

"My only advantage as a reporter is that I am so physically small, so temperamentally unobtrusive, and so neurotically inarticulate that people tend to forget that my presence runs counter to their best interests. And it always does. That is one last thing to remember: Writers are always selling somebody out."

Joan Didion
1968

"If we treated our audience with the respect its members deserve, and gave them an accurate understanding of the pressures of time and space under which we work, we could acknowledge the inherent limitations and imperfections in our work. ... We could say plainly what we all know to be the case, that the process of selecting what the reader reads involves not just objective facts but subjective judgments, personal values and, yes, prejudices. Instead of promising All the News That's Fit to Print, I would like to see us say - over and over, until the point has been made - that the newspaper that drops on your doorstep is a partial, hasty, incomplete, inevitably flawed and inaccurate rendering of some of the things we have heard about in the past 24 hours - distorted, despite our best efforts to eliminate gross bias, by the very process of compression that makes it possible for you to lift it from the doorstep and read it in about an hour. If we labeled the product accurately, then we could immediately add: But it's the best we could do under the circumstances, and we will be back tomorrow with a corrected and updated version.

"If we did that, I suspect, not only would we feel less inhibited about correcting and updating our own stories, we might even encourage the readers to contribute their own information and understanding to the process. We might even find ourselves acknowledging something most of us find hard to accept: that they have something to tell us, as well as to hear from us."

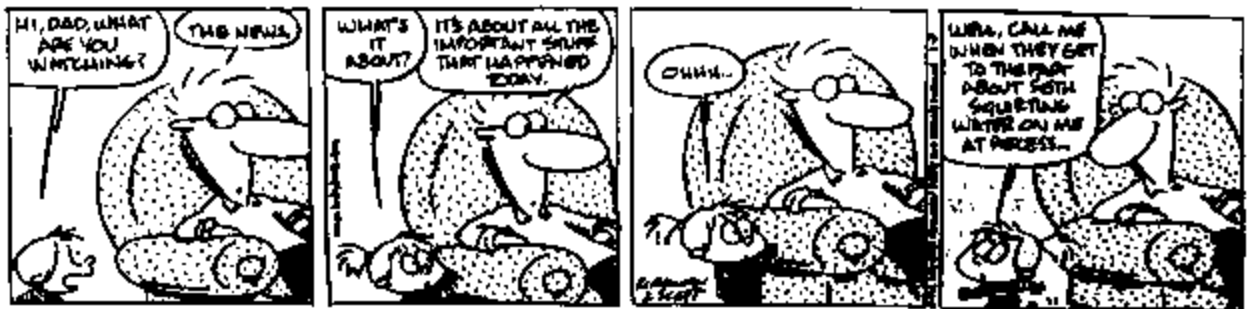
David Broder
1979

"Every journalist who is not too stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible."

Janet Malcolm

"We see the world through lenses we have ground ourselves."

Baby Blues



I think you can tell what my concerns are,

I love newspapers. I'd read them all day if I could; indeed, I've spent too much time in Chapel Hill doing just that. I love the places I "go," the people I "meet" and the things I learn through newspapers. But I also know well - and never forget - that they're just one small vision, one small version of the world.

I have big worries about newspapers.

I can't tell you the number of times people have told me, "The paper sure messed up that story," "I was misquoted," "I never said that," "The paper gave such a one-sided report."

Or, on the other hand, the number of times people have told me, "No, I never read the paper."

I don't know who is more troubling: the critic or the nonreader.

Some of the reading I have done this winter has been about ethics, objectivity, media history and criticism and "feeding frenzies."

One of the most disturbing things I read was a portion of James Fallows' 1996 book, Breaking the News, in which he described one part of a television series titled "Ethics in America," which aired in the late '80s. This particular segment, titled "Under Orders, Under Fire," shows journalists and members of the

military discussing a hypothetical situation in which a journalist, who had been allowed to accompany the enemy - North Kosanese soldiers - on patrol, realizes to his horror that an ambush is being prepared for some American and South Kosanese soldiers.

Initially, Peter Jennings, one of the panel participants, said he would do everything he could to alert the Americans.

Even if it meant losing the story, Ogletree (Charles Ogletree, the Harvard Law School professor who was moderating the panel in Socratic fashion) asked,

Even though it would almost certainly mean losing my life, Jennings replied.

At that, Mike Wallace mercilessly berated Jennings.

"I am astonished really. ... You're a reporter."

Didn't Jennings have a higher duty, asked Ogletree.

"No," Wallace said. "You don't have a higher duty. No. No. You're a reporter."

And Jennings, saying he had lost sight of his journalistic duty to remain detached, quickly agreed, backtracked and apologized for his original decision.

I read all this with disbelief - awe, repugnance.

But later, and somewhat calmer, I wondered if perhaps I, like Jennings, had misunderstood what it means to be a journalist, what journalism is all about. To be an impartial witness, must a journalist think beyond the moment? Understand the larger picture? Must a journalist transcend nationalistic concerns? Transcend human concerns?

Grudgingly, but with enormous reservations, I began to think perhaps there was something to Wallace's words. But I certainly didn't enter his camp the way Jennings had - unreservedly.

And I remained troubled.

But then I read a powerful essay by Martin Bell, a former war reporter for BBC and now a Member of Parliament. (From 1965 to 1997, Bell covered more than 80 countries and 11 wars.) Bell's essay, titled "The journalism of attachment," made me once again consider Wallace's words - and unreservedly reject them.

When Bell began his career, he participated in what he calls "bystanders' journalism," in which he concentrated on tactics and strategies of war rather than on the people fighting the war and the people being affected by the war. But over time, Bell experienced a sea change. He began to see that journalist-as-detached-and-neutral observer was bunk. Journalists are a part of the world and they are a part of what they are reporting. And what they're doing has repercussions.

(He tells an agonizing story - and possibly doubtful, though he fears not - story about a reporter in Bosnia who, wishing to write a profile about a sniper, found himself on the front lines with said sniper:

"The sniper was peering out from between two bricks in his forward defences. The reporter asked, 'What do you see?' The sniper replied, 'I see two people walking in the street; Which of them do you want me to shoot?' It was at this point that the reporter realised, too late, that he had embarked on a project which was inherently lethal and which he should not even have considered. So he urged the sniper to shoot neither of them, made his excuses and turned to leave. As he did so, he heard two shots of rapid fire from the position just behind him. He turned and looked, questioning. 'That was a pity,' said the sniper, 'you could have saved one of their lives.'")

Bell realized journalism is not a mirror that silently reflects the world; rather, journalism is wholly unlike a mirror because it affects what it reflects.

Bell writes that "in a world where genocide has returned in recent years to haunt three continents," reporters must shock, disturb and not remain indifferent to "good and evil, right and wrong, the victim and the oppressor."

He closes with these words: "What in the end is our vaunted technology for? And what is the justification for a disengaged journalism which would requires (sic) its practitioners, as special people with special privileges, to close their hearts; to pity?"

"This is a phrase with certain historical resonance. There was in this century a military commander who urged his generals to do just that - to close their hearts to pity. He enjoyed a measure of success for a while. His name was Adolf Hitler."

Parliament is all the richer for having Bell a member.

Journalism is all the poorer for his absence.

Howard Kurtz's Media Circus is a call to arms. An unabashed lover of the press (he's the media reporter for The Washington Post), he's no fawning apologist, either. He calls the warts as he sees them and make a strong case - a plea! - that newspapers renounce News Lite, stop shrinking stories into ever-smaller digests - "will eventually digest themselves out of existence" and give up cutesie graphics and yuppie features.

Kurtz writes: "The problem with dumbing-down newspapers is that we're talking down to people, and they know it. Instead of capturing their attention the hard way - with well-written stories about schools and taxes and crime and culture and other things that matter in their lives - we take the easier (and cheaper) way out. We move from our greatest strength - depth and texture - and assume that everyone in the video generation has an attention span of ninety seconds."

Kurtz further laments that so many U.S. papers look and sound exactly alike with large color photographs, large color weather maps; story summaries, the same columnists, the same wire stories. And in the light of this country's huge diversity, this is a crime: A wide variety of papers should exist - each having a distinct personality, a discrete voice.

Kurtz's book was published in 1993, but given the continuing decline in newspaper readership and circulation figures and the continuing increase in other news sources, his advice remains vital and timely.

(In 1997, daily circulation for all papers dropped for the 10th consecutive year, to 56.7 million. In 1997, 68.7 percent of adults read a daily paper; in 1967, 73 percent of adults read a daily paper. Forty-eight percent of 18-to-24-year-olds read a paper, compared with 68 percent of people older than 65. In 1916, 2,461 papers were printed in the United States. In 1997, that number was 1,509. Many afternoon papers have folded, and only 2 percent of American cities have competing papers. Newspaper chains control 80 percent of the nation's papers.)

Newspapers must stop trying to emulate television (that battle was long lost) and reclaim their unique mandate - in-depth stories about significant subjects - "the hobgoblins of everyday life": housing, the homeless, day care, race, prejudice, injustice, mass transit, health care, the environment, poverty - that explore the ramifications of various aspects of the subject under consideration.

Perhaps then will papers have a chance at aborting their free fall.

"We need to stop destroying imperfect people
at the altar of an unattainable morality."

Richard Gephardt
December 1998

Larry Sabato's Feeding Frenzy is another searing indictment of the press. Sabato defines a "feeding frenzy" as the media coverage of an event or person "where a critical mass of journalists leap to cover the same embarrassing or scandalous subject and pursue it intensely, often excessively, and sometimes uncontrollably."

Sabato cites numerous examples, including Jimmy Carter's "killer rabbit," Geraldine Ferraro's family finances, Jack Kemp's and Tom Foley's purported homosexuality, Gary Hart and Donna Rice, Dan Quayle and Paula Parkinson, Chuck Robb's partying, Barney Frank's male prostitute. The list could - and does - go on and on

(Because this book was published in 1991, and because Sabato is concerned solely with politicians, we are thankfully spared, among others, Donald, Ivana and Marla; the William Kennedy Smith rape case; the Buttafucos; the Bobbitts; Michael Jackson; the Brock Adams and Bob Packwood sexual harassment cases; and, the biggest of them all, Bill and Gennifer and Paula and Monica and, oh no, now Juanita?)

While admitting that journalism "has often been remarkably uncivilized, and far more so at the beginning of the American Revolution than today" (We learn that the first newspaper published in America, Publick Occurrences, Both Foreign and Domestick, in 1690, reported that "the king of France 'used to lie with' his son's wife."), Sabato says the current, over-the-top obsession with the sensational and scandalous began in the mid-'70s.

Before that time, for about 40 years, the press showed restraint on reporting on a politician's private life, following the rule that "the private life of a public figure should stay private and undisclosed unless it seriously impinged on his or her public performance." (Some might say the press showed unbelievable, even negligent, restraint during those years: Consider the non-reporting on Franklin D. Roosevelt's fragile health and John F. Kennedy's reckless and wanton promiscuity - matters of not little import for the nation.)

From about 1966 to 1974 - years that bore witness to the Vietnam War, Teddy Kennedy's Chappaquiddick accident, the Pentagon Papers, Watergate - the cozy, swallow everything, believe everything, "tell almost nothing" "lapdog" journalism evolved into "watchdog" journalism, in which public statements were questioned and scrutinized rigorously. Private lives, however, and private matters, continued to remain just that - private and not revealed.

But in the mid-'70s, the "watchdog" devolved into "junkyard-dog," with more and more aspects of private life becoming fair fodder for public consumption. And the reporting turned harsh, aggressive, nasty, i.e., feeding frenzies.

This ever-increasing, no-holds-barred, unrelenting emphasis on the private is justified on the widely held belief that "private conduct is a road map to public action."

Well, to an extent. Certainly some private "foibles" cannot and should not, be dismissed as trivial and of no account - especially when they reveal a self-destructive personality best not entrusted with the public weal.

But all this must be balanced against a politician's public positions, statements and actions - all part of the complicated equation that make up a human being and which, unfortunately, all too often are given short shrift in favor of the titillating and tawdry.

Sabato claims all this blood-seeking has ignored such important issues and real scandals as the savings-and-loan debacle and unending messes at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in the 1980s.

(To make this a bit more current - Monica Lewinsky's ingenuous assertion that her affair with Bill Clinton "didn't affect his job," notwithstanding - one can't help but wonder what was ignored or neglected while this country feasted on Bill and Monica.)

(In the Oct. 20, 1998, issue of The New Yorker, the writer Bobbie Ann Mason writes: "It hardly seems credible that we have truly turned into a tabloid nation. Future historians will be at a nonplus. They will have to conclude that America was suffering from some sort of fin-de-siècle insanity. They will speak of our premillenarian madness, when - faced with the implosion of Russia, the financial collapse of Asia, international terrorism, and other grave matters - we eviscerated the American government because a middle-aged man dallied with a young, willing woman and then tried to hush it up.")

Furthermore, Sabato says, this unending concern with the scandalous doesn't give the electorate adequate information with which to make thoughtful, informed decisions, and it discourages decent, competent, but-all-too-human-and-possibly-mistake-prone men and women from entering the political fray.

There's no easy answer to all this. I'd like to request simply that reporters begin each day with a recitation of either the Golden Rule or Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative, but that's pie-in-the-sky thinking.

Journalism is a money-making, profit-seeking industry, and no question does the sexy story sell, adding to today's all-important bottom line - hardly inconsequential.

But these financial concerns and the understanding that personal matters can be indicative, revealing and important must be balanced against journalism's charge to provide people with a fair, balanced and orderly telling of significant events that affect their lives and world.

The Feb. 24, 1999, issue of the newspaper USA Today printed a list of the top 100 news stories, as decided by 67 journalists and historians. (Please see next page.) With the exception of Bill Clinton's impeachment, brought about by a sex scandal, not one sensational story made the list.

To conclude this section of the evaluation, I would like to mention Robert Darnton's 1975 essay "Journalism: All the News That Fits We Print," and then return briefly to James Fallows' Breaking the News.

Darnton, a Princeton University professor and historian, was a crime reporter for the Newark Star Ledger and The New York Times from 1959 to 1964. His essay dissects newsrooms: how do reporters learn their craft; whom do they really write for (other reporters, their editors and sources, and Mom); the dukedoms and pecking order of newsrooms; and - most interesting to me - how are stories written.

Darnton says reporters do not sit down to write with "minds a tabula rasa." Rather, they come to their stories mindful of particular newsroom traditions and narrative conventions that they use to impose form on the "booming, buzzing confusion of the day's events."

Darnton learned that "atrocities among black persons" did not constitute news, that the higher the victim's status the bigger the story, and that sidebars about "last steps" are the inevitable accompaniment to kidnapping and disappearance stories.

He learned that every story about a child's death has the de rigeur, typical-sounding, standard-format reaction from the grieving parents (so typical, in fact, that Darnton could make up such quotes when he needed them!); and that twice a year the same old story about policemen's horses would trot their way into print.

"It was like making cookies from an antique cookie cutter," Darnton writes.

And he came to see that the phrase "All the news that fits we print" had

100 events that shifted history

A list of the 100 top news stories of the 20th century, as determined by a survey of 67 journalists and historians conducted by the Newseum, a journalism museum based in Arlington, Va.:

- 1 United States drops atomic bombs on Japan, ending World War II. 1945
- 2 Astronauts land on moon. 1969
- 3 Japan bombs Pearl Harbor. 1941
- 4 Wright brothers make first flight. 1903
- 5 Women win right to vote. 1920
- 6 John F. Kennedy assassinated. 1963
- 7 Nazi concentration camps revealed. 1945
- 8 World War I begins in Europe. 1914
- 9 Supreme Court decision ends school segregation. 1954
- 10 Stock market crash begins Depression. 1929
- 11 Discovery of penicillin. 1928
- 12 Discovery of DNA structure. 1953
- 13 Communism collapses with dissolution of Soviet Union. 1991
- 14 President Nixon resigns. 1974
- 15 Germany invades Poland; World War II begins in Europe. 1939
- 16 Russian Revolution ends; Communists take power. 1917
- 17 Henry Ford begins first Model T assembly line. 1913
- 18 Soviets launch Sputnik, world's first satellite. 1957
- 19 Einstein presents Theory of Relativity. 1905
- 20 FDA approves birth control pill. 1960
- 21 Polio vaccine proves effective. 1953
- 22 Adolf Hitler named chancellor of Germany. 1933
- 23 Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated. 1968
- 24 D-Day invasion. 1944
- 25 AIDS identified. 1981
- 26 Civil Rights Act outlaws segregation. 1964
- 27 Berlin Wall falls. 1989
- 28 Television debuts at World's Fair. 1939
- 29 Mao Tse-tung assumes power in China. 1949
- 30 Lindbergh flies solo across Atlantic. 1927
- 31 First mass-market PCs launched. 1977
- 32 World Wide Web revolutionizes Internet. 1989
- 33 Bell Lab scientists invent the transistor. 1948
- 34 FDR launches New Deal jobs and economic program to combat the Depression. 1933
- 35 Cuban missile crisis. 1962
- 36 Titanic sinks in north Atlantic. 1912
- 37 Germany surrenders. 1945
- 38 Roe v. Wade decision legalizes abortion. 1973
- 39 World War I ends with German defeat. 1918
- 40 First regular radio broadcasts begin. 1909
- 41 Worldwide flu epidemic kills 20 million. 1918
- 42 ENIAC is world's first computer. 1946
- 43 Regular TV broadcasts begin. 1941
- 44 Jackie Robinson breaks baseball's color barrier. 1947
- 45 Israel achieves statehood. 1948
- 46 Plastic invented. 1909
- 47 Bus boycott in Alabama after Rosa Parks refuses to give up seat to white person. 1955
- 48 First atomic bomb test in New Mexico. 1945
- 49 South Africa ends apartheid. 1993
- 50 Martin Luther King Jr. leads civil rights march on Washington. 1963
- 51 Scientists patent computer chip. 1969
- 52 Marconi sends radio signal across Atlantic. 1901
- 53 Sex scandal leads to impeachment of President Clinton. 1998
- 54 Secretary of State George Marshall proposes rebuilding plan for war-ravaged Europe. 1947
- 55 Robert F. Kennedy assassinated. 1968
- 56 Senate rejection dooms League of Nations. 1920
- 57 Rachel Carson book, Silent Spring, helps launch environmental movement. 1962
- 58 The Beatles appear on Ed Sullivan. 1964
- 59 Voting Rights Act removes obstacles to minority voting. 1965
- 60 Russian Yuri Gagarin is first man in space. 1961
- 61 First jet airplane flight. 1941
- 62 U.S. troops arrive in South Vietnam; U.S. bombs North Vietnam. 1965
- 63 North Vietnamese forces take over Saigon, capital of South Vietnam. 1975
- 64 Manhattan Project begins secret work on atomic bomb; first chain reaction. 1942
- 65 GI Bill of Rights passed to help veterans. 1946
- 66 Alan Shepard is first American in space. 1961
- 67 Nixon faces Watergate scandal. 1973
- 68 San Francisco earthquake. 1906
- 69 United Nations established. 1945
- 70 Communists build Berlin Wall. 1961
- 71 Mohandas Gandhi leads nonviolent protests in India. 1920
- 72 Standard Oil loses antitrust case; monopolies lose power. 1911
- 73 U.S. withdraws ground troops from Vietnam. 1973
- 74 Allies establish NATO to counter Communist power in Eastern Europe. 1948
- 75 Stalin forces modernization in Soviet Union; 25 million die in resulting famines. 1928
- 76 Franklin Roosevelt elected president. 1932
- 77 Mikhail Gorbachev becomes Soviet leader, allows unprecedented freedoms. 1986
- 78 Max Planck proposes quantum theory. 1900
- 79 Scientists clone sheep in Great Britain. 1997
- 80 Interstate highway bill begins massive effort linking nation. 1956
- 81 Opening of Panama Canal. 1914
- 82 Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* helps launch women's movement. 1963
- 83 Space shuttle Challenger explodes. 1986
- 84 U.S. sends troops to South Korea. 1950
- 85 Violence erupts outside Democratic convention in Chicago. 1968
- 86 Sigmund Freud publishes *Interpretation of Dreams*. 1900
- 87 China's forced modernization program results in famines killing 20 million. 1968
- 88 U.S. enters World War I. 1917
- 89 Babe Ruth hits 60 home runs, a record that lasted 34 years. 1927
- 90 John Glenn is first American to orbit Earth. 1962
- 91 North Vietnamese reportedly attack U.S. ships; Congress allows use of force. 1964
- 92 Pathfinder robot lands on Mars. 1997
- 93 Hitler launches night of Nazi violence against Jews and their businesses. 1938
- 94 Winston Churchill becomes British prime minister. 1940
- 95 First "test-tube baby" born healthy. 1978
- 96 Soviets blockade West Berlin; Allies react with massive airlift. 1948
- 97 Bill Gates and Paul Allen start Microsoft Corp. 1975
- 98 Chernobyl nuclear plant explosion kills more than 7,000 in Soviet Union. 1986
- 99 Trial of teacher John Scopes in Tennessee pits creation against evolution. 1925
- 100 Surgeon general warns tobacco is a health hazard. 1964

two meanings. One, stories saw print if there was enough physical space for them. And two, stories "must fit cultural preconceptions of news."

Writes Darnton: "Yet 8 million people live out their lives every day in New York City, and I felt overwhelmed by the disparity between their experience, whatever it was, and the tales that they read in *The Times*."

"...it is not differences which immobilize us, but silence. And there are so many silences."

Audre Lord

Which brings me back to Fallows. In Breaking the News, he advocated what he called public journalism, which would "produce coverage that would make people feel connected to the public path of their community." A number of newspapers have ventured down this path, asking readers to tell them what they want to see in their papers - a tactic praised by some, vilified by others.

I think a potentially more beneficial service - as opposed to letting readers set a paper's agenda and one that could act as a counterbalance to Darnton's "cookie-cutter" stories - would be for newspapers to sponsor round-table discussions for groups of people desperately needing to understand one another: Muslims, Jews, Christians; blacks, whites, Native Americans, Latinos, Asians; gays, straights; poor, rich.

I envision these conversations occurring on a regular basis and a transcript of each discussion printed in the sponsoring paper.

Newspapers are in the communication business. Yet how often do they contribute to genuine understanding among people? Understanding that could affect and alter individuals? Understanding that could affect and alter the world?

"To see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another; to feel with the heart of another." Those words were written by the Austrian psychologist/psychiatrist Alfred Adler.

Not a bad goal for an individual ... not a bad goal for a newspaper.

Scapegoat - Any material object, animal, bird or person on whom the bad luck, diseases, misfortunes and sins of an individual or group are symbolically placed, and which is then turned loose, driven off with stones, cast into a river or the sea, etc., in the belief that it takes away with it all the evils placed upon it.

Standard Dictionary of Folklore,
Mythology & Legend

"That's just the way; a person does a low-down thing, and then he don't want to take no consequence of it. Thinks as long as he can hide it, it ain't no disgrace."

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
Mark Twain

As for my proposed project on scapegoating and the press, I am terribly behind. (No surprise, I am sure.) I've read several books on scapegoating in general and some on C.G. Jung and his idea about the Shadow component of the human personality. The Shadow, which plays a large role in scapegoating, is the dark part of the personality - the part where we relegate those emotions, ideas and beliefs we would prefer not to recognize in ourselves but recognize all too readily in others.

I've read news accounts of situations in which scapegoating may have played a part: incidents involving blacks, the ultimate and permanent scapegoats in the United States; Richard Jewell and the Centennial Park bombing; Oklahoma City and Abraham Ahmed, a Jordanian-American who, within 24 hours of the bombing was fingerprinted; handcuffed, photographed, strip-searched and humiliated for three days before being released; and Haider and Saker Al-Saidi, two Iraqi refugees who lived in Oklahoma City and whose house was attacked by a stone-throwing mob. Panicked, Mrs. Al-Saidi, seven months pregnant, suffered premature contractions and delivered a stillborn child - a child named Salaam (Peace).

Furthermore, I've read several articles about Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden in which they are portrayed as scapegoats.

But the press and all this? I don't know. ...

Clearly, the press must plead guilty to Larry Sabato's "feeding frenzies," but most of the people he describes - Tom Foley and Jack Kemp are two notable

exceptions - could not be called scapegoats. By definition, a scapegoat is innocent of causing the situation for which he or she is being blamed.

And clearly, the press must also plead guilty to a shameful lack of restraint and deplorable lapse of journalistic ethics in such cases as Richard Jewell and Abraham Ahmed.

But I don't think - at least right now - that the press initiates scapegoating. It certainly can perpetuate such an event, however, once motion. I think a return to good old journalistic standards could prevent this; being willing to get it right rather than first; questioning the motives and credibility of sources; declining to use anonymous quotes; forgoing the reporting of rumor and gossip; shunning "gotcha" journalism; eschewing the printing of a story simply because some other news organization has done so; giving appropriate play to a story; admitting mistakes, up-front and immediately; and never forgetting such basic human qualities as kindness, sensitivity and decency.

I've been attending three UNC classes: Psychology 140: Advanced Personality - an overview of some major personality theorists of the 20th century; Folklore 186 - a discussion of the ritualized and formulaic structures of the classic genres of folk narratives - myths, legends, urban legends, jokes, tall tales and animal stories; and Religious Studies 10: Religion in Global Perspective - an introduction to Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and an attempt to answer the question, What is religion?

All have been great! I am accumulating an extensive reading list - for later!

Another special Chapel Hill pleasure has been to attend plays put on by UNC students and that change almost weekly.

I've always thought one of the signs of a good vacation is a new-found sense of exhilaration and revitalization. This feeling of renewal can lead to new plans, new goals, new aspirations - from the mundane to the major. And even though - speaking only for myself - actual follow-through may not ensue, I love the Christmas morning feeling, however fleeting, of hope and possibility.

I think I had hoped that this fellowship would provide me with similar feelings of renewal by giving me a chance to step out of the newsroom and look at it - and my role in it - from a different vantage point. And see

something worthwhile.

But I must admit that while at times I have felt excited and energized, I mainly feel exhausted and troubled. And think I will reserve judgment on what this has all meant to me.

To my shame, I must confess that this has been a very selfish time for me. I have not helped a single journalism student or visited any UNC publication, offering help. I am grateful for the financial support of the Knight Foundation and hope I do something reciprocal in the few weeks remaining.