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On the Cover

Photo By Valerie Schillaci

Cover Photography By Marco Morelli

(LJR)
Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up the 2008 Langara Journalism Review, the final project of the Langara School of Journalism graduating diploma class.

The 14 people who put this magazine together are storytellers. Every one of us came to journalism school because we want to tell stories. Some of us will fulfill this dream as news reporters, sports journalists, arts or business writers. Some of us will work in radio or television. All of us will likely work on the Internet.

For the past two years, we have been learning our craft, training for the day we become professional journalists. That day has come, and this magazine is the proof. The stories found here are about our new lives, about the storytelling industry we have chosen to enter.

None of us came into journalism to get rich, but we will balance the modest pay with our passion for expression, the long hours with a commitment to truth. We will move away from what we know to satisfy our curiosity for other people’s stories. Every professional journalist makes sacrifices to be a storyteller, and we will be no exceptions.

The stories inside this magazine are about our new colleagues: their dreams, mistakes, setbacks, and successes. Their stories are a foretaste of our own. From veteran reporters and senior editors to alternative media publishers and street vendors, each of them has a role in bringing stories to life, just as we will.

Our magazine reflects upon some of the most pressing questions we face as new journalists: Will we work for our principles or for our rent? What is more important, striving for objectivity or advocating for what we believe? What does the future hold for journalism’s long-standing institutions?

We hope you enjoy this year’s LJR. We enjoyed making it and we look forward to meeting you in the newsroom, the press scrum and the editing booth.

Finally, we would like to give a very warm thank you to Rob Dykstra for being such a wonderful teacher and friend. Thank you Rob, for your tireless efforts to make us appreciate the niggling details.

—Justine Davidson
Dahr Jamail has covered the war in Iraq for four years as an independent and unembedded journalist. He files stories for the Guardian, the Independent, BBC and others. He shares his views on the media and the war.

You never attended j-school. How has that affected your work?
For starters, I didn’t have to unlearn the myth of objectivity taught in western journalism courses, nor any of the programming that compels people to hope to be part of the establishment media. Plus, I don’t buy the idea of journalism as a “profession.” It was never a profession until corporations began buying up media outlets, and out of needs to consolidate and pressure from advertisers, the myth of the “professional” journalist came into being. This is also when the myth of “objectivity” was born. I believe journalism is more of a craft or trade. Besides, it is not rocket science, and the most important attributes of good journalism are honesty, integrity, compassion for who you are reporting about, and a willingness to work hard.

You’ve been in and out of Iraq for more than four years. What work are you most proud of?
Breaking the story of the U.S. military using White Phosphorous in Fallujah during the November 2004 siege. It was an important story which was summarily ignored by the Western media, and was important because it was a war crime. Second to that, I did a report for the group Public Citizen about Bechtel’s failure to fulfill their contractual obligations of reconstructing Iraq’s water treatment infrastructure. That report came out in Spring 2004. Today, 70 per cent of Iraqis do not have access to potable water. Third would be my book.

Do you think Americans believe what corporate media report?
Not anymore. The majority of people here, across the political spectrum, no longer trust the corporate media. This is thanks in large part to that very media who completely de-legitimized itself by helping the Bush administration sell this illegal war and the lies that justified it to the American people. The problem is that most folks don’t know where to turn to get accurate information, particularly regarding Iraq and Afghanistan.

How do you cope with losing your friends and colleagues to the war?
Tough question, because there’s no easy answer. I’ve lost a few friends, Iraqis, that I worked with in one capacity or another, and so far the most difficult aspect is survivor’s guilt. Why did that happen to them and not me? Why do I get to leave there and come home, with all the comforts here, and they could not? I talk with friends about it, and write about it, and continue doing work to try to show people the scope of the catastrophe in Iraq.

Robert Fisk said objective journalism is a euphemism for government mouthpiece. Is objectivity desirable or even possible?
I agree with him. It’s a ridiculous idea to pretend that anyone, especially a journalist in a time of war, could be objective. Show me any human who could report on a family being slaughtered by crazed marines in Haditha and be “objective” about it, and I’ll show you someone who ought to be institutionalized. But then that is what the corporate media wants—robots for “journalists”—because if the myth of objectivity was truly attainable, that is what we would have. Unfortunately, in many instances, perhaps we’re not far from that. (LJR)
New law to protect sources

One of a journalist's most important duties is to protect his or her sources, and fulfilling that duty repeatedly brings reporters into conflict with the law.

Currently, there is no legislation in place to protect journalists' sources, but that might soon change.

Bill C-426 is an amendment to the Canada Evidence Act and is up for third reading in the House of Commons.

If approved, the bill will protect journalists from being forced to reveal sources of information used in any published material. Judges will not be able to order journalists to declare a source unless there is no other way of identifying the person, and the disclosure is vital to the public interest.

Earlier this year, the Ontario Court of Appeal overturned a contempt-of-court charge and a $31,600 fine against Hamilton Spectator reporter Ken Peters.

In 2004 Peters had refused a court order to reveal a confidential source. Last Jan. 22, the Canadian Association of Journalists intervened on his behalf.

The source, who was present at a 1995 meeting during which Peters received sensitive documents, eventually came forward, saving Peters a trip to jail.

The CAJ applauded the decision but is still calling for a shield law and maintains that whistleblowers should be able to come forward without fear of retribution. - Manisha Krishnan

Transit board leaves reporters behind

Metro Vancouver’s public transportation authority has left reporters stranded curbside by agreeing to conduct most of its business behind closed doors.

TransLink’s new chairperson, Dale Parker, said the board will have “extensive public input” before decisions are made, but board meetings will likely only be open to the public and media four times a year.

The publicly funded board was restructured late in 2007. The former board was made up of regional politicians and most of the meetings were open to the public. TransLink's move to limit media access will likely leave reporters with no other option than to file regular Freedom of Information Act requests, according to Vancouver Province reporter Frank Luba, and that means any news will be old news by the time it gets to the public. "FOIs take a minimum of 30 days, and with delays sometimes 60 days,” said Luba. - Anne Makuch

Global to open bureaux overseas

At a time when more and more news outlets are relying on freelance and citizen journalists, Global National's decision to open four new foreign bureaux over the next year is good news for Canadian newshounds.

The new bureaux will be located in London, Delhi, Jerusalem, and either Shanghai or Hong Kong, according to Global's executive producer Kenton Boston. All four should be up and running by September 2009.

Hiring at the bureaux will be done internally, and the nod will most likely go to seasoned reporters, some of whom may constitute a bureau of one, Boston said. He believes the move is part of a larger industry trend to put money back into foreign reporting.

The sites were chosen based on geography and global importance, economically and politically. Boston acknowledged that the continents of Africa and South America are both underreported by North American media outlets and said coverage of those areas is predominantly in the hands of freelancers and news wires. - Justine Davidson
Media fueling ignorance, not understanding: critic

Several broadcasting outlets are facing scrutiny after a Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission complaint was filed by a group of individuals, academics, and media-watch groups.

The grievance filed against CBC TV, CBC Radio, CKNW, CTV and Global TV, alleges the broadcasters “failed to provide accurate, comprehensive, fair, full, and unbiased coverage when they reported that Laibar Singh ‘came to Canada illegally’ or that he ‘was illegal’ in Canada prior to taking sanctuary in July 2007,” according to a press release.

The complainants say the news reports negatively influenced public perceptions of Singh and breached the broadcasters’ ethical code.

Singh, a paralysed refugee claimant, sought sanctuary at a Sikh temple in Surrey.

“By inaccurately stating that Laibar Singh ‘entered Canada illegally’ when in fact he came under a prescribed channel that many asylum seekers choose, and by leaving out essential context about laws pertaining to asylum seekers, broadcasters have used the public airwaves to fuel ignorance rather than to inform the public,” said Isabel Macdonald, communications director at Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, a media watch group based in the United States.

Dr. Fiona Jeffries, an instructor at Simon Fraser University’s communications department said it is imperative that the news media adhere to its own established ethical codes of accuracy and responsible reporting.

“This complaint seeks to hold the news media to its public responsibility,” said Jeffries.

None of the broadcast stations named in the CRTC complaint offered comment.

- Anne Makuch

Tragic record set in 2007

A record 171 journalists and news professionals died on the job in 2007. But deaths due to murder actually fell to 120 from 133 the year before, according to the Brussels-based International News Safety Institute.

The number of reporters and support staff who died in air and road accidents rose from 22 to 35.

The war in Iraq once again set the stage for “the worst single killing ground in 2007,” as 65 news personnel died, the institute reports.

Following Iraq, the most dangerous countries for journalists in 2007 were Mexico and Somalia, each reporting nine deaths. Pakistan counted eight, while seven media personnel died in Brazil and six perished in Sri Lanka. The Philippines and India each accounted for five deaths last year, while four journalists were killed in Afghanistan and three in Haiti.

As in past years, the majority of casualties were local reporters working on their own turf.

“The death toll is appalling, unacceptable, and getting worse,” said institute director Rodney Pinder.

- Anne Makuch

Facebook use raises sourcing concerns

As if it weren’t affecting our lives enough already, Facebook is now transforming the media.

Journalists who are members of the online social networking site are using it as a link to research and interview sources for news stories.

Jeremy Nuttall, a CBC reporter and freelance writer for the WestEnder, said Facebook allows journalists to seek information about a community they are not part of and know little about.

After a teen was stabbed to death in East Vancouver, Nuttall said one of his colleagues used the site to access threatening messages on the teen’s wall, revealing the event could have possibly been gang related.

But while Facebook can be a helpful resource, Nuttall said he has noticed an increasing number of news stories based solely on Facebook groups and events.

“It can be a good tool, but journalists have to be careful not to depend on it too much,” he said.

In January, the London bureau of the Agence France-Presse prohibited its reporters from using Facebook or Wikipedia as independent news sources. The decision was made after a number of major news outlets, including the Globe and Mail, quoted portions of Benazir Bhutto’s son’s Facebook profile, which turned out to be fake. To date, no Canadian media outlet has implemented a similar ban.

- Meagan Albrechtson

Illustration by Kristen Miedema
MAKING IT IN INDIE MEDIA

Some journalists prefer to work outside the corporate box, but at what cost?

Story by Jackie Wong // Photos by Valerie Schillaci and Marco Morelli
You’re fresh out of journalism school. You have your credentials in hand and you’re ready to take the world of journalism by storm. Surely, a well-paying job is just around the corner...or not.

Graduating from j-school to the newsroom is not as easy as it appears, and many grads end up abandoning their journalistic aspirations before they’ve begun.

I recently witnessed a typical casualty. He had all—or more—of the official certifications required to work in media. He had earned a bachelor’s of science and a master’s of neuroscience followed by a master’s degree in journalism. After a couple of local internships, it would seem that a paying job in journalism would be easy to come by. But as we know, the world can be a cruel place and it was only after a grueling, six-month job search that our protagonist landed a job... in science research.

“I continue to pitch freelance submissions, but not with as much gusto as in my younger writerly days,” says Chilton. “I guess these days a medical plan and vacation days are more important than writing about stuff that relatively few people care about.”

For the relative few who continue to write about the offbeat “stuff” that Chilton left behind, getting paid for your passions remains an uphill battle.

Enter Graeme Worthy. He’s the kind of guy who describes himself as excitable, and he is—his enigmatic smile hints at a mischievous mind. He has the quick reflexes and devil-may-care attitude that come with a lifetime of bike commuting.

At 29, Worthy has no formal training in journalism. Most of his newspaper experience is drawn from unpaid involvement with UBC student papers, the Ubyssey and Discorder.

“At no point was I there for the cash,” he says. “I was kind of there because I liked projects.”

Worthy’s volunteer work at student papers left him with editing, design and web production skills that landed him paid work in web design and computer programming down the road. In spring 2006, he had saved up enough money from a computer programming gig to launch Tooth and Dagger, a Vancouver-based alternative newspaper.

Laying out and editing each issue on his home computer, Worthy paid for the production of the paper out of his own pocket. Tooth and Dagger quickly gained momentum as a prominent new local publication with a strong stable of young writers.

Worthy started Tooth and Dagger because he felt alternative voices were missing from Vancouver media.

“I didn’t like the papers that were around,” he says. “I thought the Terminal City Weekly was a free alternative paper that suspended publication in fall 2005. No official explanation was ever given for its demise, but it was speculated that under-financing played a starring role.

Worthy was inspired by the offbeat features like the dollar pizza reviews and geek columns that the new Terminal City ran — grittier, funnier stuff than what was found in other mainstream papers.

With the start of Tooth and Dagger, Worthy set about producing a paper that would reflect the quirks and passions of a demographic not served by Vancouver’s existing papers.

He ran stories about the daily life of bike couriers, urban gardeners, computer recyclers, and people who foraged road kill for food, alongside regular brunch reviews and news commentary.

Worthy wanted to create the work environment of his dreams — a community-minded, creative space where people could talk about the city they loved, and how they could make it better.
The business of running a newspaper is seldom taught in journalism schools, but for new media entrepreneurs, business smarts are crucial to success.

“I never came into this intending to be administrative in any way, be a leader in any way,” says Aaron Leaf, a 23-year-old Ryerson University journalism graduate and editor of Vancouver’s Ricepaper magazine. “Now I find myself needing to organize people.”

Leaf’s undergraduate degree in journalism primed him for work in big media from the get-go, so his current work on a smaller magazine such as Ricepaper makes him somewhat of an anomaly compared with the rest of his graduating class.

“Ryerson really sees itself as a farm team beating the industry,” he says, adding that most of the friends he graduated with now have full-time salaried jobs in journalism.

“I think in Toronto there’s a lot of people who think of themselves as on a professional track. In Vancouver, a lot of people see [journalism] as a hobby.”

Leaf moved back to Vancouver after completing his degree and considers himself the black sheep of his journalism class—he’s neither working full-time in the Toronto area, nor is he moving up the corporate media ladder.

Instead, he’s supporting himself as a banquet server at the Pan Pacific hotel while he works on Ricepaper, a 13-year-old literary magazine originally intended for Asian-Canadians.

Since becoming involved with Ricepaper about a year ago, Leaf has worked to reshape the magazine’s content to reflect the changing interests of its readership.

“The magazine has to be focused on being a good magazine, as opposed to being the mouthpiece of [the Asian Canadian Writer’s Workshop],” he says.

Leaf and co-editor Herman Cheng have rebuilt the infrastructure of the magazine to allow for a broader range of contributors.

Leaf is now paid regularly for his work at Ricepaper. Still, the wages aren’t enough to pay the rent so he supplements his income by waiting tables. At one point, he says “I went for eight months with no pay whatsoever with this vague idea that I’d be getting some sort of compensation.”

“Things are looking really good,” he says. “It’s that weird thing where you stick around enough, all of a sudden it starts happening.”

Surviving lean periods through odd jobs and fragmentary work isn’t for everyone. But if there’s hope for independent journalists, a lot of that hope lies in sticking around.

Worthy’s advice to aspiring journalists: Get off the couch.

“Do it. Do it with whatever means you have. If nobody wants to publish your work, publish it. If there’s not a paper to publish your work in, make your own paper. If it costs $1,000 to print your newspaper, try to find someone to help share the costs of the thing.”

If gumption and elbow grease are ingredients for success, so is failure. “Suck. It’s super important to suck. ‘Cause you’re gonna. Badly. And that’s totally okay,” Worthy says.

“Getting hate mail is the best thing you can have. That means you win.”

Hate mail collections aside, making it in journalism requires motivation and tenacity. Even with the right credentials, there is no guarantee of that big journalism job.

But Leaf says it could be closer than you think.

“If you live in Vancouver, it seems a million miles away, a million contacts away. But it’s really not.”

LJR
Better media help voters make better decisions, and a Vancouver-based economist has a plan to give voters more power to improve the media.

Mark Latham is the creator of Voter-Funded Media, or VFM. Put simply, VFM is a way for voters to award funding to the media outlets that have served them best. It's already up and running at the University of B.C. and Simon Fraser University student unions, and Latham is working to introduce it at several college campuses in the Lower Mainland.

“I had long had this feeling that I wanted to change the world – save the world!” says Latham, who has put up more than $16,000 of his own money to prove that the concept works.

Raised in Burnaby, Latham earned degrees in math and business at UBC before going on to complete a PhD in finance at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s prestigious Sloan School of Management.

Latham taught finance at Berkeley though the ’80s, and it was in the summer of 1988 that he first had the idea that led to VFM. At the time, it was focused on improving corporate governance.

“I think it would be very beneficial,” he wrote to a colleague, “to have a consulting firm hired directly by the shareholders. They would be an independent monitor of management, with no executive power except to spend a limited budget authorized by the shareholders.”

The idea raised a few eyebrows, but went nowhere. In the meantime, Latham left Berkeley to work on Wall Street for heavyweights such as Salomon Brothers and Merrill Lynch. Six years in the trading capital left him with considerable financial freedom and a renewed interest in corporate governance.

“In the power structure of corporations, I had seen some things that looked not good, and I had an idea on how to fix them.”

Latham’s idea was for a company’s shareholders to keep a modest amount of money out of the control of company management. Independent consulting firms would fight for the job of scrutinizing the management, and would be paid out of the shareholders’ money. The competition would encourage the consultants to bring the shareholders quality information. And better-informed shareholders, Latham argued, would be better equipped to vote on their management’s performance.

Fast forward to the year 2000. Latham has pitched his idea to more than a dozen companies, and has been turned away by every one.

Celebrity businessmen Warren Buffett and Bill Gates both wrote to their shareholders to advise against adopting Latham’s proposal.

“I was disappointed,” he says, “so I started shifting my focus a bit, realizing there was a parallel issue in democracies.”

Latham retooled his idea, with voters replacing shareholders, media outlets replacing consultants, and government replacing management. He also decided to put up his own money to prove it would work.

Now living back in Vancouver, Latham dubbed his plan “Turbo Democracy,” and took it to UBC’s student government, the Alma Mater Society, in 2006.

“Student unions being about the smallest scale democracy which is still big enough that you see quite a disconnect between the elected council and the average voter,” explains Latham.

“Well, the first thing they said to me was ‘Get rid of that name!’” he recalls, laughing. Newly christened as Voter-Funded Media, Latham’s idea was finally put into action during the January 2007 Alma Mater Society elections, nearly 20 years after he first proposed it.

“As a candidate, I found it wholly unpleasant,” says Matthew Naylor, who was running for AMS Vice-President at the time. “Questions were asked of me that wouldn’t have been asked otherwise. We had more coverage, and more diverse coverage than we’ve had in the past.”

(continued on page 37)
A knock at the glass enclosure that separates The Canadian Press’ Vancouver bureau from the outside world does little to catch the attention of the few staff members milling about the newsroom. The office is surprisingly quiet, with only three bodies answering phones, watching television screens and banging out copy on computers. For the news wire’s newly appointed Vancouver bureau chief, Wendy Cox, it’s a different story. Her telephone is ringing off the hook and piles of paper overflow off her desk. When she finally hangs up the phone, she takes a deep breath to calm herself and sits down. “It’s been an unusual year,” Cox says.

She explains that since she took over the bureau chief position last summer “the news cycle has been unusually punishing.” Cox and her team of editors and reporters are responsible for getting all the local, national and international news to the news wire’s 100 or so member newspapers, TV and radio stations and Internet news outlets. Although the sheer number of front-page stories coming out of Vancouver has been extremely high this year, not all the added pressure on the bureau can be blamed on that alone. Forget the fact that there are only 10 full-time and one part-time staffer. Or the fact that one of those full-timers was sent to Afghanistan for a good chunk of the year. The biggest reason the bureau is facing an uphill battle this year is because Canada’s largest newspaper chain, Canwest Global Communications Corp., pulled its membership from The Canadian Press wire service.

On June 30, 2007, Canwest, the owner of more than 10 daily newspapers in Canada including the Vancouver Sun, The Province and the Victoria Times Colonist, cancelled its membership with The Canadian Press to form its own wire service based in Ottawa.

The move means a loss of $4.6 million in fees for The Canadian Press, which represents approximately 10 per cent of it’s annual budget and takes away most of Vancouver’s major daily news providers from the news-sharing service itself. In addition to cancelling its membership, the news giant last February announced the opening of the Canwest News Service. The service does not only produce Canwest generated content for news outlets already in the Canwest chain, but sells content to other media outlets in direct competition to The Canadian Press.
In an attempt to boost its brand image since the departure of Canwest, The Canadian Press has advised its members to use the company’s full name, instead of the well-known abbreviation CP.

Created in 1917 to distribute news coming back from the First World War to newspapers across Canada, The Canadian Press quickly grew and transformed its identity from a news distributor to a full news service that produced original copy for its member newspapers. In 1924, The Canadian Press was credited with building telegraph lines linking Eastern and Western Canada and opening communication from coast to coast. Now, in 2008, the national wire service and its 250 journalists work in bureaus in most major Canadian cities distributing news stories, photographs, audio and video clips and Internet-based copy to media outlets across the country and abroad.

The loss of Canwest has forced the wire service to make changes in how it operates in all Canadian cities. But the Vancouver bureau has felt its impact harder than most. “Canwest pulling out is an acute issue in Vancouver because all other cities in Canada have non-Canwest papers,” Cox explains. The hardest hit since the loss of Canwest has been to The Canadian Press reporters, due to the added workload and pressure of getting stories that would have been previously picked up from the Sun or The Province. The bureau is much busier, and it frustrates Cox. “We get our butts kicked on certain kinds of stories. The gang war is a tough story for us to keep up with. We just don’t have a reporter dedicated to working the copy.”

Although providing other member news outlets with Vancouver stories has proven to be challenging, Cox feels it has made the bureau stronger and forces her team to be sharper. “Our people do a remarkable amount of work. They work their tails off.” She says many of the staff took the pullout personally. “It’s injected a level of competition we never had before. I think it’s a good thing.”

Competition has prompted the bureau to form stronger alliances with remaining members such as The Globe and Mail. The relationship between the two has become much tighter and they rely on each other more for stories that have importance to all British Columbians, not just Vancouver readers. Before Canwest cancelled its membership, the cooperative was not privy to The Globe’s B.C. copy. Cox says, “We now rely on the Globe in a way that probably exceeds the way we relied on the Canwest papers for local stories.” In wake of the loss of the Victoria Times Colonist, the Vancouver bureau has also formed a relationship with westcoaster.ca, an online paper out of the West Coast resort town of Tofino. Cox credits the small Internet-based outlet with keeping The Canadian
Press alive on Vancouver Island. “It’s not a relationship we would have had before. This has really made us think outside the box and form better relationships with smaller papers.”

The initial threat by Canwest to pull its membership from The Canadian Press came in 2006, when an internal strategic review was released based on five months of discussion among The Canadian Press’ members about its structure. Canwest disagreed with the other members about the direction in which the cooperative was going. The Winnipeg-based media giant wanted a complete change in the structure and only wanted to pay for stories it picked up. The current structure offers only two types of memberships. One for smaller newspapers, called NewsStream and one for larger newspapers called Datafile, which provides more of the wire service’s original copy.

The Canadian Press was under the gun once before. In 1996, Southam Inc., the former newspaper giant now owned by Canwest, threatened to pull out its newspapers from the co-op. Though Southam eventually backed down, it took The Canadian Press massive restructuring and staff cuts to recover from the fallout. Now 10 years later, the news wire is faced with a similar challenge.

To maintain the extensive news coverage that, in large part, was previously provided by Canwest’s Vancouver Sun and The Province, The Canadian Press will need to fill a few gaps. But that will not be easy when the wire service’s total annual operating budget has only grown from $46 million to $48 million in the last 10 years. Although there are no plans to hire new staff to cope with the added workload since the Canwest pullout, there has not been a significant reduction in staff. Cox emphasizes “the bureau is not going to lose any jobs like in 1996. We have no plans for lay-offs but we’re certainly not going to get bigger.”

The distribution and production of online copy, audio and video are becoming increasingly important in journalism, and The Canadian Press now provides more of these multi-format news forms than ever before. With newspapers, broadcasters and online outlets fighting for the same audience, the responsibilities for a Canadian Press reporter have expanded from simply writing copy. The days of sitting back and waiting for the local dailies to file their stories are over.

Camille Bains, a reporter for The Canadian Press for the past eight years, says “When you’re trying to do everything—processing audio, trying to get your quick hit out, trying to write your story, and at the same time shooting video—you wish you had four arms. You don’t have much time to do the story you were trained to do. Now you’ve got this other stuff to deal with.”

According to Bains, the loss of Canwest has created some much-needed competition. “Competition is good in this business,” she says.

Having worked under the deadline pressure of a newspaper and now for The Canadian Press, Bains believes the new competitiveness sparked by the pullout will work to her newsroom’s advantage.

“For us it’s a group effort. It’s a cultural difference between Canwest and us.” One advantage the cooperative has over Canwest is that their reporters are constantly filing stories throughout the day, not just once. “We’re just doing more of it than they are, and faster than ever before,” Bains says.

Although editors and reporters at The Canadian Press’ Vancouver bureau are shouldering the bulk of the added workload, they welcome the challenge. The competitive nature of journalism is alive and well these days around Vancouver. Bains says there is a sense of pride amongst the staff in the newsroom. “The reporters around the city all respect each other; we all know we have a job to do. But at the end of the day, we want to be better than the other person.”

Cox doesn’t deny Canwest’s exit has hurt the wire service, but maintains her bureau has improved since the pullout. “We’ve gotten better since we lost them, but we’d rather have them. Canadians as a whole are better served by having the entire co-op intact.” (LJR)
I was just beginning my interview with Luis Felipe Morales, mayor of Moyogalpa, a small town in southern Nicaragua, when I realized I might have said too much.

“I’m not aware of this project. There’s Canadian money involved?” he asked me, leaning closer to listen to my answer.

I was surprised he knew nothing about Produmer, a $2.8 million Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) funded project aimed at diversifying agriculture across Nicaragua. After all, the project’s sesame farmers here on Isla de Ometepe, a spectacular island-in-a-lake formed from two volcanoes, had been the most successful than in any other part of Nicaragua.

The mayor’s ignorance was a sudden reminder of what country I was in. Nicaragua ranks 123rd out of 179 nations rated in Transparency International’s 2007 corruption index. It’s rarely clear who will benefit from a development project in the long term.

Produner, organized by the Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) on CIDA’s behalf, has been helping sesame farmers grow high-quality,
sustainable sesame crops and find ways to sell those crops internationally since 2001. I spent most of August visiting farmers in towns scattered throughout the Occidente, the Pacific coastal plains of Nicaragua, to learn about their experiences under the project.

Reporting on this project wasn’t easy. Commuting along hurricane-thrashed highways is one thing, but the struggle to get honest quotes, and tell the story in a way the average Canadian cares about was the real challenge. It’s good to pay attention to a project’s results, but I learned it’s more important to be resourceful in overcoming cultural obstacles.

Chances are good that upon arriving in a developing country, a rookie journalist will experience a heady combination of professional uncertainty and culture shock. I felt both when flying into Managua, the nation’s capital, in the midst of an electricity crisis. It quickly became apparent I was entering the second-poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. Looking down on a city of 1.7 million was like looking into a dark and abandoned church, with a few candles left burning in the tabernacle.

In the daylight, it’s a decidedly less sacrosanct place. Managua is a noisy city whose natural state seems to be disrepair, thanks in part to Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and a powerful earthquake in 1972. Pollution seems to stick to your forehead in the muggy heat. In the middle of busy streets, old tires warn drivers of uncovered manholes whose lids were stolen for scrap metal.

But the real reporting work took place in smaller towns like El Sauce, Malpaisillo, and Cosiguina, all less than a few hours drive by a pothole-ridden highway from Leon. Farmers I spoke with on the drive by a pothole-ridden highway spoke of Leon. Farmers I spoke with on the drive by a pothole-ridden highway were simple farmers or former Contras, but the real reporting work took place among the poor and humble.

I had a translator, but tried to speak as much Spanish as possible. There’s nothing like stumbling attempts at a foreign language to help narrow the cultural gap.

While my various translators were great guys, working with them imposed limits I hadn’t expected. At times, I could tell answers were being vastly simplified for me — I had to keep reminding them not to paraphrase too much. I was already losing some context through translation, and I needed direct, emotive quotes.

Answers tended to lead back to the need for more funding to keep the project going. And it was pretty much expected that lunch was on me. But that was alright — eating unnamable food with the local muchachos, whether they were simple farmers or former Contras, was a great way to bring down barriers. When I returned to El Sauce later that month for a follow-up interview, farmers were much more willing to share their insights.

The project’s agricultural experts acted as my guides in each rural community, and put me in touch with the farmers — a selection process that I realize in hindsight might have catered to their own agenda of getting good press. Farmers seemed especially guarded when these specialists sat in on my interviews, making it tricky to craft questions that would unlock honest answers.

Dealing with corruption is a part of life in Nicaragua, but poor farmers aren’t always innocent. A co-op in Malpaisillo tried to trick their buyers into paying a high price for non-organic sesame, and when it didn’t work, have me report they were cheated. The incident kept me aware of the need to stay vigilant and avoid reporting hearsay.

I sought out aspects of the project that would resonate with Canadian readers. Taxpayers in Canada would appreciate Produmer’s business-like approach, and the fact that slackers aren’t tolerated. Eco-conscious Vancouverites would be pleased to read the project is pushing organic sesame as a crop to replace the chemical-intensive cotton plantations so prevalent in the 1980s.

Nicaraguans know their political support often determines whether they receive government help. Produmer could have been seen as part of that partisan system, explaining why farmers were careful to self-censor any comments negative towards MEDA.

Many rural people support president Daniel Ortega’s Sandinista government, and socialist election slogans aren’t hard to find painted on walls in most towns. Framed pictures of Ortega and Che Guevara look down paternally from the mayor’s office in Malpaisillo.

It was sometimes a challenge to focus on the small project I was covering, instead of the country’s intriguing political history. The Sandinistas were in power from 1979 to 1990, a period marked by great promise of social revolution, by turmoil and war against the U.S.-backed Contras. After 15 years on the sidelines, the Sandinistas are now running the country again.

Along the roadside, giant pink billboards feature a larger-than-life Ortega exhorting social revolution with a fist raised in triumph: Arriba los pobres del mundo! (Rise up, poor people of the world!) It’s a slogan some Nicaraguans scoff at, noting they can’t rise up with constant power shortages and a lack of rural infrastructure necessary to bring water to farms.

It makes the smaller stories — such as how foreign aid is helping local farmers buy into something that could mean lasting change — worth telling. (LJR)
The most coveted consumers aren’t buying newspapers. What is journalism’s oldest medium doing to capture the 20-somethings?

Young Canadians are forcing print-oriented news outlets across the country to step back and re-think the way they’ve been targeting readership. With so many options, especially the Web, the young hip crowd is tuning out newspapers more than ever before. What, if anything, are traditional print outlets doing to lure them back?

A study done by Claire Boily for the Canadian Media Research Consortium in 2005, shows 39 per cent of those aged 18 to 34 regularly follow the news. She also reported that the rate of newspaper readers aged 18 to 24 is dropping. In 1998, 56 per cent of that group read newspapers compared to 45 per cent in 2004.

A statement by the Canadian Newspaper Association enforces Boily’s findings. “If young people have not become newspaper readers by age 24, they are unlikely to become readers later in life.” So what’s turning them off?

According to Boily, the first strike against big media is corporate ownership. Big is perceived as bad. Her report states: “This media concentration is perceived as very high in North America and the print media as well as television appear to be especially affected by this convergence, which ultimately undermines information quality.”

Boily’s findings show young people aren’t satisfied with what big news corporations are trying to feed them. Her study shows that 76 per cent of young Canadians believe the media are influenced by powerful members of society and 57 per cent are concerned about concentration of ownership. One young woman was quoted in the report as saying, “I feel like our generation is jaded by the media, because you see fake news sources and who owns what paper. We are a lot more aware of that now, they are like the enemy.”

The local community papers seem to fare somewhat better. According to a study done three years ago by ComBase, the research component of the Canadian Community Newspapers Association, young people are actually picking up the local papers.

The study showed sixty eight per cent of Canadians aged 18 to 34 read their weekly community papers compared to 34 per cent who read the dailies. In B.C., they found that 30 per cent of readers aged 18 to 34 read only their community newspapers.

If the big media are perceived as not trustworthy, it’s no surprise that many young people are seeking out alternatives. In Vancouver, The Georgia Straight has
long represented an alternative voice, in part, based on the mythology of its ’60s iconoclasm, but also because of its independence from big corporations.

The Straight is in itself a corporate entity, appearing to make big bucks from pages and pages of ads and relatively little editorial copy, apart from the extensive entertainment listings. But young people would much rather turn to its cleverly written news and entertainment columns, than those of Vancouver’s dailies, the Sun and The Province.

John Burns, former senior producer of Straight.com and now book editor of the Georgia Straight, believes independent news matters to young people. “As the ownership of media continues to converge into a few large companies, an alternative perspective rooted in our community becomes more and more important.”

So it’s not that young readers aren’t hungry for information; in fact it’s quite the opposite, but they’ve acquired a taste for independent news and they want more.

In television, the indicators are similar. While Boily’s data shows that youth aged 18 to 24 spend most of their time in front of the TV, the local news at six isn’t what they’re watching. With the call of an eagle at 11:30 p.m. the voice of Stephen Colbert gives young people every piece of political news they feel they need. The Colbert Report dishes out news with a side of sarcasm, which seems to be the right recipe for the young, who are ever sceptical of the status quo. While the show deals mainly with American politics, Colbert is much-watched and talked about by the young crowd in Canada.

The Internet is another prime reason newspapers could be facing a potentially slow and painful death? In an age of instant gratification, what could be more convenient than sitting down at a computer and having instant access to whatever news you feel like reading? In fact, young people already spend much of their time on the Internet so news is just a click away.

As Burns says, “If you don’t put yourself in people’s way — if you don’t make yourself relevant to their daily lives — why would they pick up a newspaper? The Internet is right there on their computer.”

Boily’s research confirms that the primary reasons Canadian youths turn to the Internet: It offers the most immediate and up-to-date information, it’s fast, abbreviated, widespread, and allows you to read only what you want, for free.
One person interviewed for her report summed it up: “People who know they only have to press two or three buttons to get the news aren’t going to go out and buy it [the newspaper].”

Big media outlets are certainly aware of this phenomenon, and are scrambling to win young people over by offering news online. “We want young people to read our paper either on the web or in print,” says Ros Guggi, deputy editor of The Province. “The challenge we face in attracting young readers is shared by newspapers across North America.”

While most dailies are putting more energy and resources into their websites in an effort to attract more readers, especially the young, Boily says it may hurt them in the end. By encouraging readers to seek news online, newspapers in turn are discouraging them from picking up the paper. Revenues from online advertising still falls below that from print so this could be a double-jeopardy scenario: Reduced newspaper circulation means less ad revenue and online revenues don’t make up the difference.

And then there are the online news competitors, such as the Tyee and NowPublic and the so-called citizen journalism sites, such as Orato. Not only are young people reading these sites, they are also writing for them. Lisa Manfield, the Tyee’s marketing coordinator, says, “People love the kind of in-depth investigative analysis that we offer. They recognize that the kind of journalism we are providing is necessary, and that few media outlets are doing it anymore.”

Burns, who has plenty of experience working with the web, knows it’s not just a matter of providing web surfers with information; it’s finding ways to connect with them and having them connect with one another.

“For years, I wrote and edited stories, then shipped them off into the world. The only feedback was anecdotal or letters to the editor. With the Internet, you can watch the numbers in real time, and you can converse with users the same way. It’s very exciting.”

The big, unionized dailies face other hurdles. Many newsrooms carry an aging staff. Senior editors who make the news decisions are unable to tap into young minds. Those who are only a few years away from retirement are sometimes reluctant to embrace the new Web technology. Management is sometimes hobbled by a head-office agenda or by union contracts.

Smaller, independent media have none of these problems. “We’re hiring young people in junior roles and as news writers, which can only help make the paper more interesting to fellow youth,” says The Straight’s Burns.

The Tyee is also finding ways to bring young minds into the mix. “We also involve student interns in our day-to-day operations and they have a good sense of how to reach youth,” Manfield said.

There is plenty of speculation on what will happen to newspapers in the future. It’s doubtful they will become extinct, but if they fail to reach out to younger readers, no one is going to reach back.

“There’s so much talk about the death of newspapers, and the sunset of the industry,” Burns says. “I think the bloom is off the rose for the Internet, though. I think that we love our time online and we’ve maybe glutted enough on the all-you-can-eat aspect. Perhaps what comes next is the desire to see quality online. For newspapers, it may be that users or readers will appreciate the curatorial aspect of the publication, and by whatever means they interact with the content, they’ll want a depth of experience that goes beyond endless ill-informed threads and blog rants.”

Young people have news and information options that previous generations did not. The newspaper, according to most evidence, is not the primary option for the majority of young readers, and their news-consuming habits formed today will likely carry over into their mid-life years. (LJR)
outside the liquor store on the corner of Broadway and Maple in Vancouver, a man named Richard is selling newspapers. His round, mocha-coloured face shines out from beneath a navy blue be-
ret worn at a jaunty angle over springy salt-and-pepper hair, he carries a toque in his pocket in case it gets cold. He has shiny white teeth and if you shake his hand, you’ll find his palm warm, dry and leathery.

Beside Richard sits a small black boom box, and from it floats the crack-
ing strains of a much-played Miles Da-
vis tape. It begins to rain and he covers himself with a large plaid golf umbrella – the expensive kind with a steel tip and carved wooden handle. Nothing he has is new, but it is all clean and of good-qual-
ity. He wears a warm jacket, sturdy shoes, and lined gloves to protect his hands from the late winter chill. He is smiling and calling out to passersby.

“Get your copy of Street Corner,” he says in his booming baritone voice.

The first time I spoke to Richard was on a brisk spring afternoon in front of the Shoppers Drug Mart on West Broadway. He was selling copies of a newspaper that was hardly a newspaper at all; it was just five or six Xeroxed pages of articles and photographs taken from the Vancouver Sun and stapled together along with a title page that read The Street.

(continued on page 22)
“Thanks,” I said, “I’ve already got one from you this week.”

“Why?” he asked.

I was flustered for a moment, knowing I had been caught in a standard lie. I stammered over my words.

“I… I bought one from you yesterday.”

“Where?” he asked.

I pointed east.

“On Commercial Drive. On the corner of Broadway and Commercial.”

“I wasn’t there yesterday,” he said, matter-of-factly.

“Well,” I said, “maybe it wasn’t yesterday...”

“Anyway,” he said, ignoring my obvious embarrassment, “this edition came out today, so you haven’t read it yet.”

Fact was, I hadn’t read a copy of The Street for years. I used to read it when it was a slick-looking 20-page paper, printed on newsprint and featuring columns written by local social justice advocates and original work by professional journalists. But the paper, sold by low-income and homeless Vancouverites, had suffered a major downturn and I no longer considered it worth reading. I had certainly bought a copy of the paper now and then, simply to support the person selling it. That day, I was exercising my right as an upper-middle-class citizen to deny charity to those who requested it. The problem was, Richard was not asking for handouts — he was doing business.

“Here,” he said, thrusting the paper at me with a smile. “Price is up to you. I pay for the copying.”

I was flustered and ashamed of myself, but I still didn’t take the proffered “No,” I said, walking away. “No thanks.”

That was the last time I passed without buying the paper. After that, I looked forward to seeing Richard and I was disappointed when weeks would go by without catching sight of him. His music and his smile brings a liveliness to the street rarely seen on Vancouver’s hippie-turnedyuppie West Side, and now, after nearly two decades of shifting fortunes, the paper he sells has recovered some of its own liveliness.

The street paper project was originally brought to life in Vancouver by journalist Michael McCarthy.

While working at a radio station in Kelowna, McCarthy came across a story about a street paper in New York City. The story piqued his interest, and when he moved back to Vancouver in 1990, he brought the idea with him.

“Everyone that I talked to — starting with my wife and my friends — everybody said I was a complete idiot. They pointed out that I had never worked on a newspaper, that I knew nothing about newspapers, but I figured I knew the business end of things, like where you get the money from. But in terms of publishing a newspaper, I didn’t know anything.”

After being told to drop the idea by his closest friends, McCarthy went around to various organizations on the Downtown Eastside to see if he could drum up support from those who were working on the front lines of the burgeoning homelessness crisis in Vancouver. McCarthy doesn’t bother to hide his bitterness when he recalls their reaction to his pitch.

“I was universally rejected by everybody that I talked to... nobody wanted the idea of hiring panhandlers. They said it wouldn’t work and they had no interest in working with people like that.

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“Far from being discouraged by the wholesale rejection he received, McCarthy took it as a sign that his idea was a good one.

“If you read job stuff and surveys from people who do life counselling, when you go around and you think you have something unique and everybody says no, then you might want to pursue it a bit further. I knew that I was right and they were wrong.”

With this in mind, McCarthy started putting together the first edition of Spare Change, so named, he says, “because I was interested in the word change. I actually wanted to give some dignity, some meaning, some self-respect to these people.”

He wrote some articles himself, then went back to the people who had initially declined to support the paper and asked for written submissions. McCarthy recalls the reaction from a prominent anti-poverty activist whom he had approached about offering employment to people who came to the downtown needle exchange.

“No, you can’t put a poster up around here. But, oh yeah, you want me to write an opinion, well I hate the police department, blah, blah, blah.”

McCarthy found a company that would print the first issue of the paper for free and was almost ready to go. He had filled 19 of 20 pages and all he needed was a final flourish.

“I wanted to stir the pot a bit in terms of getting some publicity. What I wanted to do was get the mainstream papers to pay attention to this and I didn’t want a sympathy, feeble beggars-type pitch.”

So he made up a poster for the back page, something for shopkeepers to put up in their windows. It said, essentially, that giving change to panhandlers is not a solution to poverty. As McCarthy puts it: “Street people need a heck of a lot more than your 25 cents.” He listed needs end of things, like where you get the money from. But in terms of publishing a newspaper, I didn’t know anything.”

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“I was universally rejected by everybody that I talked to... nobody wanted the idea of hiring panhandlers. They said it wouldn’t work and they had no interest in working with people like that. Everybody’s in the business of providing beds and medical care and emergency services and nobody to this day is interested in the concept of employment... It’s a heck of a lot easier to say, ‘Give me funding and we’ll house people and give them medical care and health care and food banks.’ Even the Salvation Army turned me down flat.”

McCarthy says he wasn’t asking for money, just support.

“I just basically said, ‘Would you like to participate in any way? Would you like stories written about what you do? Would you like to write a column? Would you send people from the shelter, or the people that you work with, would you say to them, there’s a job for you?’ And the universal response was no interest whatsoever.”

Far from being discouraged by the wholesale rejection he received, McCarthy took it as a sign that his idea was a good one.

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McCarthy’s idea worked. Whether it was the back page poster, or simply the concept itself, media outlets all over Canada were calling him up asking for interviews. And it wasn’t just journalists calling, it was people who wanted to work.

“I started having street people call me here at home...and my wife said, ‘if you
get one more of those phone calls from some drunk at the bar, you’ll be living somewhere else.’ So I rented a cubicle on Pend-er Street and I put a desk in there and we had a line-up of people around the block who wanted to work.”

The first issue was published in the fall of 1992 and the papers were left at the Salvation Army for vendors to pick up. The second issue came out in January of 1993, and every two weeks after that until 1997. After the premier issue, vendors paid a quarter for each copy, not so much to cover printing costs, says McCarthy, but to make the paper worth something to those who sold it, and through sheer determination they kept it alive.

Enter Sean Con- don. In the summer of 2006, Condon was working for the West Ender, a Black Press community paper serving the West End of downtown, and feeling frustrated that he couldn’t do more stories about Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. He started talking to friends in the business about what he could do and eventually struck up the conversation with Darren Atwater, a local journalist who had recently taken on the role of editor at the Street Corner. “It was still just photocopies at that time,” says Condon of the first paper he and Atwater put out, “but it was original content, nothing stolen from other papers. The quality had been so poor up to that point, [the vendors] were just happy the lines were straight.”

In September, Condon took over as editor and Street Corner went back to the presses to become a bona fide newspaper again. The change was a success. In November 2007, the people behind Vancouver’s other street paper, The Street, decided to join the Street Corner team.

Today, Street Corner boasts a dozen vendors, and Condon hopes to triple that number by the end of 2008. With more vendors on the street, Condon wants to see more people buying and reading the revitalized paper. Attracting those readers, he says, is a two-part challenge.

“First, we have to raise awareness in the city about what we are doing and why you should buy the paper. The second is content. We have to make sure that when someone new buys the paper, they learn something; they are intrigued and they want to buy it again.”

He describes the content strategy as “subversive.” “People have a certain perception of a street paper — that it is put together by homeless people and it is all about homelessness and poverty. We are trying to change that perception.”

He wants to attract new readers with entertainment features, breaking news and lighter fare such as puzzles and horoscopes. Once people know there is more to street papers than just stories and news about homelessness, he says, they will start to value it as part of their weekly reading. He points to the Big Issue, a street paper that started in London and has spread to Australia, Africa and Japan, as a model.

“Anybody can pick up a copy of the Big Issue and enjoy it for the entertainment stories or reviews, but then they might go on to read a vendor profile or a story on poverty issues. It’s an easy entry point for people to learn about poverty.”

Condon stresses the importance of the vendors in deciding the paper’s content. “When we started working on the paper, they told us they wanted to keep things like the David Suzuki column. They know best what their customers like about the paper.”

He says the vendors work as a bridge between two worlds: the Downtown Eastside and the rest of the city. “People talk about barriers to the poor, but there are barriers on the other side too. People are afraid to go to the Downtown Eastside so they don’t know what it is really like. These guys are out there acting as ambassadors. It’s their paper.”

While McCarthy quit the paper because he didn’t want the responsibility of being “a den-father to a bunch of guys with serious addiction problems,” Condon doesn’t seem overly concerned about keeping the vendors in check.

All new vendors must sign a code of conduct that says they must not harass (continued on page 37)
Wyng Chow was 56 when Patricia Graham, editor-in-chief of the Vancouver Sun, fired him for an apparent conflict of interest involving a story he wrote and an investment. Chow frequently wrote about Concord Pacific LTD., a Vancouver real estate company that sold him a condominium in 1995. The flooring put into the condo was different from what Chow was promised, so he accepted a $15,000 discount for the trouble. In 2001, Chow purchased another condo from Concord for $39,000 below the price paid by other buyers.

When Chow appealed his dismissal from the Sun, he told arbitrator Rory McDonald the discount was given because of further problems with the design of the original condo. McDonald cited several letters Chow had written to Concord between 1997 and 1999 containing language he and Graham described as, “disgusting, unbelievable, profane, nasty and ugly.” He concluded Chow had used his high-profile position to demand benefits, and the termination was upheld.

In another conflict-of-interest case, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission accused former CBS MarketWatch columnist Thom Calandra of promoting 23 companies from February to December 2003. The commission concluded Calandra went beyond general market analysis to specific stock recommendations without disclosing his investments to his readers. When Calandra’s newsletter came under the SEC investigation, he advised CBS of his resignation. The SEC claims Calandra purchased shares of companies he profiled more than 100 times, netting a tidy $406,000.

That buy-write-sell pattern is called scalping, and it begs the question: Do businesses reporters use their power for profit?

Many B.C. stock promoters make that accusation against veteran Vancouver Sun business writer David Baines, who specializes in securities reporting. His articles influence market prices, giving him the opportunity to earn money off his column. Baines has been sued unsuccessfully 18 times.

“They just go through the process,” he says. “There are a lot of sleazy promoters out there and they can’t understand that somebody would be writing negatively about a deal unless there was something in it, some financial motivation. They just don’t understand that I do this as part of my job.”

In 1998, Baines won a libel suit against Florida securities writer George Chelekis, who accused him of generating negative news about companies to drive down the price of shares.

“That was a big case. We sued him and won $825,000 plus legal costs, the second highest libel judgment in Canadian history. The irony was that the SEC later discovered that he had been doing exactly what he had accused me of doing:
taking secret payments to write false news about companies.”

On Feb. 25, 1997, the SEC filed a complaint against Chelekis accusing him of “knowingly or recklessly making materially false and misleading statements concerning six publicly traded companies.” The complaint also states, “Chelekis failed to disclose... that he and entities he controls... received at least $1.1 million from more than 150 issuers, and 275,500 shares of stock from 10 issuers, as payment for recommending securities of such issuers in [Chelekis'] Hot Stocks publications.” Chelekis was ordered to pay $163,000 in fines.

Baines’s newspaper, the Vancouver Sun, has no clear policy about reporters’ coverage and their investments. The Sun has no mandatory disclosure policy, nor does any other newspaper in Canada. No specific law governs business reporters and their investments. This gives reporters the opportunity to use information that is not yet public to invest with no fear of an audit by either their employer or a securities regulator. Baines says the understanding of the conflict among business reporters is “a mess.”

“It’s up to reporters and editors to be on the side of caution,” he says. “They should not invest into anything that comes into conflict with their writings.”

After the experience with Calandra, “MarketWatch has opted for a crackdown,” says Steve Maich, a business writer for Maclean’s magazine. “Staff must now disclose all of their trading to management, who will perform random audits. In essence, MarketWatch is creating the kind of compliance procedures in use at many Wall Street brokerages.”

Canada’s Business News Network also has a written policy that requires reporters and immediate family members to disclose their investments.

“It’s entirely appropriate to have a policy like that because [business journalists] are reporting on day-to-day price machinations,” Baines says.

Even though BNN and MarketWatch are larger, more influential outlets, he says, “There should also be some mechanism for monitoring investments at the Vancouver Sun in case any questions come up. An editor should be able to make some random checks to see if the reporter is in any conflict or potential conflict.”

Valerie Casselton, the Vancouver Sun’s executive editor, says creating a mandatory disclosure policy is unnecessary. Casselton says she should simply “trust reporters to do what is right.”

Baines considers his investments to be an “open record for serious inquiries to dispel any possible confusion over this issue.”

“If any questions came up, I would open my books to my editors so that they could review this,” he says.

Baines writes about companies on the TSX Venture exchange, which includes junior companies, and to minimize any potential conflict he says his only investments are in large companies listed on the TSX, NYSE and NASDAQ, over which his writings have little influence. He willingly provides a list of his current stock investments, and while there were no apparent conflicts with his writings, there is, as he concedes, no guarantee that it is a complete display of all his financial interests. As he acknowledges — and reinforcing his point about lack of controls — he may well have secret foreign accounts, far beyond the reach of employers and security regulators.

The B.C. Securities Commission monitors financial fraud and is the B.C. equivalent of the SEC. But unlike its American counterpart, the BCSC has not taken action against any business journalist and does not have a section in its act containing rules on journalists’ investments.

With so many brokers to monitor, Maich and Baines say the BCSC has little time for journalists. “Changing the letter of the law to make tighter and more stringent rules might be effective damage control, and it might make managers feel better,” Maich says, “but it doesn’t alter the spirit of the rules. All it does is make a relatively simple ethical principle unnecessarily complicated.”

So while this potential money-making scheme seems enticing to the unethical journalist, Baines says the truth is always bound to surface.

“People who engage in this sort of subterfuge quite often leave tracks, whether it’s cell phone records or wire transfer records. It’s very hard to operate an account out of Canada or the U.S. in the Bahamas without leaving something.”

The potential for business journalists to make some big bucks is very much there, but few cases come to light, so it’s hard to know how prevalent the practice really is.

One has to track back more than two decades to find the example of former Wall Street Journal reporter R. Foster Winans, who was convicted of insider trading and mail fraud for repeatedly leaking the contents of his Heard on the Street columns to a stockbroker. Winans admitted his participation in the scheme and to earning $31,000 from it, but pleaded not guilty, arguing that his behaviour was unethical but not criminal.

In the aftermath, a SEC official noted that Winans was by no means the only journalist who stood accused of law breaking, and who brought disgrace to journalism. (LJR)
Watch your step

The dangers of court reporting

John Daly, a veteran reporter for Vancouver-based Global BC, tramps up the cold concrete steps leading up to the Supreme Court building in downtown Vancouver. He has been here many times before. Glimpses of sunshine flicker across his face as he hurries toward the entrance. Nearby, people hustle through the streets, but their voices and footsteps are muffled by the strong structure of the courthouse. He pushes open the heavy glass doors and reads a sign that warns: Weapons, Cameras, and Recording Devices Are Strictly Prohibited.

But Daly needs no warnings. The 58-year-old Bronx native is an experienced, street-wise reporter who has covered every news beat there is. And he knows covering the courts has own special pitfalls. Yes, he knows.

In June 2005, Daly covered a trial involving an undercover RCMP officer who became chummy with a criminal in what is commonly known as the “Mr. Big scenario.” Despite a court-ordered identity ban, Daly unwittingly revealed the undercover officer’s first name in a 15-second news clip.

Unfortunately, Daly didn’t realize undercover officers often use their real first names to avoid being exposed as frauds. “To be honest with you, it never really dawned on me that the first name was covered by the ban. In fact, I don’t think
Watch your step

Story and photo by Valerie Schillaci

The dangers of court reporting

Daly agreed he would speak to stu-

ents at three journalism schools

about the gravity of publication bans,

especially ones designed to protect

the identity of undercover officers.

The legal process was both time

consuming and difficult, says Daly. 

Global had to work around his court 

ordered schedule. But he was not 

alone. Amy Carmichael, who cov-

ered the same case for The Canadian 

Press, breached the ban and was giv-

en the same deal. In September 2006, 

Daly and Carmichael visited journal-

ism schools at the British Columbia 

Institute of Technology, the Univer-

sity of British Columbia and Langara 

College. They showed students the 

TV news story, and discussed con-

tempt of court — the failure to obey 

a court order. “Most students were 
surprised you could be charged, and 
it was found to be a valuable caution 

for anybody reporting on the courts,” 

Daly says.

Identification bans restrict jour-

nalists from reporting on anything 

that could expose a person involved 
in a sensitive legal case. Journalists 

reporting on the courts have to be 

extremely careful with identifica-
tion bans; Daly’s experience is proof. 
The bans, which he calls “one of the 
sand traps or sink holes that exist in 
the world of reporting,” is intended 

to protect the safety, reputation and 

well-being of a person involved in a 

legal battle. The greatest challenge 

for a journalist is speculating on what 
identifies someone. In Daly’s case, 

the first name was enough to identify 

the undercover RCMP officer.

It is especially dangerous to use 

names in small communities where 

people know each other. In 1998, the 

Nelson Daily News and one of its re-

porters were ordered to pay $19,000 to 

a woman who was sexually assaulted 

and seriously injured by a common-

law spouse. The court had issued a 

public ban on the woman’s name to 

protect her identity. But the news-

paper printed it anyway. The victim, 

who had plans to open a business, 
had to leave town because she was 

ashamed fellow citizens knew of her 

experience.

In some cases, even giving the 

physical description of a victim, or 
naming relatives can lead to prob-
lems. The Duncan Citizen was or-
dered to pay $10,000 in 1993 to cover 
personal damages to a woman who 

had been sexually abused by her 

stepfather. The paper did not identify 
the victim by name but did name the 

stepfather, who was well-known in 

the community.

Journalists who walk into a court-

room unprepared run the risk of miss-
ing the “red flags” or warnings that 

trigger a journalist to be extra cau-
tious. For instance, identity bans are 

almost always in effect when it comes 
to sexual assault victims, young of-

fenders, and frequently, such as in 
Daly’s case, undercover officers.

Along with identity bans, there 

are restrictions to ensure the jury’s 
decision isn’t swayed by information 
inadmissible in court. Reporters 
can’t expose anything that happens 
in the courtroom when the jury isn’t 

present, or the criminal history of the 

accused. Daly’s lawyer, Dan Burnett, 
doesn’t agree with such broad restric-
tions. “We’re blindfolding the whole 
population of Canada about what’s 
going on in a case basically because 
we don’t trust we can find 12 reason-
able people,” he says.

But Robyn Elliot, a law professor 
at the University of British Columbia, 
says bans balance the rights of the 

accused with the need for courts to 
be public. He believes without bans 

the media would expose too much 

information, which could lead to the 

death of open court system we now 
have. Banned information may not 

become public at the time of the trial, 

but, “They [people] are going to be in-
formed at some point.”

Elliot’s biggest fear is that crimi-

nals or anyone with a vested in-

terest in seeing a mistrial will attend 

the trial and start posting banned 

information online. That possibility 
makes Daly believe it is pointless to 

protect the identity of an undercover 

RCMP officer. “If bad guys know who 

the players are they can go where the 

trial is,” he says. “They can go down 

there and eyeball the officers and get 

the names they’re using and put it on 

the Internet, but the average person 
can’t read about it.”

A provincial court judge, who doesn’t 

wish to be named, says “having some-

one in the courtroom to listen to the 
evidence is based on the principle of 

having courts open to the public, and 

while they are welcome to listen to the 
evidence, they cannot publish it. So it is 

not a matter of hiding the evidence from 

the public.”

Ethan Baron, who frequently covers 

the courts for The Province newspaper, 

understands he needs to tread carefully
when it comes to court reporting. But, he says, aside from
the legal restrictions there are other hurdles. “It’s difficult to
get people [involved in a case] to speak in a way that repre-
sents accurately what they’re going through. They’re usu-
ally overcome by emotion, and aren’t necessarily coherent.”
He says it’s important to get sources to clearly explain their story so
the reporter can convey it accurately.
Daly believes the Canadian judicial system is at a crisis of credibility. “I think [judges] need to take their heads and
bang them together, and have a powerful discussion of why they’re so secretive.”
Daly now covers only the occasional court case, not
his choice. You could say he’s learned a lesson from his recent experi-
ence, but he’s not convinced he was in the wrong. When
asked how the legal limita-
tions fit with the journalist’s role in society,
Daly is blunt: “As a journaist, you are less
than a human being; you are less than the average per-
son in the streets because you are a po-
tential threat.”

Daly

“it’s difficult to get people to speak in a way that represents accurately what they’re going through. They’re usually overcome by emotion, and aren’t necessarily coherent.”
ports reporters are often envied in the newsroom because they have more leeway than news reporters to play with the angle and style of a story. But does sports journalism also stray from the usual journalism tenets of balance, fairness and objectivity to appease or even boost the hometown team? Are sports writers inherent hom-ers because they share the excitement, the fervour, the hope with the hometown fan?

Given the proximity of sports reporters to coaches, owners, public relations operatives and players, a blurring of boundaries can and does occur. The potential to be compromised is high because of their close ties with the people they write about.

Sports reporters often travel on the team plane, sleep in the same hotel, go out to dinner and talk strategy with the athletes, and are then expected to provide fair coverage of a game. Is this getting too close to your subject?


Jonathan McDonald, sports editor for The Province newspaper, says a journalist’s relationship with a team can be a useful tool in getting the whole story to the public.

“PR people represent athletes as great people. Good writers come in who know a lot of people and use their experience to get really good stories and expose what people are actually like.”

McDonald says sports organizations don’t react well to criticism, but they aren’t the only ones. Fans, he says, can be even worse, citing the large number of complaints the paper receives when, for example, the coverage is critical of the Vancouver Canucks.

We all strive for objectivity, and we all fail because we’re human.

“People say we are unsupportive of the Canucks because if they are having a rough season or losing streak we report about it. I have been asked numerous times by outraged fans, ‘How can you be so negative? They are our home team.’ My response is that they may be your team but we are sports writers. We will commend them when they do well and we will criticize them [when they don’t].”

Iain MacIntyre, a Vancouver Sun sports reporter and columnist who regularly covers the National Hockey League, says although some fans have a hard time reading critical reviews of their favourite teams, their opinion of the writer makes a difference.

“The reader’s perception is often formed by the journalist’s perception. There tends to be a long-term feel for the writer as well as the team they’re covering.”

MacIntyre doesn’t deny there is a natural tendency to root for the home team, but he believes a reporter’s stories should still have balance.

“Looking for fairness and evenhandedness, that’s the best you can hope for. If we’re all being honest we probably want to see the home team do well. But I believe that a reporter can write about the team without compromising his or her own integrity. There is no intent to cater to the reader. It’s about what the compelling issue is.”

MacIntyre says he works hard to get a good story and believes that maintaining credibility is the most important factor to being a well-respected writer.

“Don’t sell your soul for a story, which can lead to a loss of objectivity. In other words, don’t accept favours to get a story that might compromise you down the road. If it’s true, you have to go with it. I make a point of not putting myself in a position to have myself challenged that way,” he says.

“We all strive for objectivity, and we all fail because we’re human. There is such a swell of interest and support for the team. We just have to do the best we can.”
George Wawmeesh Hamilton was fresh out of journalism school last spring when he was interviewed for a reporting job at daily. He thought the interview went well but he never received a call informing him of his status. Hamilton is Aboriginal. And that, he believes, is why he didn’t get the job. “What I had found out later from a friend who worked there was that the editor said, ‘I want to be certain and clear that there’s no agenda.’”

“I took that to mean that I’m a mould for the First Nations. They think I want to do glowing Aboriginal stories,” Hamilton, 42, says while poking his finger into his chest. “Of the people that they hired, only one was a minority.” After all the hand-wringing and so-called affirmative action plans to bring minorities into newsrooms, are there still barriers for ethnic journalists trying to get their foot in the door?

Institutional racism, a form of racism occurring specifically in institutions such as public bodies, corporations and universities, could be one such barrier. Numerous studies have
been conducted in an effort to gauge diversity in the newsroom but the reports stop after 2004.

Ros Guggi, deputy editor for The Province newspaper, in charge of hiring, doesn’t believe the commitment toward improving diversity in newsrooms has disappeared. “I know that diversity is something that we strive for at The Province. Our newsroom reflects many of the ethnic groups found in the Lower Mainland,” she says. “We’ve made progress in increasing the diversity in our newsroom and know we need to do this to cover a very multicultural community.”

Within the next few years, a significant number of journalists at The Province, many of them older, white males, will retire. Guggi says that while there is no formal affirmative action program at the paper, she will have diversity in mind when hiring replacements.

There are roughly 200 journalists of colour working in Canadian broadcasting, many of them in television. Most of the surge stems from the Broadcasting Act, amended in 1991, which states that broadcasting must “reflect the circumstances and aspirations of the multicultural and multiculturism nature of Canadian society and the special place of Aboriginal peoples within the society.”

As Johal, B.C. correspondent for Global National, believes television and radio have advanced more quickly than print because of their smaller newsrooms. “The size of personnel is so much smaller than in a print newspaper. Generally, print newsrooms across Canada are a lot bigger. It’s difficult, visually, to see change. It takes longer.”

In 1990, the French-language arm of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Radio-Canada, enforced an equality program to guide the hiring process. By 2000, members from all minority groups rose to 4.8 per cent of total employees in Quebec and for Aboriginal people that number rose to 1.3 per cent — small but significant improvements.

But why aren’t such changes evident in print journalism? In 2000, a study by Florian Sauvageau and David Pritchard at Laval University found that only 2.7 per cent of the editors in the 37 papers surveyed said they had a very strong commitment to improving diversity, down from 26 per cent in 1994.

According to the study, “racial minorities have slightly increased their presence in the field; however, the gains do not keep up with the huge increase in ethnic minorities in the Canadian population.” The survey showed that at the 37 papers, there were only 72 journalists from minority backgrounds.

With the popularization of the affirmative action program, which prioritizes minority candidates, the ethical question is whether it’s appropriate to hire people based on the colour of their skin over their skill set.

Warfield believes the affirmative action program is significant to Canadian culture, but it’s treading dangerous waters. “There are two sides to it. We face this two-way street when it comes to implementing these programs.” The two-way street she’s talking about raises concerns about the issue of prejudice when implementing an affirmative action program. Companies and businesses that favour hiring certain groups of people could be seen as having a bias. Likewise, disqualifying Caucasian candidates up for the same positions can be considered discrimination.

Warfield feels any program to hire more ethnic journalists would reflect the diverse culture and thus would be a step in the right direction. “If there’s already a white anchor, and an Asian anchor gets hired over another white anchor, I don’t see that as a problem.”

But Jenna Kelsey, a 19-year-old second-year journalism student at Kwantlen, believes it’s unfair for white journalists to be overlooked based on race. She fears an affirmative action policy could leave her out in the cold.

“More recently, television stations have been hiring a more ethnically diverse staff,” Kelsey says. “I think now more than ever it’s harder to get on television being a Caucasian because newsrooms are trying harder to incorporate ethnic backgrounds.”

The Ryerson study indicated that between 1994 and 2004 there was a 50 per cent drop in commitment by newsroom managers to hire more people of colour. The common justification was “that minority groups just don’t apply here.” Guggi says her newsroom faces the same problem. She doesn’t get enough applications from qualified people of colour.

“It takes a long time to change the makeup of a newsroom when you aren’t doing a lot of hiring each year,” Guggi says. Warfield agrees. “I think we should flip the camera around and show it from the point of view of the ethnic reporter. It’s too simple to say that there is some form of racism going on. It’d be very tough to prove. More needs to be done to encourage them to apply instead of pointing fingers saying editors aren’t hiring people of colour.”

“If you don’t have trained journalists of diverse backgrounds, then you don’t

If you look at journalism schools across Canada, for the most part there isn’t a strong enough representation, visually, of minorities in those classrooms.

Katie Warfield, a journalism instructor at Kwantlen University-College who teaches media and diversity, believes newsrooms need to re-think diversity, especially with Canada’s growing multicultural population. She says more ethnic journalists are going into TV and radio because that’s what TV and radio are looking for. “There’s only so much you can tell from a byline in print. It’s not visual compared to TV.”

Vancouver is a city known nationally and worldwide for its multiculturalism.
have anyone to hire. You have to look at the grassroots level.” She suggests taking a closer look at journalism schools, not only newsrooms. “If you look at schools, not newsrooms. “If you look at journalism schools across Canada, for the most part there isn’t a strong enough representation, visually, of minorities in those classrooms. We have to look at why that is.”

Warfield speculates that immigration plays a factor in how young minorities decide whether or not to pursue journalism. She believes that if young minorities are being raised in a household where their parents are entrepreneurs and make a lot of money, they will be driven to pursue profit seeking jobs.

“Let’s face it, you’re not in journalism for the money,” she says. “Here at Kwantlen, if you look at the business department it’s predominantly Asian compared to the journalism department which is predominantly white.”

Johal agrees with Warfield’s theory. “Immigrant parents aren’t exactly forcing or encouraging their kids to head into journalism because they don’t see it has being a successful, rich and rewarding career.”

Some journalism schools are trying to increase diversity in the classroom. The school of journalism at the University of Regina offered a diversity workshop for Aboriginal and visible minority students taking general studies courses in early 2007. The workshop provided the students with a hands-on learning session with professional news reporters, with the aim of promoting journalism as a career. There was a mock news conference, a writing session and a chance to experiment with page layout and photos.

The coordinator of the workshop, Leonzo Barreno, wrote in a press release that today’s media outlets need to reflect the cultural differences within their communities. He added that by holding diversity workshops at journalism schools, more ethnic minorities will be attracted to the field, which in turn makes it easier for media outlets to hire qualified people of colour.

“Because of our province’s ever-changing demographics, it’s important to have different cultural backgrounds and experiences within a newsroom,” Barreno says.

Guggi believes that qualified ethnic journalists need to step forward and apply. “We get a limited number of applications from journalists of colour who have the previous experience we require. We require them to work at a small paper, along with having strong reporting and writing skills. I am confident the number of qualified applicants will increase as more journalism graduates of colour progress through the ranks.”

So while ethnic representation in print newsrooms still lags behind television’s, Hamilton rightly points out that Canadian print newsrooms have been traditionally white and have had much farther to go. He believes it will take more than a decade or two to see a significant change.

“It’s going to take time,” Hamilton says. “Diversity is still in its infancy. It needs to be given time to grow.” (LJR)
By Benjamin Alldritt

Journalism is a profession under siege. Reporters in the 21st century find themselves pressed on all sides: by newsmakers, whose obstructive and manipulative skills have never been sharper; by employers who increasingly value efficiency of production over quality of public service; and by a public that is turning to non-professional, web-based news sources. These evolutionary pressures are redefining the media ecosystem – many traditional jobs will be changed, some journalistic niches may be wiped out altogether.

When an ecosystem changes, often the most visible effects are seen on the large predators – in journalism, these are the investigative reporters. Like polar bears and great white sharks, their numbers are collapsing as their environment changes around them.

News has always been a business. It costs money to operate a newspaper or television station, and ownership has always had to find ways to pay the bills, by charging their audience, or selling advertising space. Conflict between journalistic ideals and commercial interests is ancient and inevitable. But the “earners” and the “burners” usually find some middle ground as both realize their dependence on the other. Editors and reporters know that their pay comes largely from advertising revenue, and the ad department understand that its clients won’t buy space in a paper nobody reads.

For many decades, journalism was insulated from the worst ravages of corporate culture by the structure of the media industry. Until recently, there was genuine commercial competition between media outlets. Scooping a rival newspaper was not just good journalism, it was good business. After the Washington Post dominated coverage of the Watergate Scandal in the early 1970s, editors at the New York Times asked for and received the resources to set up dedicated investigative teams. Beyond this, ownership of many of the most distinguished newspapers was retained by families, such as the Grahams at the Washington Post and the Bancrofts at the Wall Street Journal. While certainly not blind to financial interests, these families valued quality journalism, and often allowed
their newspapers to run at a loss. The Bancrofts endured more than a decade of heavy losses at the Wall Street Journal. The Bancrofts ultimately sold the Journal to Rupert Murdoch in 2007, where it will join dozens of other newspapers and broadcasters from around the world in the News Corporation stable.

In Canada, media ownership is notoriously concentrated. This lack of real competition has disconnected excellence in journalism from commercial success. From the point of view of ownership, it is largely immaterial whether a story is broken by the Vancouver Sun or The Province or Global TV. For an editor, investigative journalism is a high-risk, high-reward proposition. A major story, such as the disappearance of dozens of women from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, requires drawing from scarce resources. And not every investigative rainbow has a pot of gold at the other end.

“I have never turned down an investigative journalism proposal,” says Kirk LaPointe, managing editor at The Vancouver Sun. “When there’s an idea, we find the time. But it doesn’t mean they’ve all been published.”

The Vancouver Sun dedicated three experienced reporters to the missing women story for four months, and it became one of the most notorious criminal cases in Canadian history. But even if the Sun’s efforts lured readers away from its CanWest cousins, the net revenue for the corporate family is left largely unchanged. It is, therefore, difficult to justify the cost of extended investigations, let alone dedicated investigative teams.

“Some people think we do this on the cheap,” LaPointe says. “We don’t. We spend a lot of money on longer-form journalism.”

But in order to convince an editor to commit resources, a reporter must either chance upon a striking piece of evidence or invest a great deal of personal time in building the case. Lindsay Kines was one of three reporters who pursued what became the Robert Pickton story. He did invest a great deal of his own time in the story, building the case to devote more resources to it. “And that’s alright for younger reporters,” says Kines. “But the more experienced people also have families and other demands on their time; it gets to be very hard to juggle.”

Newsrooms are slimming budgets and shedding staff, but the paper or newscast still has to be filled. As the CBC’s Stephen Quinn put it, “We have a big, braying, merciless news goat that we have to feed every hour.” The need to have something, anything, to file before deadline trumps the desire, however genuinely felt, to dig deeper. “It’s easy to fall into that straightforward action-reaction-comment process,” says Quinn. As a result, reporters gravitate towards events that are easily translated into for-

a lot of mileage out of simply going to the courthouse. Because it’s hard NOT to get a story there. If there’s nothing in one courtroom, then you just cruise over to the next. It’s not quite fish in barrel, but...well, yeah it is.”

A study conducted by Trudie Richards and Denel Rehberg-Sedo at Halifax’s Mount Saint Vincent University examined diversity of sources in newspapers. They looked at sources for randomly selected stories on the front pages of the Globe and Mail and the National Post between 1998 and 2003. The Globe yielded 149 stories, the Post 152. The researchers divided sources into three categories: “routine channels,” such as news releases, news conferences, speeches, and comment from spokespersons; “informal channels,” such as leaks, interviews with officials other than spokespersons, and information from other journalists; and finally “enterprise channels,” which include independent research, events the reporter actually witnessed, and interviews with figures speaking without official permission. At the Globe and Mail, enterprise stories accounted for only 13 per cent of front page coverage. At the Post, it was 11 per cent. Routine channels provided more than two-thirds of the stories for both national newspapers.

The Vancouver Sun conducted a similar study, and arrived at an enterprise percentage figure “less than 20, but safely into double digits,” according to LaPointe.

Those who make the news – government officials, business leaders and public figures – understand this very well. Their public relations people know how to play on the weakness of the modern newsroom.

Governments in particular have become adept at rewarding superficiality and frustrating investigation. Pick up a government press release and it will read like a news story, with a nice crisp lead, supporting paragraphs and quotes. Often a separate “backgrounder” is thoughtfully attached to bring the

If there’s an issue in all of journalism it is that there is far, far more of an opportunity now to have news staged for you, and for you to simply lurch from staged opportunity to staged opportunity.

"
As journalists, we haven’t been very effective in convincing people that the right to know is a very important right.

As a tool for obtaining original information and distributing news, the impact of the Internet on journalism can hardly be overstated. Once the sole preserve of large media firms, a global distribution network is now available to virtually anyone on the planet at negligible cost. The rise of blogs and sites such as YouTube has prompted some to question if professional journalism itself is endangered.

The effect of the Internet on investigative journalism is complex; even as it threatens the economic viability of traditional news outlets, it opens new avenues of inquiry and sources of information to reporters. Already, reputable newspapers, including the Vancouver Sun, have published articles that cite Wikipedia as their source. How long can newspapers glean information from the web and then charge readers to publish it on bundles of paper and truck them around the city when the web is available constantly and without cost?

“We’re not really a newspaper culture here anymore. We’re a web-first culture,” says LaPointe. “We publish pretty much everything online first. When the hockey game ends, probably within 10 or 15 minutes, we’ll have our first story on the web. That’s changed the culture, no question. Reporters have to treat online as their first draft.”

Many routine assignments could be dropped from traditional newspapers; the cost of “covering” them is simply not worth it when hordes of “citizen journalists” have already uploaded video and amateur analysis to the web. The strongest remaining profit centre will be driven by “uncovering” information. This is where investigative journalists may come into their own. The web can provide a flood of high-speed, low-depth news, but only a paid professional can offer in-depth research and context.

These are times of profound transition for all journalists. Those in the investigative reporting business are torn between the strictures of an outdated economic news model and the demands of the Information Age. But the opportunities that come with this age will ultimately give skilled investigators huge advantages. As the industry evolves, they may yet survive, adapt, and flourish.

(LJR)
VOTER-FUNDED MEDIA  
(continued from page 11)  

The 2008 AMS elections were the second time out for Voter-Funded Media. Eleven media outlets paid the $150 entrance fee, down from 13 in 2007. This year's top winner was campus newspaper The Knoll, with the blog UBC Insiders and debating society newspaper The Devil's Advocate rounding out the top three.

“This is what I called the turbo,” says Latham. “It’s a feedback loop that builds up the strength of the whole system. You vote for better media, which helps you vote for better politicians, and keep an eye on them once they’re in office.”

The Simon Fraser Student Society is also introducing the idea, and Latham is in talks with Langara and Kwantlen Colleges’ student unions. Once he has a number of student examples up and running, the economist-turned-democratic-reformer wants to scale up to the municipal level and beyond.

But why do we need VFM off-campus, where media consumers already vote with their dollars? Don’t sales figures already tell media if they’re doing a good job? To understand VFM’s role, says Latham, you have to distinguish between private goods and public ones.

“The thing you would pay for out of your own pocket is different from what you would vote to pay for as a group,” he argues. “We do not expect individuals to pay for public goods voluntarily.”

“The same people who buy People Magazine at the checkout and want to read about celebrities, they will vote to spend collective money for in-depth analysis of the tax system and how it should be improved. Totally boring – they don’t want to read it, but I think they realize it’s important.”

Though he acknowledges it might be a tough sell at city halls, Latham hopes to have a municipal level example within two years. He also hopes to find additional sponsors to help provide the initial prizes.

“Anyone who uses the rhetoric of democracy should support this,” says Matthew Naylor. Despite losing his race in this year’s VFM- scrutinized election, the political science student is adamant that voter-funded media find a place in higher levels of government.

“I think it can, I think it will, and I definitely think it should.” (LJR)

STREET PAPERS  (continued from page 23)  

anyone, sell on private property, deal in drugs or stolen property while selling the paper or appear intoxicated on the job, but Condon says the rules need to be flexible.

“The drug and alcohol one is interesting,” he says. “Some of the vendors will have drug dependency issues, they need it to function day to day...and frankly some guys are much more pleasant to deal with when they’ve had a drink, so there has to be some leniency.”

It is this kind of acceptance of people’s often difficult and complicated lives that makes street papers such a valuable employment model. As Condon points out, most employers would fire someone if they showed up for work after spending a night on the street or couldn’t come in because of the chronic illnesses associated with life below the poverty line.

“With Street Corner, [the vendors] are independent business people. They work the hours that suit them and they are in charge of themselves. It’s a low threshold entry point into employment and that’s really the key to street papers: providing people with the opportunity to make their lives better.”

For now, the paper is a labour of love for Condon and its five directors. They all volunteer their time to put the paper out on schedule, write grant proposals and raise funds. Vendors buy the paper for 50 cents per copy, which covers printing costs, and the UPS Store on West Hastings donates its services as a distribution centre.

Ads aren’t a priority, Condon says. The focus now is to get new people buying and reading a paper that he says covers issues affecting all Vancouverites.

“That’s what the Big Issue did; they saw a need for good entertainment coverage in London and they filled that gap. Vancouver needs independent, in-depth journalism and I hope we can provide that.”

He says hopes to one day hire staff reporters, but until then he will have to rely on contributors who believe in Street Corner and will work for free.

While Condon works on improving the paper’s content, Richard is still working his beat.

Several people who pause outside the liquor store to buy copies of the paper stay and chat despite the spitting rain. They talk about the weather, the paper, the upcoming holidays. It is obvious from their relaxed smiles and easy chatter that Richard is a welcome part of their daily lives.

“My back’s too old for construction,” Richard says of his job. “Sellin’ papers? It’s a living. I got a cheap room, don’t drink, don’t smoke, shop for bargains.”

With a grin he pulls out two thick pork chops from his bag.

“Butcher on Hastings always has something on sale; got these for a dollar each. Other guys, guys who drink and take drugs — they need more money than I do.”

Richard survives on the money he earns selling the paper. He says he doesn’t need to collect welfare, that he can earn enough on his own.

There is a steady stream of customers going in and out of the liquor store. On the opposite side of the building a man in a cowboy hat busks for change.

A ragged couple argue while sorting cans and bottles from an overflowing shopping cart. Richard considers the scene, shakes his head and goes back to his work.

“Get your copy of Street Corner,” he calls out into the gathering dark. (LJR)

Since this article was written, Street Corner has changed its name to Megaphone and added 8 full-colour pages to every issue.
A majority of graduates from journalism schools across Canada are women. But that majority isn’t found in the newsroom, and it certainly isn’t reflected in the top editorial positions.

At the start of 2008, 70 per cent of journalism students at the University of British Columbia and Kwantlen University College were female. At Carleton University in Ottawa, 77 per cent of journalism students were female, and at Concordia University in Montreal, there were an estimated 65 to 70 per cent.

But these numbers aren’t reflected at the top. In newsrooms, there are still many more male editors-in-chief than female. Looking at the 32 newspapers with the largest circulations across Canada, only five women hold the top position.

Why so few?

One likely factor is that women bear children, and this can affect their career path.

“Women still have the major responsibility of childrearing,” said Lucinda Chodan, editor-in-chief of the Victoria Times-Colonist.

“Journalism has such irregular hours. You think you have a day that ends at 6 p.m. and then a large news story breaks and you can’t go. If you have kids it is very difficult to do this job. You never know when you’ll be home.”

Chodan has been editor-in-chief for three years, and previously worked as a deputy editor at the Montreal Gazette and as a senior editor, assistant manager and feature editor at various other newspapers.

She does not have children, but understands the demands such a demanding position can put on family life.

“My husband is very patient. We try to dedicate time every week together,” she said.

Daphne Bramham, a columnist for the Vancouver Sun, agrees that choosing to have children can be an obstacle when you’re trying to grab a managerial position.

“For women who are the primary caregivers, of course it’s a problem. Newspapers aren’t very forgiving because of daily deadlines.”

“If it’s your children’s Christmas concert, or if they are sick, it doesn’t matter,” she adds.

A 2006 General Social Survey conducted by Statistics Canada reported that men are increasingly taking a leave of absence from work to welcome home their new baby boy or girl.

But while 90 per cent of fathers returned to work shortly afterwards, only 60 per cent of mothers did so.

And when women do return to work, they can find it a difficult experience. Eight out of every 10 women reported their return as being stressful or very stressful.

In contrast, the majority of fathers described going back to work as not too stressful or not stressful at all.

Kirk LaPointe, managing editor of the Vancouver Sun, agrees the demands of raising children makes women more hesitant to grab that top job.

“As you age, you will often start raising a family,” he said. “It either interrupts careers or sidetracks them.”

At the Calgary Herald, a daycare was built 20 years ago to accommodate the demand of female journalists with children.

Genderwise, the Herald newsroom has an equal amount of women and men. Ron Newell, recently retired executive editor of the Herald, said the daycare helps promote women to both work and raise families.

LaPointe believes that initiatives such as this “make a huge difference.”

But raising children isn’t the only obstacle women might face when working up the career ladder. Bramham says sometimes women can’t break into the “old boys’ club.”

“There are very few of these [senior] positions, so competition is hard. And I think it is still easier for senior management to choose people they are comfortable with, and these people look like them. They are usually white men,” she says.

“Even though we are 50 per cent of the population, we are not represented as well as we should be.”

Bramham, who has been an editorial page editor and the Asian Pacific reporter for the Sun, says there is a long battle ahead for women journalists.

“I’ve been a journalist since 1978. I have worked for one of the few women editor-in-chiefs. The battle is not over.”

She adds: “If you want to stand out, work harder than all the guys. Ask, are you willing to make the sacrifices?”

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