THE IRE JOURNAL

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MARCH/APRIL 2001

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Mayan women in Chichicastenango, Guatemala, take part in a religious procession.

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Cover photo by,
Ted Kirk, the Lincoln Journal Star

THE IRE JOURNAL

VOLUME 24 | NUMBER 2

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The IRE Journal (ISSN0164-7016) is published six times a year by Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. 138 Neff Annex, Missouri School of Journalism, Columbia, MO 65211, 573-882-2042. E-mail: journal@ire.org. Subscriptions are $60 in the U.S., $70 for institutions and those outside the U.S. Periodical postage paid at Columbia, MO. Postmaster: Please send address changes to IRE. USPS #4516708

Newsrooms unite to finish vote coverage

BRANT HOUSTON

No matter what the findings may be, the effort by news organizations to examine voter ballots in Florida in the 2000 presidential election is a fine example of public service journalism.

If ever the characterization of the press as "the court of last resort" had an appropriate use, it is in this instance. After all, the U.S. Supreme Court ended the official examination of ballots and no other public forum remains.

That there are two efforts (and two consultants) – one by *The Miami Herald* and *USA Today* and one by eight other news organizations – doesn't diminish the significance of inquiries, which have involved some of IRE's most knowledgeable members in computer-assisted reporting. After all, who really objects to double-sourcing a story?

The Miami Herald's award-winning investigation into that city's 1998 mayoral election found fraud and overturned the results. The findings were impressive, but that's not the standard that must be met to dig deep into this latest election. The standard is to tell the public – from a non-partisan viewpoint – what really went wrong and how those wrongs might be prevented.

As database expert Dan Keating, formerly of *The Miami Herald* and now at *The Washington Post*, told *The New York Times*, the goal of the investigation is to "build the definitive historical archive" of the ballots using social science methods and complete transparency as to what was done.

Some of the negative reaction to the inquiries gives the strong impression that the choice to go forward with the project was not only clearheaded, but also necessary. Does incremental knowledge really make an issue murkier? Should we leave the scene of the accident without looking at the cause?

Politicians have persuaded some of our own colleagues to doubt the wisdom of looking at the questionable ballots. But it's encouraging and reassuring that newsroom leaders are directing significant time, resources and money into this public service project and, equally important, that they are joining together to do it. It is a strategy that IRE used effectively 25 years ago in the Arizona Project, where reporters banded together to follow up on the work of slain member Don Bolles.

By the time this column appears, the project may be finished and the debate and discussion over the findings will have begun. That discussion alone will mean that the mission has been accomplished.

International efforts

This issue of *The IRE Journal* includes a special excursion into international reporting and we hope all our members will find it useful. As we have said before, for U.S. journalists, international reporting no longer means only filing from foreign bureaus. The international issues are hitting U.S. hometowns, whether it be factory closings, illegal immigration and labor issues, trade, new illnesses or a host of other topics. For our international members, we hope this *Journal* helps them find resources and contacts in the U.S. that can illuminate issues in their countries. But most of all, we are trying to make it easier for journalists everywhere to share information on the critical investigative stories that cross borders and involve far more than one journalist's country.

As another part of that effort, journalists from Europe and the U.S. will be getting together in April at the first conference that IRE has co-sponsored in Europe. The conference, hosted

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Brant Houston is executive director of IRE and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting. He can be reached through e-mail at brant@ire.org or by calling 573-882-2042.

CAR training for editors set for March boot camp

An intensive four-day workshop tailored to the needs of newsroom managers, including top editors or news directors, managing editors, AMEs, assignment editors and other editors directing reporters will be held March 8-11 in Columbia, Mo.

The boot camp will teach editors what they need to know to make CAR successful in their newsrooms. They'll experience just enough hands-on work to understand what their reporters are tackling and what more is possible. They'll hear from other editors who have successfully used CAR and will gets tips on how to negotiate for electronic records. Bonus information will be included on the 2000 Census.

Cost is decided on a sliding scale based on market or circulation size. Register online at *www.ire.org/training/mar08*.

MU fellowship winner will be Journal intern

University of Missouri graduate student Suzanne Bessette has been named the second recipient of the Brent Johnson Memorial Fellowship.

The working fellowship was created to honor an MU graduate student who died in April 1999. Brent Johnson worked at IRE as managing editor of *Uplink*, a publication focused on computer-assisted reporting.

The fellowship – established with gifts from IRE members, Johnson's family and friends – allows a graduate student in the School of Journalism to work on IRE publications. The award carries $1,000 from a memorial fund, $1,000 from IRE and a tuition waiver.

Bessette, who graduated Magna Cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Brown University, will work as an editorial intern for *The IRE Journal*.

Crime statistics book is available from IRE

IRE has published the third volume in its beat book series. "Understanding Crime Statistics: A Reporter's Guide" was written by IRE's Kurt Silver in cooperation with Criminal Justice Journalists and takes reporters step by step through analyzing crime data. Chapters include: Uniform Crime Reports; Crime by the Numbers; Writing the Crime Statistics Story; Database Analysis of Crime Statistics; and Resources: Tipsheets and Stories.

The book costs $15 for IRE members and $20 for non-members. Order online at www.ire.org or call 573-882-3364.

New datasets on tap from IRE and NICAR

The IRE and NICAR Database Library has expanded its collection, adding new datasets and bringing back some unavailable for a couple of years. Others have been updated. The datasets include:

- Storm Events. This is the official U.S. government database of storm events around the country, including tornadoes, hurricanes, tropical storms, droughts, snowstorms, flash floods, hail, wild/forest fires, fog, and avalanches. Fields include: date and time; states and counties involved; latitude and longitude; property and crop damage; and injuries and fatalities.
- National Practitioner Databank. This database contains information about doctors and other health care practitioners who have had medical malpractice suits filed or adverse action taken against them. Although names are not included, some news organizations have been able to use this with other public records to identity individual practitioners.
- DOT Truck Census and Accidents. These two databases, which have not been available through the library for the last two years, are a good starting point for looking at motor carriers and truck accidents on U.S. roadways. The accidents data includes details on accidents involving vehicles owned by motor carriers. The census data allows you to find more details about those carriers, including the type of cargo they transport.
- Airmen Directory. Due to a fight over privacy, this database has not been available from the FAA for a couple years. A law passed in April 2000 once again made the data public; however, airmen had the opportunity to withhold their names. The data currently holds names for about 65 percent of the airmen – both pilots and non-pilots – who have active certificates. Nothing is available on those airmen who opted for privacy.
- The Consolidated Federal Funds Report. From the U.S. Census Bureau, it shows how much money the federal government has spent. It covers federal expenditures or obligations for grants, salaries and wages, procurement contracts, direct payments for individuals, other direct payments, direct loans, guaranteed or insured loans, and insurance.
- DOT Fatal Accidents (FARS). It includes all fatal accidents on U.S. roads where someone died within 30 days of the accident. This can be used for analyzing fatal accident rates on your area highways or those involving a particular vehicle.
- The ATF Federal Firearms Licensees database. Lists all federally approved gun dealers in the United States, including stores where guns are sold, rifle clubs, museums and pistol ranges.

More information about these datasets, including cost, sample slices and record layouts, is available at www.ire.org/datalibrary/datasets, or by calling 573-884-7332.

MEMBER NEWS

Joe Adams, an editorial writer at *The Florida Times-Union* in Jacksonville, made *Presstime* magazine's annual "20 under 40" list of young professionals to watch in the news industry. Adams is the author of "The Florida Public Records Handbook," which recently earned a national Sunshine Award from the Society of Professional Journalists. ■ **Walt Bogdanich** has left "60 Minutes" to join *The New York Times* as an enterprise editor overseeing investigative projects on the business desk. ■ **Heather Catallo** is now a reporter with WXYZ-TV in Detroit. ■ **David Dietz** has moved from TheStreet.com to Bloomberg News in San Francisco. ■ **Jeff Donn** is now the AP's northeastern regional writer and is based in Boston. ■ **Jim Donovan** has moved from WGHP-TV in High Point, N.C., to a newly formed consumer investigative unit with WBNS-TV in Columbus. ■ **Tracey Eaton** is now the bureau chief of *The Dallas Morning News'* new Havana bureau. ■ **Victor Epstein** was formerly with the *Naples Daily News* and is now with the *Omaha World-Herald* where he is a business reporter. ■ **Robert Gavin** has moved from the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* to be part of a state and regional economics team for *The Wall Street Journal*. ■ **Richard Green** is the news editor for The Associated

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Send Member News items to Len Bruzzese at len@ire.org and include a phone number for verification.

Editor's Note:

Due to a font error at the printer, a few pages in the January-February issue of *The IRE Journal* included a recurring typo. We are assured the problem has been fixed.

Update:

Senior contributing editor Steve Weinberg has added another book to his list of the best of investigative books for 2000, which appeared in the January-February edition: "The Buying of the President 2000" (Avon), by Charles Lewis and the Center for Public Integrity staff.

PLANNING UNDER WAY FOR CHICAGO CONFERENCE

BY *THE IRE JOURNAL* STAFF

Journalists will head to Chicago for this year's IRE National Conference. The June 14-17 program will pay close attention to the needs of daily and beat reporters – especially those in smaller newsrooms – while offering dozens of panels on how the best work was done during the past year.

Panelists will include the winners of this year's IRE Awards and those who have done top-notch investigative reporting year after year. Expect to hear about digging into the Firestone tire story, the Florida recounts, the pharmaceutical industry, worker safety, illegal immigration, plus effective uses of the Freedom of Information Act and state open records laws.

Conference:

IRE National Conference
June 14-17, 2001
Chicago
Hyatt Regency

Fast track panels – less than an hour each – will offer a barrage of valuable tips on covering city hall, courts, businesses, schools and backgrounding individuals both through the Internet and through documents.

Besides a special track of panels aimed at broadcasters, the popular Broadcast Show & Tell room will allow journalists to screen their work for peers and pick up story ideas.

Costs:

Registration: $150 (students, $100)

Optional CAR Day: $50 (students, $35)

To attend, membership must be current.

NICAR staff members and other speakers will hold daily sessions on computer-assisted reporting (CAR) topics in the CAR Demo Room. The NICAR staff also will offer an optional day of CAR discussion and demonstration on Thursday. There will be a heavy emphasis on using census data and other databases for investigative stories.

IRE members and speakers from the Poynter Institute will offer special breakout and one-on-one sessions on editing, writing and putting together the investigative story.

On the international front, some of the best foreign investigative reporters will speak and U.S. journalists will talk about how global issues have impacted their communities.

IRE business

As always, IRE will handle significant membership business during the conference. Elections for board of director seats will take place Saturday, June 16. Board members whose seats come up for balloting this year include Judy Miller, Rosemary Armao, David Boardman, Rose Ciotta, Mark Lagerkvist and Drew Sullivan.

Declarations of candidacy, even by incumbents, have not yet been made, but such notice may be given starting May 1. (See Running for the Board.) As in previous years, only members attending the conference will be allowed to vote. That tradition was upheld by the membership at last year's conference in a close vote on an initiative to allow absentee ballots. A similar initiative may be submitted again this year.

How to register:

- Register online at www.ire.org
- Print form from Web site and mail or fax
- Photocopy form found in this Journal

Members with voting privileges include: professional members, retired professionals and academic members. Associate members and student members can't vote.

A vote also will be held on IRE Awards contest judges.

The conference will be held at the Chicago Hyatt Regency. Members can register online at www.ire.org or photocopy the form found in this issue of the *Journal*.

RUNNING FOR THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The IRE Board of Directors serves as the governing body of IRE and meets several times a year – both as a group and in conference calls – to debate and vote on issues. Directors serve on various committees made up of board members and appointed non-board members to focus more closely on such topics as diversity, publications, the endowment and freedom of information.

IRE members considering running for the Board will have a shot at one of six seats this year, although incumbents are allowed to seek re-election.

Although members have until June 15 to get on the ballot, candidacy statements with brief biographical information will be posted on the IRE Web site as early as May 1 and accepted as late as June 4 for Web posting.

Candidates who wait until the conference to announce must deliver a one-page statement/bio to the IRE executive director or deputy director by 5 p.m. central time on Friday, June 15. These – along with the previous Web announcements – will be posted on a bulletin board in the main conference area.

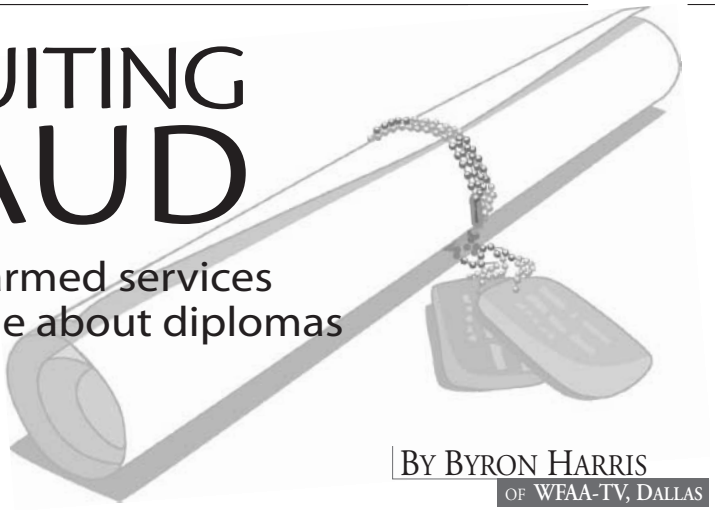
At the Saturday afternoon (June 16) membership meeting, candidates will need to be nominated and seconded from the floor by two other IRE members. There will be no nominating speeches, but candidates will have two minutes to address their peers. Voting will be by ballot at the membership meeting, with no absentee ballots.

Immediately following the Board elections, there will be a separate election for IRE Awards contest judges. Judge candidates will be nominated and seconded from the floor. Voting will be by ballot.

Board candidates wanting to appear on the IRE Web site should submit a candidacy statement/bio limited to 400 words. Head shots are encouraged. Send announcements via e-mail to Deputy Director Len Bruzzese at len@ire.org along with contact information.

RECRUITING FRAUD

Enlistees in armed services coached to lie about diplomas



BY BYRON HARRIS
OF WFAA-TV, DALLAS

In the Navy, it's known as "the moment of truth" and it happens to all new enlistees within the first 48 hours after their arrival at boot camp. While the "moment of truth" is designed to determine the honesty of the recruits, a WFAA-TV investigation found it also says a lot about the Navy.

The young recruits are tired; they've gone without sleep for as much as a day, and their mental resistance is low. They're ushered into a classroom at Great Lakes Naval Training Center north of Chicago, where an officer sternly challenges them on their background.

"If any of you have any problems in your past you've lied to the Navy about, you'd better stand up now and tell us," the officer will say. "If you don't, and the Navy finds out, you'll be prosecuted."

The young men and women are bone-weary, scared and confused by their first encounter with military discipline. Many have been drilled by their recruiters back home not to open their mouths. But some inevitably "come clean" about drug use, criminal behavior or academic deficiencies. In so doing, they end their Navy careers.

The goal of a recruiter is to put young men and women in boot camp, or "butts on the bus" in the Navy vernacular. A WFAA-TV investigation found that recruiters supplied enlistees with hundreds of counterfeit high school diplomas and instructed them to lie about their academic background. At the time of our reports, the Armed Services wanted 95 percent of their enlistees to be high school graduates, because history shows high school grads have a better success rate in boot camp than those who don't complete high school.

Our investigation began in the spring of 1999 when a young woman called us about a young Marine recruit from East Texas. He was her boyfriend, and a ninth-grade dropout, who badly wanted to join the Marines. His recruiter told the youngster he'd need a high school degree to be accepted, and that for $300 he could acquire a diploma and successfully enlist. With the recruiter as a go-between, the $300 was paid to Living Christ Academy in Dallas, more than 100 miles from the young man's home. A "diploma" was issued in the young man's name, even though he never attended classes.

He enlisted and successfully completed boot camp. His troubles began when the Marines discovered the irregularities in his credentials and threatened to throw him out.

We told his story on the air, sending a WFAA-TV intern into Living Christ as part of the report. The school's proprietor told our intern that more than a hundred recruits from the Army, Navy and Air Force obtained diplomas from her school. When we aired the information about Living Christ, we got calls from three other recruits, also high school dropouts, who'd obtained counterfeit diplomas so they could join the Navy.

The Navy had a much more serious problem than the Marines. Navy recruiters had been systematically acquiring counterfeit diplomas for years through a man named John Reynolds who was a "friend" of the armed services. Reynolds, as he admitted when we confronted him in person, simply printed up the phony degrees on his home computer. His diploma-like documents were labeled "Lincoln Academic Academy." Our research showed sometimes he charged recruits $35 to $50 for his services, but that in other instances he simply gave them the diplomas – and fabricated transcripts – for the

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INDIAN CASINOS

Analysis shows reservation gaming pays off for very few Native Americans

BY DAVID PACE
OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A steady drumbeat of news stories throughout the 1990s documented the rapid growth of casino gambling on American Indian reservations. From small stakes bingo parlors that generated just $100 million in 1988, Indian gambling exploded into an $8 billion industry, with scores of glitzy casinos to rival the best that Las Vegas could offer.

The AP project produced a series of stories that began moving on the national wire a few days before Labor Day. The AP wire Web site, http://wire.ap.org, also prominently displayed the project, providing an interactive map to locate Indian casinos in each state and their ownership and financial details.

The Web site also included searchable tables documenting the unemployment picture during the 1990s on each reservation, as well as changes in poverty, income and business activity indicators in the 399 counties that are part of Indian reservations.

But lingering questions remained. How had the billions of dollars in gambling revenues changed the lives of Indians on reservations, historically among the nation's poorest areas? Was gambling solving the unemployment, poverty and welfare problems that have plagued reservations since their creation in the 19th century? The Associated Press set out last spring to answer those questions by gathering data on a broad range of quality of life variables during the 1990s and then using it to compare reservations that have casinos with those that don't.

The immediate problem in designing such a research project was the scarcity of data collected at the reservation level. The 1990 Census provides a detailed snapshot of reservation life at the beginning of the casino boom, from education levels to poverty rates to housing conditions. But comparative information from the 2000 Census won't be available for several more years, and the Census Bureau collects no reservation-level data in the years between the decennial census. We found only two other government sources of reservation-level data: The biennial workforce report compiled by the Bureau of Indian Affairs from unemployment data provided by tribes, and the Agriculture Department's Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations.

Finding data

Rather than wait for the 2000 Census, we used the BIA workforce reports for 1991 and 1997, and the Agriculture Department's FDPIR data for 1990 and 1998 as two comparative variables. We also obtained from the Department of Health and Human Services a breakdown by race of welfare caseloads in each state. That enabled us to compare American Indian welfare participation during the 1990s in states that permit casino gambling with those that don't. Finally, we asked the Census Bureau's geography division to create a database of all the counties that are part of Indian reservations. That enabled us to use the bureau's 1989 and 1995 county income and poverty estimates, and its 1990 and 1997 county business pattern records, for comparative analysis.

The next major hurdle was dividing tribes into gaming and non-gaming categories. To operate a Las Vegas-style casino, the National Indian Gaming Regulatory Act requires that a tribe first negotiate a compact with the state. From the National Indian Gaming Association, we obtained a current list of Indian gaming operations and used it to divide tribes into gaming and non-gaming categories. We divided them based on the legal definition, designating as gaming tribes those that operate Class III casinos under compacts with states. Tribes with small-stakes bingo games were combined with those that have no gambling operations into the non-gaming category.

The analysis found that welfare participation on Indian reservations with casinos grew far less during the 1990s than on other reservations. But the historically high unemployment and poverty levels on reservations changed very little during the 1990s, despite the influx of gambling money. Between 1991 and 1997, when the U.S. unemployment rate dropped from 6.9 percent to 4.9 percent, the unemployment rate for 146 tribes with casinos declined from 55.9 percent to 52.2 percent, and it actually increased slightly among the 55 tribes with casinos that opened before 1992. Among the 144 tribes without casinos, the unemployment rate increased from 43.6 percent in 1991 to 48.3 percent six years later. Similarly, the average poverty rate in counties where there are gaming tribes declined only slightly between 1989 and 1995, from 17.7 percent to 15.5 percent. In counties of non-gaming tribes, the poverty rate increased slightly, from 18.2 percent to 18.4 percent. In the U.S. as a whole, the poverty rate increased from 12.8 percent to 13.8 percent during that period.

Gambling revenues

To understand why gambling revenues weren't having more of an impact, we tried to determine where the money was going. We

filed a Freedom of Information Act request with the National Indian Gaming Commission – the agency with regulatory oversight of the Indian gambling industry – asking for a revenue breakdown of the casinos. The commission refused to release financial data on individual casinos, saying it was proprietary information. But it did classify the casinos into six different revenue categories, from those making more than $100 million a year to those making less than $3 million a year, and provide a cumulative revenue total for each category. We then used the tribal enrollment numbers in the workforce reports from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to calculate the actual number of Indians belonging to tribes in each of the six categories.

What we found was a tremendous concentration of gambling revenues among tribes with few members. The 23 tribes with casinos making more than $100 million a year, for example, got 56 percent of the $8.2 billion in total Indian gambling revenues in 1998, even though they account for just 5.1 percent of the American Indian tribal population. Conversely, tribes that own casinos making less than $10 million a year account for more than half the Indian population but received just 5 percent of the total gambling revenues.

Telephone interviews with tribal leaders, academic experts and government officials, and reporting trips to a half-dozen reservations and casinos in Arizona and Oregon confirmed the findings of the computer analysis. Tribes with the two-dozen most successful casinos, like the Gila River Community just south of Phoenix, have made major investments on their reservations, and tribal members are beginning to see the results. But the far more common story is the experience of the San Carlos Apaches in eastern Arizona. The tribe's $40 million casino provides jobs to several hundred of the tribe's 10,500 members, and a $65,000 monthly dividend to the tribe. But the reservation's unemployment rate increased from 42 percent in 1991 to 58 percent in 1997, and the number of tribal members receiving welfare jumped 20 percent during that period. Because the 1.8 million-acre reservation still does not have a bank, tribal members lucky enough to have a job have to travel to Globe, Ariz., each week to cash their checks.

David Pace has been with the AP since 1978, including 15 years as the Washington, D.C.-based regional reporter for Georgia and Alabama.

FOI REPORT

Physicians and greater access

CHARLES DAVIS

The freedom of information movement has turned its attention to physician data in recent months, attracted by a series of newspaper reports on medical errors. Unlike so many of our frustrating crusades, the campaign for access to information about doctors is wholly successful, driven by journalism that has aroused reformers.

In January, a sweeping New York state law requiring public access to a broad range of provider information took effect – the direct result of the 2000 investigation of the *New York Daily News* into the state's haphazard regulation of bad doctors. Other states are exploring a variety of methods for facilitating public access to physician data. And Congress is making noise about mandating disclosure of the massive National Practitioner Data Bank, despite a General Accounting Office report blasting the database's sloppy management.

For health reporters, these must be heady days. For years, reporters on the medical beat have faced a stone wall of resistance by physicians, HMOs, state medical boards and medical schools, who long ago banded together into a hyper-effective lobbying machine determined to keep the medical community safe from the prying eyes of journalists and the public.

Much has changed in the past year, however, thanks to the work of the *Daily News*, which found, among other things, that the state health department knew the identities of hundreds of New York doctors who have been sued repeatedly for malpractice, but rarely launched investigations of their care.

After months of follow-ups detailing a system rife with apathy and inattention, the newspaper's work found its way into the halls of the state legislature, which provided access to physician data long hidden from citizens. New York's law establishes a patient safety center within the state health department and makes available via the Internet and a toll-free number a spate of health care information. Now available to New York citizens: hospital report cards; health plan data; and physician profiles detailing education, criminal convictions, disciplinary actions, privileging affiliations and suspensions, malpractice history, contracted health plans, publications, partners and more. It's an investigative reporter's gold mine, but more importantly, it arms the public with the information they need to do some reporting on their own about their doctors.

Commerce Committee Chairman Thomas J. Bliley, R-Va., wanted to do the same thing on the federal level, opening up the federal data bank so patients could search a Web site to learn about their doctors' records. Bliley faced a much tougher fight on Capitol Hill, however. He introduced legislation late last year that died in committee, and retired after the 2000 session. The American Medical Association – which once fought every effort to disclose doctor records but now publicly supports some type of public access – cites a General Accounting Office report that revealed major flaws in the federal data bank.

The AMA's shift toward some level of public access is a major step forward, and demonstrates the power of the many stories around the nation detailing medical malpractice and lax oversight of those doctors who repeatedly violate their oath.

Investigative journalism is driving this shift toward access, which is moving inexorably toward greater access to records about physicians than ever before.

Already, numerous states, state licensing boards and even some local hospitals are compiling and making available to the public balanced and complete information about physicians. This is in sharp contrast to the National Practitioner Data Bank, which is largely devoted to malpractice litigation information, a particularly poor indicator of a physician's qualifications.

Advances in computer technology, coupled with growing public and professional interest in information about physicians' qualifications, are rapidly changing the environment in which such information is gathered and disseminated. The next battleground likely will involve malpractice payment records, usually the result of court action.

Doctors are especially sensitive to malpractice suits because physicians who take risky cases often end up with more lawsuits on their record even though they have done nothing wrong.

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Charles Davis is executive director of the Freedom of Information Center, an assistant professor at the Missouri School of Journalism and a member of IRE's FOI Committee.

Photo: John Lee | The Chicago Tribune

A photo of Charles Merriam and his family sits prominently among other family photos on top of a piano inside his daughter's home in the western suburbs of Chicago. Charles Merriam, a former Amoco executive, was killed in 1987 in an unsolved murder case. A possible suspect was Frank Milito, a long-time friend of former Chicago Police Superintendent Matt Rodriguez. Merriam threatened to close Milito's Amoco gas station in Lincoln Park.

THE TIES THAT BIND

Friendships between criminals, local police cause feds to back off

BY DAVID JACKSON
OF THE *CHICAGO TRIBUNE*

A three-part *Tribune* series revealed ties of friendship and money between crime figures and certain Chicago police officials, and showed the FBI and U.S. Attorney's Office scaled back an investigation into those relationships for fear of alienating the police department.

To expose the intricate ties between crime figures and police, the *Tribune* examined internal files from eight law enforcement agencies, more than 300 court files, and land and corporate records stretching from Cook County to the Caribbean island of Curacao.

Federal authorities responded to the Oct. 22-24 newspaper series by launching a criminal investigation to determine whether any federal agents leaked information to the reporter.

Investigators from the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Inspector General have so far questioned four IRS agents to determine if they provided information to the *Tribune*, according to a person familiar with the probe. The Treasury Department's criminal investigation is ongoing.

The story began when projects editor Robert Blau suggested that we examine the unsolved killing of Amoco Oil Co. executive Charles Merriam, who was gunned down in the foyer of his suburban home in 1987. Merriam came from a family of civic leaders and his homicide generated headlines for days and continued to roil local law enforcement circles. Police chief Matt Rodriguez was forced to resign in 1997 shortly after he acknowledged his friendship with a potential suspect in the Merriam case – a convicted felon named Frank Milito. Rodriguez's abrupt resignation left unanswered questions about the extent of his ties to Milito, and about the links between other Chicago police officials and crime figures.

While those questions launched the *Tribune's* investigation, another reporting goal soon emerged: to help solve the Merriam killing and two other linked homicides by presenting new facts about the cases. Only time will tell if the series met that mark.

Wise guy ways

When I initially approached law enforcement officials, doors slammed shut and, in some cases, authorities were notified that a reporter was asking questions. The 13-year-old Merriam homicide was still an open case, I was told repeatedly.

I began a sweeping search of public records on every person who played a role in the case – whether they were witness or suspect, crime figure or untainted cop. I pieced together personal histories by checking every division of the local and federal courts, querying online databases and sorting through a variety of federal and local records.

In two cases I built family histories from:

- early 20th Century census sheets;
- land and building records;
- old phonebooks and criss-cross directories held by two local historical libraries;
- birth, death and marriage records;
- immigration records;
- newspaper clippings;
- and law enforcement records.

These paper and electronic sources yielded critical details that put lives in context and prompted questions that made interviews fruitful. The records also led me back to legal and law enforcement sources who began to offer hints and limited details. My questions earned the grudging respect of people who eventually provided records and internal files, and my circle of sources expanded with each file I obtained.

The records and interviews revealed previously unknown financial and personal ties between former Superintendent Rodriguez and Milito, a North Side businessman who served prison time for tax fraud and who invested with a Chicago mob boss. Milito took then-

Superintendent Rodriguez on numerous overseas vacations, hired two of Rodriguez's family members when they needed money, donated funds to a police party held in Rodriguez's honor and loaned Rodriguez the use of a condo as an afternoon getaway, among other favors.

Milito's personal and financial relationships with Rodriguez and other Chicago and Cook County sheriff's police officials cast a shadow over the ill-starred Merriam murder probe. Overseen by a friend of Rodriguez on the Cook County Sheriff's Police Department, the Merriam homicide investigation bogged down amid weeks-long delays in processing the crime scene and the loss of evidence, internal law enforcement records showed. At least one witness was hesitant to cooperate because Milito was a friend of Chicago's police chief, and some investigators privately questioned the integrity of the probe.

The details on Rodriguez and Milito led to records and interviews that revealed other ties between Chicago police officials and criminals. In one case, a cluttered northwest side tailor shop was a hangout for crime figures and police – including Rodriguez. In another case, a crime syndicate pornographer hired tactical officers to work security at his adult bookstores. These officers, who remain on the force, were investigated for the million-dollar rip-off of a drug courier.

Those relationships apparently violated a police rule that forbids officers from associating or fraternizing with criminals, but the rule was honored only in the breach. Even when confronted with disturbing details of the relationship between Rodriguez and Milito, the FBI and U.S. Attorney's office reined in investigators

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Photos: John Lee | The Chicago Tribune

Orso's restaurant in Old Town Chicago is owned by Frank Milito. Milito, a long-time friend of former Chicago Police Superintendent Matt Rodriguez, has been connected with several murders over the past two decades, including the high-profile 1987 murder of Amoco executive Charles Merriam.

An Amoco gas station on Chicago's north side is run by Frank Milito, who has personal and financial dealings with law enforcment offices.

Photo: Ted Kirk | the Lincoln Journal Star

Above: Mayan women in Chichicastenango, Guatemala, take part in a religious procession.

CROSSING BORDERS: WHEN INVESTIGATIONS GO INTERNATIONAL

Whether you're in Washington, D.C., or Lincoln, Neb., learning global reporting techniques is critical these days as nations become more tightly interwoven through crime, money and immigration. Investigative reporting examples in this issue show you are never too small or too far removed to discover why events half a world away may directly impact your community.

DRUG FLOW

Orlando, San Juan reporters team up to track heroin

By Henry Pierson Curtis
of *The Orlando Sentinel*

The single-engine plane flying from Bogota to southwest Colombia bobbed in updrafts over the upper Andes. Forests on the ridges a few thousand feet below hid opium poppy fields no larger than baseball diamonds.

The 90-minute flight was the last leg of a 1,900-mile trip in March 1999 to trace how the drug reached Florida and what was being done to stop the flow. I was there because heroin from opium gum produced on these remote farms had killed more than 150 people on my beat in Florida.

One day into the trip, I ate lunch with Colombian President Andres Pastrana, members of a U.S. congressional delegation, the U.S. ambassador and a variety of State Department and military officers behind both countries' anti-drug strategy.

A day later, Colombian National Police pilots offered their version of the war on drugs. The equipment sent them by the United States was second-hand junk, they said. Paid $660 a month, these pilots flew 20-year-old helicopters that couldn't safely reach the high-altitude poppy farms. That meant the cops they carried had to hike for hours, frequently climbing hand over hand up the mountains.

Photo: George Skene | The Orlando Sentinel

A used syringe lies in a thicket next to an Orlando high school.

Wanting to show me what they faced, a senior police aide said I could join one of the crop eradication missions if I went to the southwestern town of Neiva. For me, it would be the culmination of more than three years of reporting on heroin abuse for *The Orlando Sentinel*.

Following the dope

Through a series of coincidences, I broke the story in mid-1996 that teenagers and young adults in Orlando were dying from heroin. The image of heroin at the gates of Walt Disney World drew national attention.

The evolving story took me from covering police in a small Florida county to making repeated trips to Puerto Rico, Washington, D.C., and Colombia.

Teaming up with Jim Leusner, the *Sentinel*'s federal courts reporter, we wrote more than 30 stories that spawned congressional hearings, raised allegations of racism and brought attention to a lack of Coast Guard and U.S. Customs presence in the Caribbean. The publicity helped generate anti-drug funding, increased federal law enforcement in Puerto Rico and changed the way police in Florida investigate overdose deaths.

The edict behind the *Sentinel*'s coverage was to investigate the international influence on local crime. Simply, we were told to follow the dope.

Until then, filing for mileage had been the biggest item on my expense account. Learning to live out of a suitcase for two weeks at a stretch was the introduction to this story without borders.

Arranging interviews in San Juan or Bogota turned out to require much the same skills needed to cover a beat anywhere – common sense, contacts, long hours and luck. I found repeated calls before leaving for a destination essential, as was following up with sources after leaving.

Fluency in Spanish helped, too.

Here's how I stumbled on this story: By the fall of 1995, patrons of Orlando's growing nightclub scene had been dying for a year of heroin overdoses, but the trend hadn't been spotted by police or the medical examiner. At the time, state law didn't require the tracking of such overdoses, and the autopsies were done by a variety of pathologists who didn't consider their separate findings remarkable.

During late 1995 and early 1996, I spent my evenings and some weekends writing

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a profile of Julie Dean, 18, who died from an undetermined overdose. Wanting to write an in-depth story of the local dance scene, I found she was the youngest of that group to die of a suspected overdose.

When heroin was identified as the cause of Julie's death, the finding was startling. State mortality records showed she was Florida's first and only teenage heroin overdose.

The significance of her death and several others I had been following came together a week before the profile was scheduled to appear in a mid-July issue of the *Sentinel*'s Sunday magazine.

Upon hearing that heroin might have killed a 16-year-old boy at a party, I began checking autopsy results on all the suspected overdose deaths of victims younger than 25 in the Orlando area. My search was aided by the state's public records law, which provides access to death records.

Helping me was Carol Gross, office manager for the Orlando's medical examiner and the sort of public employee a reporter prays to meet sometime in a career. Within five days, records confirmed the heroin deaths of five teens and five adults under 23 during the previous year. The story, "Long Out of Sight, Heroin is Back – Killing Teens," ran across the top of the front page on Sunday, July 14, the same day as the magazine profile.

Anger explodes

Public reaction was immediate. Churches held meetings. Politicians staged hearings, and a drug summit was attended by national drug czar Barry McCaffrey. All this happened within three months.

But one quote in the original story drew intense criticism. "Our stereotypical dealer is a Hispanic, usually a Puerto Rican male in his early 20s," said Lt. Ernie Scott, the Orange County sheriff. "All the heroin dealers we have encountered are recent arrivals to Florida from Puerto Rico and from New York and Detroit."

The drug agent supported his comment with records of 26 suspects arrested on charges of dealing heroin. The federal Drug Enforcement Administration also identified Puerto Rico as the primary source in Florida for South American heroin.

The reference disturbed members of Central Florida's Hispanic community, which is dominated by immigrants from Puerto Rico. The anger grew with each new story. By year's end, there were 20 front-page stories related to heroin, Puerto Rico and Central Florida.

In October, Leusner and I made our first trip to Puerto Rico to find out how heroin passed through the island from Colombia to Florida. Knowing someone to open doors became more important than the ability to speak Spanish. Sources that Leusner had developed during nearly 20 years on the federal court beat in Florida repeatedly helped us obtain interviews with drug agents and drug counselors, along with government officials who otherwise wouldn't have returned our telephone calls.

Two of the most important contacts came through *The San Juan Star*, Puerto Rico's English-language newspaper. While using the newspaper's clip library, we met police reporter Pedro Ruz Gutierrez and court reporter Oscar Serrano Negron.

On that first trip, Leusner and I broke a story about Puerto Rico's witness protection program, which relocated 324 witnesses to the mainland without the knowledge of the U.S. Department of Justice. The witnesses included drug dealers and at least one contract killer who were sent to live without supervision in Florida and 11 other states.

The Oct. 11, 1996 headline, "San Juan Dumps Drug Dealers Here," further angered Hispanic readers. Puerto Rico Gov. Pedro Rossello's administration challenged the story. And on Nov. 4, between 3,500 and 5,000 marchers turned out to oppose drug abuse and decry the *Sentinel*'s reporting on Puerto Rico.

On Nov. 7, U.S. Rep. Bill McCollum held a field hearing in Orlando and concluded the threat posed by the witness protection program had been exaggerated.

Photos: The Orlando Sentinel

Protesters voice opposition to depiction of Puerto Rico in Sentinel drug stories.

Orange County deputies arrest a man suspected of possession of heroin during an area sting.

The Sentinel responded by launching a joint project with *The San Juan Star* to track and document the criminal behavior of as many relocated witnesses as possible. Breaking into teams of a reporter from each paper, we spent 15 days with Ruz and Serrano interviewing defense lawyers, former prosecutors, judges, homicide cops and agents of the island's Special Investigations Bureau. Each had stories to tell about dealers and killers given a ticket to the States in return for their testimony.

The stories prompted Florida Gov. Lawton Chiles to demand and receive an agreement in 1997 that Puerto Rico would identify every witness in the state and curtail further relocations. McCollum retracted his comments and described witness-protection records as abysmal. A subsequent story prompted New York officials to demand a similar agreement after the *Sentinel* reported on a contract killer sent to live in Rochester on witness-protection funds and supplemented by state welfare.

Florida now tracks all heroin deaths. Other changes include the creation of a federal and state task force targeting heroin abuse in Central Florida. Drug agents go to the scene of nearly every overdose to try to identify dealers. During the most intense publicity, heroin deaths dropped to 25 in 1997 after rising from 6 in 1994 to 20 in 1995 and 37 in 1996. But deaths rebounded to 52 in 1998 and 65 in 1999.

The Sentinel continues to expand its coverage of the Caribbean and Latin America. In 1999, a bureau was opened in San Juan. My colleague, Pedro Ruz, who was hired from *The San Juan Star* in 1997, has spent five weeks reporting from Colombia since October 1999.

As for my trip to the poppy fields I mentioned at the beginning of this story? It ended poorly. The plane let me out on an empty airstrip in Neiva and immediately took off for Bogota. The aging police helicopters were gone. The only people around were playing soccer alongside the runway, and they turned out to be off-duty firefighters and police. A police sergeant watching the game explained that the aviation unit had left days before to destroy cocaine fields farther south. No one from Bogota told them to expect a visiting reporter.

So here's my final bit of advice: Call ahead when you travel and double-check your arrangements.

Henry Pierson Curtis covers crime and drug abuse for The Orlando Sentinel. He is a graduate of the University of New Hampshire with a degree in Spanish.

Tracking international sources

By Nora Paul and Neil Reisner

If you're interested in seeing how international stories affect your local audience, try these sources that offer a view to countries around the world.

If you need background on a country and lists of links to relevant sites, check out these sources:

- www.orientation.com. A full service site for country specific information (but not for North America or Europe – only central and Eastern Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Oceania, Latin America and the Caribbean).
- One World/ Nations Online at www.netscout.net/oneworld/indexnav.html. Finding the list of countries is a bit of a scroll, but once you do you get a list of links to tourist guides, airlines, railroads, news, museums, universities, and local country search sites/directories.
- Vive World at www.allnewspapers.com. Click on a country or find countries that have certain characteristics and get a brief backgrounder and list of links to government sites, local media, financial institutions, and museums.

To search Web sites within a country, try:

- www.searchenginecolossus.com/Select a country and get a list of country specific directories and spiders. Indicates language it is available in and where the site originated.
- www.twics.com/~takakuwa/search/.
- www.searchenginewatch.com/links/Regional_Search_Engines/

When looking for statistics and data resources, consider:

- CIA World Factbook at www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html. It includes detailed information about each country with many statistics and background notes.
- Directory of Official Statistical Agencies at www.cbs.nl/isi/directory.htm. This has contact information for the statistical agencies in each country (with or without a Web site – individual contact, telephone, address, and fax).
- Statistics institutions at www.gksoft.com/govt/en/statistics.html, and www.census.gov/main/www/stat_int.html.

If you are looking for a listing of the government and legal resources for individual countries, consult these guides:

- www.gksoft.com/govt/en is a link to the key government agencies.
- gksoft.com/govt/en/parties.html links to political parties by country.
- The NYU Law Library's guide to foreign and international legal databases can be found at www.law.nyu.edu/library/foreign_intl. Also, the Washburn University School of Law Library's foreign and international law is at www.washlaw.edu/forint/forintmain.html.

  A guide to multicountry/multilateral agreements can be found at fletcher.tufts.edu/multilaterals.html.
- For evaluating international legal sites, try www.llrx.com/features/evaluating.htm.

For translation services, consider:

- E-lingo at www.worldblaze.com/search/index.html. Need to find pages from non-English sites but don't know the search term to use (much less be able to read the results)? E-lingo can help. Put in a search term in English, select one of five languages to translate it to (German, Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese) and get the results back translated to English.
- Babel Fish at babelfish.altavista.com. Put in the address of a Web page you've found, select the "translate from … to" option and get the page back with a very rough translation.

Other helpful sites:

Cops and crime: talkjustice.com/cybrary.asp and www.copnet.org/local/index.html.

Economics: www.odci.gov/cia/di/products/hies, www.oecd.org/dac/debt/htm/debto.htm, www.worldbank.org/data/.

Education: unescostat.unesco.org.

Health: www.who.int/whosis/

Labor: stats.bls.gov/flshome.htm, laborsta.ilo.org/cgi-bin/broker.exe

Tourism: www.world-tourism.org/

Trade: www.census.gov/ftp/pub/foreign-trade/www/

This tipsheet was prepared for the 2000 IRE National Conference in New York by Nora Paul, then library director at The Poynter Institute, and Neil Reisner, then an education writer at The Miami Herald. Paul is now director of the Institute for New Media Studies at the University of Minnesota. Reisner is now law editor at the Miami Daily Business Review.

Photos: Robert Miller | The News & Observer

The father of this young girl who just celebrated her first communion in Mexico missed the big event because he was working in Durham, N.C., earning money to send back home.

One of eight children, this young child in Mexico plays peek-a-boo with a feathered friend. Her older brother works in Durham, N.C., and sends money home to the family.

UNDER-GROUND EXISTENCE

for immigrants working in U.S.

By Ned Glascock
of the (Raleigh) *News & Observer*

Time was running out. In the dusty yard outside her concrete-block home in an Otomí Indian village in the mountains of central Mexico, Cristina del Plan was openly suspicious of the two gringos asking so many questions about her dead son.

The sun was falling, the clouds were readying to cut loose with another rainy-season deluge and our little rental car with the golf cart tires didn't look like it could make it back down the mountain to our base in the town of Pahuatlan once those steep, rutted roads had turned to mud.

Photographer Robert Miller and I were in Mexico for *The News & Observer* of Raleigh, N.C., reporting on the new immigration pipeline linking Latin America and North Carolina. The result: a newspaper series titled "Underground in Carolina."

Trying to win over del Plan, Miller and I pulled out our *N&O* business cards, our reporters' notebooks imprinted with the company name and eventually our passports, which she scrutinized far more closely than any customs official in Mexico City. No, we said, we are not government agents, we are journalists from the United States, from Carolina del Norte, where your son died. We want to write about him.

At last, with the help of a neighbor fluent in both Spanish and del Plan's native language, Otomí, she relented. Her story – of a son's quest to pull his family out of poverty, and of his mysterious death in North Carolina – played an important role in our two-day series.

In recent years, as fast-rising numbers of Spanish-speaking immigrants have settled in North Carolina, *The N&O* has written small chunks of the broader immigration story: the rising need for classes in English as a second language; government agencies' struggles to overcome the language barrier; and increasing crimes against immigrants, among others.

But the paper had never done the big-picture story. And by reporting only what was happening in the Tar Heel state, we were missing half the story.

A viable community

With "Underground in Carolina," we set out to explain why a place like North Carolina, for generations dominated by whites and blacks, suddenly was attracting so many Hispanic immigrants.

Day One of the series showed the human side of immigration: how the desire to build a better life by chasing greenbacks in North Carolina tears at the fabric of family as well as entire communities in Mexico. At the same time, two places that had never known immigration – Mexico's Pahuatlan region and Durham, N.C. – had suddenly become inexorably linked.

In Durham, we showed how the new immigrants have become an increasingly vital and visible part of the community, while paradoxically living an underground existence because so many are undocumented.

On day two, the series delved into the economic underpinnings of North Carolina's increasing reliance on immigrant labor. The story explained how legal loopholes and weak enforcement by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service allow employers using immigrant workers to avoid responsibility, in essence hiring undocumented immigrants with a sly wink.

In reporting the story, it quickly became evident that we couldn't rely on the usual officials and data sources. Large-scale immigration to North Carolina was so new that official numbers were worthless. Anecdotal evidence – of entire neighborhoods becoming Hispanic seemingly overnight, of an explosion in Hispanic businesses – made U.S. Census Bureau statistics on Hispanic residents and INS estimates of illegal immigrants seem laughable.

That said, we did spend considerable time interviewing INS enforcement agents, immigration attorneys and political leaders. Also, we targeted business people who rely on immigrant labor; most wanted nothing to do with the article. In addition, we filed Freedom of Information Act requests on all INS workplace raids carried out in North Carolina (surprisingly few, as it turned out.)

The best sources, of course, turned out to be the immigrants themselves.

The first challenge was to decide how to identify undocumented immigrants in the

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newspaper. *The N&O*'s policy is to name names in all but the most unusual of circumstances.

The question was given careful consideration in light of the unintended consequences of a recent article by an *N&O* features writer, a well-written and moving profile of an undocumented Mexican immigrant. The article used his full name, photos and where he worked. Following publication, INS agents raided the store and deported the immigrant, along with several others.

For "Underground in Carolina," *N&O* editors decided that winning the trust of undocumented immigrants was crucial to telling their stories – stories we almost certainly would not get if we insisted on printing complete names.

In some cases, we used only the first names of undocumented immigrants living in Durham. Of the dozens of people in the series, only three had made-up names, and they were identified as such. They were a husband and wife and a friend of the family, who grew so fearful of exposure that allowing them to invent names was the only way to keep them in the story.

In contrast to our photos from Mexico, all pictures of immigrants in Durham were shot in shadow, underscoring the theme of living an underground existence.

The next task was identifying immigrants to interview. Local Latino leaders were reluctant to help after the INS raid. Working independently, we wound up with a story that surprised even leaders with strong ties in the Hispanic community.

Miller and I spent weeks in low-income Hispanic neighborhoods, building trust with immigrants, learning about their lives, their families in Mexico, their dreams.

It was an exercise in patience. The immigrants had come to Durham to work, and their schedules meant that Miller and I devoted many nights and weekends to the project. Frequently, people failed to show for interviews when an unexpected chance to work overtime arose, a friend got arrested or a beat-up car broke down. Most did not have telephones, so all arrangements were made in person.

Eventually, Miller and I settled on a group of immigrants from Pahuatlan, Mexico, a traditional small town northeast of Mexico City. Before leaving for Mexico, we collected the names of the men's family members and directions to their homes in Pahuatlan (often involving footpaths crisscrossing the mountainside). And we asked them to write letters we could give to their loved ones.

Once in Pahuatlan, we simply tracked people down and did the interviews. Townspeople were surprised by this pair of Spanish-speaking gringos – one white, one African-American – who knew all their relatives in North Carolina. They treated us like family. By the end of the trip, complete strangers – mothers, sisters and young wives – were running up to us in the cobblestone streets with letters to take back to their sons, brothers and husbands in Carolina del Norte.

Upon publication, policymakers, academic researchers, business leaders, Hispanic leaders and immigration activists of different persuasions called "Underground in Carolina" a groundbreaking effort to explain the consequences of immigration in North Carolina.

Ned Glascock is the demographics & cultures reporter for The News & Observer of Raleigh, N.C., and has traveled extensively in Latin America. "Underground in Carolina" was nominated for a Pulitzer.

LESSONS LEARNED

By Ned Glascock

A couple of lessons from our series "Underground in Carolina":

- When reporting in Mexico or most Latin American nations, it obviously helps to speak Spanish. If you don't speak the language, at least take the time to learn a few rudimentary expressions. A little bit of courtesy goes a long way.

  But also bear in mind that dozens of indigenous cultures have their own languages, and people may speak Spanish only as a second language, if at all. Best to find an appropriate interpreter in advance.
- If you're taking technology abroad – laptops, cell phones and so forth – make sure you've got something compatible with the infrastructure where you'll be working. You might consider making arrangements with a local newspaper, if that won't jeopardize your story.
- In reporting international stories, it is hard to understate how essential advance preparation is – from packing the right clothes to understanding the local culture. And while you don't want to leave home without having a clear understanding of what you want in your notebook when you get back, always keep a fresh eye out for the unexpected. Invariably, you'll get loads of that.

International coverage on a hometown budget

By David Stoeffler of the Lincoln Journal Star

When President Bill Clinton chose Nebraska as the location last December for a farewell address on foreign policy, I imagine a few eyebrows rose among the "intellectual elite" on the coasts.

Nebraska? What do a bunch of corn growers know (or care) about foreign affairs?

Plenty.

Most any farmer can tell you the relationship between depressed prices for grain and economic problems in foreign markets, especially in Asia.

Nebraskans own their share of foreign-made cars and electronic products. They've given their share when it has come to fighting wars in foreign lands. And the expansion of the Internet has been shrinking the planet, bringing folks in America's heartland in contact with like-minded people from around the world.

Finally, the state's history is closely tied to settlement by immigrants from other countries, with the largest influx coming in the 1870s and 1880s – Germans, Bohemians, Swedish and Irish.

When the story is told of Nebraska in the 1990s and the first decade of this new century, it may once again be a story of foreign immigrants, but this time of people from Mexico and Central American countries. The state's Hispanic population more than doubled in the 1990s – to about 77,000, making them the largest minority group in the state.

Lincoln Journal Star reporters and editors have set out to explore all aspects of that growth, focusing on the effects in Nebraska, but also reaching across our borders to probe the causes.

Our first major investigative story led us to our second major piece.

In the first story, veteran political reporter Don Walton spent the summer of 1999 investigating the dangers faced by a largely Hispanic work force in the meat packing industry. The lead on his first story says it all: "Lured north of the border by the hope of a better life, a largely Hispanic work force labors in Nebraska meat packing plants under conditions some critics describe as a classic case of worker exploitation."

Photographer Ted Kirk, who worked with Walton on the meat packing investigation, posed the next logical question. After seeing the gnarled and injured hands of workers and hearing of the conditions in the plants, Kirk wondered what could be so bad that would make people flee their homelands to endure that kind of work for $8 an hour. As the descendant of Greek immigrants, Kirk had some thoughts as to the causes, but he asked to go take a look for himself.

Kirk teamed up with Spanish-speaking reporter Angela Heywood Bible and in the summer of 2000, we published "Far From Home," a four-day series of stories and photos tracing Lincoln members of the Cazun family back to the village of Nancinta, Guatemala. The report explored the hard life in Guatemala, the harrowing and costly journey to the United States and the difficult adjustment to life in Nebraska.

Photo: Ted Kirk | Lincoln Journal-Star

Immigrants working in the meatpacking industry in Lincoln spurred a look at how international issues affect even small, heartland communities. Edwin Bautista of Guatamala came to the U.S. five years ago and now attends Blessed Sacrament Catholic School where he works to improve his English.

Planning a project

This was not an easy story to cover, so we have some advice for others interested in similar projects:

- **Learn to juggle.** For an 80,000-circulation newspaper, these types of projects are large investments of time and money. The involved reporters and photographers have to balance regular assignments while gathering the background material. Then other staff members must pick up a heavier load in order to free up people to concentrate on the story. Often, these kinds of stories can be scheduled for slower times on the reporter's beat – or at least during times when few other people are on vacation. Regardless, editors will have to make tough choices – ignoring some minor stories and perhaps living with getting beat a time or two by competitors.
- **Talk the talk.** It helps to have a staff member who speaks the language fluently, but (as was the case for our meat packing story) you often can find a community advocate or a local official to translate. Take precautions to check the work of interpreters – maybe by using different interpreters in different settings – so you can be sure they are not putting their own spin on the story.
- **Build trust.** This can be a major barrier especially in working with immigrants, some of whom are in the country illegally. Many sources will be reluctant to talk, but if you can gain their trust, their help in getting to the real story will be invaluable. This is especially true when traveling to unfamiliar territory. Reporters and editors should be sure to discuss how far the paper is willing to go to protect identities of sources and whether the paper is willing to withhold certain details about sources, such as if a person is a legal worker.
- **Overcome obstacles.** Travel can be expensive – and can take a lot of effort to set up. A 12-day trip to Guatemala and four days in Southern California for two staff members amounted to just under $10,000 – about one-sixth of our travel budget for a year. That means saying no to lots of other trips, or negotiating support from your publisher (as we were able to do).

  Even with family connections in Guatemala, logistical details were complicated. Keep in mind that if you are traveling to an undeveloped foreign country, you need to be prepared for many obstacles (including roads that are nearly impassable). Shopping for airfares, getting passports and vaccinations, exchanging money and dealing with bureaucracy all take time. You'll also need to consider the risk of carrying expensive equipment (cameras, lenses, computers) and you'll want to talk to your staff about suitable safety precautions.

  And don't underestimate the time required to do a good job – first by the staff members involved, but also by desk editors and copy editors to coach, to help with rewrites, to select photos and to create an eye-catching design.
- **Plan, prepare and promote.** Finally, you'll want to take extra steps to prepare your readers if they aren't accustomed to your newspaper doing these kinds of stories. Be sure to promote the coverage – and explain early and often the local impact and why they should care, even if they are a bunch of corn growers from Nebraska.

David Stoeffler is editor of the Lincoln Journal Star and an IRE member.

Global reporting network unveils TOBACCO SECRETS

By Maud S. Beelman
of the International Consortium
of Investigative Journalists

The allegation had wafted through the close-knit international anti-tobacco community for some time. The tobacco multinational companies controlled the global smuggling of their own cigarettes in an attempt to expand market share and evade billions of dollars in national taxes.

Researchers had already demonstrated – by comparing international import-export statistics – that about one-third of all cigarettes reported annually as exported did not show up on import rolls. They questioned why the tobacco multinationals said and did so little about so much missing inventory every year. The rumor languished. Attention was focused on other fronts in the tobacco wars, and there was no proof, in a complicated story that spanned continents, of the alleged activity by a subject with deep pockets and a penchant for large libel lawsuits.

Then two unrelated developments converged to lift the veil. Tens of millions of pages of tobacco company documents were made public under U.S. court orders that settled the various tobacco litigations of the late 1990s. And the newly created International Consortium of Investigative Journalists began searching for a topic for its premier cross-border investigation – a story suited to the unique talents of ICIJ's global network of investigative reporters.

ICIJ was the brainchild of Charles Lewis, founder and executive director of the Center for Public Integrity, a nonprofit investigative reporting group based in Washington, D.C. It was created in September 1997 to extend globally the center's style of long-term, large-scale investigations that few of its colleagues in daily media had the luxury of doing. Post-Cold War globalization had made borders permeable, giving new meaning to the adage that all news is local. But it also gave rise to increasingly more complicated issues, such as international crime or cross-border political corruption. Talented reporters working in concert across borders, the center determined, were needed for the task.

The tobacco smuggling allegations – which, if proved, would suggest corporate involvement in blatant attempts to evade the law – were the perfect vehicle to test the ICIJ model of cross-border collaboration.

The investigation started out as a tip from a source about the suspicions behind the discrepancy in import/export statistics. Through e-mails with members of the international anti-tobacco community, we soon learned that the same U.S.

Photo: Julian Lineros | RED

The ICIJ story found that smuggled cigarettes are often sold by the stick on the streets of Colombia's cities.

court order that dumped millions of pages of tobacco company documents in Minnesota had allowed one of the tobacco companies to put its documents in a depository closer to corporate headquarters in England. Through more e-mails we learned that one of the first researchers to gain access to this little-known depository had come across some documents he believed indicated corporate involvement in smuggling. He sent us a sampling.

So far, our reporting had been through e-mails, listservs and by researching what little had been written on the subject on the Internet and in Lexis-Nexis. The documents we saw convinced us to move ahead, and we arranged a meeting at our Washington office with the researcher (a lawyer active in the international tobacco-control movement) and an ICIJ member from Colombia, since the initial set of documents dealt mostly with tobacco operations in Latin America.

Clues revealed

Two days spent poring over more than 500 pages of company correspondence, internal memoranda and reports turned up many leads, including a document that discussed how the company would give 5 percent sales incentives to people selling cigarettes in "San Andresitos." We had assumed that was a town name, but the Colombian ICIJ member gasped. The correct spelling, she informed us, was "sanandresitos," and it was slang for the black market. This document suggested that not only were the companies aware of how their cigarettes ended up on the black market – something they had long denied – they actually encouraged their sales on the smuggled market through financial incentives. It was a point we might have missed without cross-border collaboration.

Our next move was to expand the ICIJ reporting network. We needed to get into the depository ourselves, replicate the documents we had seen, and broaden the search. An ICIJ member in Britain, one of that country's most respected investigative reporters, joined the team.

We spent several weeks in the depository in England, studying thousands of pages of documents. (In all, we reviewed more than 11,000 pages of corporate documents for the story.)

We built a matrix of the major allegations and players and the documents that addressed

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GUEST COLUMN

Finding information in unfamiliar tapestry

VICTOR MERINA

Years ago, when I was working on a magazine story in the Philippines, I developed what I would eventually call my "eat balut, drink beer" rule.

Balut, for those unfamiliar with this delicacy, is a boiled embryonic duck egg savored by some aficionados for its singular taste and cherished by others merely for the bravado that comes with eating an egg dish that actually crunches while leaving feathers on the palate.

On this occasion, I was in Manila sitting with several reluctant sources who were eyeing me – a reporter born in the Philippines but raised in America – with some suspicion. So, they decided to put me to their cultural test.

Before answering my questions, I had to down the dish that they now pushed in front of me along with a bottle of San Miguel. Eat balut, they said. And drink beer.

Normally, I don't eat balut. Nor do I drink beer – San Miguel or otherwise. But I did both this day, and I did so because of my newly adopted-on-the-spot "eat balut, drink beer" rule. That directive, simply stated, is that when a key source or a table of sources invites me to do something that I do not normally do – and it does not violate my principles – I will indeed eat, drink and be wary.

And I will do so because it makes my sources comfortable. I will imbibe because it demonstrates a willingness to share something that is meaningful to them. And I will partake because, in a small way, it is a signal of acceptance of a part of their culture. Admittedly, a tiny part – but an important one nonetheless. A baby step across cultures.

For many journalists, of course, cross-cultural reporting is nothing new. As a matter of routine, we find ourselves rooting around foreign territory and in strange neighborhoods trying to discern information through an unfamiliar tapestry – and that unfamiliarity has nothing to do with race or ethnicity or nationality.

After all, as journalists, we investigate corporate hierarchies, government bureaucracies, athletic communities and political organizations. We delve into issues of law enforcement, religion, science and the arts and find that each of those communities has its own language, its own rituals and traditions, and its own distinct culture.

In our stories, we often are asked to depart from our socioeconomic class to report on wage earners and salaried executives who are below us and above us in income level and social status. We work on pieces that involve a different gender, sexual orientation or educational level than our own. And we pursue the celebrity and the powerful, traipse among the lost and the incarcerated, to get our stories in print, on the air, on the Web.

In essence, we do a lot of cross-cultural reporting.

But when it comes to dealing with race and ethnicity, and with groups identified by nationalities and common heritage, we journalists find ourselves feeling even more tentative and uncertain about our task. What do we report? How do we report it? What do we ask? How do we ask it? Are we missing the real story here?

We may realize that there is indeed something missing, and we soon realize that our interviews, our reporting, our writing call for added sensitivity, awareness and understanding. Not merely to sprinkle us with the humanity that so many of our critics say journalists lack, but because in order to do our job effectively, we need to be adept in gathering information and be fair and accurate in using the information we obtain.

In other words, good cross-cultural reporting is good reporting *period*. It leads to good writing and sound editing. And the overall result is better journalism.

There are many of our colleagues who are already engaged in this.

A former colleague at the *Los Angeles Times,* Tracy Wilkinson, has won the Polk Award for her coverage in Bosnia, Kosovo and Albania. She now covers Israel, Jordan and other countries in that region for the *Times* where she has learned to adapt as a reporter – in how she dresses and how she asks questions. In Gaza, for example, she found that some people would refuse to talk unless she covered her hair, and in other areas, she found that subtlety and courtesy and the indirect question were far more effective in eliciting answers during interviews than the hard-edged question.

While covering Latin America earlier, Wilkinson

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Victor Merina is a Ford Foundation diversity fellow working with the Poynter Institute for Media Studies. He was a writer at the Los Angeles Times for nearly 20 years, and is now a teaching fellow at the UC Berkeley School of Journalism.

Journalism groups link stories, reporters

By Maud Beelman

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists currently has 76 journalist-members in 41 countries in its invitation-only network. We try to vet prospective members as carefully as if we are hiring them because, in a sense, we are. We put ICIJ members on paid contract for various investigations, based on their location, expertise and availability. We have several other investigations under way and more in the planning stages, all on issues that transcend national borders.

What ICIJ attempts to do is long term and large scale, in keeping with our goal of producing the kind of investigative projects that daily journalists often don't have the time to do. (See www.icij.org and www.publicintegrity.org for more on ICIJ and the Center for Public Integrity.)

But the model we use – collaboration with trusted colleagues in other countries – can be applied by anyone with a little creativity and editorial backing.

So many stories today do not stop at water's edge, and there are a variety of ways to link up with reporters in other countries who may be working on similar topics. According to *Editor & Publisher*, there are 4,678 newspapers online worldwide. That's a good place to start researching whether other reporters are grappling with the same topic as you. (Some of the many sources for such information are http://emedia1.mediainfo.com/emedia, www.onlinenewspapers.com or the Global News Index at www.mediachannel.org.)

Increasingly, international journalists' associations offer training in investigative reporting techniques and, equally importantly, networking opportunities. In Asia, the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (www.pcij.org), home to two ICIJ members, does outstanding investigative reporting in the Philippines (its most recent investigations cover the excesses that led to President Estrada's impeachment). PCIJ is also a founding member of the Southeast Asian Press Alliance (www.seapa.org), an organization of independent journalists from the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia that offers training programs to journalists throughout the region.

The European Journalism Centre (www.ejc.nl) in Maastricht, Netherlands, offers training courses in investigative reporting to journalists from across Europe and the former East bloc and serves as a networking mechanism. In Latin America, IRE's own Periodistas de Investigacion (http://investigacion.org.mx), based in Mexico, along with some local initiatives, try to enhance the quantity and quality of investigative reporting among the media.

The International Journalists' Network (www.ijnet.org), run by the Washington-based International Center for Journalists, provides news on media developments around the world and is a source of contacts for journalists in many countries. IRE is also a resource for journalists abroad through its various international training programs.

In other words, there are numerous ways to research and connect with international journalists who may share your background and passion for a given subject. Many international journalists are quite eager to work with their U.S. colleagues, especially if they can learn some investigative reporting techniques. And, as ICIJ's tobacco investigation has shown, the impact of cross-border collaboration can be substantial.

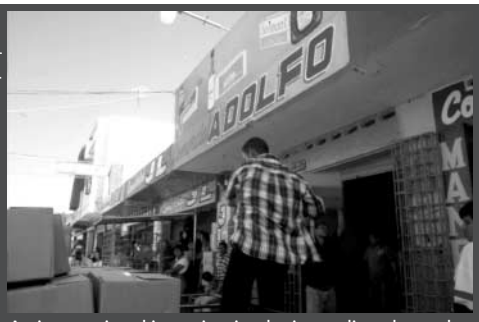

Photo: Cesar Restrepa | RED

An international investigation by journalists showed that cigarettes are transported from large warehouses to stores like this one in Maicao, Colombia, where they are resold in smaller quantities.

them. We fleshed out the story with interviews in our respective countries. We wrote and re-wrote and had our copy reviewed for libel by four lawyers on two continents. And when we published in late January and early February, almost a year after hearing the smuggling allegation for the first time, we did so simultaneously in four countries. It appeared in the center's online investigative report *The Public i* (www.public-i.org), in *The Guardian* newspaper in Britain, which reprinted our findings, in *La Nota*, a Spanish-language business news magazine in Colombia, and in *The Age*, an Australian daily newspaper. Before week's end, our report had been re-reported, translated and reprinted in over 40 publications from 10 countries.

ICIJ's inaugural investigation prompted parliamentary hearings at which senior company officials and our British colleague were called to testify. The British government recently announced it would launch a formal investigation into the allegations. Government officials in Brazil and Argentina sought information from ICIJ on how to access similar documents. And three civil lawsuits have since been filed in the United States under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) against the major tobacco companies by the governors of Colombia, the government of Ecuador and the European Union. ICIJ's work has been referenced in each.

Maud Beelman is director of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists at the Center for Public Integrity in Washington, D.C. Prior to that, she was an AP correspondent for 14 years and covered German unification, the post-Gulf War Kurdish crisis in Iran and Iraq and the wars in former Yugoslavia from 1991-1996. Beelman is also an Alicia Patterson Foundation fellow.

AT RISK

By Joel Simon of the Committee to Protect Journalists

If you wanted to learn the truth in Mozambique, Carlos Cardoso was just about the only person to help you. In a country where the press is tightly controlled by the ruling FRELIMO party, Cardoso published an independent fax newsletter called *Metical* that reported on government corruption and human rights abuses.

After leaving his office on November 22, Cardoso was driving through the streets of Maputo, Mozambique's capital, when two cars cut him off. Cardoso died in a hail of bullets fired by two gunmen wielding AK-47s; his driver was seriously injured.

While the assassins are still at large, few in Mozambique doubt that Cardoso was killed because of his reporting. The day he was murdered another Mozambican journalist, Custado Rafael, was assaulted and had his tongue slashed by three men who accused him of "talking too much." Rafael had been investigating corruption at the Mozambique Commercial Bank, and Cardoso had been reporting on the same story.

Cardoso's murder shows why investigative reporters around the world face special risk, particularly in countries where the press is generally restricted and officials are unaccustomed to public scrutiny. In such countries, because there are so few investigative journalists, those who want to silence a story may try to do so by killing the messenger. As one of Cardoso's colleagues in Mozambique put it, "He was killed because he was isolated."

Applying pressure

Twenty years ago, the Committee to Protect Journalists was created to ensure that no journalist working on a dangerous story felt alone. CPJ's model was the 1980 case of Alcibiades Gonzáles Delvalle, a Paraguayan journalist who was visiting the United States when he learned that he would be arrested if he returned to Paraguay. Gonzáles, who had been a long-time critic of the Alfredo Stroessner government, decided to go home anyway, but to let U.S. journalists know that he faced arrest. When Gonzáles was arrested, his journalist colleagues made sure it was big news, and pressure on the Paraguayan government forced his release.

CPJ has refined and expanded that strategy, but we still use journalism to defend journalists around the world. Each year, we investigate, document and make public nearly 600 individual attacks, sending out the news as soon as it is confirmed and posting it on our Web site, www.cpj.org.

Many journalists tell us that the fact we are investigating an attack makes them feel more secure. In other cases, we can bring redress simply by highlighting individual abuses. We also can compile a damning record of press freedom violations that we can use to publicly pressure a head of state, or others responsible for abuses.

Those who use violence or the threat of violence to silence the press and turn it away from reporting a story must be made to understand that such tactics will only ensure greater and more intense coverage of the story.

International spotlight

By highlighting abuses, CPJ has helped win freedom for a number of jailed or detained journalists in the past year. Serbian reporter Miroslav Filipovic was sentenced in July to seven years in prison for reporting on alleged atrocities committed by Serbian troops in Kosovo. An intense international campaign helped win his release in October, soon after the fall of Slobodan Milosevic.

CPJ also fought for the release of Russian reporter Andrei Babitsky, who was detained for his critical reporting on the Chechen war. We pressured a Mexican police chief to drop criminal charges against a reporter who was briefly jailed after publishing an article linking him to the drug trade. And recently, we helped secure the release of Swiss journalist Oswald Iten, detained by Indonesian authorities for reporting in the embattled province of Irian Jaya without a proper visa.

Cardoso's murder reminds us that the more isolated a journalist is, the more vulnerable he or she becomes. CPJ will continue to investigate Cardoso's murder, and to make public any progress. We want to make sure that his killing is not just a local story, but an international incident. We hope that someday soon Cardoso's killers will be captured, and that the story they thought they could suppress will become major news.

Joel Simon is the deputy director of the Committee to Protect Journalists. He reported on Latin America for 10 years, and is the author of "Endangered Mexico: An Environment on the Edge" (Sierra Club Books).

U.S. data can provide insight for international story angles

By Paul Overberg
of USA Today

Even though Census 2000 data will provide a treasure trove to journalists interested in the local angle of foreign lands and people, it's not going to be available for many months.

In the meantime, there is still valuable – but less well-known data – available right now that gives surprisingly detailed information on immigrants in communities across the U.S.

The single biggest and best source is the Current Population Survey, a 50,000-household survey that the Census Bureau conducts for the Bureau of Labor Statistics every month. While it's mostly done to calculate the unemployment rate, additional queries are made every one to two years about income, household and family structure, voting, education, school enrollment and childbearing.

For example, the most basic report on immigrants was published in January. It was the latest annual compendium on the U.S. foreign-born population, based on the March 2000 CPS. (See www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/foreign.html.) It includes a simple eight-page overview, 60 data tables and links to comparable annual data tables back to 1995.

And a whole new world of insight has been opened since the CPS began including in 1994 a question about citizenship on a variety of surveys. Consider this scenario: a perennial lament of political life is the declining voting rate, which is measured, among other ways, in the November CPS that follows the national election every two years. But a piece of this decline, however, is bogus because it's calculated by dividing the number of people who say they vote by the voting-age population. This may have worked fine in the 1960s, when citizenship rates skyrocketed after the U.S. opened immigration doors that had been closed for 40 years, but it isn't going to wash today.

Specifically, this country has millions of adults who can't vote because they're not yet citizens. So once the Census Bureau asked the citizenship question in its 1994 voting survey, it found that voting rates among citizens were several percentage points higher than measured among voting-age adults. In some states – notably California, Florida and Texas – rates are 5 to 10 percentage points higher than they were measured with the old yardstick. Predictably, national voting rates among Hispanics and Asians were 10 to 20 percentage points higher using the more accurate gauge.

The standard CPS reports don't always cross-tabulate citizenship by the subject focus, whether it's income, union membership or year of school enrollment. But it's there, and available through a tool called Ferret that lets you download or tabulate online the individual survey responses any way you please. (See http://ferret.bls.census.gov/cgi-bin/ferret.)

One big limitation of the CPS is local focus. Standard reports cover national and regional totals, but there's not enough data strength in the survey for state or local levels. While you certainly can roll two or three years' survey data together to do that, (as the bureau does for its annual income reports), I would suggest talking with bureau experts before you try it with citizenship data.

That's one reason why Census 2000 data is so important. It not only provides more nuance on immigration and assimilation issues, but it's designed to show it for every neighborhood in the nation.

Wealth of detail

So what questions are asked on the 2000 Census? Well, the queries parallel those on the 1990 Census, so there won't be comparability problems when it comes time to do stories. But these questions only are asked on the long form, which went to about one household in six. That means you need to be a little cautious in interpreting the data, especially for very small areas. But the questions provide a wealth of detail that's worth the trouble. Each person is asked:

- Ancestry or ethnic origin, such as Jamaican, Norwegian, Ukrainian, etc.
- Language spoken at home, and facility speaking English. This lets us analyze, by age and other variables, how isolated from English-speaking culture the people in an area are, and which languages they use. It also lets you find the neighborhoods with the most languages spoken at home.
- Country of birth. Among other things, this lets you see how clustered immigrants are, and how those clusters match – or don't – with concentrations of U.S. natives whose ancestry is from the same country. Do Irish immigrants cluster near old Irish neighborhoods? What kind of immigrants have filled that old Italian neighborhood on the south side of our city?
- Citizenship. Was the person born in the U.S., born in its territories, born abroad of U.S. parents,

Here are some other Census Bureau data that can help in international reporting:

- The bureau's international staff compiles population estimates and projections, by age, sex, fertility, work and marital status and other variables, for 227 countries and regions. The data is available in a variety of ways, including customized downloadable extracts and as animated population pyramids on the bureau's Web site (See www.census.gov/ipc/www/idbnew.html).
- Free monthly foreign trade data. While compiled in a variety of ways, one way to focus it is to track the U.S. balance of trade with a single country whose immigrants are numerous in your area. Global Trade Information Services, a Census Bureau vendor, takes the raw data and sells CDs and Web access with a variety of richer layers. You can, for example, track U.S. imports and exports with one country by type and volume. You can also track a single state's exports by destination and type and volume. (See www.census.gov/foreign-trade/www/index.html and www.gtis.com.)

naturalized or not a citizen? How close together are the neighborhoods of highest and lowest citizenship rates? What's the national origin of the biggest groups in each one?

- Year of entry. Citizenship rates rise steadily with duration in the United States, but that will vary by nationality, education, etc. Why are my local XYZ immigrants naturalizing so much more slowly than the average for my area?

All this information can be analyzed for any area as small as a census tract (a neighborhood averaging 4,000 people) and broken down by all the other variables in the census. So you should consider:

- Checking how income and education affect things like citizenship rates by years since entry.
- Looking at whether, say, Salvadoran immigrants in your area naturalize at rates that vary from those of Dominicans and Guatemalans and Mexicans.
- Thinking about how you can use these questions to measure assimilation rates (speaking English, education, etc.) of various immigrant groups in a big city.
- Looking at neighborhoods with the highest rates of non-citizens and other languages spoken at home, and checking the difference in household and family structure from that of others in your city or metro area.

To really do focused analysis, wait for the Public Use Microdata Sample, which is a 1 percent or 5 percent sample of the actual census response forms. It's not due out until 2003, and will be harder to work with and won't identify areas smaller than about 100,000 people, but it lets you do analysis you just can't do from standard census data.

Paul Overberg has been database editor at USA Today since 1993. He has helped lead seven IRE workshops on Census 2000 data.

Cross-cultural reporting demands reporter preparation, sensitivity

By David E. Kaplan
of *U.S. News & World Report*

In-depth reporting on cultures outside your own can pose special challenges and require extra care. Whether you're going overseas or covering immigrant communities at home, investing time to understand those you are reporting on can pay big dividends. Non-Western and traditional cultures, in particular, demand special attention. Here are some suggestions:

- **Study the culture.** Time spent with the best books on a culture's history and background are always worthwhile. Knowing about historical figures and events, major religions and political movements not only helps place in context what you find; it shows others that you've taken the time to understand who they are.

- **Understand basic customs.** Pay special attention to different customs and values. Remember that cultural cues and sensitivities will vary. Who you greet first and where you sit can unknowingly insult others. Being too direct and "businesslike" can quickly wreck an interview in some cultures. Understanding the concept of "face," or public self-respect, is especially important in East Asian cultures.

- **Be aware of personal space and contact.** Handshakes and backslaps may be wholly inappropriate. One's personal "space bubble"– the distance between you and others – also changes from culture to culture. Observe how close members of that culture stand to each other. Direct eye contact is not always appropriate. Gestures, such as pointing and crossing your arms, can be seen as rudeness or a sign that you are bored. These factors often take on added importance with male-female and younger-elder interactions.

Language and relationships

- **Learn the language.** Language is the key to understanding what's going on around you. Americans could learn much from Europeans and Asians, who typically speak at least one other language. A basic understanding opens doors, demonstrating to others that you have taken their culture seriously. Even clumsy attempts at learning another's language are often greeted with encouragement and smiles.

- **Speak plainly.** Even when dealing with people whose English is good, speak plainly and clearly. Remember that you are not speaking – and they are not listening in – their mother tongue. The possibility of confusion and misunderstanding is always present. Avoid slang. Remember to slow down just a bit, without being obvious and therefore insulting.

- **Use a trusted translator.** When using a translator, make sure he or she is someone you can rely on. Go over questions in advance. Those eager to translate for you may have their own motives for doing so; those close to your subject may be biased as well. Whoever translates, make sure they're not re-interpreting your questions, but asking them in the most literal way.

- **Find a guide.** Find people within the community who can act as cultural guides. They could be a local reporter or social worker, a religious figure, teacher, or political activist. Try to get a mix of ages, class, and gender. Their insights and connections can be the difference between a average story and a great one.

- **Use introductions and relationships.** Throughout much of the world, personal relationships are essential. One does business with another only after a bond has been established. Ask trusted sources for introductions; even a phone call can make a huge difference. Write letters of introduction to those you want to see. Many East Asians will not respond to a phone call from someone they do not know.

- **Remember that families come first.** In many traditional cultures the family is valued above all. Elders, too, require extra attention. You should act accordingly. You may need to pay male elders special respect even if you are not dealing with them directly.

- **Be patient and keep a sense of humor.** Reporters, by nature, tend to be aggressive and deadline-oriented. To get anything done in most non-Western cultures, particularly traditional ones, you'll need time, lots of patience, and a fine sense of humor.

Tools and techniques

- **Vary interview techniques.** Not everyone reacts like Americans or Europeans. Some cultures believe that directness and disagreement are rude; others value a good argument. Japanese sometimes say "yes" when

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TRAINING JOURNALISTS

abroad poses special challenges

By Drew Sullivan
for *The IRE Journal*

I asked Zeljko Kopanja, the editor of *Nezavisne Novine*, a large, national newspaper in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, how his staff does investigative reporting in a country where there are no rights to public records.

"Liquor, women and coffee," says the veteran editor with a smile.

Kopanja explains that most business is done over the bitter Turkish-style coffee Bosnians are so fond of. Kopanja also sends female reporters to interview male government officers. They're more likely to talk especially after a few Rakijas, a local plum brandy.

Zeljko Kopanja, the editor of *Nezavisne Novine*

Investigative reporting is serious business in Bosnia, and Kopanja is one of the most serious practitioners. Two crutches leaning on the wall behind him are testimony to his commitment: In October of 1999, Kopanja lost both his legs to a car bomb outside his Banja Luka home. His paper had just run a series documenting Bosnian-Serb and Serbian atrocities during the war – the first such admission in the Bosnian-Serb controlled Republic of Srpska.

Our talk was my first realization just how different reporting is abroad. After spending four months abroad, I now realize American journalism is the exception to the rule – unique because of its history, laws, culture and the environment in which it operates. One visit to a former communist country and you soon realize most of what you learned in journalism school or on the job just doesn't apply.

Yet dozens of reporters are training abroad and American-style investigative reporting is what many want. American reporters have a lot to offer, but to be successful you're going to need to prepare.

Here are a few of the difficulties facing reporters in Bosnia I wish I had considered before I arrived:

- Bosnian reporters have no tradition of independent journalism. There is no muckraking, Watergate or H.L. Mencken. Often, there are no old-timers in the newsroom to offer advice.
- Reporting can be dangerous. It's a dimension few American reporters ever need to consider. Reporters are threatened daily and violence against reporters is not uncommon in Bosnia.
- Journalists abroad often work under bad – or no – laws. In many countries, including Bosnia, journalists can face criminal (not civil) penalties for libel. Currently, there is no freedom of information law and no shield law.
- The newsroom culture is different. Reporters can be irrelevant to the final story. The top editor, often a well-known and outspoken personality in town, may personally decide what the story is long after it has been reported.
- In many countries, independent journalism is a niche in the market. It's a matter of simple economics. Many media organizations get their money from the government, special interests, political parties or organized crime. That leaves independent media to make its money from the marketplace.

  But in Bosnia, like some other countries, there is no economy. Advertising dollars are scarce. A 30-second television spot earns about $3 and stations may collect only about 20 percent of those revenues because of the common practice of not paying bills.

  Thus, a journalist can expect to make between $200 and $400 per month in Bosnia, if he or she ever actually gets paid.
- Many working reporters have no journalism training, and often neither do their editors. Media organizations recruit off the street, often taking young kids and volunteers.

The result in many former communist bloc countries is a media that American readers might politely call tabloid-style.

In Bosnia, personal attacks in print are not uncommon and even respected outlets will name fellow journalists or politicians as liars, drunks, spies or womanizers. An "investigative story" might be hearsay surrounded by a few inaccurate facts. While many journalists are honorable and do good work, problems are still endemic in the industry.

Back to basics

As a trainer, these problems make your job hard. Reporters who have trained abroad say success is a matter of good preparation and working hard to find what is relevant.

"I asked some journalists as I prepared, 'what can I teach you that would be interesting and useful?'" says Rosemary Armao, managing editor of the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*. "They told me it would all be interesting and none of it would be useful."

She said she proved them wrong by going back to basics. Internet skills and interviewing techniques proved very popular, as well as just sitting around and sharing story ideas.

In Bosnia, there is growing interest in health, science, environment, education and business news after years of political reporting having a near monopoly on newshole. Yet few such skills are present.

Armao says it's critical to read the work of local reporters. Her best exercises were ones that involved local issues she pre-reported.

"You don't have to like it or approve of the way it was done, but if you use examples, then you'll be relevant," she says.

She also advises reporters to get there early and spend time with local reporters – even visiting their newsroom to see how things are done.

Course materials also should be vetted and checked by people who know the local culture and pop culture, says Don Ray, projects editor at the *Daily Press* in Victorville, Calif.

"In Warsaw, I made reference to 'that most beautiful building that rises above the center of the city' only to learn that the Russian-built monument is the most despised remnant of post-communist Poland," he says.

Drew Sullivan, an IRE Board member, is currently freelancing and helping train international journalists. He most recently served on the projects team of The (Nashville) Tennessean.

TIPSHEET:

By Drew Sullivan

If you're interested in training abroad, here are some tips from the veterans:

Be mindful of the cultural differences. "During my first training in Finland, I did my intro to why CAR is so cool and no one said anything," says Jennifer LaFleur, database editor of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. "I asked for questions, and no one said anything. Later, someone pulled me aside and said that they were not comfortable asking questions and that if they didn't like the session they would just leave."

Expect to cover less material and keep things simple. If you don't speak the language, you'll only be able to cover half your material. Trainers say to prepare materials well in advance and get them translated by a reputable translator. If it's important, have that translation checked.

At the same time, check out your interpreter carefully. A bad interpreter can make the experience miserable and your best material either dry or nonsensical as Rosemary Armao, managing editor of the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune,* found out.

"I was telling Bosnians about a series on chicken farmers done by *The* (Baltimore) *Sun* and I just lost them. I could see them looking at each other strangely, kind of scratching their heads. The translator had made it chicken-farmers, as in roosters with hoes. I stopped the class while we all sorted it out and we roared with laughter. But it took a big chunk out of presentation time."

Go over with your interpreter what you'll be talking about ahead of time. If you mention a grand jury, you have to explain it. It is often easier to simplify your talk than to waste time explaining intricacies that are often irrelevant to them.

Simultaneous translation is best but it often means that expensive equipment is needed.

Be prepared for the unexpected. Operating in some countries is exceedingly difficult. Services we consider basic (Internet connectivity, photocopying equipment, electricity) may not always be available when you need it. Prepare for nothing to work and simplify your needs.

Cover the basics. As I was told in Bosnia, "make sure you tell them to get both sides of the story."

Find out the local law. So much of the way we operate is dictated by our American libel and freedom of information laws. The same is true abroad. Find out what laws pertain to journalists and how that influences their reporting.

If you need to use computers, allow time to familiarize yourself. LaFleur says to make sure you know the language of the software you will be using. Something as simple as a re-mapped keyboard can be troublesome. There's nothing worse than walking into a class and seeing a Cyrillic keyboard for the first time.

Finally, Armao says the best advice she got was "don't lecture."

"You ask the participants what they think and how they do things and you end up with a conversation, not a lecture," Armao says. "The advice has kept me from adopting the attitude of some trainers abroad that we're the smart Americans here to show you how to do it."

GLOBAL CONFERENCE

Denmark training emphasizes international commitment

By Kate Miller
of *The IRE Journal*

As part of an on-going effort to increase its international network of journalists, IRE has helped organize the first international conference on global investigative and computer-assisted reporting.

The Danish Institute for Computer Assisted Reporting (DICAR) and the Danish Organization for Investigative Journalism (FUJ) will serve as hosts and co-sponsors for the conference April 26-29 in Copenhagen.

IRE Executive Director Brant Houston says the event is a critical step in IRE's growth because of the increasingly global nature of news. "So many stories that appear to be local actually now touch on global issues, whether it's the environment, health, genetics, trade, factory closings, privacy vs. public interests, or politics," Houston says. "We need to build our network of members and friends throughout the world to help each other do better stories, and we need to provide good resources for journalists everywhere."

DICAR chairman Nils Mulvad shares Houston's view and says the purpose of the conference is to bring together journalists from different countries to learn from each other and forge working relationships. "We think globalization also will spread to journalism, and we can work together and exchange methods, training and stories," he says.

IRE has worked with other international organizations in the past, including the Inter American Press Association, the Committee to Protect Journalists and Periodistas de Investigacion in Mexico, which IRE helped found. IRE's relationship with the Danish journalists dates back to 1996, when Mulvad and another Danish journalist first attended a NICAR boot camp. The training went so well they invited IRE and NICAR trainers to Denmark for more training and have since attended several IRE and NICAR conferences. When DICAR was founded in 1999, it was modeled after NICAR.

Mulvad says computer-assisted reporting in Europe is not yet common, but is growing. DICAR has attracted dozens of journalists from Scandinavia and Eastern Europe to its conferences and FCJ and FUJ in Denmark have a combined membership of 170.

Mulvad says his priorities for DICAR include evaluating the level of information access in each country, changing views, learning about the different possibilities of computer-assisted reporting, training journalists in these methods and working together on stories.

The co-sponsored conference, which will be conducted in English, will not only include panels on investigative reporting, but also hands-on training using the Internet, spreadsheets, database managers, and mapping and statistical software. The conference will feature a diverse group of speakers from countries such as Sweden, Lithuania, Germany, Bulgaria, Palestine, Turkey, New Zealand and Great Britain. U.S. journalists, including Houston and other IRE members, also will speak. Topics will include such areas as backgrounding corporations, interviewing, education, war zones and project management.

The four-day conference will be held at the Hotel D'Angleterre in Copenhagen and cost IRE members $350. Any funds remaining after the conference will go toward making the European conference an annual event. A registration form, complete panel list and other information can be found at www.ire.org/training/demark/2000conf/.

Kate Miller, a former editorial intern for The IRE Journal, is a graduate student at the Missouri School of Journalism and currently interning at The Industry Standard in Washington, D.C.

Conference on Global Investigative Journalism

Hotel D'Angleterre
Copenhagen
April 26-29, 2001

Organizers

IRE – Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc.
FUJ – Danish Organization for Investigative Journalism
FCJ – Danish Organization for Computer-Assisted Reporting
DJE – Mid-Career Institute for Journalism, Denmark
DJH – Danish School of Journalism
EJC – European Journalism Centre
Gräv – Grävände Journalister, Sweden
SKUP – Association for a Critical and Investigative Press, Norway
IJA – Investigative Journalists, Bulgaria

www.ire.org/training/demark/2000conf/

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they mean "no." Double-check what you hear and be flexible in how you get at the truth. Also, study the way people in that culture ask questions.

- **Be sure of your facts.** Whenever possible, double-check your story with a native from the culture you are writing about. Make sure foreign names, places and events are correct. Occasionally, they might ask you to change something they believe puts their culture in a bad light. Listen, consider, but make up your own mind.
- **Follow stories back to the homeland.** In covering immigrant communities, keep in mind that most stories lead homeward. Politics, money, food, religion, the family – all eventually lead overseas. Tracing the story from your backyard to a land thousands of miles away makes for a compelling read.
- **Organize multi-ethnic teams.** Whenever possible, work in a team with at least one person from the culture you're reporting on. It makes the reporting more effective, guards against stereotyping and overkill, and lends more credibility to the work.
- **Subscribe to the immigrant press.** For covering immigrant communities in your own country, subscribe to their local press. There are usually bilingual papers with lively coverage, and the staffs tend to be friendly and cooperative. But be forewarned: accuracy can vary widely, so verify everything.
- **Subscribe to homeland periodicals.** Following reports on the country can be a useful source of tips and background on immigrant communities.
- **Join a cultural or historical group.** Meet people in the immigrant community through various associations. Holidays, banquets, and other special events can be good times to network. Remember that an open, direct style of friendliness may not always be best; be prepared to cultivate "quiet" respect when the situation calls for it.

Warnings

- **Take special care of sources.** Both overseas and in immigrant communities at home, take extra care of those who help you. Exposure of confidential sources can put them in real danger from government agents, gang members, and others. For exiles from authoritarian regimes, families back home can be at great risk. Remember, you can always leave – but they can't.
- **Special challenges for women.** Cross-cultural reporting often poses special problems for female journalists, who may be seen by male subjects as second-class citizens, sexually exotic, or just unusual. Understand the place of women in that culture, dress conservatively, and always maintain a professional manner.
- **The media's image may be different.** Reporters in many lands routinely take bribes, practice extortion (by threatening negative publicity), and work closely with powerful business and government interests. You may have some explaining to do.
- **Avoid being compromised.** While overseas, be wary of changing your money on the black market. Gift giving and receiving is an honored custom in some cultures, but there is a fine line between a gift and a bribe. Ask your guides to help you to distinguish which is which. In repressive nations, you may be followed, your phone tapped and your hotel room bugged. Be alert that women (or men) who come your way may be provocateurs. On dangerous assignments, let your associates know what you are doing and check in regularly. When appropriate, let your nation's embassy know you are working in that country.

Finally, keep in mind there are few absolutes. One nation may host many cultures; one culture may divide by region, dialect, and clan. What works in one place may not be appropriate in another. At the same time, there's no magic wand. Understanding other cultures takes time. If you can't make the commitment, the best you can be is polite and attentive, and use your good sense.

Remember, good reporting always counts. No matter how different the culture, certain reporting techniques will always be invaluable. Paper trails, in whatever language, should be followed as far and as best you can. And follow the money along with the paper. Money, after all, is the universal language. The chain of accountability, too, should be followed as high as possible. Tenacity, good organizational skills, a keen sense of observation, good writing and editing – all of these remain essential to the best reporting, regardless of where you are.

David E. Kaplan is a senior writer on the investigative team at U.S. News & World Report. His books include "Yakuza," on the Japanese mob, and "Fires of the Dragon," on the murder of Chinese-American journalist Henry Liu.

Electronic data can be found for international stories

By Noemí Ramírez
of *Diario El Mundo*

So, you don't have data? Don't give up!

You attend the IRE or NICAR conferences and hear about wonderful story ideas for investigations you can't find or can't obtain – data for your own country. If this is the case, see if you can create your own databases from paper records, or even better, search for information about your country somewhere outside the national borders.

For example, Jose Roberto de Toledo of the Folha de Sao Paulo constructed a database of more than 100 cases of multiple homicides for 1998 as a way to profile the victims. (For more examples and information, check out the March 2000 issue of Uplink.)

Do not reinvent the wheel. Check the IRE Resource Center for story ideas and the IRE and NICAR database library for ready-to-go, cleaned databases. The addresses are www.ire.org/resourcecenter and www.nicar.org.

Get familiar with the Freedom of Information Act. A good starting place is the Freedom of Information Center at the Missouri School of Journalism. Besides providing excellent guides on using FOI as well as sample letters and contacts at federal agencies for FOIA requests, you will be able to find out what other FOIA requesters are asking the government. What for? To increase your network of sources potentially willing to share information with you.

For example, the center has made available a detailed example about FOIA logs from the Persian Gulf War at

http://web.missouri.edu/~foiwww/foialogs/gulffoialog.html.

Create your tool kit of online resources and check it regularly. The U.S. government and other agencies and institutions are being very good about updating their information and making it available in an electronic format. When creating your online tool kit of U.S. sources, make sure to check: public agencies; private institutions; watchdog and non-for-profit organizations, and university libraries and historical archives.

If you haven't done it already, spend *a lot* of time online. Topics to look at? You name them. For almost every issue you can find tons of databases and online resources. For example, take a look at:

- The Manufacture and User Facility Device Experience Database, or MAUDE, at www.fda.gov/cdrh/maude.html. MAUDE data represents reports of adverse events involving medical devices. The data consists of all voluntary reports from manufacturers, health care professionals, other U.S. and foreign government reporting sources and the general public. An online search is available which allows you to search the CDRH's database information on medical devices which may have malfunctioned or caused a death or serious injury. The data is also available in zipped files for downloading.
- The Immigration and Naturalization Service provides annual statistical reports at www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/aboutins/statistics/index.htm. The INS offers detailed statistical data about immigration trends in the United States. It includes useful information such as refugee-status applications by geographic area and country. Also, NICAR sells the INS legal residency dataset with information on the characteristics of aliens who immigrated and attained legal residency.
- The U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency at www.state.gov/www/global/arms/wmeat97/wmeat97.html. The ACDA collects data on international arms sales, arms treaties, and military expenditures. The annual reports include .PDF tables by region, organization, country, major supplier and recipient country. (For a quick tip on how to import .PFD tables, check Tom McGinty's article in the July/August 1999 Uplink.)
- Securities and Exchange Commission data at Free Edgar (www.freeEdgar.com/) and 10K Wizard (http://10kwizard.com). These Web sites offer a free full-text search of SEC filings as well as other useful tools to background every publicly traded company in the United States, no matter whether the company is American or not. Both Free Edgar and 10K Wizard include information – such as the registration statement or the financial annual reports – that is easily turned into Excel spreadsheets for further analysis. One extremely useful feature is the electronic alert service that will send e-mail notifications when any of the companies in the watchlist submits an electronic filing to the SEC. For a detailed explanation of how to use the Free Edgar and 10K Wizard, request tipsheet #1138 from the IRE Resource Center.
- The Center for Responsive Politics, www.opensecrets.org/2000elect/lookup/AllCands.htm, defines itself as "a non-partisan, non-profit research group based in Washington, D.C. that tracks money in politics, and its effect on elections and public policy." The donor lookup database retrieves individual and soft money contributions that are above $200. To find out how much money employers of foreign companies with offices in the United States are giving to the American presidential candidates, try entering the name of a company in the occupation/employer field.
- The Federation of American Scientists at www.fas.org has an impressive collection of reports on a variety of issues such as animal health diseases, cyberstrategy, biological and toxin weapons, intelligence and nuclear resources. Check the Public Eye Project at www.fas.org/eye/3nws.htm for nuclear and missile facility satellite images.

Noemí Ramírez is the director of library services at Diario El Mundo in Madrid. She formerly was director of the IRE Resource Center.

Guest column

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was able to penetrate and better understand the differing cultures with her Spanish-speaking ability. And it was her determination to learn the local history and politics and, by extension, the motivation of people in those countries that she has taken to her coverage in the Middle East. It is the same approach that served her in Los Angeles.

Still another foreign correspondent, David Gonzalez of *The New York Times,* once told me how he covered a largely African-American neighborhood in New York by spending time in that community and getting to know residents and businesses and ministers without the press of deadline. That would prove crucial later when a disturbance broke out in that community and Gonzalez was able to begin reporting immediately and with authority because of the contacts he had made and the people he knew. When things became heated on the street, he was even able to find sanctuary in a local church because people already knew him there.

I suspect that Gonzalez still uses those same methods in his foreign reporting to find the right people to talk to, to lend authenticity and authority to his reporting, and to tackle the complex rather than simplistic story.

Those are the attributes that are important in reporting across cultures, and they became a mantra for some of us at a recent Poynter Institute-Columbia University seminar on coverage of race and ethnicity. Seeking to identify the characteristics in a story that raised the level of excellence, the responses that kept resonating were: genuine and powerful voices in a story, the unmistakable sense of authenticity, and a journalist's willingness to embrace complexity.

I would like to add something else, as well. And that would be courage – both individually and institutionally. Covering other cultures and doing a good job is no easy task. There are risks involved including incurring the resentment and criticism from outside and within news organizations. And covering your own culture – as some journalists of color have learned – can also prove difficult. Investigative reporters who write critical stories about their own are too often viewed as traitors to the community.

But there is a necessity for better reporting and writing on cultures *and* across cultures, whether domestically or abroad. In our investigative stories, as well as other journalistic pieces. In the end, the reward is there for our readers or viewers or listeners – and for the community we may have overlooked in the past.

And it may all begin with a little balut and beer.

Photo: The Sacramento Bee

In an 18-page special section on methamphetamine abuse, editors and reporters from the three Bee newspapers worked together to flesh out the story of how the drug was affecting individual lives, law enforcement and the environment. Photographers also worked together, showing the human side of the drug use.

THREE PAPERS TRY "NOVEL" APPROACH TO DETAIL CALIFORNIA'S METH MARKET

BY MAREVA BROWN
OF *THE SACRAMENTO BEE*

When *The Sacramento Bee* City Editor Joe Demma dropped a thick, stapled outline onto my desk last spring detailing the anticipated stories for our yet-to-be-reported methamphetamine project, I took a deep breath. I've done a few editor-driven projects and a few more reporter-driven projects and generally, I've found the reporter-driven projects to be more flexible.

Still, I've never been one to turn down the opportunity to work on a project and this one sounded exciting. Ultimately, I discovered that a well-edited team project can be both flexible and interesting.

For some time, editors at three newspapers (*The Sacramento Bee*, *The Fresno Bee* and *The Modesto Bee*) had been discussing ways in which the three papers, with a combined circulation of more than 725,000, might cooperate more on news coverage and, possibly, even on a joint special project.

There are a number of issues of common concern to the three cities, which all lie within California's vast Central Valley. Among them: water, agribusiness, immigration, land use, and the area's worldwide supremacy in producing a toxic and addictive street drug, methamphetamine.

The editors of all three papers – Rick Rodriguez in Sacramento, Mark Vasche in Modesto and Charlie Waters in Fresno – eventually agreed that meth would be the trial balloon.

An intimate look

Cathy Riddick, Fresno's assistant managing editor for projects, was handed the job of coordinating a dozen reporters and more than a

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Photo: Craig Kahlruss | The Sacramento Bee

Marty Klein of PARC Environmental of Fresno emerges from a barn with a 22-liter flask filled with a concoction of ephedrine, hydriodic acid and red phosphorous during cleanup after a meth lab bust at a rural home west of Madera.

dozen photographers, artists, editors and others. Demma, in Sacramento, and Dave Peterson, a Modesto assistant city editor with responsibility for crime and safety, rounded out the ranks of line editors.

They called the reporters and photographers to Modesto – geographically in the middle – on March 27, 2000, for a daylong introduction and brainstorming session. The thick packet outlined a four-day project with a main bar/sidebars format and stories on users, victims, law enforcement, and others. In short, a pretty standard project outline.

At that point, there was some trepidation among the reporting ranks about trying to find something significantly new to be worthy of a project. *The Modesto Bee* several years earlier had run a comprehensive and well-reported multi-day series on meth. *The Sacramento Bee* had run several lengthy take-outs over the previous several years on various aspects of the methamphetamine trade.

But Riddick was determined to make the project work. She led an exhaustive discussion about what we'd done and what we saw as new information to be researched and reported. Of course, in the end, what made our project compelling was not the new information but our ability to cover a vast geographic area and a broad journalistic topic in detail – providing intimate descriptions of the lives of those affected by this drug and of those who battle it daily on the streets, in court or in rehab houses.

So, while Riddick assigned topics to each reporter, she left the story assignments broad and encouraged each person to follow additional interests.

For example:

- Sacramento writer Nancy Teichert – a whiz at computer-assisted reporting – was assigned to help create databases for the project but left free to discover whether she needed to create them, download them or contract out to have them made. She did that, and then ventured outside to find a former prostitute in rehab who talked of dumping meth into her morning coffee and using children in her escort service.
- Ty Phillips, a sports and feature reporter for *The Modesto Bee*, was assigned to cover law enforcement. He and photographer Adrian Mendoza went on a number of busts, but also spent many days hanging out with users, access that paid off with rich detail and memorable photographs of a formerly attractive woman, Jackie Hughes, who now is toothless and wrinkled.
- Fresno photographer Craig Kohlruss went into overdrive, getting shots of users, drug busts and addicts in rehab.
- Marijke Rowland in Modesto and I were given the general topic of "the human cost." We met later and decided that she would cover rehabilitation and I would cover the victims – specifically focusing on children of meth users.

Rowland's two stories, the last in the project, take us into the office of Carol Moltrum, the rehab gatekeeper for rural Butte County. She accepts calls from addicts seeking help only between 1:30 and 3:30 p.m. weekdays, and even those lucky enough to get an appointment have to wait days or weeks for an initial interview.

I wrote three stories and pieces of others for the project, including the prologue about a little girl who tugs on the bulletproof vest of the officer who comes to arrest her mother. "I know what you came for," she whispers. Down the hallway in her mother's bedroom, she opens a dresser drawer to reveal small bags of drugs, scales, pipes and account books that document sales.

Pushing deadlines

Former Sacramento columnist Steve Wiegand was named the lead writer, in charge of synthesizing the various stories as they came in and rewriting as necessary.

Each reporter was assigned to an editor based on topic, not geography. After a month, we were ordered to return to *The Modesto Bee's* downstairs meeting room for another daylong session to discuss what we had found and estimate how much time we would need to complete our reporting.

Riddick led the meetings, asking questions about our reporting and applauding each reporter's endeavors. Demma, a former project editor at *Newsday*, also plied us with questions. At that meeting the real stories began to emerge.

Teichert and Fresno's Russell Clemings were working on environmental stories from different angles, wondering how to merge them. Riddick told them to report and write them separately and we'd figure it out later.

In addition, Fresno's Mike Krikorian, now at the *Los Angeles Times*, had been reporting on the international implications. Over the past decade, methamphetamine has gone from a drug typically manufactured by outlaw biker gangs to one cooked at night in massive batches in the secluded orchards of the Central Valley by Mexican nationals.

He had found that in the early 1990s, the leaders of Mexican drug cartels expanded business operations. They were already running marijuana and cocaine into California, but marijuana was cheap and they had to split the cocaine profits with Columbian cartels, which grew and synthesized the drug. Meth could bring huge profits and be cooked virtually anywhere.

So while we had reported the relatively new phenomenon of Mexicans commandeering the manufacturing trade, Krikorian wanted to follow the trail back to Mexico, to the tiny town of Apatzigan, which now suffers from its own meth-use epidemic.

At the same time, Crystal Carreon in Modesto was proposing a trip to Iowa to illustrate how the Central Valley's meth had become a major export business. Both trips were approved, kicking back original deadlines by a couple of weeks and allowing all of us some extra time in the field.

In the meantime, Washington bureau reporter Michael Doyle was writing a story on the history of meth-related legislation.

The copy started rolling in by mid-June, more than 7,500 inches in all. Some of it was camera-ready, some of it was in note form. Some was a mix. Each topic editor read the copy before forwarding it to Riddick. She, in turn, edited it and then gave it to Wiegand for rewrite.

By then, Wiegand knew what he wanted to do. But it was unusual and risky, and he had to sell the editors first.

A different format

On the drive back from our May 1 meeting in Modesto, Wiegand, Teichert and I had been talking about the breadth of material and the quality of some of the anecdotes that we heard.

Phillips had met a couple of drug addicts whose stories were dramatic and compelling. He was told to write them as anecdotes, potentially as sidebars. Carreon, too, had some vivid anecdotes that would have served as good illustrations in stories about law enforcement. She planned to write at least one as a sidebar.

We feared losing many of the anecdotes or having them grossly abbreviated when the project came together. We needed a different format. But what?

Wiegand, who was in the midst of writing a "History for Dummies" book in his spare time, suggested we write the project to read as a novel. Some of the more compelling anecdotes could be stand-alone chapters. Complete news stories could be written in a more conversational voice and be intermingled with the more anecdotal chapters.

The editors were persuaded.

Some reporters who were comfortable with the different style wrote camera-ready chapters. Others who were less comfortable with the format, or who wrote in a more traditional news style, had their stories reworked. Wiegand also blended similar topics, turning Teichert's and Clemings' separate stories and a stand-alone anecdote by Carreon about a young family now living in a former meth lab into an interesting and compelling single chapter on environmental clean-up issues.

He took three separate user anecdotes written by different reporters – Phillips, Teichert and me – and wove them into a single chapter on users.

In early August, he filed some 1,300 inches of copy. Over the next month, he and Riddick arranged chapters, edited and eventually cut another 100 inches.

Some material that didn't make the print cut was used in the online version of the project, which also featured a database pinpointing sites of meth labs and busts. Additionally, it had special links to resources – including region-wide information on substance abuse programs.

The project ran October 8 as an 18-page special section, printed on special paper and inserted into each *Bee*. It bore all three mastheads and had no bylines. Instead, bio boxes on the back page provided a bit about each of us and a partial list of what we'd covered.

In retrospect, I have to say the editors were great.

They left us alone to report the stories as we saw best and didn't get involved in the writing. The executive editors collaborated with each other as they edited, so conflicts were resolved before any rewrite requests reached us. Heck, they even persuaded the *Bee* publishers to let us add two pages.

Photo: Hector Amezcua | The Sacramento Bee

Michael Sherman, chief of neonatology at UC Davis Medical Center in Sacramento, holds a baby he believes was born addicted to meth. Sherman says this child is fortunate because he was not born with physical deformities.

Mareva Brown is a senior staff writer for The Sacramento Bee, where she covers children's and family issues. She has written numerous projects including one in 1998 on California's troubled policy of shipping juvenile delinquents to unmonitored out-of-state boot camps and one in 1995 tracking what happened to 47 death row inmates who ultimately were paroled after the death penalty was overturned in the 1970s.

BOOK OFFERS HELPFUL INFORMATION FOR MORE THAN BUSINESS BEAT

BY STEVE WEINBERG
OF *THE IRE JOURNAL*

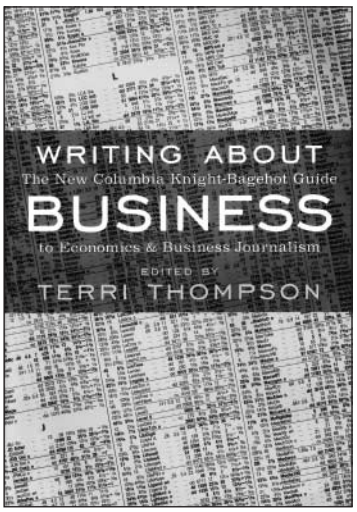
If you're not a journalist covering business or economics, and therefore think this new book has nothing to offer you, please read on. You won't be sorry.

Terri Thompson, who reported for *Business Week*, *U.S. News & World Report* and others before agreeing eight years ago to run the year-long midcareer Knight-Bagehot Fellowship program at Columbia University, begins by explaining that the book is divided into three sections. The first section includes 11 chapters by 11 different journalists (all former Knight-Bagehot Fellows) on the concepts of business and the economic system in which those businesses (as well as the governments watching over them) operate.

That might sound like a mainly esoteric section for most IRE members. But wait: On the fourth page of the very first chapter ("How Economic Systems Work," by freelance journalist Barbara Presley Noble) I learned something that I never knew before, something that will add to a piece I'm currently reporting.

What I learned is this: The unemployment rate calculated by the government is not determined by how many employable individuals are out of work. It is determined by those out of work who are actively seeking employment. Those who have no jobs for whatever reason and are not actively seeking re-entry are known as discouraged workers. That means in any geographic locale the percentage of the working-age population actually wanting to work can be determined more or less precisely, allowing a journalist to write with authority about jobs unfilled because there aren't enough workers, period, versus jobs unfilled because there aren't enough willing workers.

It turns out that even the first section of this book contains lots of useful information. For journalists delving into government policy and programs, there are chapters about how to evaluate government performance, and how to use information provided by government for countless investigative projects.



"WRITING ABOUT BUSINESS: The New Columbia Knight-Bagehot Guide to Economics and Business Journalism," edited by Terri Thompson, director, Knight-Bagehot Fellowship at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. Published by Columbia University Press, 422 pages, $50 hardcover, $27.50 paperback.

For those delving into private sector behavior, the first section of this book also is a treasure trove about how to understand what for-profit entities do to reveal, and sometimes mask, their operations. The chapters on sales, marketing, accounting principles and reading financial statements ought to help novice, intermediate and advanced journalists alike understand how to compare actual performance with the high-gloss annual report version.

In "Covering Business in Your Town," by *Lexington Herald-Leader* business editor Jacalyn DePasquale Carfagno, there is insightful information about the intersections among government agencies, private-sector businesses and consumers. Through regulations, grants, taxes and the like, governments, businesses and individual consumers of their products and services are inextricably bound. It is usually impossible to write about any of them well without understanding all of them.

Other helpful points in the book include:

- **Blazing new trails.** Section one goes where two IRE main books rarely go. While sections two and three overlap a lot with IRE's "The Reporter's Handbook: An Investigator's Guide To Documents and Techniques" and overlap some with "Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide," the examples are different, and therefore useful. The three books used in tandem enhance each other beautifully.
- **Unearthing information.** Section two covers interviewing techniques, especially when executives turn out to be recalcitrant, as well as documents that are supposed to be routinely available from publicly traded and private companies. It also looks at documents about the private sector that should be routinely available in government files; using the federal Freedom of Information Act when documents are not routinely available; and finding valuable information through the Internet and within commercial databases.
- **Working the beat.** Section three focuses on reporting areas such as insurance, health care, real estate, urban development, the environment, the workplace, taxes, not-for-profit institutions, consumer issues, the retail industry, the media/entertainment industry, the technology/telecommunciations industry and personal finance.

Not so incidentally, "Writing About Business" contains a fascinating introduction by Chris Welles, long-time *Business Week* reporter and editor as well as one of Thompson's predecessors as Knight-Bagehot director. Welles is one of the best investigative journalists ever to concentrate on the private sector.

Specifically, Welles is not entirely upbeat about the state of in-depth business journalism, saying many news organizations "have cut back on investigative reporting and tough business coverage of corporate behavior …. Instead they allocate more resources for personal finance, a course of action that is less likely to disturb managing editors and advertisers. Indeed, tenacious, iconoclastic investigative reporting is not exactly flourishing these days. Publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Business Week*, *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Consumer Reports* and a handful of other

publications routinely produce groundbreaking work. But after these, the list dwindles rapidly."

The situation could worsen, Welles says.

"Many journalists pull down six-figure paychecks. Some are looking forward to cashing in their stock options – and gaining millions of dollars from some Internet initial public offerings. Business writers are also much more socially respected than in previous eras, sought out for conferences and book contracts … Reporters are supposed to be gadflies, feisty, irreverent critics of the status quo and the conventional wisdom. Now, some observers say, journalists have joined the establishment. They have become defenders of the status quo."

Where investigative reporting of the private sector is mediocre or worse, Welles believes part of the reason is frequently the daunting nature of the task.

"Covering business and economics is more demanding than any other specialty, much more difficult, for instance, than writing about a football game, a school board meeting, a robbery, a new musical fad, or even a political campaign," he says.

And while economists tend to be talkative with journalists, there is rarely consensus among economists about causes or effects, and journalists face downright hostility more than government reporters do when covering individual businesses, Welles says.

"Public entities recognize an obligation to serve the public and thus tend to be responsive to reporters seeking information. Corporations often do not feel that obligation. Although they are publicly owned in the sense that their stock is owned by investors, corporations really serve private ends – making money for their employees and their shareholders … They actively advertise their products and employ public relations people to polish their images … Yet they are far less forthcoming to reporters about negative events. It is not unusual for a corporation to forbid its employees to talk to reporters seeking to write about the company."

Journalists spurred on – rather than discouraged – by such behaviorare the kind of journalists the craft needs. This is the kind of book those journalists need.

Steve Weinberg is senior contributing editor to The IRE Journal, a professor at the Missouri School of Journalism and a former executive director of IRE.

LEGAL CORNER

Will Judicial Conference thwart Internet access to court records?

DAVID SMALLMAN

On Nov. 13, 2000, when much of the nation had its attention focused on the disputed presidential election in Florida, an organization responsible for providing policy guidance to the federal judiciary issued a request for public comment on Internet access to court documents. While acknowledging that the paper versions of case files had long been presumed to be open for public inspection and copying unless sealed by court order, the Judicial Conference of the United States announced that it was studying "the privacy and security implications of vastly wider public access" to court records stored on computerized databases (www.privacy.uscourts.gov).

As justification for curtailing public access, the Judicial Conference noted that case files can contain private or sensitive information "such as medical records, employment records, detailed financial information, tax returns, Social Security numbers and other personal identifying information." It went unmentioned that court records also contain information of vital public interest, including cases about aircraft safety; defective tires, medication, baby food, toys; tax, stock, and election fraud; insurance scams; toxic waste dumping; perjury by government officials; illegal arms deals; bank failures; antitrust claims; and civil rights violations.

Practical obscurity

Along with its issuance of the request for comment, the Judicial Conference also released a nine-page "staff report" entitled "Privacy and Access to Electronic Case Files in the Federal Courts" (www.uscourts.gov/privacyn.htm). The centerpiece of this report is a one-sided analysis of case law justifying suppression of private or sensitive information contained in public court files. Because indiscriminate disclosure of this data in "the new electronic environment" may violate an individual's right to privacy, interfere with fair trials, or impede law enforcement efforts, presumptive rights of access dating back to the founding of the Republic are fair game for restriction.

Interestingly, the report fails to discuss the well-established test for identifying traditionally protected rights of access under the First Amendment. Other flaws include the report's apparent reliance upon an inapposite 1989 Supreme Court case, which denied access to criminal rap sheets under FOI and, in doing so, reversed a lower court ruling largely on the basis of a dissenting opinion by then-appellate judge Kenneth W. Starr. Dicta in the Supreme Court's decision suggested that a privacy interest may somehow reside in information that was once publicly available, but is now "practically obscure" on the grounds that it has become more difficult to locate. For example, the court referred to "the vast difference between the public records that might be found after a diligent search of courthouse files, county archives, and local police stations throughout the country and a computerized summary located in a single clearinghouse of information." But the case in which this novel doctrine emerged only applied to FOIA requests for criminal records compiled by law enforcement authorities. It is not relevant or applicable to publicly filed records maintained by the judical branch.

Case management

The request for public comment coincides with implementation of a powerful case management system, which has been designed to give each federal court the option to create electronic case files either by imaging of paper files or through direct filing of electronic versions of documents. Remote access to the new system is provided through an upgraded version of an existing Web-based system, known as PACER (Public Access to Court Electronic Records). The database currently contains dockets (a list of documents filed in each case) and will soon be expanded to include the full text documents (except for those filed under seal).

Access to documents through PACER requires payment of 7 cents to view, download, or print a page of roughly 54 lines. The Judicial Conference asserts that this fee represents a savings over the current 50 cents-a-page photocopy charge. But

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David Smallman is general counsel of DocketWatch.com, a real-time online legal data provider. He has been pro bono counsel to IRE and NICAR since 1993, and is the Journal's contributing legal editor.

ELECTION 2000

Media scrutiny finds far-flung, systematic flaws

BY RON NIXON
OF *THE IRE JOURNAL*

The 2000 presidential election will be remembered as one of the closest in history. It also will be remembered for providing comedic fodder to late night talk show hosts and introducing the word "chad" into the nation's pop culture.

Most important perhaps, the election will be remembered in journalistic circles for investigations finding an election system that, in many places, is flawed and dysfunctional.

Hundreds of news organization across the country found problems in the election system going beyond Florida, which gathered most of the attention in the presidential race. Some of those findings include:

- The 3,067 individual counties in the United States have few national standards for determining how votes get counted. The job of counting the 100 million or more votes often falls on poorly trained and understaffed county clerk offices with few resources. A *Wall Street Journal* investigation found that county governments typically spend about 3 percent of their budgets on the clerk's office.
- Voting failures often fall on those who can least afford it: minority and low-income communities. Investigations by *The New York Times* and several papers in Florida show that voting systems in these communities tend to be older and less reliable than those in high-income communities.
- Registration lists are often flawed. News organizations discovered many people were turned away from polls because their names were not on a list. A *Miami Herald* investigation found that hundreds of felons voted in the presidential elections.
- In Florida, poor ballot designs may have given thousands of votes to the wrong candidate. Another *Miami Herald* investigation found that a third-party candidate gain of votes in a heavily Democratic county was a statistical anomaly.
- A national investigation by the Scripps Howard News Service found that the 2000 election was not that uncommon. Each year, millions of votes are thrown out and not counted.

Faulty registrations

Thomas Hargrove, a reporter for Scripps Howard who conducted the news service investigation, said the idea for the article began with a simple question: Could the 2000 election and the Florida fiasco be an isolated problem?

"We found that it was not," Hargrove says.

The news service examined the 1996 presidential election to see if similar problems could be found.

"Our investigation showed that in the Dole-Clinton arace, millions of votes were not counted," he says. "In one West Virginia County, the county clerk had just found 1,000 votes that Bob Dole should have gotten."

Of course, Hargrove says, those votes weren't enough to change the election because of Clinton's lead over Dole.

"Our studies did show that there were numerous problems in voting across the country and not just in Florida," Hargrove says.

Investigations by the *Wall Street Journal* and *The Los Angeles Times* reached similar conclusions. Specifically, the papers looked at voting in counties across the country and found that undercounts and discarded votes were the norm, rather than the exception.

Scripps Howard also found other problems. Official registration lists in the United States have become so faulty that scores of counties claim to have more voters than actual adult population. Sloppy bookkeeping led 190 counties and the state of Maine to appear to be more than 100 percent registered in the 1996 presidential election. Most of the problems with under-votes were attributed to faulty voting machines, Scripps found.

Discarded ballots

One of the first newspapers to look at the voting machine problem was the *Tallahassee Democrat*, a 68,000-circulation paper in Florida's capital.

"We kept hearing from community groups that something was wrong with the machines,"

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Uncounted ballot review

The Palm Beach Post concluded in its review of 10,600 previously uncounted ballots in Miami-Dade county that President George W. Bush would have gained six more votes than former Vice President Al Gore if all dimples and hanging chads had been counted.

The Gore camp had expected to pick up as many as 600 votes in the Miami-Dade recount. The analysis also found the highest under-vote rates occurred in predominantly black precincts. An unusually high number of mis-votes near the holes for Bush and Gore on the ballot backed a theory by the county's election supervisor that many voters may have poked their punch-card ballots without properly inserting them into the voting machines.

The Post's analysis published in January was the first of several expected by local and national newspapers.

SOLDIERS' DEATHS LEAD TO QUESTIONS ABOUT HARASSMENT

BY GREGORY PIATT
OF *STARS AND STRIPES*

It started out as a promise to another reporter.

In the fall of 1998, I wrote a story about the death of a soldier who was hit by a train while on the railroad tracks outside a U.S. Army barracks in Darmstadt, Germany. It was the second death on those same tracks in eight months and it had piqued my interest.

I asked my colleague, Sgt. Tonja Arch, about the first soldier to die there – Spc. Karl Herrick. It turns out he was from the same barracks as the second solider to be hit by a train, Pvt. Ibrahim Hasan.

Arch was at the end of her tour with *Stars and Stripes*, a newspaper for military serving abroad that has a mix of civilian and military reporters, but she was adamant I follow up on the story. I promised I would.

Herrick's death was ruled a suicide, while Hasan's death got a less definitive answer. Still, both men shared a chilling history: both had faced hazing and harassment in their units, both were considered outsiders among other soldiers, and both had officers over them who failed to protect them from unfair treatment.

Over the next 11 months (in which my reporting was interrupted for six months because of NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia and the peacekeeping forces entering Kosovo), I would use old-fashioned reporting skills to come up with a two-day series called "Death on the Tracks." That series, which was a finalist in the IRE Awards, looked at what happened to the two soldiers leading up to their deaths – and the Army's haphazard investigations into both.

Harassment and hazing

I found that Herrick's superior, Sgt. 1st Class Lewis Brown, neglected to help the 22-year-old on the night he threatened suicide because Brown was occupied elsewhere – namely, sleeping with a subordinate's wife.

"He neglected his soldier because I was there," said Caroline Dunbar, the woman involved. "Basically, he put himself before the soldier."

However, the Army's investigation into Herrick's death never touched on this love affair, even though Sgt. Willie Dunbar had complained to his superiors around the time of Herrick's death that his wife was seeing Brown, his boss. Further, an investigation a month after the suicide didn't reveal that Brown and Dunbar were together on the night of Herrick's call for help.

And Brown? He simply received a letter of reprimand for his actions on the night Herrick died.

Further, we found out that Hasan, a patriotic Albanian-American and devout Muslim, possibly was depressed because of racial harassment by other soldiers, and had even sought counseling from a Roman Catholic priest. His own father, Lek Hasan, was upset when he found out that while the Army investigated the hazing and harassment in E Company of the 51st Infantry, officials denied these actions contributed to 18-year-old Hasan's death.

To probe further into these problems, I did phone interviews, interviewed soldiers in the units and got the death reports and other documentation from the parents. These steps were necessary because the military often has its own peculiar rules for releasing information, often influenced by a command's desires to control the flow and presentation of facts.

Arch gave me the death report from the U.S. Army's Criminal Investigative Command she had just received from Herrick's parents, who requested it from the Army. The death report wasn't redacted by the military as it would be if it had been requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

The report had testimonies and names of soldiers in Herrick's unit, the 32nd Signal Command stationed at Kelley Barracks in Darmstadt; the names of his non-commissioned officers and the condition of Herrick's barracks room that had indicators he dabbled in witchcraft or the dark arts.

[When working with the military, the lesson is to get as much documentation from the parents or those involved because the names might not be redacted. The military is sensitive about the Privacy Act and won't release names.]

It was a bit different in the Hasan case. Since Hasan's father challenged the military and its findings, the Army wouldn't give Lek Hasan any documentation. So he and his lawyer had to FOIA the death report, which had the names redacted.

Stars and Stripes requested the same reports, but the newspaper is owned by the Defense Department and so may not file a traditional FOIA like other media organizations. Specifically, under FOIA, one government entity can't FOIA another government entity, but under *Stars and Stripes'* regulations we are given the same priority as other media.

So we filed for the death reports and other investigations in August 1999 under what we call a "non-FOIA-FOIA," which leaves the decision whether to release the information up to the government department that was FOIA'd.

We were denied the Hasan death report about a month after the stories appeared.

Circuitous route

In order to get information, I interviewed Sgt. Dunbar several times. He gave me a copy of the investigation, even when his command

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Police

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for fear of alienating the Chicago Police Department, records and interviews showed. Then-U.S. Attorney James B. Burns turned down a request by prosecutors to include Rodriguez in a grand jury probe of police corruption, a Justice Department memo showed. It was not until 1998, three months after Rodriguez had resigned, that federal agents visited the former police chief at his home and asked specific questions about the extent of his financial ties to Milito.

In several instances, public records led to people and documents that had eluded law enforcement officials. In one example, a friend of Merriam's who had seen a stranger casing Merriam's activities shortly before the killing was shown a series of photographs by the *Tribune*; the friend identified the stranger as a violent mob associate.

Decaying records

Another example concerned Milito's investment in a Caribbean island casino run by Chicago mob figure Vincent "Jimmy" Cozzo. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and U.S. Embassy officials had investigated whether Cozzo's casino was used to launder drug profits for the mob, but their probe stalled when officials could not get financial records from the Curacao government, internal memos showed.

I obtained Curacao court permission to examine the bankrupt casino's records. While a court trustee stood by, I crawled through the shipping container where the records were stored, my pants tucked into my socks to keep out ants. The decaying records revealed a web of deals that brought potential murder suspects and swindlers together with law enforcement officials from the agencies investigating them.

The reporting reinforced several lessons:

- Whenever possible, do interviews in person. Even when crime figures and law enforcement officials brush off interview requests, call out every question you have and give them every chance to respond to the information about them you may publish.
- Some sources take risks to provide information, so draw a clear line on any confidentiality agreements you make. Ask your editors about your newsroom's practices and policies, and make sure you understand them before making agreements with potential sources. If you extend a promise of confidentiality, carry that promise with every step you take.
- Investigate every one of your sources, as some may have unintended biases or hidden agendas.

The Treasury Department's criminal investigation into the *Tribune's* sources has touched the lives of three current and one former agent, and could have a chilling effect on others who might present information of public significance to a reporter. A more heartening, unofficial response came from numerous Chicago police officers who called to say they supported the newspaper's investigation into the crime ties of their superiors. "It's great that you're exposing these bosses," one cop said. "Officers want these crooks in jail."

David Jackson has been an investigative reporter at the Chicago Tribune since 1991, except for a year-long stint at The Washington Post, where he shared the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for public service. At the Tribune, where he works today, he was a Pulitzer finalist in 1996 for investigative reporting and in 2000 for national reporting.

Election 2000

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says Nancy Cook Lauer, now capital bureau chief for the *Democrat*. "We wanted to check it out, to see if there was indeed a problem or if this was just partisan bickering."

Using data from the various clerks' offices on the type of voting machine used, and demographic information from the state, Lauer found that there was indeed a pattern: Voters in Florida's poorer communities were more than twice as likely to have their votes discarded as those in more affluent counties.

The *Democrat's* analysis found that there was a stronger correlation between income levels and discarded ballots than the type of balloting machines and discarded ballots.

The New York Times analysis also showed that there were problems with voting machines and uncounted votes. Blacks were more likely to have their votes discarded because they often lived in counties that used more error-prone punch cards. *The Times* also found 64 percent of black voters lived in counties that used punch cards as opposed to 56 percent of white voters.

Such investigations, however, were not without criticism. Several articles by *The Miami Herald* had the methodology questioned, even by other news organizations. For example, a *Herald* investigation, which found that Reform Party candidate Pat Buchanan's 3,400 votes in a heavily Democratic county was a statistical anomaly, was criticized and widely discussed on one of IRE's electronic mailing lists, NICAR-L.

Geoff Dougherty, the *Herald's* database editor, says the methodology for the study was sound and that he had talked with a statistics professor at a local university who had conducted similar studies.

Finally, Republican Party officials are criticizing an effort by newspapers in Florida and several national newspapers led by *The New York Times* to conduct a recount. GOP officials have questioned the recount effort because they say there are no state standards for how to count disputed ballots.

Ron Nixon is director of IRE's Campaign Finance Information Center. The CFIC (www.campaignfinance.org) is dedicated to helping journalists conduct more in-depth coverage of campaigns by covering the money trail.

Harrassment

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claimed it didn't have a copy of it when we non-FOIA-FOIA'd the report. He also gave us photos of Caroline Dunbar and Brown.

With a relative who was in the military acting as a go-between, and some persistence on my part, Lek Hasan agreed to give me the death report he received under FOIA. I then had enough to begin writing my stories.

Next, I began the circuitous route that often colored this investigation:

- I called the local commander of the Army's Criminal Investigative Command (on his cell phone, which he did not appreciate), whose unit did the investigation into both deaths. He referred me to U.S. Army Europe's public affairs office.
- USAREUR public affairs asked for a written version of our questions, but then referred me several days later to the Criminal Investigative Command headquarters in Fort Belvoir, Va.
- The spokesman in Virginia told me he wouldn't comment on our questions because we hadn't received a copy of the death reports that we requested through the non-FOIA-FOIA process, even though we had received the reports from the parents.
- The U.S. Army refused to open an investigation into Brown's activities on the night Herrick died. The reason: Brown was transferred to a base in Texas and his new commanders refused to look into an offense that happened in another command.

After Hasan died, the Army investigated the non-commissioned officers in the airborne unit. New restrictions were instituted after they found excessive alcohol abuse and private weapons in the barracks. In addition, excessive use of exercise was banned, because it was being used to haze young soldiers. Still, our follow-up reporting showed that such hazing continues – but in private.

Currently, Lek Hasan's lawyer is preparing a lawsuit against the Army. He says our stories were instrumental in the Army releasing new guidelines on suicide and harassment.

Gregory Piatt is the Belgium bureau chief for Stars and Stripes, and has been with the newspaper for two and a half years. His main duties are to cover NATO, the peacekeeping missions in the Balkans and the U.S. military communities in Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg.

Legal corner

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its materials say nothing about technological efficiencies inherent in displaying and distributing documents on the Web – a development that calls into question the economic basis for any fee per page view. The Judicial Conference has announced plans to make electronic case files "available" at public computer terminals free of charge, but it would apparently condition such access upon perhaps submitting to security or identity checks.

An information monopoly?

Critics of the existing framework for distributing court records suggest that institutional pressures to maintain control over an increasingly valuable database may be a motivating factor behind the present initiative by the Judicial Conference. They point to an information monopoly that is largely unaccountable to the public, and which functions as a self-perpetuating, supplemental funding mechanism beyond what Congress annually appropriates to the judicial branch for operation of the federal court system (approximately $4.3 billion for FY 2001). Interestingly, government agencies are not exempt from PACER fees, so whatever the outcome of the initiative to restrict public access to electronic records, a huge market for that data remains.

In much the same way that people are still shocked to discover that the American Red Cross sells at a profit blood donated by volunteers, some are surprised that court files can be sold as a commodity by those entrusted to maintain them. Nevertheless, since 1948, when the Judicial Conference of the United States was created by federal statute, it has had broad powers (through committees chosen by the sitting chief justice) to make policy regarding the administration of the United States courts. Even before that, the federal judiciary apparently used its proprietorship over court records to provide advance access to court decisions by commercial vendors, who then resold compilations of this material to the legal community.

Certain states, including Florida, operate Web sites that provide unlimited, free Internet access to public court calendars, lists of cases, litigation documents, judicial opinions, and Webcasts of appellate arguments (www.flcourts.org). Similarly, federal agencies, such as the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, provide unrestricted, no cost access to enormous numbers of continuously updated records on a fully searchable, state-of-the-art Web site (www.uspto.gov).

In contrast, under the auspices of the Administrative Office of the Courts, the federal judiciary operates a relatively cumbersome, pay-as-you-go system, selling data page by page to individual requesters. Fees for the PACER system are authorized, though not necessarily endorsed, by Congress. Currently, the advent of electronic case filing, together with a captive audience of government agencies, lawyers, and possibly the public, promises to produce a revenue windfall. With millions of new documents available for sale over the Internet, the federal judiciary is poised to reap rewards of a monopoly supplier of essential data. That is, unless Congress withdraws authorization to charge taxpayers for public court records under a "slush fund" provision described in 28 U.S.C. §612

Policy alternatives

A question posed in the request for comment was: Should electronic case files be protected from unlimited public disclosure, or should they be treated the same as paper files? With the stated goal of promoting "consistent policies and practices" and to ensure that similar "protections and electronic access presumptions apply" in more than 200 separate courthouses, the Judicial Conference outlined its own set of answers. For cases involving civil disputes (*e.g.*, products liability, contract disputes, etc.), the Judicial Conference offered for consideration the following options:

- Maintain the presumption that all filed documents that are not sealed are available both at the courthouse and electronically.
- Define what documents should be included in the "public file" and, thereby, available to the public either at the courthouse or electronically.
- Establish "levels of access" to certain electronic case file information.
- Seek an amendment to one or more of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure to account for privacy and security interests.

Criminal case file options include a proposal for an outright ban on extending procedures for electronic case filing to such records ("do not provide electronic public access") as well as an option for partial access ("provide limited electronic public access to criminal case files"). Notably, the list of options does not include an option for unrestricted access to publicly filed criminal case records, which, in fact, happens to represent the status quo. Appellate and trial courts have found that presumptive First Amendment or common law rights of access attach to court records involving pretrial proceedings in criminal cases; information contained in or attached to indictments; criminal complaints; pleadings; bills of particulars; the fruits of the discovery process; suppression hearing transcripts; bail and detention records; plea agreements; and trial and post-trial records.

Bankruptcy cases, which account for the largest number of annual filings, also typically contain personal and financial data. Accordingly, options for restricting access to these records include amendment of the Bankruptcy Code to curtail full disclosure of the most sensitive data; requiring less information on documents filed in bankruptcy cases; restricting display in electronic records of Social Security, credit card, and other account numbers to the last four digits; and segregation of sensitive information in the public file by collecting it on separate forms to be available only to persons involved in the case.

The problems

Despite the professed desire to foster informed debate, questions posed by the Judicial Conference have generated consternation among those who see an overly hasty intervention by the judiciary as premature, unwarranted, or constitutionally suspect under the equal protection clause.

Without downplaying legitimate concerns about the hot button issue of personal privacy and the serious problems caused by identity theft, the materials distributed by the Judicial Conference do not establish that restricting remote electronic access to court records would improve the security of personal data. Moreover, as the Judicial Conference recognizes, Congress has quickly responded through new laws and pending legislation to shield personal banking and medical records, tax returns, and Social Security numbers from unwarranted disclosure at the behest of the government. Many also believe that judges are already doing a laudable job of balancing privacy concerns with presumptive common law and First Amendment rights of access. Because existing measures are adequate, there appears to be no reasonable basis for enhancing access based upon personal status (litigants and lawyers versus the public-at-large), or for providing superior access to public court records at no cost based upon mere physical presence at a courthouse (as opposed to remote access from an individual's home office via the Internet).

Houston column

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by Danish journalists in Copenhagen, will cover topics such as tobacco smuggling, terrorism, freedom of information, editing, multinational investigations, tracking international businesses, schools, immigration and courts. We plan to put some of the conference materials on our Web site and possibly try a live Web broadcast of one of the panels.

Smaller news groups

While we strive to improve our international work, we also are seeking ways to get out to our members all over the United States and to increase our help to those at smaller newsrooms.

This year, we already are scheduled to be in 15 of the 50 states and figure to have been in more than half when our workshops in local investigative reporting, computer-assisted reporting, census, campaign finance, and other topics are completed. In addition, our National Conference, June 14-17, will be centrally located in Chicago.

We also are working on constant improvements to our Web site, including the videostreaming of investigative broadcast stories from our Resource Center and an increase in basic tipsheets, guides, and books on daily and beat coverage.

FOI Column

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Many physicians claim this lack of context merits continued closure of such records, but the recent work of the *Daily News*, *The Hartford Courant* and the Associated Press used public records to identify doctors with large numbers of malpractice payments or disciplinary actions. In each series, editors and reporters worked to keep information about medical malpractice in context, and doing so did nothing to minimize the findings.

Journalists and others committed to open government should capitalize on the newfound interest among policy makers in access to physician data. For evidence of what can be done, look at New York, where citizens and journalists can now monitor the health of their health care providers in ways unimaginable even a year ago.

Charles Davis is executive director of the Freedom of Information Center, an assistant professor at the Missouri School of Journalism and a member of IRE's FOI Committee.

Recruiting fraud

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recruiters to insert in their files. The scheme worked because the Navy apparently never checked the credentials to see if they were authentic, and because the recruiters repeatedly coached the enlistees never to tell about their counterfeit degrees.

"If you don't tell the Navy," the recruiters said, "they'll never know." This finely tuned system broke down when new enlistees spilled the beans during the moment of truth. But the Navy may have found a way around this problem because of the prevalence of drugs in the past of many recruits.

According to the Navy, about a fifth of its recruits – roughly 10,000 young men and women – washed out of boot camp in the fiscal year closest to our reports. The Navy says the overwhelming majority, more than 95 percent, were expelled because of drug problems.

Coincidentally, the three enlistees who came to us also said they were told to lie about drug use. Two of the three said they were habitual marijuana users and told their recruiters about it. The recruiters put them on a regimen of medications intended to cleanse their systems, even giving them a preliminary urine test to determine if they'd pass the Navy's official urinalysis upon induction.

The case of the third recruit may illustrate the Navy's diploma strategy. She enlisted with phony high school credentials, purchased through her recruiter. She confessed to it during the moment of truth. When it came time for her release from the Navy, however, she discovered she was being expelled because of drug use. She did admit to pre-enlistment drug use in an interview after she'd already admitted she entered the Navy with a phony diploma.

The Navy Recruiting Command would never consent to an interview on camera for the reports, either in Dallas, at Command headquarters in Tennessee, or in Washington. We also requested an interview with the Secretary of Defense, who declined. Two former naval officers did talk to us. One, who had been a lawyer in the Navy in the early 1990s, saw our stories and said the same problems had occurred when she was in the service. We found Carl Nyberg, an Annapolis graduate, through a source at ABC 20/20 who heard we were working on the story. Nyberg had investigated diploma fraud in the Chicago area while in the Navy five years earlier and ultimately resigned his commission, in part because he felt the Navy wasn't addressing the problem.

Unlike the Navy, the Marines did talk to us, as did the Air Force.

We discovered the Air Force also was using Lincoln Academic Academy diplomas. We sent a WFAA-TV writer into an Air Force recruiting office on a whim, simply because it was in the same shopping center as a Navy recruiter we were investigating. Our writer was wearing a hidden microphone. He told the recruiter he wanted to join the Air Force but needed a diploma. Almost immediately, the recruiter offered to get him one. Later, the recruiter accompanied our undercover writer to obtain the diploma at John Reynolds' house. We confronted the Air Force recruiter on camera as he emerged from Reynolds house. He said it was the first time he had ever been there and that he learned about Reynolds' diploma mill from another Air Force recruiter.

After these stories aired, we used the Freedom of Information Act to request the investigations the Marines, Navy and Air Force did as a result of our reports. The Marines and Air Force disciplined some of those involved. The Navy did not, although it did quit accepting diplomas from the schools we investigated. We also requested all diploma-related investigations the Navy had done in the nation over the previous year under FOIA. After five months, the documents arrived. They outlined Navy investigations in five other states, including the case of one young man whose records showed he was "commuting" 300 miles a day to the school where he got his diploma.

Since our reports, the services have lowered their standards. They now require 90 percent – not 95 percent – of their new entrants to be high school graduates. They've also broadened their standards for what constitutes a high school degree to include home schooling.

Despite the change in standards, recruiting fraud still has costs: one financial, the other institutional. The expense of enlisting young men and women, shipping them to basic training, feeding, housing and clothing them, and transporting them home after they're expelled can be easily calculated. But not all fraudulent enlistees get sent home. The institutional corrosion is much harder to determine.

Byron Harris is a senior reporter and has been with WFAA for 26 years.

MEMBER NEWS

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Press in Oklahoma City. He was the AP broadcast editor in Portland, Ore. ■ **Louise Knott Ahern**, formerly with *The Detroit News*, is now an education reporter for *The Press-Enterprise* in Riverside, Calif. ■ **Benjamin Lesser** is now with *The Record* in Hackensack, N.J. where he specializes in computer-assisted reporting. He was formerly with the *Albany Times Union*. ■ **Scott Maier**, formerly of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, has joined the ranks of academia as associate professor of journalism at the University of Oregon. ■ **Tony Marra** is leaving WFTV-TV in Orlando where he worked as an investigative producer and heading west to Tampa where he will work on the special projects unit with WFLA-TV. ■ **Alex Pulaski** and **Brent Walth** of *The Oregonian* were awarded a C.B. Blethen Memorial Award for Distinguished Newspaper Reporting in the investigative reporting category. The award was for their investigation into pesticides and children. ■ **Clint Riley** has left the *Courier-Post* in Camden, N.J. to join *The Virginian-Pilot* as a staff writer based in Virginia Beach. ■ **Julie Ross** left *The Birmingham News* to cover education for the *Detroit Free Press*. ■ **George Schwarz** now covers Los Alamos county government for the *Los Alamos Monitor*. He was an education reporter with the *Rio Grande Sun* in Espanola, N.M. ■ **Karen Setze** was formerly with the *News-Enterprise* in Elizabethtown, Ky. and is now with the *York Daily Record* in Pennsylvania where she covers night cops. ■ **Sharon Walsh** is now the deputy New York Bureau chief for *The Industry Standard*. She was formerly with *The Washington Post*. ■ **Tom Walsh** of the *Detroit Free Press* is now the senior editor for technology and research. Formerly, he was the projects editor at the paper. ■ **Chris Weston** has taken the newly created position of managing editor of *The Greenville News* in South Carolina. He was the managing editor for local news. ■ **Robert Wiener** has left MSNBC and is now a reporter with lexisONE.

IRE SERVICES

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTERS AND EDITORS, INC. is a grassroots nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of investigative reporting within the field of journalism. IRE was formed in 1975 with the intent of creating a networking tool and a forum in which journalists from across the country could raise questions and exchange ideas. IRE provides educational services to reporters, editors and others interested in investigative reporting and works to maintain high professional standards.

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Contact: Mary Jo Sylwester, maryjo@nicar.org, 573-884-7711

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UPLINK – Monthly newsletter by IRE and NICAR on computer-assisted reporting. Often, *Uplink* stories are written after reporters have had particular success using data to investigate stories. The columns include valuable information on advanced database techniques as well as success stories written by newly trained CAR reporters.
Contact: Mary Jo Sylwester, maryjo@nicar.org, 573-884-7711

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To attend this conference, you must be a current IRE member through July 1, 2001.
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CAR DAY (optional)

Thursday, June 14 is the optional Computer-Assisted Reporting Day and requires an additional fee. If you would like to attend, please check one of these options:

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IRE in Chicago

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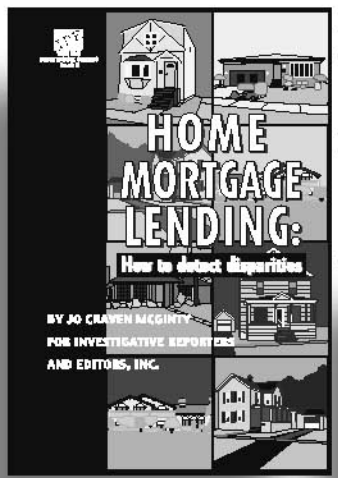

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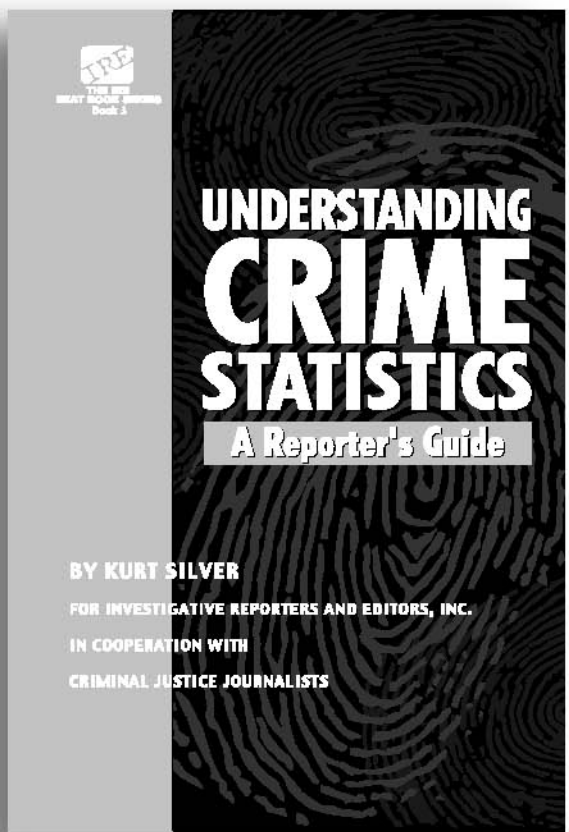
Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Jo Craven McGinty guides reporters through understanding and using Home Mortgage Disclosure Act data. Included are specific story ideas and lists of recent tipsheets and stories available through IRE.



UNDERSTANDING CRIME STATISTICS

A Reporter's Guide

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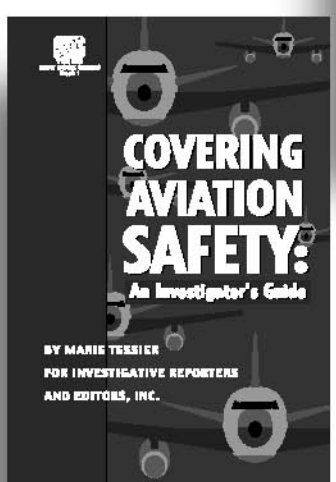

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