year to consider a presidential bid.

Rep. Cheri Bustos, D-Ill., was a reporter for the *Quad City*

Times for nearly 20 years before she successfully ran for public office. Wrote TheHill.com: “It was a profession that suited her well.”

Despite that perpetual revolving door, advocates and fellow journalists alike react when an environment or energy reporter like Wald or Capiello decides to leave the profession.

Typical was the reaction from *Corporate Crime Reporter*: “This did not sit well with public interest activists who for years had to deal with Wald’s pro-nuclear bias. And it continues an unseemly trend of mainstream news reporters going to work for the industries they covered as reporters.”

Asked about the accusations of bias in his energy coverage, Wald said, “I guess I will leave that for others to judge.”

Personal, financial considerations are factors

“How people live their lives is a personal matter,” commented SEJ member Nancy Gaarder, reporter at the *Omaha World-Herald*, about the recent departures. “Who am I to judge?”

Indeed, the decision to leave journalism is often personal, dictated by a number of factors.

Founding SEJ President James Detjen began covering science and environmental issues for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1982, during the time when legendary editor Gene Roberts was at the helm. “It was a very exciting time to be there,” Detjen said.

But, in the early 1990s, daily newspapers were showing serious signs of economic distress — and Roberts left the *Inquirer*.

After extensive family discussions, Detjen decided to leave journalism — not only because of uncertainty about the *Inquirer*’s future but also because he and his wife were worried about financing a college education for their children.

In 1994, Detjen accepted an offer to teach at Michigan State University, occupying the Knight Chair in Environmental Journalism. Detjen, his wife Connie and their two sons sold their home in Pennsylvania and moved to Michigan, where the new job included decent pay and the prospect of reduced tuition for their two sons.

“Initially, I wasn’t sure it would work out,” he said. “But it did and I loved it.”

Financial realities, including layoffs, also influenced others who left environmental reporting.

Peter Dykstra left Greenpeace in 1991 for a job in journalism. He got hired to work on environmental coverage at CNN in Atlanta. In 2008, “it was my turn to be laid off” when parent Turner Broadcasting cut back its science and environment coverage.

Dykstra, a former SEJ board member, landed a job as publisher at the Environmental Health News web site four years ago, but recently saw his hours and salary shrink when the non-profit lost a substantial chunk of funding.

Gary Polakovic, another former SEJ board member, covered environmental issues for 23 years, but a 2007 buyout offer led him to give up his job at the *Los Angeles Times*. After leaving the *Times*, he used some of his buyout money to create a public relations firm called Make Over Earth.

“I left because extreme instability in the newsroom made career traction impossible,” Polakovic said in a 2010 interview with the Poynter Institute. Polakovic declined to be interviewed for this *SEJournal* piece.

Finding ‘life after journalism’

Robert Engelman, SEJ co-founder and board member, covered

science, health and the environment for the Scripps-Howard Washington bureau, where the fledgling SEJ held many of its organizational meetings.

“Once I understood the basic science surrounding the stories I was covering and had developed a diversity of good sources, I came to believe these were critically important stories, worthy of aggressive coverage,” he recalled.

But coverage disagreements with his editors had Engelman re-assigned to cover the House of Representatives, a beat he had little interest in.

“Feeling rebellious about having so little control over my beat assignment after many years in the profession, I began to consider other options,” he said.

Engelman decided to leave Scripps-Howard, taking an advocacy job with NGO Population Action International. He eventually moved to think tank Worldwatch Institute and served as president prior to his retirement.

For Connecticut journalist and SEJ member Jan Ellen Spiegel, moving back and forth from journalism to flacking for politicians like Rep. Joseph Kennedy, D-Mass., proved to be challenging.

“I found it extremely hard to do,” she said. Spiegel is now writing for the online CTMirror.

Another SEJ member, Roger Witherspoon, left journalism for a time to work for petroleum giant Exxon in its environmental grants program. “The transition to Exxon was hard because the corporate world was different,” he recalled. Witherspoon eventually left the corporate world and returned to journalism. “Coming back into the business was not that big of an adjustment for me,” he said.

Reflecting on the economic realities of the current journalism climate, consider the plight of Kelly Conde. She was the winner of second place in last year’s SEJ feature writing category for a piece she wrote for *The Missoula Independent* while still a student.

Despite her obvious writing talent, Conde’s undergraduate degree in science and a graduate degree in environmental journalism, she ended up in an advocacy job with the Sawtooth Society because she said there were no reporting jobs available.

“I actually never left the journalism profession because I never really got a chance to try it in the first place,” said Conde.

‘Making lemonade’ with a PR slot

Though journalists are sometimes critical of former colleagues like Capiello who leave the profession for public relations jobs, the universal feeling is, they will probably be good in their new role.

“I tend to look at such moves as making lemonade, and suggest that in the long term, it may help the entities they joined to better serve both media and the public, as the individuals are likely to bring their ‘bad habits’ of journalism integrity into their new shops,” said SEJ board member Mark Schleifstein, environment reporter for the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* and nola.com.



Former *New York Times* reporter
Matthew Wald

Photo: courtesy Matthew Wald

Freelance Files

Staying Afloat in Murky Ethical Waters

By HANNAH HOAG

Freelancing is a tough way to make a living these days.

When you’re paid by the word, it’s easy to spot the trend: freelance writing rates haven’t climbed in the past decade. Ask a freelance journalist who has soldiered on for longer than that and you’ll hear that today’s rates are on par with those from 20 or, even, 30 years ago.

A host of explanations reportedly account for the pay freeze: Print magazine advertising collapsed; subscription numbers plummeted; online content became free; people wanted to write for “exposure”; the feature well dried up, and the marketplace became flooded with freelancers after the dissolution of staff jobs and environment beats.

It shows up on freelancers’ balance sheets. In 2014, I filed more articles and wrote a greater number of words than in 2013, but I earned a similar income. It all adds up to a lot more hustle for the same pocket change.

This sad state of affairs drives freelancers to supplement their income with better-paying work — and sometimes plunks them into murky waters.

Experienced reporters have transferrable skills that can be put to use in other fields. They research deeply, knit compelling narratives and write quickly — exactly the skills wanted by communications offices, marketing agencies and PR consultancies.

In addition to committing acts of journalism for newspapers and magazines, websites and

trade magazines, many credible freelance journalists also sell their editorial services to universities, advocacy groups and pharmaceutical companies. They edit reports, blog, and write branded content for companies and organizations that all have a particular point of view, sometimes for double — or more — the hourly journalism rate.

They are richer than the rest of us.

Doing this type of work can grate against some of the ethical principles many journalists learned in school or on the job and adhere to via their professional associations. But it’s up to freelancers to recognize potential conflicts of interest — few publications have outlined their views in ethics handbooks. (*The New York Times* is an exception. See http://www.nytimes.com/wp-content/uploads/nyt_ethical_journalism_0904-1.pdf)

“I do a lot of both journalism and PR, and I just try to always make sure that I’m as transparent as possible,” says Kendall Powell,

a freelance science journalist based in Colorado. “But where’s the line? Do I just have to disclose, disclose, disclose and let readers decide for themselves if I’m a shill for the Man?”

‘I never want to be surprised’

Many editors believe journalists shouldn’t write press releases, custom content, or contribute to other corporate publications. Even when there is no uncertainty about the integrity of the journalist’s reporting, the perception of a conflict of interest can risk the reputation of the reporter — and the publication.

“I never want to be surprised by a potential problem,” says Adam Rogers, the articles editor at *Wired*. “The worst thing that could happen would be that I’d be working with a reporter and then I’d see his or her name as the point of contact for a press release, without getting prepared for that possibility.”

Freelancers sometimes parcel their journalism and non-journalism work by theme to avoid any perceived conflicts of interest. They might write advertising and marketing copy for pharmaceutical companies, but dedicate their journalistic work to the coverage of climate change.

What about other scenarios? If you write for a university alumni publication, can you still write about other researchers at that institution for a newspaper or mag-

azine? Not if you follow the rule of thumb that you shouldn’t take money from those you cover. On the other hand, is it reasonable to exclude the work of thousands of researchers because you wrote one \$400 news story?

Disclosure, says Rogers, is the first step. It’s important to have the discussion with your editors before it becomes an issue. But it doesn’t necessarily absolve the journalist of his actions. “If you have something that’d need to be disclosed in a story, you should also be rethinking whether you have the right writer,” he says.

Freelancers are now being tapped to write branded content. On one listserv I belong to, a freelance tech journalist said a magazine editor he worked with had asked him to write client-sponsored content (labeled as advertorial) for the same magazine at a higher rate.

It seemed wrong to me. That kind of behavior doesn’t fly in

Continued on page 21



For two weeks in 2008, author Hannah Hoag lived — and worked — aboard the CCGS Amundsen, a Canadian Arctic research icebreaker that served as a home base for climate change researchers from around the world. Although the trip was organized by a journalism association, the World Federation of Science Journalists, which covered travel costs and accommodation on board the ship, some media outlets told Hoag they couldn’t consider stories from the excursion.

Photo: Bennie Mols

Continued on page 10

Going Whole Hog on Innovative Student Project

By LAURA RUEL



Dave Hull, farm manager at Tom Butler's industrial hog farm in Lillington, N.C., greets one of over 6,000 pigs housed in ten hog houses. Photo by Caitlin Kleiboer

Duplin County, N.C., has more hogs than people — actually about 30 hogs for every person. My state is the second-largest hog producer in the nation, after Iowa.

Yet I was unprepared to hear my students at UNC-Chapel Hill's School of Journalism and Mass Communication say how they wanted to spend their summer. They wanted to spend seven weeks wading through shit. Pig shit. Hog waste, to be exact.

I'm the executive producer of the school's acclaimed "Powering a Nation" project, which during the previous five years had focused on student-conceived stories about coal, oil, wind power, water, natural resources and electricity. Initially funded with a grant from the Carnegie and Knight foundations, "Powering a Nation" has become a model for new types of storytelling about U.S. energy use. We had seen much success — from SXSW wins to an Emmy nomination to a Grantham Award of Special Merit.

So I was pumped for another great year when we met in spring 2014 for a "breakfast and brainstorm" session at my home. I couldn't wait to see what that year's student group had planned.

After much discussion, they made their choice. I was skeptical at first: Hog waste? Really? But I believed these talented students could choose any topic and make it interesting. What ensued during the next two months was an amazing voyage of discovery.

Hog waste = alternative energy

The pork industry has been raising a stink in North Carolina for years. It's not just the smell; it's the air pollution that causes asthma, sinus problems and potentially fatal inflammatory lung conditions.

In fact, a nuisance lawsuit filed against pork producers claims that the odors, gases, particulates, bacteria and other toxins emanating from hog farms have made it almost impossible for people to live safely nearby.

At "Powering a Nation," we look at energy, and we soon found out about the power of pork.

Attending an alternative energy conference at UNC was part of the students' preparation for the summer. The students met many of the state and region's alternative energy experts. But one man stood out.

"When I scanned the conference agenda to see who I wanted to connect with, I saw experts in solar, wind, green transportation, and other sustainable energy projects," said "WholeHogNC" student editor Kelly Creedon. "And then I saw there was a hog farmer on the list, and I knew exactly who I wanted to talk with. At 75,

Tom Butler was an unexpected character in the world of renewables, and his quiet but persistent enthusiasm for making energy from hog waste really drew me in."

The story by Jess Clark and Dree Deacon later described him:

Tom Butler's business card has the words "Power in the Poop" printed across the creme-colored cardstock. Flip it over, and you'll see an aerial photo of his farm: 10 narrow hog houses in a neat row along a sandy dirt road. Behind them are three huge, mint-green tarps that Butler uses to cover his "hog lagoons," or the large pools that collect millions of gallons of hog feces and urine from his 6,000-plus herd.

Butler's lagoons generate electricity for his farm operations, hence the striking tagline on his business card.

The students could envision the story. Motion graphics could demonstrate the process of how hog waste is converted to electrical energy and sold back to the grid. Researching and explaining this process would challenge these aspiring science reporters. And who doesn't like bacon? The personalities of hog farmers and ham lovers would add to the engagement of our video stories.

It was a solid plan. But as their research continued, they discovered something else.

The students learned that Butler's method hasn't been proven to be profitable or affordable.

Challenges 'pulled apart'

Producing pork means big money for big businesses. A number of credible researchers have proven the ill health effects and the air pollution hog farms cause. The story was much more complex than initially thought.

It became a summer of difficulties. Getting access to the area's hog farms was challenging. The battle lines in the community had been drawn, and our desire to tell all sides of the stories was challenged by people who were suspicious, frightened and skeptical of our motives.

As the students outlined in the staff editorial:



Pigs at Cane Creek Farms, a local community-supported agriculture farm in Efland, N.C. The farm raises hogs naturally — antibiotic and hormone free. Photo by Caitlin Kleiboer

The history of North Carolina's pork industry is shaped by community tensions and the struggle for power.

Our journalistic exploration of the industry was met with some pushback, ostensibly, at least in part, from fear: fear of losing one's job, assets, reputation, even livelihood.

Perhaps the ultimate irony is that this fear — pitting activist against farmer, corporation against reporter, neighbor against neighbor — is driven by a shared set of values and common goals of maintaining community, family and tradition.

The students knew that their storytelling had to be fair, accurate and trustworthy. Even in this age of multimedia, sometimes the story could be best told with words. With some community members hesitant to be in front of a camera, we used short video clips with well-chosen words in the site section, "Pulled Apart."

Investigative work about the complexities of the pork industry also challenged the team. Getting quotes "on the record" proved difficult. We used interactive and motion graphics to explain the industry's growth and carbon footprint. We also did video stories to capture the state's culture of pork and Butler's farm operation.

The media matched the messages. The impact was enlightening.

WholeHogNC.org has already won a gold medal in the large group multimedia category of College Photographer of the Year and has been recognized by the professional "Best of Digital Design" competition of the Society for News Design.

How did we accomplish this in about two months?

'Creativity essential'

Creating the right mix of personalities and skills was the crucial first step to success. Our unofficial mantra at UNC's J-school is similar to many journalism schools today. We want our students to be jacks-of-all-trades, but masters of one.

We chose the students who have shown commitment to their craft because they absolutely love it. They intimately know the strengths and weaknesses of their chosen craft and respect the strengths of others.

Early in the project process, we spent time using "design think-

ing” methods to work through student ideas. This problem-solving strategy challenges team members to use creativity, original ideas and — sometimes — non-traditional thinking to work through solutions.

What this meant in our newsroom is that no one media form trumped another in the early planning stages. Creativity was essential. If we could do anything, what would we do to make the storytelling as clear, understandable and straightforward as possible?

Granted, this needed to be done quickly. I recall that early team meetings sometimes fell flat. The team didn’t see a clear direction for their work. They were impatient and frustrated.

But — as it always does — results materialized when the time was right. By encouraging (and sometimes expediting) these early stages of design, the collective skills and talents of the group came together and a clear path was laid.

The project coaches and my fellow producers all had to buy into this thinking process. It was essential that we did not let our “coaching” become “directing,” or our “advising” become “dictating.”

Once the students determined their direction, the team had to work non-stop and push to make the project deadline. Here is where the students needed to sometimes stop thinking about the big picture and focus on their individual parts of it.

For WholeHogNC.com, here was the team composition:

- 2 researchers/writers
- 2 photographers/videographers
- 1 graphic artist/designer
- 1 graphic artist/designer/web developer
- 3 full-time producers
- 4 part-time consultants/coaches

Hard work and long hours were no strangers to any team member. The seven weeks of time allotted to produce the project provided us all with a stringent deadline and clear goals.

Tips for your special student projects

No one formula was used to create WholeHogNC.org. I do know that the wide range of teaching, training and instruction our students at UNC receive from faculty in every area — from reporting, to ethics to programming — provided a solid for the team.

I also offer the following tips for anyone preparing to under-



Photo by Caitlin Kleiboer

take a similar project:

- Choose your team carefully. Pay special attention to students who are talented in one form of media, but respectful of other forms.
- Allow the team to make important decisions. All major decisions about the project must come from the team, not from an individual. Everyone becomes more invested in the project’s success

this way.

- Respect the “design thinking” process. Allow the lulls of idea generation and the frenetic pace of project planning to flow naturally. Remind the students that fits and starts are part of the process they must go through.

- Have the team set deadlines. This may be the one area where producers and coaches may be tempted to intervene. But, again, the students will be more dedicated to deadlines if they make the commitment themselves.

- Select coaches with dedication. All coaches must buy into the project process of student-driven ideas and creativity. They, too, must respect other coaches and have a specialty area of expertise. Coaches who want to “take over” can be disruptive. In addition, coaches do not need to be with the team constantly. Having them operate as consultants, working with the students when they ask for guidance, is best.

Laura Ruel has been the executive producer of “Powering a Nation” (poweringanation.org) for the past six years. She is the Hugh Morton Distinguished Associate Professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at UNC-Chapel Hill and teaches interactive design, usability and user experience design.

Leaving the Beat Continued from p. 6

Agreed Witherspoon, also an SEJ board member: “It is always preferable to talk to someone who has been a journalist.”

Gardner added, “When journalists go to the ‘dark side’ they often emerge as some of the very best PR people. They understand deadlines, they have good news judgment and, I hope, they have a thick skin.”

Dykstra also concurred: “It is easier to abide by the rules of engagement when you have seen both sides.”

Merritt Clifton, a veteran reporter, blogger and SEJ member with a knack for putting issues into perspective, including the current debate, put it this way: “Honest people will still be honest people, even if they do PR, while the pond scum in PR who once worked in journalism were probably pond scum then, too.”

In the end, former reporters like Detjen and Engelman, both SEJ founders, discovered there is life after journalism.

“It wasn’t easy to walk away from newspaper journalism,” Engelman said. “But, for me, there was not only life after journalism, but a fulfilling career that grew out of and benefited from my years as an environmental journalist.”

Added Detjen: “I never looked back.”

Rae Tyson, former environmental reporter for USA Today, is an SEJ co-founder and former president. He left journalism to become public affairs director at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Tyson rejoined journalism and SEJ after his retirement from federal service in 2010.



A butcher trims pork at Cliff’s Meat Market in Carrboro, N.C., the destination for locally-raised hogs. Photo by Caitlin Kleiboer

Inside Story

An Ibis Takes Off ... and a Micro-Beat Pays Off



Researchers serve as ‘foster parents,’ bonding with northern bald ibises shortly after they hatched in captivity, acquainting them with the paraglider that will join them on their winter migration over the Alps from Germany to the Tuscan region of Italy. Photo: © Johannes Fritz

Amid much discouraging news about the environment, “along comes a feature story that lifts the reader off the ground with hope.” That was the high praise judges gave 2014 SEJ award winner Chelsea Wald for her story about a scientist trying to teach ibises to migrate again. Wald, a native of Alexandria, Va., writes about science and nature from Vienna, Austria. Her work has appeared in Science, Nautilus, Slate, Discover, TheAtlantic.com, The Economist, BBC Wildlife and more. She is also the author of “A Traveler’s Guide to Astronomy and Space in the Southwest.” “Inside Story” Editor Beth Daley interviewed her recently.

SEJournal: What elements constitute a good feature story for you?

Chelsea Wald: One trick I’ve learned is to try to sum my story up in a single intriguing sentence: “A scientist thinks he understands migration — until he tries to teach an endangered bird to fly south again.” Done right, these sentences can convince you that you have everything you need for a good narrative: strong characters, twisty plots, and a rich sense of place.

Far from oversimplifying the story, they make you want to sit down and read a good yarn. And, for freelancers, they can be the key to a successful pitch. That’s not to say that I can always get this sentence right before I begin writing. It’s a process of drafting and revising, as well as challenging it with the facts, like a hypothesis.

SEJournal: Your ibis story was deeply reported — you even

camped out with the researcher. What is the trigger for you to know that a story is worth that much time?

Wald: I devoted an absurd amount of time to this story. I first read a quick news story about this ambitious conservation project on a local English-language news website in early 2012. Yet almost nothing had been written about it in English for an international audience, which I figured was potentially great for me. So I contacted the project leader and arranged to meet up with him the next time he was in Vienna at a conference.

“Something very real — and complex and inspiring — was happening.”

Chelsea Wald

It was clear to me that something very real — and complex and inspiring — was happening, and I had been yearning to do some field reporting, so I arranged to travel to southern Germany by train and to camp out with him in the field for a night. After that, I was sure I had a great story, but I wasn’t sure what form it would take.

Over the next year I spent another five days or so in the field with the project’s anti-hunting team. I hadn’t placed a feature, but during that time I sold some news stories about it that helped cover

As seen from the accompanying paraglance, a flock of migrating northern bald ibises soar over the Italian countryside of Tuscany as they near their new winter home.

Photo: © M. Unsöld



A northern bald ibis
(*Geronticus eremita*).
Photo: © Johannes Fritz

costs. When *Nautilus* bought the feature (before their first issue even came out), they covered another night in the field (in a hotel this time) to bring it up to date.

I've continued to follow the story and place shorter pieces since the feature came out. I consider this a sort of micro-beat, which continues to pay off.

SEJournal: Can you give fellow SEJers any tips on structuring long pieces? How do you approach it, handle transitions?

Wald: Find a great editor! That's probably the best advice. Also, after lots of grief, I now tackle first drafts by writing the story in chronological order as much as possible. I love stories that jump back and forth in time but think that most benefit from a straight-forward structure.

Beginnings and endings are also big challenges, but it helps me to approach them together, as two parts of a whole. I've noticed how I read, especially online: If I'm liking a long story but don't have time for the whole thing, I read the beginning, scan the middle, and then jump to the end. If there's a meaningful link between top and bottom, a sense of closure, even though I haven't read every single word, the experience can still be sublime.

SEJournal: What project are you working on now and most excited about?

Wald: Thanks to a travel fellowship from the European Geosciences Union, I was able to deeply report a story in *Nature* about a soil scientist who works in forensics, solving crimes. [See story at <http://bit.ly/1Pvk2tb>.] It wasn't supposed to be a profile at first, but the more I got to know this scientist over two years, the more I realized that she was the story.

SEJournal: You have a degree in astronomy from Columbia University and worked in Chile on a Fulbright studying ancient astronomy. What got you interested in journalism?



A northern bald ibis sitting on a nest in the bird's rookery in Burghausen, Germany. Photo: © M. Schweikl



Writer Chelsea Wald accompanied the northern bald ibis migration from a chase helicopter. Photo: courtesy Chelsea Wald

Wald: I was one of those people who was fascinated by everything and didn't want to specialize. I thought that being a science journalist would allow me to continue to learn my whole life, and it has. What I didn't realize is that it would make me an expert in something, after all — in science and environmental journalism — and I take a profound pleasure in doing this work well and continue to try to get better all the time. (And, believe me, I don't usually feel like an expert.)

SEJournal: What advice can you give to freelancers to pitch stories to publications?

Wald: Freelancing features is an endurance sport. I maintain files and get Google alerts on many different story ideas that I'm following — probably dozens at this point, although some are more active than others. Some of them I've pitched once or twice, and others I haven't yet. It's important for me to keep a running list of ideas for when an editor (very rarely) comes to me and says, hey, what ideas do you have for me? It's amazing how blank my brain can go if I don't have that list to reference.

I think the biggest mistake that freelancers (including me) make is to fail to focus the pitch. We leave too many threads in there, thinking that the editor will pluck out the one that he or she wants, but the reality is that the pile obscures all of the threads.

"Inside Story" editor Beth Daley is reporter and director of partnerships at the New England Center for Investigative Reporting, a nonprofit newsroom based at Boston University and affiliated with WGBH News.

Reporter's Toolbox

The Paradox of Plurals — More Than One, or Less?

By VICKI and JOHN PEARSE

One elephant, two elephants, a herd of elephants. No one privileged to have witnessed these magnificent animals on their own turf in Africa could deny the splendor and dignity of every individual.

But suddenly, when they become quarry, hunters go after "elephant." They pursue "leopard" and "rhino." The fearsome lions and tigers and bears in the Land of Oz, when game for hunters, are reduced to "lion," "tiger," "bear."

What happened? Deprived of the plural "s," the prey transform from living, breathing, and potentially dangerous animals into something abstract, therefore at once less threatening and less subject to uncomfortable ethics.

With one stroke, the hunt is exalted, and the prey is diminished.

The dropped "s" is not an accident. For example, on a hunting blog, a hunter uses "elephant" when he is hunting, "elephants" when he is estimating the number of individuals. He writes, "I have hunted elephant three times. ... Each hunt I saw numerous (far in excess of 100) elephants." This is the same person talking, so he sees a difference between the two options and chooses each to fit the context.

A travel writer for the *Seattle Times* praises Zambia, where "... big game such as lion, leopard and elephant is abundant." Yet in the same article, she recounts, "We sit for maybe 20 minutes and watch as the elephants eat and lock tusks." Again, "elephant" as game is a formless singular, but when watching an elephant family, she mentions the mother, baby, aunt: now they are individuals.

I hunted elephant, drank water, added flour and sugar. These nouns for substances or commodities have no plural. Are elephants substances?

Deer, elk, moose. Bison, beaver, grouse. When wild animals become sport or commodities, they lose their individual identity. The words quarry, game and prey themselves conveniently lack explicit plurals.

Oddly, domestic animals are a mix.

We say one sheep, two sheep with no unambiguous plural form, while poultry, cattle, and livestock are plurals with no singular form. At the same time, the particular kinds (chickens, geese) or genders (hens or roosters, cows or bulls) merit specified plurals; if your goal is eggs or milk, the gender of the individual producer is critical.

Domestic animals with whom we enjoy individual relationships invariably retain explicit plurals: dogs, cats, horses.

Seafood somehow has its own rules.

We use the same word fish both for the animal and for the flesh that's eaten. But ichthyologists and fishermen will say fishes when they mean more than one species. (This is simply a convention, and a cryptic one; an invented policy applying to a single animal group can only complicate writing and confuse readers. Why not one fish, two fishes?)

Ambiguous plurals prevail for salmon, trout, tuna, sole, halibut, bass, herring, cod — but, strangely, anchovies and sardines take an "s." Squid and shrimp are rarely if ever dignified with plurals, but clams, mussels, and oysters always are — because we have to deal



What do you call a group of algae? Algae, of course. This furry algae coats the north face of rocks in Point Reyes, Calif. Called Trentepohlia, these algae contain green chlorophyll, but red pigments predominate. Photo: Chris Bruggers

with each one individually to wrest it from its shell and then eat the whole animal?

Ironically, the language of the conservation community follows that of hunters and fishermen. It may be because these different interest groups interact closely, but also, conservationists are often most focused on abstractions (populations and distributions), somewhat less on individuals.

In contrast, biologists studying behavior, for example, must commonly distinguish their study subjects as individuals and therefore automatically use plurals: elephants, rhinos, beavers, fishes, octopuses, and abalones.

Environmental journalists, while free to choose their language, should be aware that their choices are thickly layered with context.

Journalists should consider context, scientific terminology

Another realm of difficulty for environmental journalists is a technical one, the correct handling of biological names for animals, plants, microbes, and their parts. If it's any comfort, professional biologists regularly stumble over these words, too.

Again, plurals are the main hurdles. It's unfortunate, in this respect, that English has become the international language of scientific communication, because English retains the Latin and Greek forms, both singular and plural, of many terms.

These same terms in French, Spanish, Italian, and German scientific literature are rendered in terms consonant with each language, and the regular plural endings of each language apply; hence, there's no comparable problem.

The attachment of English speakers to Latin and Greek terms might be blamed on the tradition of teaching these languages in fashionable schools to young gentlemen who then clung to this mark of privilege. Now such classes are nearly extinct, but we are stuck with this heritage.

In English, for example, the term for what are commonly called

Continued on page 23

Making 'Rain' For the Caring Middle



Author Cynthia Barnett experiences a sun shower in the rainiest place on Earth, Cherrapunji, in India's state of Meghalaya.

Photo by Rimjhim Gogoi

For this latest installment of “Between the Lines,” a question-and-answer feature with authors, SEJournal book editor Tom Henry interviewed longtime SEJ member Cynthia Barnett about her third book, *RAIN: A Natural and Cultural History*, which came out in April. It’s a unique, ambitious book that goes beyond climate science and water in general to show how rain itself has been perceived around the world by numerous cultures throughout history. Barnett sees rain as “a unifying force in a fractured world.” She also is the author of two other highly acclaimed books, *Mirage: Florida and the Vanishing Water of the Eastern U.S.* and *Blue Revolution: Unmaking America’s Water Crisis*.

SEJournal: This is such a unique book. How did you get the idea for it and what convinced you there was enough material to do a whole book just about rain?

Cynthia Barnett: The seed of the idea came from readers of my previous books, “Blue Revolution” and “Mirage.” As I went around the country speaking about water, I found that even people skeptical of climate change love to talk about the crazy weather: record rainfall, epic drought, extreme storms. I started using weather as an opening to talk about climate change with general audiences – in

libraries and churches and the like. Then one drizzly Friday afternoon, I was swooning over this nice rainfall on the patio outside my office, and it hit me that I could write the story of rain. I felt sure someone must have already done it, but no one had.

The problem was never whether there would be enough material – just the opposite. The story of rain is the story of Earth and humanity; it’s impossible to do it justice. It pains me to think of everything I left out, including sections I worked so hard on and had to cut, such as the chimpanzee rain dances observed by Jane Goodall and others at Gombe National Park in Tanzania.

SEJournal: Your first two books are fine water books. But how would you compare “Rain” in terms of the writing? Were you thinking it had to be something more than yet another water book? What special challenges or surprises did you encounter?

Barnett: I spent many years as a journalistic water geek – I’ve written not one but two entire book chapters on water economics, and countless wonky policy stories on water infrastructure, wetlands mitigation banking, desalination, you name it. I’m proud of all that work, but for once, I wanted to try to write something literary and even lyrical. “Rain” is that effort.

What surprised me was how much harder it was than writing about policy and economics, maybe because I wasn’t used to it. For me, describing nature in the Hoh Rainforest in Washington or the rainiest place on Earth in Cherrapunji, India, without sounding purple, was harder than explaining water pricing. I’ve never rewritten so much or anguished so much over every sentence.

SEJournal: Many of us have written about water, weather and climate, but your narrative connects rain to culture and religion and everything from modern weather apps, the ‘80s hit “It’s Raining Men,” witchcraft trials in the Little Ice Age, Thomas Jefferson and Texas Gov. Rick Perry. What inspired this approach and what challenges did you face tying things together to keep them from sounding like just a string of anecdotes?

Barnett: There is a lot of religion and culture – music, literature, even fashion – in “Rain” because those frameworks can help make environmental stories more engaging, and because I wanted to draw new readers to my work. Too often I feel like we write for the choir, the people already concerned about water and other environmental issues. I wanted to do a better job reaching the “caring middle” – people who would care if they knew the same things we do, but they don’t seek out our stories.

The organizing thread is similar to my other books: Our hubris and constant attempt to defy nature, erecting subdivisions in places that are too wet to build, growing corn in places too dry to farm. With rain, we’ve always yearned for some semblance of control, from the Roman rain god Jupiter Pluvius, to Congress’s foray into rainmaking in the 19th Century. Governor Rick Perry’s rain prayers aren’t much different than the Mesopotamians’ 4,000 years before. In the end, of course, it turns out that we have managed to redirect the rain – only not in the way anyone would have intended.

SEJournal: I understand SEJ had a direct influence on you landing a book contract. What was it?

Barnett: I was unlucky enough to send “Rain” to the publishing houses in late October 2012 with the subtitle “A 4-billion-year-old love story” – just before Hurricane Sandy barreled into New York. For me, rain is a love story, but it was naïve to pitch it that way. Some of the editors responded while shuttered in at home, so eager were they to make comments like, “I don’t LOVE this idea.” I’ve never gotten such snarky rejection letters.

Here’s where SEJ comes in. I had just been at the annual [2012] conference in Lubbock, where I talked on Bill Souder’s book panel about “Rain” and my idea about weather as a unifying force and a way in with the “caring middle.” Bill was intrigued enough to tell his editor at Crown, and she was intrigued enough to call my agent and ask for the proposal – which never happens. She read the proposal, completely got the book, and ultimately bought it. Had I not gone to SEJ that year, I still would have published “Rain,” but I wouldn’t have a major publisher and all that means to a book.

SEJournal: Roughly how many other books did you read and how many scientific journals, periodicals, and historical documents did you consult to give yourself the ability to write with authority on this subject? Any that would be particularly valuable to SEJ members? What agencies do you find most helpful?

Barnett: This is the beauty of turning your beat into a book. So much of what I read and collected over the years to educate myself about water helped me see how to write the history of rain. I learned about the “rain follows the plow” era of American settlement more than a decade ago when I first read Wallace Stegner’s biography of John Wesley Powell, “Beyond the Hundredth Meridian.” Anyone covering water/drought now will benefit from that wonderful book, along with Marc Reisner’s “Cadillac Desert” and Donald Worster’s “Rivers of Empire” and “Dust Bowl.”

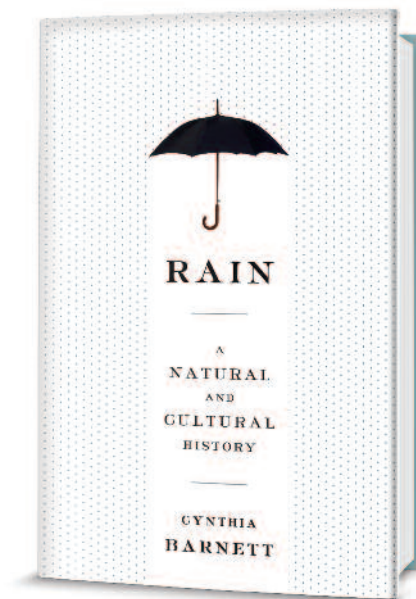
I couldn’t give you a number on the journal articles. I have privileges at a university research library, which has been essential to each book. For every topic, I check out every book and I scan everything that’s appeared in every major journal in the past decade or so to see what jumps out. For history, art and culture I relied a lot on JSTOR [a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary sources].

As far as agencies go, I think weather/climate reporters are fortunate that they get to deal with NOAA. I don’t think I’ve met one person in NOAA who wasn’t helpful and committed to helping the public understand our complicated atmosphere. The meteorologists I visited at The Met in Exeter, England, were of the same spirit. For rainfall data, I stuck with NOAA’s National Climatic Data Center in Asheville, N.C., so that my numbers would be consistent. NCDC also has the world’s largest archive of historic weather records. They are stacked to the ceiling in this cavernous basement, some in ship’s captains journals hundreds of years old.

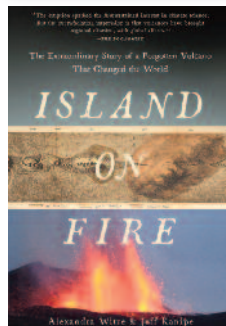
SEJournal: What advice would you give to would-be writers interested in tackling a subject as broad as rain, so they can stay focused on storytelling and not end up with something that reads like a textbook or scientific journal?

Barnett: One mistake we journalists make is to think of a book as multiple articles joined end to end. I did too much of that in my first two books. It’s important to build a strong argument or narrative through-line, with great transitions from chapter to chapter, so that the reader feels with you from beginning to end and the overarching narrative hangs together.

This seems like crazy advice from someone who stuck the history of the mackintosh raincoat in a book that ultimately leads to climate change. But it’s all connected. No one knew the factories cranking out macs and other textiles in Manchester, England, in the nineteenth century would help create first the human health disaster of smog, and then acid rain, and then – even change the climate. When it comes to the environment, everything is connected to everything else. In a way, that made my job easier.



BookShelf



Island on Fire: The Extraordinary Story of a Forgotten Volcano That Changed the World

By Alexandra Witze and Jeff Kanipe
Pegasus Books, \$26.95

Reviewed by TOM HENRY

This tautly written book opens with a basic premise: Can a single volcanic explosion change the course of history?

“Island on Fire: The Extraordinary Story of a Forgotten Volcano That Changed the World” brings us to that intersection of natural science and human history with a fascinating, up-close look at a 1783 eruption most of us have never heard about at an Icelandic super volcano called Laki near a mountain called Baroarbunga.

To many of us, these are just unusual words from one of the most unusual places on Earth. Iceland is a place many of us will never see and rarely hear mentioned or read about in news reports. Yet it is an incredible, complex place for geologists, an island with many volcanoes — some which could have the potential for spewing what Laki did someday.

It is the largely unknown contributions that volcanoes have made to climate change, not only above Earth’s surface but also below the sea, that drew me to this book (not to mention my budding fascination with Iceland and the Arctic in general, as well as Antarctica).

Ask yourself the last time Laki’s 1783 eruption factored in today’s climate discussion or even a brief summary of Earth’s climate history. But if we journalists are truly going to attempt to understand climate as a global phenomenon, we all need to learn more about the contributions from remote regions as well as their amazing history.

In the case of that 1783 eruption from Laki, an estimated 9,000 people in Iceland died. But that heavy toll doesn’t account for years of climate disruption, famine and disease that followed in that and other parts of the world.

Laki’s eruption, the authors state, is one of history’s great untold natural disasters — in no small part because of where the evolution of journalism itself was back then.

The authors contend we’ve now learned the eruption wasn’t just about the ash, lava and fog. It was also about poisonous gases blamed for longstanding impacts as far away as Europe and Africa.

With a lack of photographs and other visuals from that era, the writing — of course — needs to step up and be as descriptive as it can, and that’s what happens in this book.

There are only 204 pages of text, but much



SEJ Members

Advertise your books
published 2014 or later

<http://bit.ly/SEJBook>

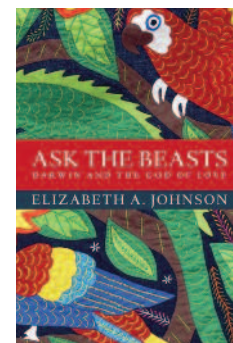
of the research is amazing and is deftly woven into a strong narrative. The result is a book that is steeped in science, but also history and the stories of people affected by a little-known landmark event.

One author, Alexandra Witze, is an award-winning science journalist and correspondent based in Boulder, Colo. She has written for the journal *Nature* and has traveled from the North Pole to the jungles of Guatemala to China’s earthquake-ravaged Sichuan province to report on a number of environmental issues.

The other, Jeff Kanipe, is an experienced science writer and the author of a number of astronomy books. Believe it or not, he has an asteroid (84447 Jeffkanipe) named after him.

With their dogged reporting and skillful presentation about the 1783 eruption from Laki and the potential impact of volcanoes in general on Earth’s system, the two of them have — in the words of *Scientific American* — helped close an important knowledge gap.

Tom Henry has been a journalist for 34 years, the past 22 at The (Toledo) Blade. He has been associated with SEJ since 1994, is a former board member, and has been SEJournal’s book editor since 2011. He is the chair of SEJ’s book award category for the third time in 2015.



Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love

By Elizabeth Johnson
Bloomsbury Continuum, \$32.95

Reviewed by CHRISTINE HEINRICHS

For those seeking spiritual direction about nature, Elizabeth Johnson offers a path with “Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love.”

A distinguished theology professor at Fordham University, Johnson embraces the premise of dialogue between science and religion, between Christians of all denominations, between people of faith, and those of none. “Building a bridge between them can have fruitful results, despite unresolved ambiguities that may result,” she writes.

Such a dialogue is not only possible, but necessary for the preservation of our planet and its species, as science and religion have come to a sad pass in contemporary America. Polls, for instance, show substantial proportions of the public “don’t believe” in evolution, the origin and age of the Earth, and other facts.

Johnson goes beyond answering those voices. She establishes a basis for a religious perspective that honors the landscape of all God’s creation, which she calls “the community of creation.” Humans hold a special place in that community, in her view, but have also spiritual responsibility to recognize and love God in all He has created.

For example, Johnson cites the final paragraph of Charles Darwin’s “On the Origin of Species,” which talks about a “a tangled bank” that is “clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth,” each of which are far different from each other but also highly dependent on each other in a complex way.

It is that kind of “tangled bank” that Johnson said requires care

from both believers and non-believers.

Christians traditionally experience conversion, a spiritual awakening, and turn to God. But Johnson calls Christian believers to a different kind of spiritual conversion, a conversion to the Earth. This ecological conversion changes perspective to concern for all the plants, animals and humans of God’s creation.

“Being converted to the Earth and its myriad inhabitants at this time of their distress is a moral imperative that transforms us toward great heartedness, in resonance with the Love who made and empowers it all,” she writes.

Her stated goal is “to discover that love of the natural world is an intrinsic part of faith in God, to practical and critical effect.”

She explores the biblical background on which fundamentalist Christians base their division of religion from science, but which — read with a different perspective — also provides guidelines for moderate and liberal Christians in their search for deeper understanding of the world.

Johnson provides thoughtful biographical material about Darwin, enriching the story of how he thought of his work and how he came to write “On the Origin of Species.”

She describes the natural world in which she sees God in all things.

A difficult read more suited for academia, “Ask the Beasts” gives the reader the history, philosophy and facts to follow Johnson’s arguments. Its fate may be as assigned reading in college theology classes. But it deserves more.

A retired Episcopal priest who first shared the book with me, told me: “As a Christian, I would want non-religious environmentalists to know that there are a lot of religious people, from all traditions, who want to reach across the ‘faith dividing line’ for the sake of the Earth and its species. Johnson gives Christians a philosophical-theological foundation for doing just that.”

Christine Heinrichs is a California-based author and SEJ.



Greening Health Care: How Hospitals Can Heal the Planet

By Kathy Gerwig
Oxford University Press, \$27.95

Reviewed by JIM MOTAVALLI

“Greening Health Care: How Hospitals Can Heal the Planet” is an important book that could have far-reaching implications for

the American health-care industry.

People concerned about the escalating costs of going to the doctor — that includes just about all of us — should read it.

So should hospital officials. They could benefit from the book’s recommendations — not only to help green their operations, but also to potentially save more money.

The book’s author, Kathy Gerwig, isn’t a journalist. She’s a front-line soldier in the fight, as a vice president of Kaiser Permanente, a big nonprofit health-care provider.

Together with companies such as Johnson & Johnson and organizations such as Practice Greenhealth or Health Care Without Harm, KP is finding out what actually works.

Many of the ideas here represent fruit so low-hanging it’s practically on the ground.

Gerwig imagines a total-health hospital with an environment that doesn’t make you sicker than when you came in — with renewable energy generation, convenient transit stops and porous pavement in the parking lot; native plantings, environmentally friendly carpets and flooring; PVC-free IV bags and Energy Star machines; natural light, fresh food, water-conserving toilets and sinks, and natural cleaning products.

A farmer’s market in the shadow of solar panels? Why not?

Hospitals such as this actually exist — Gundersen Health System in Wisconsin, for instance, does much of the above, and it’s also been energy independent since 2014, thanks to everything from wind turbines to biomass boilers.

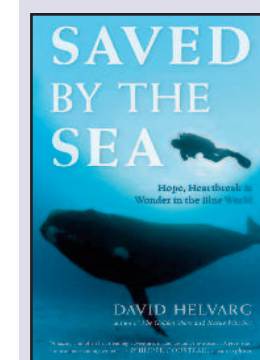
Gerwig’s book makes the business case for green, citing a recent study that states, “If the health care industry conserved energy, reduced waste, and more efficiently purchased operating supplies, it could save more than \$15 billion over 10 years.”

She’s particularly good at promoting waste reduction, including the expensive-to-process “red bag” stuff. By avoiding the landfill with reduce, reuse and recycle programs, hospitals could reduce their operating expenses by almost 20 percent, according to the book.

Did you know that operating rooms produce as much as 30 percent of all hospital waste?

A lot of that waste is single-use disposable instruments. One way hospitals are saving money is by switching to perfectly safe — but only recently available — recycled alternatives. But such changes take time.

More examples of how patients were helped through combined wellness and environmental programs would have been welcome. But this isn’t a book aimed at general readers. It’s more a blueprint for a hospital makeover. If you see its bright green cover at your local nurse’s station, you’ll know that sustainability

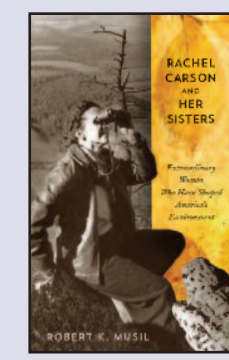


“Saved by the Sea Hope, Heartbreak and Wonder in the Blue World”

by David Helvarg

New World Library
<http://www.indiebound.org/book/9781608683284>

David Helvarg’s story is a profound, startling, and sometimes funny reflection on the state of our seas and how our lives are linked to the natural world.



“Rachel Carson and Her Sisters Extraordinary Women Who Have Shaped America’s Environment”

by Robert K. Musil

Rutgers University Press
<http://bit.ly/RachelCarsonAndHerSisters>

A provocative fresh look at Rachel Carson that reveals the roots of her political passion and the women who inspired and were inspired by her.

is on the agenda.

Jim Motavalli is a Connecticut-based SEJ member, author and freelancer whose articles have appeared in various publications over the years, including *The New York Times*. He has written extensively about the automotive industry.



The Great Texas Wind Rush: How George Bush, Ann Richards, and a Bunch of Tinkerers Helped the Oil and Gas State Win the Race to Wind Power
By Kate Galbraith and Asher Price
University of Texas Press, \$16.72

Reviewed by BILL KOVARIK

Gold, oil and land rushes are such oversized legends in Texas that the initial image of a “wind rush” conjures a vision of Pecos Bill striding over the sagebrush prairie, planting rows of giant white whirligigs and leaving streams of glowing electrons in his wake.

Yet sometimes living legends are even more interesting.

How in thunder would the politically far-flung panoply of Texas politicians and tycoons such as George W. Bush, Anne Richards and T. Boone Pickens agree on something as ephemeral as grabbing power out of thin air?

Kate Galbraith and Asher Price answer that question with a vividly crafted cross-section of the wind industry through biography, history and literary journalism.

The story starts with the need for water in Texas and the rush of wind engines in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The wind that turned those engines was said to drive women mad (“always women,” the authors wryly note). The relentless wind made Texas

Advertisement

Oh wow, that SEJ 25th Anniversary logo would look gr8 on a mug!

Or a tee shirt, or a canvas bag!

Water bottles & bumper stickers!

Beer glasses!

Flasks!

Baseball caps? Lapel buttons?

Mousepad!

Psssst...

You can get any of this and more at SEJ Gear.
Support SEJ and go in style.

www.cafepress.com/sejgear

(20% of the proceeds supports the Society of Environmental Journalists.)

“good enough” for a man or a dog, “but no place for a woman or a cat.”

With hundreds of thousands of wind engines pumping water for railroads and cattle ranches, wind energy was no stranger to the high plains.

So when Texas’ first electric wind farm came along in 1980, it wasn’t seen as radical or even all that unusual.

Galbraith and Price cite the story of Michael Osborne, a visionary influenced by Buckminster Fuller and the solar energy movement of the 1970s, who cobbled together a wind farm in Pampa, Texas.

The wind farm boasted seven 60-foot, 25-kilowatt windmills that needed constant repairs. Since the utility paid only a few pennies per kilowatt hour, Osborne’s wind farm went bankrupt, but the lessons were applied to the new wind farms, with ever-larger turbines and towers. And as the windmill proponents earned their spurs, their persistence began seeping into the diverse political life of Texas.

Around 1992, Texas governor Ann Richards started planning policy and technical initiatives for renewable energy, convinced that most of the previous attempts at energy independence had been little more than “a declaration of war in one place or another.”

Richards’ initiatives fed into the 1999 state electric market deregulation, signed by then-governor GW Bush, which included a 2,000 MW target for wind energy. By 2005, then-governor Rick Perry signed a bill that more than tripled the requirement with a goal of 2015.

The goal was easily met in six years, in part because Pickens, billionaire owner of huge natural gas resources, backed wind power as a hedge against the fluctuating costs of natural gas. The 2008 “Pickens Plan” called for \$1 trillion dollars of investment in wind power within 10 years, an amount that seemed preposterous at the time but, with the spread of the great wind rush from Texas outward, now seems merely ambitious.

Along with these oversized Texas figures, a diverse group of profiteers, pioneers and visionaries kept up the grassroots momentum. Since wind power didn’t really compete with anything else, and needed only modest tax incentives, inertia was the problem, not opposition.

“The lesson is one of persistence,” the authors say. “Even in the dark days of the 1980s [the early organizers] never stopped peddling their ideas to anyone who would listen.”

If there is any one fault in the book, it is that the authors somehow missed quoting the late Molly Ivins, who in a 2003 column told ConEd to “eat it” on high nuclear power costs, noting that if wind power had been subsidized at even a fraction of the rate of conventional energy, it would already be the cheapest energy source available.

Today, even though public support for renewable energy is strong, conservative politicians are backing away from the technology at the behest of fossil fuel interests.

And so, as the sun sinks slowly in the west, this rare moment of political unanimity reflected in Galbraith and Price’s *Great Texas Wind Rush* seems, after all, destined to become the stuff of Texas legend.

Bill Kovarik is an SEJ member, a former board member, and a professor of communication at Unity College and Radford University, where he teaches history of media, the environment and renewable energy.

Freelance Files *Continued from p. 7*

other newsrooms, like Gawker, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Wired*, and Quartz, where anyone being paid for editorial can’t also be paid to write sponsored content. [<http://digiday.com/publishers/freelancers-branded-content-purgatory/>]

But several journalists on the listserv said they routinely wrote journalistic pieces and sponsored content within the same beat.

‘No strings attached’ invitations

Yet another concern freelancers have to contend with is how to cover the costs of reporting a story. Travel budgets are tight or nonexistent at many magazines these days, yet governments, advocacy groups and conference organizers are keen to have journalists attend their events.

Sometimes these are “no strings attached” invitations, other times the sponsor asks the journalist to write a blog post or publish a minimum number of articles after the outing. Some of these “hands-off” opportunities give freelancers the chance to cultivate sources, do face-to-face interviews with key players and government officials, or provide them with access to remote research locations, for example.

In late 2014, I was faced with these decisions. I was invited to visit a research station in the Falkland Islands, paid for by the Falklands/U.K. governments, but otherwise hands-off. There would be opportunities to spend time in the field with researchers studying environmental change, which I cover regularly, but there was no obligation to write anything.

Shortly after that, I received an invitation to Arctic Frontiers, an annual meeting in Tromsø, Norway that covers pan-Arctic science, policy and business issues. Again, the Norwegian government would foot the bill.

Even though I suspected the editors I worked most with would frown at the circumstances, I asked a handful of them for their thoughts. All of those I heard back from told me they could not accept a story that originated from such a trip because it would appear as though the hosting organization had paid for coverage.

I understood their point of view completely and did not take the trips. Yet I know staff journalists and freelance reporters attend these events. If one thing is clear, it is that there is no consensus among editors — or publications — on where the grey areas lie.

As long as freelance rates remain flat, journalists will continue to face ethical dilemmas over the types of work they choose to do.

I described this mess to Paul Voakes, a professor of journalism at the University of Colorado, Boulder. “No matter what happens, make sure that you can stand by what you did, and explain why you did what you did, and not cloak anything you did in the background,” he says. “That is something that was a good moral principle 100 years ago and will continue to be as the technology changes.”

Hannah Hoag is a science journalist and editor from Toronto. Her work has been published in *Nature*, *Discover*, *Ensa*, *Wired*, *New Scientist*, and many others. She is a co-founder of *Bracing for Impact*, a crowd-funded independent journalism project hosted on *Beacon*, and a contributor to “*The Science Writers’ Handbook*.”



© 2015 by the Society of Environmental Journalists.

Editor: A. Adam Glenn

Photo Editor: Roger Archibald

Production and Design Editor: Chris Bruggers

Section Editors

BookShelf and Between the Lines: Tom Henry

EJ Academy: Sara Shipley Hiles

Freelance Files: Sharon Oosthoek

Inside Story: Beth Daley

Reporter’s Toolbox: Vacant

Editorial Board

Robert McClure (chair), Tom Henry, A. Adam Glenn,

David Sachsman, JoAnn M. Valenti

SEJ Board of Directors

President, Jeff Burnside

KOMO-TV Seattle

First Vice President/Programs Chair, Jennifer Bogo

Popular Science

Second Vice President/Membership Chair, Kate Sheppard

Huffington Post

Secretary, Christy George

Independent Radio and Television Producer

Treasurer/Finance Chair, Don Hopley

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Future Conference Sites Chair, Douglas Fischer

DailyClimate.org

Imelda Abano

Independent Journalist and President, PNEJ

Ashley Ahearn

KUOW-FM, Seattle

Elizabeth Grossman

Independent Journalist

Robert McClure

InvestigateWest

Susan Moran

Independent Journalist

Mark Schleifstein

NOLA.com|The Times-Picayune

Roger Witherspoon

Freelance Journalist

Representative for Academic Members, David Poulson

Michigan State University

Representative for Associate Members, Meaghan Parker

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

Founding President, Jim Detjen

Knight Center for Environmental Journalism, Michigan State University

Executive Director, Beth Parke

Visit www.sej.org

SEJournal (ISSN: 1053-7082) is published quarterly by the Society of Environmental Journalists, P.O. Box 2492, Jenkintown, PA 19046. Ph: 215-884-8174. Fax: 215-884-8175. Send story ideas, articles, news briefs, tips and letters to *SEJournal* Editor Adam Glenn at adam@a2gmedia.com. The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) is a non-profit, tax exempt, 501(c)(3) organization funded by foundation grants in response to SEJ proposals, media company contributions, earned income, university sponsorship of the annual conference, occasional regional events, individual donations and unrestricted contributions of general support from diverse sources. Its membership is limited to journalists, educators and students who do not lobby or do public relations work on environmental issues. For non-member subscription information go to www.sej.org and click “Publications.”

Men in Trees in Indie Films

By JoANN VALENTI

Ordinary guys in catharsis in the forest seems to be something of a theme for notable indie movie productions this year, judging from recent screenings at the Sundance and Slamdance annual film festivals in the mountains of Utah.

For instance, movie star James Franco plays a divorced dad recovering from alcoholism who takes a hike in the national park in the film “Yosemite.” Nature is a prime setting for attempting to bond with his two sons, right before a mountain lion turns up.

Similarly, Sundance founder Robert Redford and Nick Nolte provide an insightful reminder of the impact of being in nature with “A Walk in the Woods.” Two estranged high school buddies, one an aging travel writer, decide to hike the 2000-mile Appalachian Trail in what is more than a road trip comedy but less than a family film. The two aging characters face off with each other, the wiles of nature and the eccentric characters one might encounter on such a trek, only to discover that some roads are better left untraveled.

More poignant is “Bob and the Trees.” This quasi-biopic docudrama follows a fast-talking 50-year-old logger in rural Massachusetts with an unexpected soft spot for golf and gangsta rap

as he struggles to make ends meet in a logging and subsistence farming economy undergoing change. In the film, a logging job goes awry as a wooded area has been infested with ant colonies, making the trees useless for harvest, and pushing the character into depression and rage.

“Bob” is played by real-life Bob Tarasuk, a popular Berkshires forester-turned-farmer who for more than 35 years has maintained countless acres of woods there. The film’s writer-director Diego Ongaro met Tarasuk shortly after moving to the rural town of Sandisfield, Mass., from Paris. “I’ve often wondered about the history of the plank you buy at the lumberyard or the log you throw in the fireplace,” Ongaro said.

Another perspective on wood — and a tribute to the lives of trees — comes from “Trees That Walk.” The Italian-language film follows logging in that country through to final wood products, from flooring and cabinetry to museum-quality violins. Over a history of world wars, industry and environmental changes, and economic challenges a story unfolds from Italians who love trees and working with wood.



On the set of the new film “A Walk in the Woods” with Nick Nolte, center, and Robert Redford, right.

Photo: Courtesy Sundance Film Festival

Docs explore ‘ecology movement,’ mountain climbing, Chernobyl

It was not all in the trees at January’s Sundance event. The festival’s feature documentary expanded the focus to an important slice of environmental history. “How to Change the World” looks to pre-Earth Day and Green Movement days, when environmental concerns fomented around what was then called the “ecology movement.”

Before becoming the world’s largest activist organization, Greenpeace began as an eclectic group of Vancouver neighbors — journalists, scientists, and hippies — united in opposition to a U.S. atomic test on an Alaskan island. The Canadian activists sailed an aging fishing boat straight for the test site. Armed only with cameras and convinced of the power of images, the Rainbow Warriors were born.

Greenpeace’s early history stored in film footage, audio recordings and photographs capture their media savvy in its most dramatic and iconic moments. Providing images of mother seals hopelessly chasing after their clubbed pups, mass slaughter at whaling stations, and maneuvering Zodiacs between whales and Russian harpoons marked the beginning of major international changes in once acceptable animal harvesting.

The documentary offers an intimate portrait of the group’s original members and of the ego struggles among activists — idealism vs. pragmatism, principle vs. compromise. Ultimately, a handful of people, including a journalist turned activist re-turned journalist, did grab the world’s attention. They just couldn’t agree on how to actually change the world.

Other documentaries and dramas on the Sundance “nature/climate change/environmental” genre list included titles on extreme mountain climbing (“Meru”), a conservationist in an Irish horror flick (“The Hallow”), eco-activists taking risks to expose illegal

trading in endangered species (“Racing Extinction”), a challenged synchronized swimmer (“Chlorine”) and an extraordinary documentary about a Ukrainian artist who exposes Chernobyl as no accident (“The Russian Woodpecker”).

New ways to fund, distribute films

One subject to emerge at the festivals was that of how to get these kinds of films made in the first place. Funding independent films is getting harder at a time when financiers are after safe bets.

But a powerful, new grassroots force has emerged on sites like Indiegogo and Kickstarter. Filmmakers can now go directly to their fans to realize their creative decisions while still maintaining creative control. The challenge remains how these projects can reach an audience.

New digital distribution platforms offer some promise. For example, YouTube returned to Sundance for a third year, sponsoring panels and encouraging new filmmakers. “We are committed to actively advancing the work of innovative, risk-taking storytellers worldwide,” said Danielle Tiedt, chief marketing officer. “On YouTube, there are no limits to creative freedom, allowing creators to experiment and push the boundaries of traditional formats and mediums.”

“Change is inevitable,” indie film mentor Redford told a theater packed with reporters at the festival’s opening press conference. “We ride with change and use it to our advantage.”

SEJournal Editorial Board member JoAnn Valenti, an emerita professor and a founding academic member of SEJ, covers environment/science/health films at Sundance and other film festivals for several academic/professional, national and international publications. For full Sundance festival information and links to films, go to www.sundance.org.

Reporter’s Toolbox: Paradox of Purls *Continued from p. 15*

seaweeds is algae; the singular is alga. Because we all learn language as infants, by ear, and encounter such exotic words much later in life, we have no ear for what is right, and effort is needed to keep the grammar straight. Thus, one continually hears and reads, for example, “the algae is.”

A natural extension of this kind of error is the creation of appalling super-plurals: if you mistakenly think, “the algae is,” it’s only a short, logical step to “the algae are.”

One can also read dismaying collections of multiple stumbles, such as “Is yeast a bacteria or a fungi?” We are not making this up.

Not abstractions, but individual beings

Avoiding such gross errors requires, first, that you know and apply the correct singular and plural of a few common words: alga, alga; bacterium, bacteria; fungus, fungi; genus, genera.

Second, where the grammatical construction might be tricky, as in “an algae-covered rock,” a simple test will help: mentally substitute some word with a regular plural ending, such as oysters. One would never say “the oysters is” or “an oysters-covered rock,” even if many oysters were covering said rock.

But, trying as the Latin and Greek are, this difficulty reveals a further dimension, with echoes of the hunting or commodity mentality.

People unfamiliar with seaweed biology often forget that algae are distinct organisms. Like the hunters stalking lions as “lion,” they view seaweeds as “seaweed,” a substance, an abstraction, or a commodity, instead of what they are: individual living beings.

Here again, the absent or misused plural undermines our experience and appreciation of the diversity and worth of the living organisms around us.

Indeed, this pattern of lost plurals repeats itself even in human relations when management talks of “labor,” as if of a mere resource or commodity, while those doing the labor see themselves as nothing less than distinct individuals and speak of “employees” or “workers.”

As environmental journalists, your main concerns will be to use the language thoughtfully and correctly, being aware of such subtleties that may initially seem trivial but communicate a loaded context. Seemingly small stumbling blocks such as plurals can turn out to be big pitfalls.

Vicki and John Pearse are marine biologists with doctorates from Stanford University. They have written or edited — separately, together, and in collaboration with others — dozens of research papers, two textbooks, and a multivolume treatise. John is professor emeritus, Dept. of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of California, Santa Cruz. Vicki was founding editor of the international research journal *Invertebrate Biology*.



Pigs like this one make for big business at Cane Creek Farms in Efland, N.C. But more recently, hog farms have become unexpected players in the business of renewable energy. Read about a student multimedia project that explored the alternative energy potential of hog farms, in a story beginning on page 8.

Photo by Caitlin Kleiboer