



THE Source

Society of Professional Journalists
Oklahoma Pro Chapter

June 2000



OCPA offers writers fresh story sources

By *Brandon Dutcher*
Oklahoma Council
of Public Affairs

I'm a relatively new SPJ member, and one of the first issues of this newsletter I received contained an article about Oklahoma Web Resources, a website maintained by Stan Ketterer at Oklahoma State University. I found the site to be a helpful tool and I bookmarked it.

In this issue of *The Source* I want to provide you with yet another source for sources.

First, a little explanation is in order. As research director at the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs (OCPA), I'm in a unique position because I wear two different hats: (1) I am a columnist who seeks

and utilizes sources, and (2) I and my colleagues are oftentimes the sources whom journalists seek out.

OCPA is a private think tank which formulates public policy research and analysis consistent with the principles of free enterprise and limited government. Shorthand: think of us as a state-level version of the Heritage Foundation. (Indeed, we share the same board chairman.) We are engaged in jour-

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—Brandon Dutcher
Research Director
Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs

nalism and also in scholarship.

On the journalism side (I have an M.A. in journalism and used to publish a small newspaper in Bartlesville), our newspaper columns have appeared in more than a hundred papers, from the *Inola Independent* and the *Hartshorne Sun* to the *Cincinnati Enquirer* and the *Daily Oklahoman* (where I'm a member of the *Opinion*

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NEXT Board Meeting, June 9

Make plans to attend the monthly board meetings of the Oklahoma Pro chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists, held the second Friday of each month.

The meetings are a great place to be heard and share ideas with other SPJ members or to become a member.

The next meeting is noon, May 9, at the OPA board meeting room located at 3601 N. Lincoln in Oklahoma City.

Bring a brown-bag lunch including a drink and join fellow journalists.

SPJ needs you and your ideas so make plans to attend. We look forward to seeing you there!

Austin trip offers fun, inspiration

By *Ronna Austin*
SPJ Secretary

Last month, several members of the Oklahoma Pro chapter of SPJ traveled to downtown Austin for a weekend to attend the National Writer's Workshop and Region 8 Conference.

Many of us came back armed with a new and improved attitude about our trade, five extra pounds from the great food there and a nifty softside attaché that was given to all who registered.

If you didn't attend, you missed out but you can still read all about it.

There were many great and inspiring speakers there.

Inside this issue you'll find stories written by some of the students who attended about a few of those speakers and the advice they offered to the masses.

Journalists learn new tricks at workshop

Magazine writer says first sentences crucial to story

By **Ryan Johnson**
OCCC Student

The former handbag salesman described himself as a hedgehog. The point?

That there are two types of writers. A hedgehog and a fox.

Tom Junod, writer for *Esquire* magazine, said the fox is an animal that knows many things while the hedgehog is “an animal that knows just one thing — how to get away. But it’s enough.”

“Journalism school makes foxes. Experience makes hedgehogs.”

The decision of which animal to be “is presented to you in the first sentence of the story” he told the audience of writers attending the National Writer’s Workshop held in Austin.

In an often funny but mostly enlightening speech entitled, “The Hedgehog and the Fox: How to Narrow Down an Infinity of Choices and Write a First Sentence,” Junod told of the experiences that have helped shape the way in which he contrives the first sentences of his magazine stories.

For instance, when writing a story about rap musicians, he said, he “struggled forever,” before writing in rhyme.

“It was the only way I could do it — me being a hedgehog,” he said. “I became a rapper.

“The writers I prize most are the people who have done their jobs the way they know how to do it even if it means breaking the rules.”

Junod said one of the hardest choices a writer makes when telling a story is how to write the lead because of the impact it has on everyone concerned.

“Not only is it important to the readers but it’s important to the subject.”

Significant too, he added, is that the first sentence helps shape the remainder of the story.

“When I write a first sentence, it should basically generate a last sentence so that everything is contained in that one crucial vessel.”

“The best newspaper leads I read are the ones that tell a story.”

During a question period, one Austin newspaper writer asked how journalists should go about keeping an editor from “butchering the lead.”

Junod replied that writers should be in a trusting relationship with the editor. Be willing to defend the first sentence, he said.

“There’s not a cut an editor should make that he’s not willing to justify.”

“There’s not a sentence a writer should write that he’s not willing to justify.”

“The story is in between.”

Junod has also written for *Life*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *GQ*.

Good journalists must be sensitive to power of words

By **Kathi Etherton**
OCCC Student

“A convention of pathfinders.” These words described the students, professors and writers at the National Writers Convention in Austin May 13 and 14.

Geneva Overholser, the first keynote speaker at the convention, spoke on the impact of journalists in the everyday world and what makes good journalism.

She said good journalism should feed the social capital and build community but said the downfall to that is the ways to build a community can cause tension.

“We are losing out ability to help shape the community,” she said.

“Anonymous sources undermine our society,” she said. “It rubs away the readers ability to judge.”

Her second point of

what makes good journalism was that the writing should bring people in, not the layout, photos and graphics.

Overholser said that while writers have a humble awareness that what they do can crush people’s hopes, they also have the power to raise them.

Journalists have the ability to do enormous good by telling the truth even though that sometimes hurts, she said.

“We shine bright light into dark corners.”

Overholser is known for a piece she wrote on a rape victim. Because she named the woman with the woman’s consent, her story sparked a national debate on the issue of naming victims in sex crimes, especially rape.

Overholser writes a twice weekly column for *The Washington Post* Writers Group.

Editor lists several reasons for avoiding New York career

By **Michaela Marx**
OCCC Student

Leslie Yazel, editor of Maxim Books in New York, said what you wear often has more to do with getting a job in New York than a collection of good work.

“At my first interview in New York, they didn’t even look at my clips,” Yazel

said. “Instead we talked about my boots and hair color.”

Her good taste earned her second interview, in which her work was acknowledged.

Yazel shared her experiences of working for *Glamour* magazine and

See “NYC,” p. 4



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From the President



By *Jim Campbell*
SPJ president

Secrecy not part of law

public scrutiny.

"The Oklahoma Press Association and media outlets throughout the state fought for this measure and for good reason," Keating said.

"In the past, the confidentiality of deferred prosecution agreements meant that the system was cloaked in darkness," he added. "A fair and efficient judicial system necessitates that it be open to the light of scrutiny."

In arguing for final passage in the Senate, Henry called the 1979 law "a super secret kind of Star Chamber proceeding in the hands of the wrong

person."

The law is intended to give deserving offenders a second chance and divert them from the prison system. But articles published across the state last fall documented that it had been used in the cases of public officials and law enforcement officers.

Disclosure of an agreement at that time was a misdemeanor.

Under deferred prosecution, an accused agrees to certain terms imposed by a district attorney and charges are never filed if the accused complies with them for up to two years.

A statewide effort by Oklahoma newspapers to strip secrecy from the state law on deferred prosecution paid off June 1 in the governor's signature.

Gov. Frank Keating signed Senate Bill 1451 by Sen. Brad Henry, D-Shawnee, which will make all new deferred prosecution agreements open to

OCPA helpful source for information

"Sources," cont. from p. 1

Board of Contributors). So when I'm wearing hat number one, I'm always on the lookout for good sources.

It's when I'm wearing hat number two that I believe OCPA can be useful to you: I can point you to sources.

OCPA is in the thick of the conservative movement, both in Oklahoma and nationwide.

No, there's no such thing as a "vast right-wing conspiracy" but there is a network of scholars, think tanks, policy experts and activists who believe in free markets and limited government.

If you're reporting on a public policy issue, you'll probably want (for the sake of balance) to interview experts from opposing sides of the issue.

And if you're having trouble finding a policy expert with a "conservative" or "free-market" orientation, OCPA can prob-

ably help.

For example, OCPA has 17 adjunct scholars from around the state — professors of economics, law, business administration, political science, history, and classics — who write OCPA policy papers, testify before legislative committees, and give speeches.

Many of them have done interviews with reporters and been quoted in the media.

Media consumers get tired of seeing the same people quoted all the time. These scholars could prove to be fresh new sources for you.

In addition to our adjunct scholars, OCPA staff can also be of assistance, granting interviews on education, taxes, government spending, or other policy issues.

For example, in the last few weeks two different reporters at The Oklahoman were working on economic-development stories (one concerning a tax

break for GM, the other a tax-funded building intended to lure new business to Woodward).

Both are good reporters seeking to write a balanced story, and they were having trouble finding anyone to object to the prevailing orthodoxy, or even to raise questions about it.

OCPA was able to help. We had recently hosted a policy forum on economic development, and I had edited an in-depth OCPA study ("Growing Oklahoma's Economy: Tax Cuts vs. Economic Development Programs"). So I was able to point the reporters to that study and to give them some quotes for their stories.

In sum, if you need policy information or experts to help you write a harder-hitting, snappier, more insightful story, OCPA can help.

To reach OCPA, call (405) 843-9212 or visit the OCPA website at www.ocpathink.org



Glamour editor offers humorous look at life of writer living in big Apple

"First," cont. from p. 2

Cosmopolitan with an audience of mostly young aspiring journalists at the National Writers Workshop in Austin.

Many journalists dream of a glamorous career as a writer for a national magazine in New York.

Yazel said moving to the big city can be a culture shock. New Yorkers lead a different lifestyle, she said, and they are often out of touch with life in the rest of the country.

Yazel humorously gave a few reasons why to stay away from the New York media:

- Subjects in magazine are recycled Yazel said. Writers always think of creative ways to repackage old stories over and over.

- Working for a monthly publication gives the editors too much time to edit. Often the article ending up in the magazine is nothing like the original.

- Everything at work is about beautiful people. To be featured one must be "magazine pretty," she said.

Yazel said connections are essential for a career in New York. She established her first link to New York at a national writer's convention. Sometimes it is like being in the Mafia, she said.

The hours are so bad that not even "fancy expense accounts blind you to the evils of the job."

Overall, Yazel said, working in New York is not so bad.

"The snobby New Yorkers are always worth a

laugh. There is the chance for fame and there are special treats like paid trips to Austin," Yazel joked.

tidbits...

Get involved!

- The Source needs you! SPJ members are encouraged to contribute to the monthly newsletter.

Add your name to the list of those whose work have graced these pages by sending along an article, picture or tidbit for publication.

SPJ is about all of its members working together. This is a great and simple way to be actively involved even with a busy schedule.

Time to update?

- Do you need to update any or all of your SPJ membership information?

National headquarters has made it simple!

On the Internet, go to: www.spj.org/membership/membupdate.htm and fill out the form.

While you're there, look around at all of the helpful information SPJ has to offer today's journalists.

Let SPJ work for you by getting involved!



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NEXT SPJ MEETING: NOON, JUNE 9, AT OPA, 3501 N. LINCOLN BLVD.